

Philosophy 1104  
Topics bank Part one  
*Pre Socratic Material*

*The Sophists*

- The Sophists were teachers of the techniques of persuasion and argument who claimed to teach the art making a convincing argument for any proposition.
  - One of them, Protagoras, asserted that "Man is the measure of all things."
  - In other words: everything is relative
  - This interest in the technique of arguing both sides of a case made them of particular interest to those with political and legal ambitions.
  - Some Sophists had highly lucrative careers.
  - This contrasts with Socrates, who did not take money for his teaching and was always and famously broke.
  - Tradition has it that his wife, Xanthippe, had to take in washing
- The Sophists, then, were considered to use reason and argument, not in the service of truth or wisdom, but fame, prestige and money
- They used their skills, not to discover the truth, but to further their own interests.
  - Their tricky rhetoric made some Athenians suspect their activity of subverting traditional morality.
  - If man is the measure, then what about the Gods and our standards of right and wrong?
  - If anything can be argued for persuasively, how can we defend our belief in justice and virtue?
- Why believe anything is true, including what we have learned from our parents and our culture?

*The Mystery Cults*

- Dionysians and Pythagoreans
  - Secret forms of worship available only to the initiated.
  - Common element: happy existence after death assured by purging of guilt or sin: Purification
  - This was achieved by certain rituals: bathing in the sea, sacrifice of animals
- Bacchic Mysteries/Dionysians**
- -mainly women
- Liberation and surrender to frenzy in order to achieve a sense of union with the God
- -Ecstasy: standing outside of yourself: ridding self of finitude
- Pythagoreans**
- reincarnation
  - Asceticism: Dietary restrictions: Vegetarianism, Pollution: Meat is tainted by blood: element of discord
  - The study of mathematics
  - The discovery of the harmonic order of the universe
  - Goal: Improvement of the soul to get best destiny.
  - Ultimately: union with the divine: rest: no more incarnation

Topics bank part two

*Socrates account of his relentless questioning and views about the afterlife in the Apology*

### **The Oracle**

- asks oracle if anyone is wiser than socrates and the oracle says no
- socrates says he finds the oracle's assertion to be a great riddle
- says he knows nothing, has no wisdom
- but the god cannot lie
- socrates is confused

### **Questioning**

- Socrates went to a man with a reputation for wisdom, a politician
- Examined him; questioned him
- He was thought wise by many.
- The examination showed he was not really wise.
- He could not answer Socrates questions or, in answering, tied himself up in contradictions
- Socrates continued this process with others with pretensions to knowledge.
- Could he find someone wiser than himself?
- Could he show that the oracle was wrong?
- No. He could find no one with real wisdom. Everyone he questioned either could not answer his questions or, in answering him, tied himself up in logical knots

### **Results**

- Those whose pretensions he exposed came to dislike him, and so did many of those listening.
  - Socrates made many enemies
- Rich young men would flock around him.
  - They liked to see the pretensions of their elders exposed.
  - They began imitating Socrates
- As a result, the enemies of Socrates came to call him a corruptor or misleader of the youth.
- Socrates realized that neither he nor those he questioned knew anything worthwhile

### **Socrates View on the Afterlife**

- 2 possibilities: 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
- Death is like a dreamless sleep
  - The dead are nothing and have no perception of anything.
  - This would be a good thing.
  - Eternity would seem to be no more than a single night
- Death is a Change from Here to Another Place
  - Death is a relocation of the soul from here to another place, the home of the dead.
  - All who have died are there.
  - Socrates claims that there he will find those true judges who are said to sit in judgment of the souls of the dead (Minos: king and judge of the dead in Hades).

- There he can keep company with Hesiod, Homer and the heroes
- The Noble Dead
  - Socrates could meet all who were killed unjustly and could compare experiences.
  - He could spend his time testing and examining the dead to see who is wise and who is not.
  - At least he could not be put to death again for doing this

### *The doctrine of recollection in the Meno*

- Socrates asserts that he did not tell the slave boy the answers, but drew them out of his mind through questioning
- Soc: Without any one teaching him he will recover his knowledge for himself, if he is only asked questions?
- Meno: Yes.
- Soc: And this spontaneous recovery of knowledge in him is recollection?"
- This is recollection: the spontaneous recovery of knowledge through questioning
- Socrates asks where the slave boy's knowledge of geometry could have come from.
- Meno asserts that he was never taught geometry
- Socrates reasons that if the slave boy did not acquire the knowledge in this life, he must "have had and learned it at some other time." (p. 41)
- He must have learned these things at some time "when he was not a man".