

Philosophy Of Socrates

Socrates

- Socrates questioned fundamental moral values of Athenian Society
- What is courage? What is virtue? What is Piety? These are all Socratic questions.
- Had many followers
- Critical of democracy
- Convicted by an Athenian jury of corrupting the youth and heresy in 399.

- Socrates wrote nothing. Plato used Socrates as a character in most of his dialogues.
- Plato was Socrates' most famous follower
- Almost all of Plato's work is in dialogue form
- Most people think the early dialogues give us a picture of the historical Socrates

Ancient Athens

- Athens was the largest Greek city state
- Athens was a pure democracy—all male citizens could take part in the assembly and vote on law and public policy.
- The everyday executive function of Government was conducted by a council of 500. Chosen by lot.

The *Phaedo*

- Socrates says that the life of the philosopher is a preparation for death. What does he mean by this?
- Death is a good thing for the philosopher. After death the philosopher will have an existence far preferable to earthly life
- What is so bad about our earthly existence?
- What is so good about the afterlife?

- Socrates does not mean that life is itself bad, but that there is something better after death (at least for the philosophers)
- Philosophers desire knowledge. But S. thinks that our physical bodies get in the way of our ability to obtain true knowledge.
- Sense perception is deceptive and incomplete
- Physical desires confuse us about what our true goal in life is.

- “Then he will do this most perfectly who approaches the object with thought alone, without associating any sight with his thought, or dragging in any sense perception with his reasoning, but who, using pure thought alone, tries to track down each reality purely and by itself freeing himself as far as possible from eyes and ears, and in a word, from the whole body.”

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What is wrong with the objects of the senses?

- Take a physical drawing of a circle. The drawing is a circular drawing, but it can never embody a true mathematical circle. The true circle, the form of a circle, can be understood only with the mind.
- A person may be just or beautiful. But they cannot just BE just or beautiful. They will only be so from a certain perspective and for a certain time.

- Everything in the physical world is an imperfect approximation of the form of that—the form which can be grasped not with our senses but with our mind.
- Beauty, goodness, justice, humanity, etc. each of these is a form that we come to know with reason, not with the senses.

- When we are embodied it is impossible to totally ignore the senses or the needs of the body. It is hard for an embodied person to grasp the forms.
- Thus the lover of knowledge will want to die because in death the philosopher will be able to obtain knowledge unimpeded by the ills and deceptions of the body.
- But is it true that the philosopher, or anyone, really survives death?

The argument from opposites

- Everything that comes to be comes from its opposite; sleeping comes from waking, something becomes cool from being hot etc.
- The opposite of being alive is being dead
- Therefore the living come from the dead and the dead come from the living
- The soul therefore comes from death to life, back to death again and again.

Problems with this argument

- The argument claims that death is the opposite of life.
- But this is not so: the opposite of being alive is not being dead, its being not-alive.
- But from the claim “being alive comes from being not alive” we do not get “the soul exists before life and after death” we get: something not alive exists before birth and after death.

The argument from recollection

If you ask people the right questions, they can come up with the correct answers.

We know that there is such a thing as equality, but we do not perceive it. Yet when we perceive things that are similar to the equal, this brings to mind the form of equality—it is the form of equality that is knowledge

Its like the picture of a Simmias recollects the man, Simmias.

- But you would not be able to recollect Simmias, if you did not already know him. Likewise, you could not grasp what equality was from the somewhat equal lines (for example), unless you already had the knowledge of the form of equality.
- We either have this knowledge at birth and know it throughout life, or learning is really just recollecting what we used to know but forgot

- Therefore, Socrates concludes, the soul must have existed before birth (In order to obtain this knowledge)