

Socrates, who was born & lived in Athens, wrote no philosophical treatises but his influence on development of philosophy was so powerful that all philosophy before him has come to be known as “*Presocratic*.” Evidently, he had a compelling personality which attracted aristocratic young men & made him welcome in prominent Athenian circles. It is common to assign the method & doctrines of Plato’s early period to Socrates. In fact, some say that the theory of Forms, prominent in *Phaedo*, was invented by Socrates. But Socrates’s questioning was perceived as threatening & rebellious. In 399 B.C he was charged with both corrupting the youth of Athens & not recognizing the gods of the city. Once convicted, he was condemned to drink the poisonous hemlock (which killed him).

These powerful scenes are framed in Plato’s Dialogues: *The Euthyphro* portrays Socrates on his way to court; the *Apology*, the trial itself; the *Crito* shows Socrates’ refusal to escape from prison, and the later *Phaedo*, the last conversation & death of the philosopher who brought philosophy to the person on the street, literally & figuratively.

SOCRATIC PROBLEMS:

**A. Whose Philosophical Views Are We Examining:
The Socratic Problem:**

1. Since he didn’t record his philosophical views, perhaps viewing philosophically fundamentally as an oral enterprise, we are unable to know exactly what he said. The problem becomes more acute because of the three extensive portraits we have him by people who knew him, each one is substantially different.

a. **Aristophanes’** (ca. 450-385 BC; a comic poet) portrait is of a sophistic natural philosophers who offers to teach anyone who will pay how to make the weaker argument the stronger and who denies the existence of the gods of the city.

b. **Xenophon’s** (ca. 428-354 BC; a military general) Socrates is a moral instructor who is quick to give advice & who is a model of common morality & religious practice.

c. **Plato’s** (ca. 428-347 BC, a brilliant philosopher) has Plato disowning natural philosophy, despising sophistry, denying that he teaches anything, & espouses such non-traditional moral views as “*no one ever does wrong willingly*,” “*it is wrong to harm one’s enemies*,” and “*knowledge is a virtue*.”

Interestingly, many historians have responded to the Socratic problem by choosing the Platonic Socrates, simply because this Socrates is the most philosophically interesting.

B. VARIANT ON DEATH:

In the *Apology*, near the end of his speech Socrates professes ignorance as to whether death is complete annihilation or the passage of the soul from one place to another. Either way, Socrates maintains, it would be a great blessing-being either the equivalent of a dreamless sleep or the opportunity to converse with the wise & courageous people of old.

In the *Phaedo*, he gives four arguments to prove the soul immortality, chiding his visitors for lamenting his pending death. He claims death is what true philosophers desire. Contemplate truth after death.

WHAT IS????

A. Using the Socratic method, the *elenchos* (roughly translates as refutation, test, or cross-examination), in 8 of 14 dialogues, he asks the following questions [adjectives]:

Euthyphro: What is holiness?

Charmides: What is temperance?

Hippias Major: What is beauty?

Laches: What is courage?

Lysis: What is friendship?

Gorgias & Protagoras: What is rhetoric?” & What is sophistry?”

B. In asking these questions, what he is looking for in is something which is:

(a) possessed by all _____ people?;

(b) possessed by only _____ actions &/or people;

(c) and makes those actions &/or people _____.

B. SOCRATIC EPISTEMOLOGY:

1. Preoccupation with the process of definition (e.g., what is piety?) was a process for arriving at clear & fixed concepts. 2. True knowledge is more than simply an inspection of fact, but has to do with the power of the mind to discover in facts the abiding elements that remain after the facts disappear (e.g., beauty remains even after the flower fades). 3. There was an order in things that mind could discover: he saw a teleological conception of things, that things have a function or purpose. 4. He distinguished 2 levels of knowledge: one based upon inspection of facts & the other based on interpretation of facts; one based upon inspection particular things & the other based upon general or universal Ideas or conceptions (e.g., Beauty, Man).

VIRTUE ETHICS: 3 MAJOR CLAIMS:

A. Knowledge of goodness is necessary & sufficient for virtue [arete]; Knowledge & Virtue were the same thing”

1. No one does wrong intentionally,
2. We always will what we perceive as good: “*To know the good is to do the Good*.” Thus, there is no such thing as weakness of the will [*akrasia*].
4. Why equate virtue with knowledge? virtue meant fulfilling one’s function. As a rational being, a person’s function is to behave rationally. 5. Every person has the inescapable desire for happiness or well-being of his/her soul. This inner well-being, this, “making the soul as good as possible,” can be achieved only by certain appropriate modes of behavior. We choose our acts with the hope that they will bring us happiness. 6. It is ignorance about one’s soul, about what it takes to “make the soul as good as possible.” Wrongdoing, is thus, a consequences of an inaccurate estimate of modes of behavior. It is the inaccurate expectation that certain kinds of things or pleasure will produce happiness. Wrongdoing is the product of ignorance simply because it is done with the hope that it will do what it can’t do. Ignorance is consists in not knowing that certain behavior can’t produce happiness. It take a true knowledge of human nature to know what it requires to be happy. 7. Happiness is the ultimate end of all human action. 8. Happiness is the ultimate human good. 9. Knowledge is necessary for virtue. 10. Vice is not from weakness of will.

B. Contends for the Unity of Virtues: Anyone who has one virtue has them all.

A person who is virtuous can’t lack any of the virtues (for example, a just person must be also courageous and temperament).

C. There can be no higher good than virtue: a virtuous person is bound to be happier than one who is not.