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## 02. What is Political Theory?

### A. Defining ~~Political Theory~~ <sup>Politics</sup>

### B. Pericles' Funeral Oration and Ancient Greece

### C. Plato, "Apology"

August 23 and 28, 2001

[note: this lecture also contains "background to Plato" notes at the end, from F'00 lectures]

Move the back ground to Socrates and the institutions of Athenian govt. stuff to the "Apology" lecture?

## Announcements:

### A. Defining ~~Political Theory~~ <sup>Politics</sup>

#### I. What is politics?

A. Tuesday I defined political theory as the **systematic and detailed study of the political ideas, interpretations, and philosophies of ordinary people.** I suggested we think of poly theory as a "map" for our ideas on politics and the good life.

1. But we've skipped a step. First of all, we need to define politics.

B. **Question:** Is politics important to your life?

1. **Question:** How would you define politics? What counts as political? What *isn't* politics? Family life? Domestic violence? Unions? Workplace tensions? Racism? Friendship? Classroom?

2. [try to get them to consider Arendt's **violence/politics** split and the **public/private** distinction]

C. **Definitions:**

1. **Dietz's definition of politics:** "The collective and participatory engagement of citizens in the determination of the affairs of their community." (from *Dimensions of Radical Dem*, p. 75.)

There are several elements to this definition:

a. "**collective and participatory engagement**" — implies *action*, participation. So the question is: what kind of action? Is buying stamps at the post office politics? Filing taxes? Voting? Also, how much participation should be permitted in the body politic? Elections? Lot? Representatives? Direct democracy?

b. "**citizens**" — someone who has the right to participate in the body politic. Who can be a citizen? What are the criteria? Do all citizens have an equal say? What kind of power do they have?

c. "**community**" — What defines a community? National, state, or local? Could other kinds of communities, like neighborhoods, racial or ethnic, etc. count? If so, what kind of political representation should they have?

2. [Pitkin's def. of politics: "the activity through which relatively large and permanent groups of people determine what they will collectively do, settle how they will live together, and decide their future, to whatever extent this is within their power" [from Young p. 9].)]

#### D. Four key aspects of politics

1. So in one sense politics is about how we govern our daily affairs. But there is more to politics than just that.

2. For one, **politics is also about power**: who gets what, how they get it, who they get it from, who sets the agenda, whose interests are served, what kind of individual is being produced by the current system, etc.

3. As Aristotle notes, politics is about **achieving the good life**.

4. Politics is also about **initiating new possibilities** (Arendt). Don't forget that throughout this course. **Every one of the thinkers we'll be studying was trying to change the world, in part by making us see this world in a different light.** [Give examples.] It's the imagination of new possibilities, what some theorists call political vision or imagination, that makes political theory so important, and so exciting.

E. [Miscellaneous] Definitions of politics from Reinhardt, *The Art of Being Free*:

- "the practice through which we seek freedom with others." 101
- "the public contestation and mediation of contending interests." 107
- "the confrontation between principled versions of the good life." 107
- "the conflictual negotiation of identities and differences." 107

what about your  
chap. 2 det's?

#### II. The historical context of political theory

A. **Ideas don't emerge in a vacuum**. Philosophies emerge and become popular only in particular social conditions.

B. **Socrates** emerged in the decline of Athens after their loss to Sparta in the Peloponnesian war, the fall of democracy and the rise of tyranny (twice). His Socratic method and his quest for truth are in some ways a reflection of the search for stability in uncertain times.

C. **Locke** and other liberals emerged in the beginnings of capitalism. Their ideas on individual rights, on tolerance, on freedom of thought, and their critique of the divine right of kings challenged the monarchies of the era and championed this new emerging class of bourgeoisie that they were a part of.

D. Likewise, **Marx** emerged during the rise of the industrial revolution, an era in which the exploitation of the working class by capitalism was at its greatest in Europe.

E. **Malcolm X** emerged at a time when the regime of white supremacy in the US was unstable due to international pressures (the Cold War, decolonization) and due to rapid industrialization of the South, which meant that Southern farmers no longer had the same incentive to keep Black workers on their farms but yet the nation did not want to see Black folk as equal humans.

F. The point is that all kinds of ideas can emerge at any time in human history, but **only under the proper social conditions will ideas take root and flower**.

1. Eg. Greeks invented **steam engine** but thought it was just a curiosity. In their era, in which the goal was not to work (i.e. to let your slaves do it) rather than to work more efficiently and to accumulate wealth, they had no use for such gadgets and science.

2. Eg. **Biological notions of race** only emerged in 19th century. Before that people divided humanity according to nation, religion, or level of "civilization." All humans were creatures of God; it's just that some were more civilized than others. Only with the emergence of modern biology and methods of classification of species, as well as a need to justify slavery in a nation in which "all men are created equal," did the notion arise that some races are inferior by nature. Prior to the 19th century such a belief was religious heresy.

## B. Pericles' Funeral Oration

### III. Thucydides, Pericles' Funeral Oration

[from the Crawley translation, revised by Wick. Numbers refer to #s in brackets, then page #s]

#### A. Background to the Funeral Oration

1. Athens, long the dominant power in the Mediterranean, entered into war with Sparta (Lacedaemon) in 431 B.C. The "Peloponnesian War" lasts 27 years, (431-404 B.C.), and ends in defeat for Athens. Signals the end of Athens' "Golden Age" (though ironically its greatest philosophers, Plato and Aristotle, write after this golden age).

2. In the first year of the war, things are going badly and Athens suffers a big defeat. Pericles, an Athenian general, gives a **panegyric** (a tribute) to the fallen soldiers.

B. Q: What are some of the characteristics of Athens, according to Pericles?

1. **Honor of one's ancestors.** 36/107

2. A **democratic constitution**: rule of the many rather than the few, equal justice to all, no distinctions of class recognized by the polity. 37/108

a. The Greek concept of "constitution" means more than just a written document that serves as a polis's fundamental law. It also refers to the structure or makeup of the polis. (Like how a person has a "strong constitution.")

3. **Freedom**, in both public and private life, yet also **obedience to the laws** and respect for others. 37/108

4. **Leisure**: games, sacrifices, etc. Not simply a life of drudgery. 38/108-9

5. An **open city**: It welcomes foreigners, yet can defend itself from them. It's not a city shrouded in secrecy and obsessed with military activities, like Sparta. 39/109

6. The central importance of **participation** in politics. 40/109-110

#### C. Participation

1. **Read** 109-110, 110 (p. 196, 7 of web page)

2. Q: Why would Athenians regard a person who doesn't take part in politics as "useless"?

3. Q: On "daring and deliberation" line: Why does he use the word "daring" to describe political participation? Do we consider voting "daring"? Why would the Greeks?

4. For Greeks, **politics was heroic**. It was not only a means to determine the affairs of the polis, it was a means for a person to distinguish himself through speech and deliberation. Politics was a form of action, just like making war. [next time: get more from Arendt]

D. Q: What else do we see in Pericles' speech, and what else do we know about Ancient Greece?

1. The **subordination of women**.

a. **Read** 45/113-14 (p. 4 of web page)

2. **Slavery**

3. **Classes and class conflict**

4. **War, imperialism, and aggression.**

E. Athens not only presents the ultimate ideals of Western Civilization, it also contains all that is terrible and unjust about it. The problems of Athens become the problems of the present.

F. Now something a few texts ideal compare to India/Chinese thought.

skip/skip?

#### IV. Politics in Ancient Greece

[Source: M.I. Finley, *Politics in the Ancient World*]

A. **Ancient Greece was a class society**, divided into rich and poor.

1. The poor consisted of those who worked for a living—peasants, landless tenants, artisans, shopkeepers. The rich consisted of those who were able to live comfortably on the labor of others.

2. **The stability of Athens** given its class divisions **was guaranteed by two things: citizenship and imperial conquest.**

B. **Athenian imperialism**

1. **War was a normal part of Greek life.** We often associate ancient Greece with democracy. We should also associate it with conquest, war, and violence. Read Vernant, *Myth and Society in Ancient Greece*, p. 29, 36

2. So for the Greeks, politics and war are the same activity, only one is aimed inward at the polis, the other outward at other poleis.

3. Athens was the region's greatest **naval power**. The wealth and power it accumulated through its numerous invasions and conquests not only benefited the rich, it also benefited the poor. Conquest gave the Athenian poor a sense of **psychological superiority** over other Greek poleis, but its primary function was to satiate the poor's desire for a) **the cancellation of their debts**, and b) **their hunger for land**. It also paid for the "bread and circuses" that keep the poor occupied on things besides their poverty and the rich's wealth.

C. **Athenian citizenship**

1. Citizenship was acquired by birth, and it was for males only. All of those males who were free (i.e. not slaves) and Athenian born were citizens. Athens had about 35-40,000 citizens at one time, out of a population of about 350,000, though most Greek poleis had 5,000 or less citizens (Kitto, *The Greeks*, 66).

2. **Greek citizenship included both the rich and many of the poor:** peasants with land, artisans, shopkeepers.

3. The **polis**: Often translated as "city-state," but the polis wasn't a state as we understand the term now: there were no professional bureaucrats running the city and no professional army. It was all run by the citizens in the **Assembly** and the Council of 500. With the exception of generals (who were elected), government positions were selected by lot.

a. The polis means city, but it also means organizing people into some sort of body that governs people's lives. Polis → polity (governing body), politics, police, etc.

D. **Slavery was the foundation of the Greek economy.** The reason why some could participate in politics was because they had the leisure time to do it. The reason why they had the time to practice politics was because slaves and wives did the majority of the productive work in Athens. Aristotle, for example, held numerous slaves, which he released only upon his death.

E. **Women were subordinate beings** in ancient Greece.

[from Okin, *Women in Western Political Thought* chap. 1]

1. Ancient Greece was a **misogynistic society**: Women were blamed for bringing evil into the world (Pandora's box). Similar to Eve in that sense.

2. Women were believed to be **inferior to men by nature**, and therefore limited in their function to making babies and household chores. Meaningful social relationships—of friends, citizens, even lovers—were found only among men.

3. "Respectable women" were secluded, confined to separate quarters within the house, kept from serious discussion, and not educated. They were not allowed to bring suit, could not go to the gymnasium, the marketplace, the courts, and the symposia. Her function was to maintain the household and produce heirs—and be faithful. They were not even supposed to provide romantic or sexual attraction to their husbands.

4. Women of "ill repute"—mistresses, prostitutes,

F. The Greeks' central concern was for *equality*, not freedom. They weren't concerned with who was free and who was a slave. (Slavery won't become a moral problem until the Enlightenment). Instead, they were concerned with who was an equal and who was an unequal. For the Greeks, **inequality was natural**, not equality (i.e. they didn't believe that "all men are created equal" but that men are in fact created unequal, in talents, abilities, etc.) Thus, **equality had to be constructed in political life**. Thus, their political task was how to make unequal men equals, and how equals should rule among themselves and over unequals. *Isonomia* over *demokratia*.

1. Thus, the condition of women, slavery, and imperialism were not morally problematic for ancient Greek citizens: these people were clearly unequals and required being ruled over.

August 28, 2001

Announcements

PHI 107 notes are more up-to-date

C. Plato, "Apology"

I. Politics in the polis:

A. Q: Any Q's or comments on Pericles?

B. The Greek political structure

1. Greek politics were not defined by elections, like they are now, but by participation.

2. **politikos**: Administration of the affairs of the polis.

3. Three main ruling bodies of all Greek poleis:

a. A large assembly. The Athenian Assembly was open to all citizens who chose to attend; eventually they began to pay citizens to attend to encourage the poor to attend. At the Assembly all citizens could initiate, amend, debate, and vote on proposals.

b. A smaller council within the assembly. In Athens this was the Council of 500, selected by lot from all citizens over the age of 30 who were willing to serve. The term in office was one year; a man could serve on the Council only twice in his lifetime.

c. A number of official positions, rotated among eligible citizens. Most of these officials were selected by lot in Athens, their terms restricted for one year.

4. Even the poor could participate in Athenian politics. They didn't have the power of the rich, but they could and did participate. Thus, the rich couldn't just rule as they pleased, they had to win over the poor to their schemes as well.

C. In this setting, political power was achieved through oratory and lobbying.

Speech was an important tool in achieving political power. The goal was not to elect representatives who shared your politics but to convince Greek citizens to support proposals you favored. The only way to do that was to lobby and canvas them. And the only way to do that is to be clever, eloquent, and savvy. You can see that in this kind of setting, philosophy can be very important to the functioning of a society.

How often did they assemble? 40 times a year - Finley

council of 50 elected by generals

II. Context of Socrates' trial (399 B.C.)

← version in 07 Apology notes in PHI 101 is better

A. Athens in the time of Socrates' trial

1. Socrates lived when Athens was in a time of transition. It had fallen from its "golden age" and people had begun to lose their sense of identity and security as a result of their defeat by Sparta in the Peloponnesian War in 404 B.C. Because of the war, Athens was in great turmoil.

2. Shortly after the war the Athenian democracy was overthrown by an oligarchy known as the Thirty Tyrants. This oligarchy was itself soon overthrown and democracy restored. But it showed folks again just how insecure Athenian democracy was. Further, several of Socrates' former students played prominent roles in the rule of the tyrants, so public sentiment was not favorable toward Socrates, and he gained the reputation of being anti-democratic.

3. Also, Socrates' student and lover Alcibiades was a traitor to Athens in the Peloponnesian war, and Socrates was often implicated in that treason.

4. In this context, Athenians asked themselves, what kind of education is proper for a democracy such that it can't be suckered by another Alcibiades or subject to another coup attempt? It is this context of instability and insecurity that partially explain Soc's unpopularity in Athens and in which Meletus and the others bring charges against him.

5. Because of the public suspicion against him, Socrates was brought to trial in 399 BC, five years after the war, on the charges of corrupting the youth and committing religious heresy. Found guilty, and killed by drinking hemlock.

del ↑ why?

## B. Socrates and Plato

1. Socrates was not a formal teacher: he did not work at any school and he never charged anyone for instruction. But he attracted numerous people, including Plato, who followed Socrates around and tried, with Socrates, to discover the true meaning of virtue.

2. Plato was a student of Socrates's for eight years. After Socrates' death, he made it a point to expound on Socrates' ideas, and later as a vehicle through which to spell out his own. It's impossible to tell whose ideas are whose, so don't sweat it.

## C. How the Athenian courts worked

1. No lawyers. Litigants state their own case without the help of counsel. The prosecution went first, then the defense, then the jury (which consisted of 501 citizens chosen by lot) immediately voted guilty or not. A majority was necessary to convict; if the plaintiff failed to receive at least 1/5 of the votes he was fined. When the vote was guilty and there was no penalty fixed by law, the plaintiff proposed a penalty, then the defendant, and then the jury voted between them.

## D. Misc.

1. The oligarchy made a practice of confiscating the estates of wealthy Athenians and resident aliens and of putting many individuals to death. In an effort to implicate Socrates in their actions, the Thirty ordered him to arrest **Leon of Salamis**. Socrates, however, resisted and was spared punishment only because a civil war eventually replaced the Thirty with a new and most radical democracy. A general amnesty, the first in history, was issued absolving those who participated in the reign of terror and other crimes committed during the war. But because many of Socrates' associates were involved with the Thirty, public sentiment had turned against him, and he now had the reputation of being profoundly anti-democratic.

## III. Socrates' defense

### A. Who is Socrates defending himself against?

1. The plaintiffs Meletus, Anytus, and Lycon

2. The community at large: All the people who don't like Socrates and who accuse him of being a person who twists the truth: They say that Soc is a man who "makes the worse argument the stronger" (18c). *"he makes the worse appear the better case" - Jowett*

### B. What does the community "charge" Soc with, according to Soc?

1. In essence, he is defending himself from charges that he is a **sophist**.

2. **Read:** Have someone read the first paragraph.

3. Sophists were like one-man colleges who went around teaching the children of the wealthy merchants who could afford their services. Sophists were trained in the art of **rhetoric**, the art of speaking powerfully and persuasively. Sophists taught how to use the powers of argumentation to persuade others (a very powerful thing in a society whose political system was based on public speaking). Sophists weren't concerned with the truth. They taught people who paid them how to use rhetoric to win arguments regardless of whether they are correct or not.

4. So in this first paragraph and in his defense against the charges that he makes the "worse argument the stronger," **Soc is setting out to prove that he is not a sophist and that he does not employ the techniques of rhetoric**. He is a seeker of truth, not a politician or other swayer of public opinion.

5. Hence Soc emphasizes that **he has never charged a fee to anyone who seeks his teachings**, which is an unusual thing to say since the plaintiffs never accused him of doing that. (19d)

6. It's also why he humbly apologizes to the jury for his poor speaking skills. He's not as slick as Meletus or Lycon, he argues, but he has the truth on his side, which speaks for itself.

7. **Truth vs. rhetoric:** Rhetoric is a performance that is designed to manipulate an audience into believing the speaker. It takes the facts and twists them to fit the speaker's argument. Truth, on the other hand, speaks for itself, Socrates believes. Philosophers use the truth to persuade, not rhetoric.

8. **Q:** Does Soc use any rhetoric in making his defense? Isn't modesty a rhetorical tactic?

C. Now, Socrates claims to have possess a certain kind of wisdom.

1. **Q:** Who told him that there is no man wiser than he?

**The oracle at Delphi.**

2. **Q:** What was Socrates' response to the oracle?

He went to everyone he could around town, from politicians to poets to skilled craftsmen to find someone wiser than he so that he could prove the oracle wrong.

3. **Q:** What did he find?

That everyone thought they were wise, and perhaps were in their area of specialty, but that no one was really wise in a broad sense.

4. **Q:** What does Soc conclude from this? What is the nature of his wisdom?

That he ain't wise, but at least he knows he ain't wise, whereas other folks think they know something but they don't. "All I know is that I don't know nuthin'." (Read 23a-b). *Q<sub>2</sub>, p. 2*

5. Socrates then takes it as **his mission in life**, his religious duty, to make something of a pilgrimage out of talking to every person he knows, seeing if they're wise, and if they're not, proving to them that they are not.

D. **So what is Soc's defense against the community's "charges" against him?**

1. Folks become humiliated when Soc or one of his imitators tests their knowledge and finds them wanting, so they dislike Socrates intensely and claim that he is corrupting the city's youth.

E. **What are the charges against him brought by Meletus?**

1. Read 24b-c. *Q<sub>1</sub>, p. 2*

2. **corrupting the minds of the young.**

3. **Heresy:** Believing in dieties other than the official gods of the state.

F. **What is Socrates' defense against these charges against him?**

1. Corrupting the minds of the young:

a. **Q:** How does Soc defend himself against this charge?

b. **Horse-trainer analogy.** Only specially-trained people can do a person good, just like only a horse trainer can do a horse good. Non-specialists are more likely to do a person harm. (25b)

c. **Q:** What do you think of this defense? Is it anti-democratic?

d. **Harming a companion harms the self.** Thus, corrupting the youth would eventually come around and corrupt Socrates, and why would Soc want to harm himself? (25c-d)

2. Heresy:

a. **Q:** How does Soc defend himself against this charge?

b. He performs a little sleight-of-hand (a little sophistry?) and changes the charges from heresy to atheism, i.e. from not believing in the gods of Athens to not believing in any gods at all. (26c-d) He then goes on to say that of course he believes in gods and is not an atheist, therefore this charge fails, too.

c. **Q:** Why doesn't Soc answer Meletus's actual charge against him? Cos of his *daemon*?

G. Socrates then moves on to a **discussion of goodness**

1. If people ask him why he would pursue a vocation that might lead to his death, Soc says that such consequences don't matter to him and that the only thing to consider about an action is whether it is right or wrong. Read 28b and 28d *Q<sub>4</sub>, p. 4*



Q5, p.4

2. Socrates here **claims to know two things** (Read 29b): a) All he knows is that he don't know and b) it is wicked to do wrong by disobeying one's superior, whether that superior be god or man.

3. That's why he can't stop practicing philosophy; he feels he is ordered to do it by God. He has to constantly push people toward goodness and toward caring for their soul rather than their bodies or their wealth. (29c-30b)

4. Q: Is there a contradiction between Socrates' two kinds of knowledge?

After all, he claims that he doesn't know anything but he seems to have a pretty firm grasp on what "goodness" is and whether or not people are attaining it.

IV. Socrates' punishment

- see of Apology 41c-41d 101

A. What penalty does Socrates offer?

1. **Free maintenance (meals) at the polis's expense.** After all, he is doing a hero's job for Athens. He should be honored for his service to Athens, not penalized. (36b-3) This proposed "penalty" was sure to piss the jury off.

2. **A small fine.**

B. Why doesn't Socrates propose banishment as a penalty?

1. For one, he doesn't fear death. Further, to stop practicing philosophy is to disobey God. (Read 37e-38b). "The unexamined life is not worth living."

C. Was the jury correct to find Socrates guilty?

D. Did Soc deliberately offer himself up to die? Would he have made the same kind of defense if he was 30 rather than 70?

E. Why does Socrates avoid politics?

1. "A man who really fights for justice must lead a private, not a public, life if he is to survive for even a short time." 32a

2. Q: Is Socrates implying that politics and morality don't mix? That morality and democracy don't mix? [I think the latter but not the former, if the "phil-king" stuff is to be consistent with what he says here.]

3. [But remember: Soc seems to put the private before the public, but he also refuses to "mind his own business" and he considers his gadfly role to be performing a public function. Plus, as Gregory Vlastos argues, Socrates seeks the good life and moral perfection for all people, including women and slaves. This, Vlastos argues, shows that Soc is really a democrat, whatever his criticisms of Athens.]

F. Is Soc a benefit to Athenian democracy or does he undermine it?

Does he uphold or undermine A. ideals?

1. Before the jury voted to convict him Soc told the jury that they should save his life, not on his account (he was 70 and near death anyway) but to save themselves.

2. Q: Why does he say that? Read 30d-31a. ~~Socrates says Athens is a noble but lazy horse and he is a gadfly.~~ Q: What does he mean by that? Q2, p.4

G. Which is more dangerous to democracy, a sophist or a philosopher?

1. Lisa sez both: Sophists cos they corrupt political judgment, philosophers cos they don't think all people are capable of political judgment.

V. Greek virtues

A. Q: What Greek virtues are elaborated in the "Apology"?

1. Q: Which ones does Socrates share? Which ones does he criticize?

2. Q: What similarities and differences are there with the "Funeral Oration"?

B. Q: What are the contradictions of Athens elaborated in the "Apology"?

1. Q: Which ones does Socrates share? Criticize?

Handwritten notes: A, E, L, and a large arrow pointing from the top left towards the bottom left.

reln. of phil	reln. of politics
truth	rhetoric
virtue	flattery
goodness	opinion
(right or wrong)	(persuasion, power)

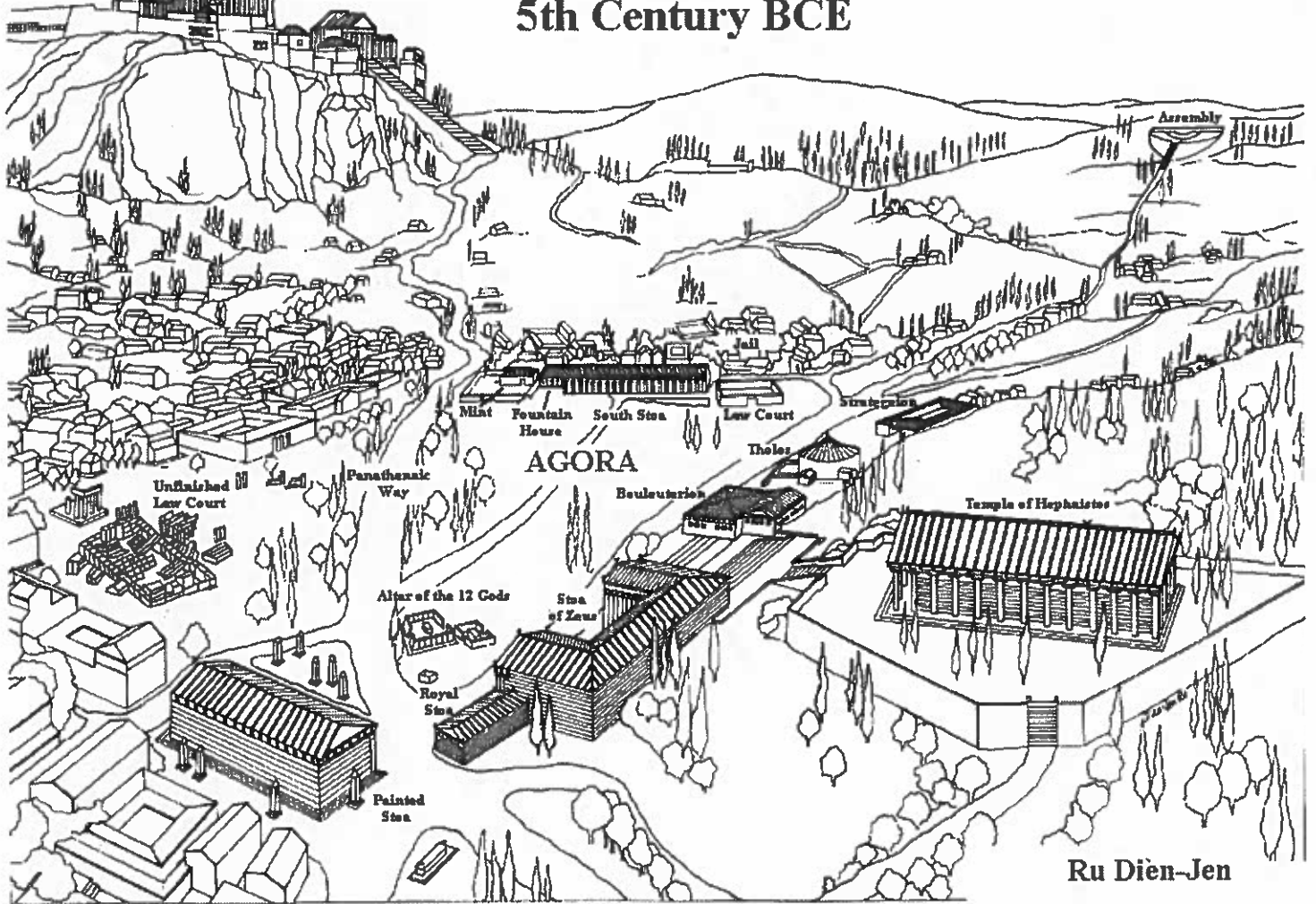
Handwritten notes on a yellow sticky note: - feast, - reorganize ↓ ↓ ↓

# ACROPOLIS

Parthenon

# ATHENS

## 5th Century BCE



Ru Dien-Jen



wiser than I was, and the Pythian prophetess answered that there was no man wiser. Chacrephon is dead himself, but his brother, who is in court, will confirm the truth of this story.

Why do I mention this? Because I am going to explain to you why I have such an evil name. When I heard the answer, I said to myself, What can the god mean? and what is the interpretation of this riddle? For I know that I have no wisdom, small or great. What can he mean when he says that I am the wisest of men? And yet he is a god and cannot lie; that would be against his nature. After a long consideration, I at last thought of a method of trying the question. I reflected that if I could only find a man wiser than myself, then I might go to the god with a refutation in my hand. I should say to him, "Here is a man who is wiser than I am; but you said that I was the wisest." Accordingly I went to one who had the reputation of wisdom, and observed to him - his name I need not mention; he was a politician whom I selected for examination - and the result was as follows: When I began to talk with him, I could not help thinking that he was not really wise, although he was thought wise by many, and wiser still by himself; and I went and tried to explain to him that he thought himself wise, but was not really wise; and the consequence was that he hated me, and his enmity was shared by several who were present and heard me. So I left him, saying to myself, as I went away: Well, although I do not suppose that either of us knows anything really beautiful and good, I am better off than he is - for he knows nothing, and thinks that he knows. I neither know nor think that I know. In this latter particular, then, I seem to have slightly the advantage of him. Then I went to another, who had still higher philosophical pretensions, and my conclusion was exactly the same. I made another enemy of him, and of many others besides him.

After this I went to one man after another, being not unconscious of the enmity which I provoked, and I lamented and feared this: but necessity was laid upon me - the word of God, I thought, ought to be considered first. And I said to myself, Go I must to all who appear to know, and find out the meaning of the oracle. And I swear to you, Athenians, by the dog I swear! - for I must tell you the truth - the result of my mission was just this: I found that the men most in repute were all but the most foolish; and that some inferior men were really wiser and better. I will tell you the tale of my wanderings and of the "Herculean" labors, as I may call them, which I endured only to find at last the oracle irrefutable. When I left the politicians, I went to the poets; tragic, dithyrambic, and all sorts. And there, I said to myself, you will be detected; now you will find out that you are more ignorant than they are. Accordingly, I took them some of the most elaborate passages in their own writings, and asked what was the meaning of them - thinking that they would teach me something. Will you believe me? I am almost ashamed to speak of this, but still I must say that there is hardly a person present who would not have talked better about their poetry than they did themselves. That showed me in an instant that not by wisdom do poets write poetry, but by a sort of genius and inspiration; they are like diviners or soothsayers who also say many fine things, but do not understand the meaning of them. And the poets appeared to me to be much in the same case; and I further observed that upon the strength of their poetry they believed themselves to be the wisest of men in other things in which they were not wise. So I departed, conceiving myself to be superior to them for the same reason that I was superior to the politicians.

At last I went to the artisans, for I was conscious that I knew nothing at all, as I may say, and I was sure that they knew many fine things; and in this I was not mistaken, for they did know many things of which I was ignorant, and in this they certainly were wiser than I was. But I observed that even the good artisans fell into the same error as the poets; because they were good workmen they thought that they also knew all sorts of high matters, and this defect in them overshadowed their wisdom - therefore I asked myself on behalf of the oracle, whether I would like to be as I was, neither having their knowledge nor their ignorance, or like them in both; and I made answer to myself and the oracle that I was better off as I was.

This investigation has led to my having many enemies of the worst and most dangerous kind, and has given occasion also to many calumnies, and I am called wise, for my hearers always imagine that I myself possess the wisdom which I find wanting in others: but the truth is, O men of Athens, that God only is wise; and in this oracle he means to say that the wisdom of men is little or nothing; he is not speaking of Socrates, he is only using my name as an illustration, as if he said, He, O men, is the wisest, who, like Socrates, knows that his wisdom is in truth worth nothing. And so I go my way, obedient to the god, and make inquiry into the wisdom of anyone, whether citizen or stranger, who appears to be wise; and if he is not wise, then in vindication of the oracle I show him that he is not wise; and this occupation quite absorbs me, and I have no time to give either to any public matter of interest or to any concern of my own, but I am in utter poverty by reason of my devotion to the god.

There is another thing: - young men of the richer classes, who have not much to do, come about me of their own accord; they like to hear the pretenders examined, and they often imitate me, and examine others themselves; there are plenty of persons, as they soon enough discover, who think that they know something, but really know little or nothing; and then those who are examined by them instead of being angry with themselves are angry with me: This confounded Socrates, they say; this villainous misleader of youth! - and then if somebody asks them, Why, what evil does he practise or teach? they do not know, and cannot tell; but in order that they may not appear to be at a loss, they repeat the ready-made charges which are used against all philosophers about teaching things up in the clouds and under the earth, and having no gods, and making the worse appear the better cause; for they do not like to confess that their pretence of knowledge has been detected - which is the truth: and as they are numerous and ambitious and energetic, and are all in battle array and have persuasive tongues, they have filled your ears with their loud and inveterate calumnies. And this is the reason why my three accusers, Meletus and Anytus and Lycon, have set upon me; Meletus, who has a quarrel with me on behalf of the poets; Anytus, on behalf of the craftsmen; Lycon, on behalf of the rhetoricians; and as I said at the beginning, I cannot expect to get rid of this mass of calumny all in a moment. And this, O men of Athens, is the truth and the whole truth; I have concealed nothing, I have dissembled nothing. And yet I know that this plainness of speech makes them hate me, and what is their hatred but a proof that I am speaking the truth? - this is the occasion and reason of their slander of me, as you will find out either in this or in any future inquiry. *Q. Wellson*

I have said enough in my defence against the first class of my accusers; I turn to the second class, who are headed by Meletus, that good and patriotic man, as he calls himself. And now I will try to defend myself against them: these new accusers must also have their affidavit read. What do they say? Something of this sort: - That Socrates is a doer of evil, and corrupter of the youth, and he does not believe in the gods of the state, and has other new divinities of his own. That is the sort of charge; and now let us examine the particular counts. He says that I am a doer of evil, who corrupt the youth; but I say, O men of Athens, that Meletus is a doer of evil, and the evil is that he makes a joke of a serious matter, and is too ready at bringing other men to trial from a pretended zeal and interest about matters in which he really never had the smallest interest. And the truth of this I will endeavor to prove.

Come hither, Meletus, and let me ask a question of you. You think a great deal about the improvement of youth?

Yes, I do.

Tell the judges, then, who is their improver; for you must know, as you have taken the pains to discover their corrupter, and are citing and accusing me before them. Speak, then, and tell the judges who their improver is. Observe, Meletus, that you are silent, and have nothing to say. But is not this rather disgraceful, and a very considerable proof of what I was saying, that you have no interest in the matter? Speak up, friend, and tell us who their improver is.

The laws.

But that, my good sir, is not my meaning. I want to know who the person is, who, in the first place, knows the laws.

The judges, Socrates, who are present in court.

What do you mean to say, Meletus, that they are able to instruct and improve youth?

Certainly they are.

What, all of them, or some only and not others?

All of them.

By the goddess Here, that is good news! There are plenty of improvers, then. And what do you say of the audience, - do they improve them?

Yes, they do.

And the senators?

Yes, the senators improve them.

But perhaps the members of the citizen assembly corrupt them? - or do they too improve them?

They improve them.

Then every Athenian improves and elevates them; all with the exception of myself; and I alone am their corrupter? Is that what you affirm?

That is what I stoutly affirm.

I am very unfortunate if that is true. But suppose I ask you a question: Would you say that this also holds true in the case of horses? Does one man do them harm and all the world good? Is not the exact opposite of this true? One man is able to do them good, or at least not many; - the trainer of horses, that is to say, does them good, and others who have to do with them rather injure them? Is not that true, Meletus, of horses, or any other animals? Yes, certainly. Whether you and Anytus say yes or no, that is no matter. Happy indeed would be the condition of youth if they had one corrupter only, and all the rest of the world were their improvers. And you, Meletus, have sufficiently shown that you never had a thought about the young: your carelessness is seen in your not caring about matters spoken of in this very indictment.

And now, Meletus, I must ask you another question: Which is better, to live among bad citizens, or among good ones? Answer, friend, I say; for that is a question which may be easily answered. Do not the good do their neighbors good, and the bad do them evil?

Certainly.

And is there anyone who would rather be injured than benefited by those who live with him? Answer, my good friend; the law requires you to answer - does anyone like to be injured?

Certainly not.

And when you accuse me of corrupting and deteriorating the youth, do you allege that I corrupt them intentionally or unintentionally?

Intentionally, I say.

But you have just admitted that the good do their neighbors good, and the evil do them evil. Now is that a truth which your superior wisdom has recognized thus early in life, and am I, at my age, in such darkness and ignorance as not to know that if a man with whom I have to live is corrupted by me, I am very likely to be harmed by him, and yet I corrupt him, and intentionally, too; - that is what you are saying, and of that you will never persuade me or any other human being. But either I do not corrupt them, or I corrupt them unintentionally, so that on either view of the case you lie. If my offence is unintentional, the law has no cognizance of unintentional offences: you ought to have taken me privately, and warned and admonished me; for if I had been better advised, I should have left off doing what I only did unintentionally - no doubt I should; whereas you hated to converse with me or teach me, but you indicted me in this court, which is a place not of instruction, but of punishment.

I have shown, Athenians, as I was saying, that Meletus has no care at all, great or small, about the matter. But still I should like to know, Meletus, in what I am affirmed to corrupt the young. I suppose you mean, as I infer from your indictment, that I teach them not to acknowledge the gods which the state acknowledges, but some other new divinities or spiritual agencies in their stead. These are the lessons which corrupt the youth, as you say.

Yes, that I say emphatically.

Then, by the gods, Meletus, of whom we are speaking, tell me and the court, in somewhat plainer terms, what you mean! for I do not as yet understand whether you affirm that I teach others to acknowledge some gods, and therefore do believe in gods and am not an entire atheist - this you do not lay to my charge; but only that they are not the same gods which the city recognizes - the charge is that they are different gods. Or, do you mean to say that I am an atheist simply, and a teacher of atheism?

I mean the latter - that you are a complete atheist.

That is an extraordinary statement, Meletus. Why do you say that? Do you mean that I do not believe in the godhead of the sun or moon, which is the common creed of all men?

I assure you, judges, that he does not believe in them; for he says that the sun is stone, and the moon earth.

Friend Meletus, you think that you are accusing Anaxagoras; and you have but a bad opinion of the judges, if you fancy them ignorant to such a degree as not to know that those doctrines are found in the books of Anaxagoras the Clazomenian, who is full of them. And these are the doctrines which the youth are said to learn of Socrates, when there are not unfrequently exhibitions of them at the theatre (price of admission one drachma at the most); and they might cheaply purchase them, and laugh at Socrates if he pretends to father such eccentricities. And so, Meletus, you really think that I do not believe in any god?

I swear by Zeus that you believe absolutely in none at all.

You are a liar, Meletus, not believed even by yourself. For I cannot help thinking, O men of Athens, that Meletus is reckless and impudent, and that he has written this indictment in a spirit of mere wantonness and youthful bravado. Has he not compounded a riddle, thinking to try me? He said to himself: - I shall see whether this wise Socrates will discover my ingenious contradiction, or whether I shall be able to deceive him and the rest of them. For he certainly does appear to me to contradict himself in the indictment as much as if he said that Socrates is guilty of not believing in the gods, and yet of believing in them - but this surely is a piece of fun.

I should like you, O men of Athens, to join me in examining what I conceive to be his inconsistency; and do you, Meletus, answer. And I must remind you that you are not to interrupt me if I speak in my accustomed manner.

Did ever man, Meletus, believe in the existence of human things, and not of human beings? ... I wish, men of Athens, that he would answer, and not be always trying to get up an interruption. Did ever any man believe in horsemanship, and not in horses? or in flute-playing, and not in flute-players? No, my friend; I will answer to you and to the court, as you refuse to answer for yourself. There is no man who ever did. But now please to answer the next question: Can a man believe in spiritual and divine agencies, and not in spirits or demigods?

He cannot.

I am glad that I have extracted that answer, by the assistance of the court; nevertheless you swear in the indictment that I teach and believe in divine or spiritual agencies (new or old, no matter for that); at any rate, I believe in spiritual agencies, as you say and swear in the affidavit; but if I believe in divine beings, I must believe in spirits or demigods; - is not that true? Yes, that is true, for I may assume that your silence gives assent to that. Now what are spirits or demigods? are they not either gods or the sons of gods? Is that true?

Yes, that is true.

But this is just the ingenious riddle of which I was speaking: the demigods or spirits are gods, and you say first that I don't believe in gods, and then again that I do believe in gods; that is, if I believe in demigods. For if the demigods are the illegitimate sons of gods, whether by the Nymphs or by any other mothers, as is thought, that, as all men will allow, necessarily implies the existence of their parents. You might as well affirm the existence of mules, and deny that of horses and asses. Such nonsense, Meletus, could only have been intended by you as a trial of me. You have put this into the indictment because you had nothing real of which to accuse me. But no one who has a particle of understanding will ever be convinced by you that the same man can believe in divine and superhuman things, and yet not believe that there are gods and demigods and heroes.

I have said enough in answer to the charge of Meletus: any elaborate defence is unnecessary; but as I was saying before, I certainly have many enemies, and this is what will be my destruction if I am destroyed; of that I am certain: - not Meletus, nor yet Anytus, but the envy and detraction of the world, which has been the death

corrupting  
before:  
corrupting  
the self  
corrupting  
before

Soc. shifts the charge

but does Socr. believe in the gods of Athens?

of many good men, and will probably be the death of many more; there is no danger of my being the last of them.

Q4 Someone will say: And are you not ashamed, Socrates, of a course of life which is likely to bring you to an untimely end? To him I may fairly answer: There you are mistaken: a man who is good for anything ought not to calculate the chance of living or dying; he ought only to consider whether in doing anything he is doing right or wrong - acting the part of a good man or of a bad. Whereas, according to your view, the heroes who fell at Troy were not good for much, and the son of Thetis above all, who altogether despised danger in comparison with disgrace; and when his goddess mother said to him, in his eagerness to slay Hector, that if he avenged his companion Patroclus, and slew Hector, he would die himself - "Fate," as she said, "waits upon you next after Hector"; he, hearing this, utterly despised danger and death, and instead of fearing them, feared rather to live in dishonor, and not to avenge his friend. "Let me die next," he replies, "and be avenged of my enemy, rather than abide here by the beaked ships, a scorn and a burden of the earth." Had Achilles any thought of death and danger? For wherever a man's place is, whether the place which he has chosen or that in which he has been placed by a commander, there he ought to remain in the hour of danger; he should not think of death or of anything, but of disgrace. And this, O men of Athens, is a true saying.

Athenian ideals

Q5 Strange, indeed, would be my conduct, O men of Athens, if I who, when I was ordered by the generals whom you chose to command me at Potidaea and Amphipolis and Delium, remained where they placed me, like any other man, facing death; if, I say, now, when, as I conceive and imagine, God orders me to fulfil the philosopher's mission of searching into myself and other men, I were to desert my post through fear of death, or any other fear; that would indeed be strange, and I might justly be arraigned in court for denying the existence of the gods, if I disobeyed the oracle because I was afraid of death: then I should be fancying that I was wise when I was not wise. For this fear of death is indeed the pretence of wisdom, and not real wisdom, being the appearance of knowing the unknown; since no one knows whether death, which they in their fear apprehend to be the greatest evil, may not be the greatest good. Is there not here conceit of knowledge, which is a disgraceful sort of ignorance? And this is the point in which, as I think, I am superior to men in general, and in which I might perhaps fancy myself wiser than other men, - that whereas I know but little of the world below, I do not suppose that I know; but I do know that injustice and disobedience to a better, whether God or man, is evil and dishonourable, and I will never fear or avoid a possible good rather than a certain evil. And therefore if you let me go now, and reject the counsels of Anytus, who said that if I were not put to death I ought not to have been prosecuted, and that if I escape now, your sons will all be utterly ruined by listening to my words - if you say to me, Socrates, this time we will not mind Anytus, and will let you off, but upon one condition, that are to inquire and speculate in this way any more, and that if you are caught doing this again you shall die; - if this was the condition on which you let me go, I should reply: "Men of Athens, I honor and love you; but I shall obey God rather than you, and while I have life and strength I shall never cease from the practice and teaching of philosophy, exhorting anyone whom I meet after my manner, and convincing him, saying: O my friend, why do you who are a citizen of the great and mighty and wise city of Athens, care so much about laying up the greatest amount of money and honor and reputation, and so little about wisdom and truth and the greatest improvement of the soul, which you never regard or heed at all? Are you not ashamed of this? And if the person with whom I am arguing says: Yes, but I do care; I do not depart or let him go at once; I interrogate and examine and cross-examine him, and if I think that he has no virtue, but only says that he has, I reproach him with undervaluing the greater, and overvaluing the less. And this I should say to everyone whom I meet, young and old, citizen and alien, but especially to the citizens, inasmuch as they are my brethren. For this is the command of God, as I would have you know; and I believe that to this day no greater good has ever happened in the state than my service to the God. For I do nothing but go about persuading you all, old and young alike, not to take thought for your persons and your properties, but first and chiefly to care about the greatest improvement of the soul. I tell you that virtue is not given by money, but that from virtue come money and every other good of man, public as well as private. This is my teaching, and if this is the doctrine which corrupts the youth, my influence is ruinous indeed. But if anyone says that this is not my teaching, he is speaking an untruth. Wherefore, O men of Athens, I say to you, do as Anytus bids or not as Anytus bids, and either acquit me or not; but whatever you do, know that I shall never alter my ways, not even if I have to die many times.

← a firm statement for someone who has nothing

Q7 Men of Athens, do not interrupt, but hear me; there was an agreement between us that you should hear me out. And I think that what I am going to say will do you good: for I have something more to say, at which you may be inclined to cry out; but I beg that you will not do this. I would have you know that, if you kill such a one as I am, you will injure yourselves more than you will injure me. Meletus and Anytus will not injure me: they cannot; for it is not in the nature of things that a bad man should injure a better than himself. I do not deny that he may, perhaps, kill him, or drive him into exile, or deprive him of civil rights; and he may imagine, and others may imagine, that he is doing him a great injury: but in that I do not agree with him; for the evil of doing as Anytus is doing - of unjustly taking away another man's life - is greater far. And now, Athenians, I am not going to argue for my own sake, as you may think, but for yours, that you may not sin against the God, or lightly reject his boon by condemning me. For if you kill me you will not easily find another like me, who, if I may use such a ludicrous figure of speech, am a sort of gadfly, given to the state by the God; and the state is like a great and noble steed who is tardy in his motions owing to his very size, and requires to be stirred into life. I am that gadfly which God has given to the state and all day long and in all places am always fastening upon you, arousing and persuading and reproaching you. And as you will not easily find another like me, I would advise you to spare me; I dare say that you may feel irritated at being suddenly awakened when you are caught napping; and you may think that if you were to strike me dead, as Anytus advises, which you easily might, then you would sleep on for the remainder of your lives, unless God in his care of you gives you another gadfly. And that I am given to you by God is proved by this: - that if I had been like other men, I should not have neglected all my own concerns, or patiently seen the neglect of them during all these years, and have been doing yours, coming to you individually, like a father or elder brother, exhorting you to regard virtue; this I say, would not be like human nature. And had I gained anything, or if my exhortations had been paid, there would have been some sense in that: but now, as you will perceive, not even the impudence of my accusers dares to say that I have ever exacted or sought pay of anyone; they have no witness of that. And I have a witness of the truth of what I say; my poverty is a sufficient witness.

See, or the gadfly of Athens ideals

Q8 Someone may wonder why I go about in private, giving advice and busying myself with the concerns of others, but do not venture to come forward in public and advise the state. I will tell you the reason of this. You have often heard me speak of an oracle or sign which comes to me, and is the divinity which Meletus ridicules in the indictment. This sign I have had ever since I was a child. The sign is a voice which comes to me and always forbids me to do something which I am going to do, but never commands me to do anything, and this is what stands in the way of my being a politician. And rightly, as I think. For I am certain, O men of Athens, that if I had engaged in politics, I should have perished long ago and done no good either to you or to myself. And don't be offended at my telling you the truth: for the truth is that no man who goes to war with you or any other multitude, honestly struggling against the commission of unrighteousness and wrong in the state, will save his life; he who will really fight for the right, if he would live even for a little while, must have a private station and not a public one.

z. 1 gadfly  
why do I stay out of politics

Q9 does this violate A. ideals of citizenship? - let's lead a private life

I can give you as proofs of this, not words only, but deeds, which you value more than words. Let me tell you a passage of my own life, which will prove to you that I should never have yielded to injustice from any fear of death, and that if I had not yielded I should have died at once. I will tell you a story - tasteless, perhaps, and commonplace, but nevertheless true. The only office of state which I ever held, O men of Athens, was that of senator; the tribe Antiochis, which is my tribe, had the presidency at the trial of the generals who had not taken up the bodies of the slain after the battle of Arginusae; and you proposed to try them all together, which was illegal, as you all thought afterwards; but at the time I was the only one of the Prytanes who was opposed to the illegality, and I gave my vote against you; and when the orators threatened to impeach and arrest me, and have me taken away, and you called and shouted, I made up my mind that I would run the risk, having law and justice with me, rather than take part in your injustice because I feared imprisonment and death. This happened in the days of the democracy. But when the oligarchy of the Thirty was in power, they sent for me and four others into the rotunda, and bade us bring Leon the Salamian from Salamis, as they wanted to execute him. This was a specimen of the sort of commands which they were always giving with the view of implicating as many as possible in their crimes; and then I showed, not in words only, but in deed, that, if I may be allowed to use such an expression, I cared not a straw for death, and that my only fear was the fear of doing an unrighteous or unworthy thing. For the strong arm of that oppressive power did not frighten me into doing wrong; and when we came out of the rotunda the other four went to Salamis and fetched Leon, but I went quietly home. For which I might have lost my life, had not the power of the Thirty shortly afterwards come to an end. And to this may will witness.

Now do you really imagine that I could have survived all these years, if I had led a public life, supposing that like a good man I had always supported the right and had made justice, as I ought, the first thing? No, indeed, men of Athens, neither I nor any other. But I have been always the same in all my actions, public as well as private, and never have I yielded any base compliance to those who are slanderously termed my disciples or to any other. For the truth is that I have no regular disciples: but if anyone likes to come and hear me while I am pursuing my mission, whether he be young or old, he may freely come. Nor do I converse with those who pay only, and not with those who do not pay; but anyone, whether he be rich or poor, may ask and answer me and listen to my words; and whether he turns out to be a bad man or a good one, that cannot be justly laid to my charge, as I never taught him anything. And if anyone says that he has ever learned or heard anything from me in private which all the world has not heard, I should like you to know that he is speaking an untruth.

Politics is an activity that doesn't take support the right, but Soc. must

But I shall be asked, Why do people delight in continually conversing with you? I have told you already, Athenians, the whole truth about this: they like to hear the cross-examination of the pretenders to wisdom; there is amusement in this. And this is a duty which the God has imposed upon me, as I am assured by oracles, visions, and in every sort of way in which the will of divine power was ever signified to anyone. This is true, O Athenians; or, if not true, would be soon refuted. For if I am really corrupting the youth, and have corrupted some of them already, those of them who have grown up and have become sensible that I gave them bad advice in the days of their youth should come forward as accusers and take their revenge; and if they do not like to come themselves, some of their relatives, fathers, brothers, or other kinsmen, should say what evil their families suffered at my hands. Now is their time. Many of them I see in the court. There is Crito, who is of the same age and of the same deme with myself; and there is Critobolus his son, whom I also see. Then again there is Lysanias of Sphettus, who is the father of Aeschines - he is present; and also there is Antiphan of Cephissus, who is the father of Epignus; and there are the brothers of several who have associated with me. There is Nicostratus the son of Theodotides, and the brother of Theodotus (now Theodotus himself is dead, and therefore he, at any rate, will not seek to stop him);

and there is Paralus the son of Demodocus, who had a brother Theages; and Adeimantus the son of Ariston, whose brother Plato is present; and Acontodorus, who is the brother of Apollodorus, whom I also see. I might mention a great many others, any of whom Meletus should have produced as witnesses in the course of his speech; and let him still produce them, if he has forgotten - I will make way for him. And let him say, if he has any testimony of the sort which he can produce. Nay, Athenians, the very opposite is the truth. For all these are ready to witness on behalf of the corrupter, of the destroyer of their kindred, as Meletus and Anytus call me; not the corrupted youth only - there might have been a motive for that - but their uncorrupted elder relatives. Why should they too support me with their testimony? Why, indeed, except for the sake of truth and justice, and because they know that I am speaking the truth, and that Meletus is lying.

Well, Athenians, this and the like of this is nearly all the defence which I have to offer. Yet a word more. Perhaps there may be someone who is offended at me, when he calls to mind how he himself, on a similar or even a less serious occasion, had recourse to prayers and supplications with many tears, and how he produced his children in court, which was a moving spectacle, together with a posse of his relations and friends; whereas I, who am probably in danger of my life, will do none of these things. Perhaps this may come into his mind, and he may be set against me, and vote in anger because he is displeased at this. Now if there be such a person among you, which I am far from affirming, I may fairly reply to him: My friend, I am a man, and like other men, a creature of flesh and blood, and not of wood or stone, as Homer says; and I have a family, yes, and sons. O Athenians, three in number, one of whom is growing up, and the two others are still young; and yet I will not bring any of them hither in order to petition you for an acquittal. And why not? Not from any self-will or disregard of you. Whether I am or am not afraid of death is another question, of which I will not now speak. But my reason simply is that I feel such conduct to be discreditable to myself, and you, and the whole state. One who has reached my years, and who has a name for wisdom, whether deserved or not, ought not to debase himself. At any rate, the world has decided that Socrates is in some way superior to other men. And if those among you who are said to be superior in wisdom and courage, and any other virtue, demean themselves in this way, how shameful is their conduct! I have seen men of reputation, when they have been condemned, behaving in the strangest manner: they seemed to fancy that they were going to suffer something dreadful if they died, and that they could be immortal if you only allowed them to live; and I think that they were a dishonor to the state, and that any stranger coming in would say of them that the most eminent men of Athens, to whom the Athenians themselves give honor and command, are no better than women. And I say that these things ought not to be done by those of us who are of reputation; and if they are done, you ought not to permit them; you ought rather to show that you are more inclined to condemn, not the man who is quiet, but the man who gets up a doleful scene, and makes the city ridiculous.

But, setting aside the question of dishonor, there seems to be something wrong in petitioning a judge, and thus procuring an acquittal instead of informing and convincing him. For his duty is, not to make a present of justice, but to give judgment; and he has sworn that he will judge according to the laws, and not according to his own good pleasure; and neither he nor we should get into the habit of perjuring ourselves - there can be no piety in that. Do not then require me to do what I consider dishonorable and impious and wrong, especially now, when I am being tried for impiety on the indictment of Meletus. For if, O men of Athens, by force of persuasion and entreaty, I could overpower your oaths, then I should be teaching you to believe that there are no gods, and convict myself, in my own defence, of not believing in them. But that is not the case; for I do believe that there are gods, and in a far higher sense than that in which any of my accusers believe in them. And to you and to God I commit my cause, to be determined by you as is best for you and me.

*The jury finds Socrates guilty.*

#### Socrates' Proposal for his Sentence

There are many reasons why I am not grieved, O men of Athens, at the vote of condemnation. I expected it, and am only surprised that the votes are so nearly equal; for I had thought that the majority against me would have been far larger; but now, had thirty votes gone over to the other side, I should have been acquitted. And I may say that I have escaped Meletus. And I may say more; for without the assistance of Anytus and Lycon, he would not have had a fifth part of the votes, as the law requires, in which case he would have incurred a fine of a thousand drachmae, as is evident.

And so he proposes death as the penalty. And what shall I propose on my part, O men of Athens? Clearly that which is my due. And what is that which I ought to pay or to receive? What shall be done to the man who has never had the wit to be idle during his whole life; but has been careless of what the many care about - wealth, and family interests, and military offices, and speaking in the assembly, and magistracies, and plots, and parties. Reflecting that I was really too honest a man to follow in this way and live, I did not go where I could do no good to you or to myself; but where I could do the greatest good privately to everyone of you, thither I went, and sought to persuade every man among you that he must look to himself, and seek virtue and wisdom before he looks to his private interests, and look to the state before he looks to the interests of the state; and that this should be the order which he observes in all his actions. What shall be done to such a one? Doubtless some good thing, O men of Athens, if he has his reward; and the good should be of a kind suitable to him. What would be a reward suitable to a poor man who is your benefactor, who desires leisure that he may instruct you? There can be no more fitting reward than maintenance in the Prytaneum, O men of Athens, a reward which he deserves far more than the citizen who has won the prize at Olympia in the horse or chariot race, whether the chariots were drawn by two horses or by many. For I am in want, and he has enough; and he only gives you the appearance of happiness, and I give you the reality. And if I am to estimate the penalty justly, I say that maintenance in the Prytaneum is the just return.

Perhaps you may think that I am braving you in saying this, as in what I said before about the tears and prayers. But that is not the case. I speak rather because I am convinced that I never intentionally wronged anyone, although I cannot convince you of that - for we have had a short conversation only; but if there were a law at Athens, such as there is in other cities, that a capital cause should not be decided in one day, then I believe that I should have convinced you; but now the time is too short. I cannot in a moment refute great slanders; and, as I am convinced that I never wronged another, I will assuredly not wrong myself. I will not say of myself that I deserve any evil, or propose any penalty. Why should I? Because I am afraid of the penalty of death which Meletus proposes? When I do not know whether death is a good or an evil, why should I propose a penalty which would certainly be an evil? Shall I say imprisonment? And why should I live in prison, and be the slave of the magistrates of the year - of the Eleven? Or shall the penalty be a fine, and imprisonment until the fine is paid? There is the same objection. I should have to lie in prison, for money I have none, and I cannot pay. And if I say exile (and this may possibly be the penalty which you will affix), I must indeed be blinded by the love of life if I were to consider that when you, who are my own citizens, cannot endure my discourses and words, and have found them so grievous and odious that you would fain have done with them, others are likely to endure me. No, indeed, men of Athens, that is not very likely. And what a life should I lead, at my age, wandering from city to city, living in ever-changing exile, and always being driven out! For I am quite sure that into whatever place I go, as here so also there, the young men will come to me, and if I drive them away, their elders will drive me out at their desire: and if I let them come, their fathers and friends will drive me out for their sakes.

Someone will say: Yes, Socrates, but cannot you hold your tongue, and then you may go into a foreign city, and no one will interfere with you? Now I have great difficulty in making you understand my answer to this. For if I tell you that this would be a disobedience to a divine command, and therefore that I cannot hold my tongue, you will not believe that I am serious; and if I say again that the greatest good of man is daily to converse about virtue, and all that concerning which you hear me examining myself and others, and that the life which is unexamined is not worth living - that you are still less likely to believe. And yet what I say is true, although a thing of which it is hard for me to persuade you. Moreover, I am not accustomed to think that I deserve any punishment. Had I money I might have proposed to give you what I had, and have been none the worse. But you see that I have none, and can only ask you to proportion the fine to my means. However, I think that I could afford a mina, and therefore I propose that penalty; Plato, Crito, Critobulus, and Apollodorus, my friends here, bid me say thirty minae, and they will be the sureties. Well then, say thirty minae, let that be the penalty; for that they will be ample security to you.

Athenian  
ideals:  
virtue,  
civic  
loyalty

*The jury condemns Socrates to death.*

#### Socrates' Comments on his Sentence

Not much time will be gained, O Athenians, in return for the evil name which you will get from the detractors of the city, who will say that you killed Socrates, a wise man; for they will call me wise even although I am not wise when they want to reproach you. If you had waited a little while, your desire would have been fulfilled in the course of nature. For I am far advanced in years, as you may perceive, and not far from death. I am speaking now only to those of you who have condemned me to death. And I have another thing to say to them: You think that I was convicted through deficiency of words - I mean, that if I had thought fit to leave nothing undone, nothing unsaid, I might have gained an acquittal. Not so; the deficiency which led to my conviction was not of words - certainly not. But I had not the boldness or impudence or inclination to address you as you would have liked me to address you, weeping and wailing and lamenting, and saying and doing many things which you have been accustomed to hear from others, and which, as I say, are unworthy of me. But I thought that I ought not to do anything common or mean in the hour of danger: nor do I now repent of the manner of my defence, and I would rather die having spoken after my manner, than speak in your manner and live. For neither in war nor yet at law ought any man to use every way of escaping death. For often in battle there is no doubt that if a man will throw away his arms, and fall on his knees before his pursuers, he may escape death; and in other dangers there are other ways of escaping death, if a man is willing to say and do anything. The difficulty, my friends, is not in avoiding death, but in avoiding unrighteousness; for that runs faster than death. I am old and move slowly, and the slower runner has overtaken me, and my accusers are keen and quick, and the faster runner, who is unrighteousness, has overtaken them. And now I depart hence condemned by

you to suffer the penalty of death, and they, too, go their ways condemned by the truth to suffer the penalty of villainy and wrong; and I must abide by my award - let them abide by theirs. I suppose that these things may be regarded as fated, - and I think that they are well.

And now, O men who have condemned me, I would fain prophesy to you; for I am about to die, and that is the hour in which men are gifted with prophetic power. And I prophesy to you who are my murderers, that immediately after my death punishment far heavier than you have inflicted on me will surely await you. Me you have killed because you wanted to escape the accuser, and not to give an account of your lives. But that will not be as you suppose: far otherwise. For I say that there will be more accusers of you than there are now; accusers whom hitherto I have restrained: and as they are younger they will be more severe with you, and you will be more offended at them. For if you think that by killing men you can avoid the accuser censuring your lives, you are mistaken; that is not a way of escape which is either possible or honorable; the easiest and noblest way is not to be crushing others, but to be improving yourselves. This is the prophecy which I utter before my departure, to the judges who have condemned me.

Friends, who would have acquitted me, I would like also to talk with you about this thing which has happened, while the magistrates are busy, and before I go to the place at which I must die. Stay then awhile, for we may as well talk with one another while there is time. You are my friends, and I should like to show you the meaning of this event which has happened to me. O my judges - for you I may truly call judges - I should like to tell you of a wonderful circumstance. Hitherto the familiar oracle within me has constantly been in the habit of opposing me even about trifles, if I was going to make a slip or error about anything; and now as you see there has come upon me that which may be thought, and is generally believed to be, the last and worst evil. But the oracle made no sign of opposition, either as I was leaving my house and going out in the morning, or when I was going up into this court, or while I was speaking, at anything which I was going to say; and yet I have often been stopped in the middle of a speech; but now in nothing I either said or did touching this matter has the oracle opposed me. What do I take to be the explanation of this? I will tell you. I regard this as a proof that what has happened to me is a good, and that those of us who think that death is an evil are in error. This is a great proof to me of what I am saying, for the customary sign would surely have opposed me had I been going to evil and not to good.

Let us reflect in another way, and we shall see that there is great reason to hope that death is a good, for one of two things: - either death is a state of nothingness and utter unconsciousness, or, as men say, there is a change and migration of the soul from this world to another. Now if you suppose that there is no consciousness, but a sleep like the sleep of him who is undisturbed even by the sight of dreams, death will be an unspeakable gain. For if a person were to select the night in which his sleep was undisturbed even by dreams, and were to compare with this the other days and nights of his life, and then were to tell us how many days and nights he had passed in the course of his life better and more pleasantly than this one, I think that any man, I will not say a private man, but even the great king, will not find many such days or nights, when compared with the others. Now if death is like this, I say that to die is gain; for eternity is then only a single night. But if death is the journey to another place, and there, as men say, all the dead are, what good, O my friends and judges, can be greater than this? If indeed when the pilgrim arrives in the world below, he is delivered from the professors of justice in this world, and finds the true judges who are said to give judgment there, Minos and Rhadamanthus and Aeacus and Triptolemus, and other sons of God who were righteous in their own life, that pilgrimage will be worth making. What would not a man give if he might converse with Orpheus and Musaeus and Hesiod and Homer? Nay, if this be true, let me die again and again. I, too, shall have a wonderful interest in a place where I can converse with Palamedes, and Ajax the son of Telamon, and other heroes of old, who have suffered death through an unjust judgment; and there will be no small pleasure, as I think, in comparing my own sufferings with theirs. Above all, I shall be able to continue my search into true and false knowledge; as in this world, so also in that; I shall find out who is wise, and who pretends to be wise, and is not. What would not a man give, O judges, to be able to examine the leader of the great Trojan expedition; or Odysseus or Sisyphus, or numberless others, men and women too! What infinite delight would there be in conversing with them and asking them questions! For in that world they do not put a man to death for this; certainly not. For besides being happier in that world than in this, they will be immortal, if what is said is true.

Wherefore, O judges, be of good cheer about death, and know this of a truth - that no evil can happen to a good man, either in life or after death. He and his are not neglected by the gods; nor has my own approaching end happened by mere chance. But I see clearly that to die and be released was better for me; and therefore the oracle gave no sign. For which reason also, I am not angry with my accusers, or my condemners; they have done me no harm, although neither of them meant to do me any good; and for this I may gently blame them.

Still I have a favor to ask of them. When my sons are grown up, I would ask you, O my friends, to punish them; and I would have you trouble them, as I have troubled you, if they seem to care about riches, or anything, more than about virtue; or if they pretend to be something when they are really nothing, - then reprove them, as I have reprovved you, for not caring about that for which they ought to care, and thinking that they are something when they are really nothing. And if you do this, I and my sons will have received justice at your hands.

The hour of departure has arrived, and we go our ways - I to die, and you to live. Which is better God only knows. *will call.*

THE END





## What is Political Theory?

### I. What is politics?

A. **Def of political theory:** the systematic and detailed study of the political ideas, interpretations, and philosophies of ordinary people. theory as a "map."

B. **Question:** Is politics important to your life?

1. **Question:** How would you define politics? What *isn't* politics?

C. **Definitions:**

1. "The collective and participatory engagement of citizens in the determination of the affairs of their community."

a. "collective and participatory engagement"

b. "citizens"

c. "community"

D. **Four key aspects of politics**

1. how we govern our daily affairs

2. politics is also about power

3. achieving the good life

4. initiating new possibilities

### II. The historical context of political theory

A. Ideas don't emerge in a vacuum. Socrates, Locke, Marx, MX's contexts.

F. only under the proper social conditions will ideas take root and flower. E.g. Steam engine, race.

## Background to Ancient Greece: Plato and the polis

### I. Politics in Ancient Greece

A. Ancient Greece was a class society

2. The stability of Athens was guaranteed by citizenship and imperial conquest.

B. Athenian imperialism

1. War was a normal part of Greek life. The function of war: sate the poor

C. Athenian citizenship

2. Greek citizenship included both the rich and many of the poor

3. The polis

### II. Context of Plato (ca. 428-347 B.C.)

B. Two events that changed Plato's life

1. Peloponnesian War.

2. The trial and death of Socrates.

C. Life of Socrates

1. The Oracle at Delphi, mission in life, Socratic method, absolute truth

4. Thirty Tyrants, Alcibiades, Socrates' trial in 399. Turned Plato from politics