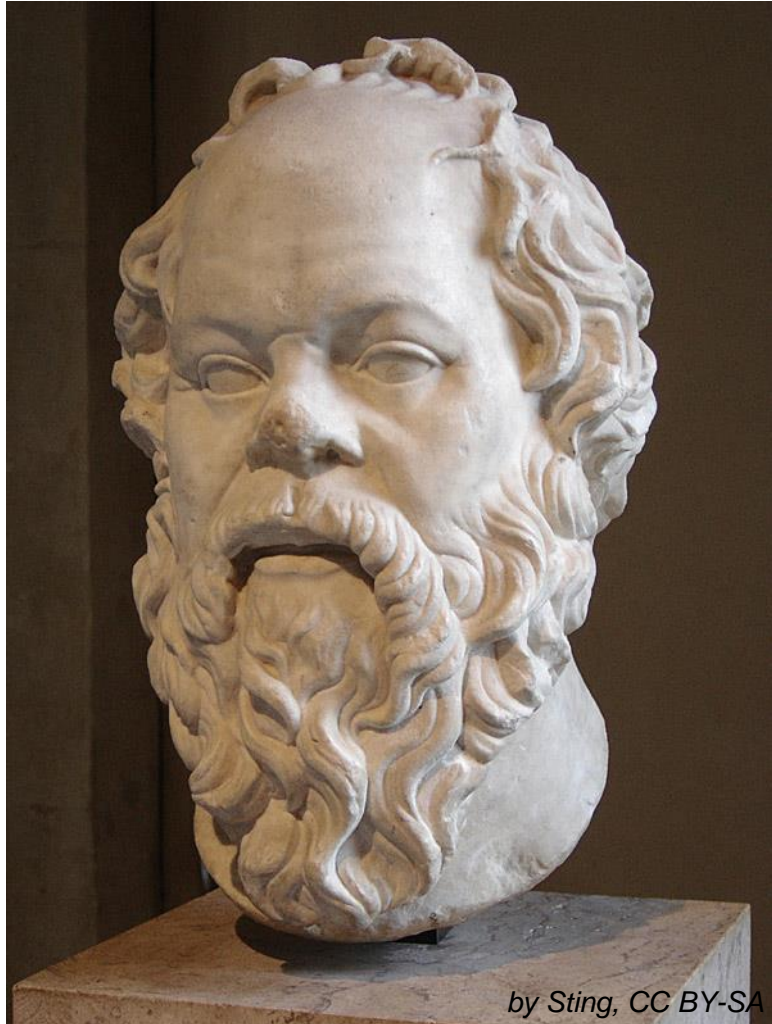


Socrates (469-399 BCE)



by Sting, CC BY-SA 2.5

Socrates

Our scene now shifts to Athens, where we find Socrates (469-399 BCE). Socrates didn't write anything, but we know of his philosophical work through his students, especially Plato.

The Method of Socrates

Socrates method for discovering the truth was to investigate through questioning. If someone claimed to know something, Socrates wanted to figure out what it was that the person supposedly knew, so he asked them questions about it.

aporia

These Socratic dialogues such as the *Euthyphro* (the early dialogues of Plato) usually end in *aporia* (puzzlement) for example, the question of what piety actually is is not really resolved in the *Euthyphro*.

Plato's (429-347 BCE) Writings

Early (examples- *Apology*, *Euthyphro*, *Crito*) These are the "Socratic dialogues" discussed above.

Middle (examples- *Meno*, *Republic*) Here, Plato goes beyond Socratic discussion and develops positive ideas of his own.

Late (example- the *Laws*) These are technical (and often difficult) expansions, development, and clarification of Plato's ideas.

The *Euthyphro*

In the *Euthyphro* dialogue, Socrates meets Euthyphro outside the magistrate's. Socrates is there because he is about to be put on trial.

Euthyphro is at the magistrate's because he is prosecuting his own father for murder.


piety

Socrates is surprised that Euthyphro would prosecute his own father, and Euthyphro claims that this shows how little people know about *piety*, which is the subject of the dialogue. Piety is something like “reverence for the gods,” etc.

Socrates says—okay great, you know all about piety, and if you can tell me what it is, this will help me at my trial, as I can say Euthyphro has taught me all about piety now.

Euthyphro's first attempt

Euthyphro first attempts to define piety by saying that it is “doing as he is doing”-- in this case, prosecuting his father for murder.



But Socrates wants not a list of pious actions, but instead:
“the general idea which makes all pious things to be pious. Do you not recollect that there was one idea which made the impious impious, and the pious pious?”

Second attempt

“Piety, then, is that which is *dear to the gods*, and impiety is that which is not dear to them”

So, according to this definition, if the gods love something, it is pious. If they don't love it, it is impious.

Socrates replies

The gods don't all love the same things. While many things can be sorted out by some standard or measurement, when it comes to:

“the just and unjust, good and evil, honourable and dishonourable[, a]re not these the points about which [people] differ, and about which when we are unable satisfactorily to decide our differences, you and I and all of us quarrel, when we do quarrel?”

So this
definition
doesn't work

Soc. Then the same things are hated by the gods and loved by the gods, and are both hateful and dear to them?

Euth. True.


Soc. And upon this view the same things, Euthyphro, will be pious and also impious?

Euth. So I should suppose.

Soc. Then, my friend, I remark with surprise that you have not answered the question which I asked. For I certainly did not ask you to tell me what action is both pious and impious: but now it would seem that what is loved by the gods is also hated by them.

Third attempt

Euthyphro says, okay, fine:
The pious is what is loved by *all* the gods.



Socrates replies by asking whether things are pious because the gods love them, or whether the gods love something because it is pious.

The “Euthyphro Dilemma”

Soc. Thus you appear to me, Euthyphro, when I ask you what is the essence of piety, to offer an attribute only, and not the essence-the attribute of being loved by all the gods. But you still refuse to explain to me the nature of piety.

The end of the dialogue- *aporia*

Soc. Then we must begin again and ask, What is piety? That is an enquiry which I shall never be weary of pursuing as far as in me lies; and I entreat you not to scorn me, but to apply your mind to the utmost, and tell me the truth. For, if any man knows, you are he; and therefore I must detain you, like Proteus, until you tell. If you had not certainly known the nature of piety and impiety, I am confident that you would never, on behalf of a serf, have charged your aged father with murder. You would not have run such a risk of doing wrong in the sight of the gods, and you would have had too much respect for the opinions of men. I am sure, therefore, that you know the nature of piety and impiety. Speak out then, my dear Euthyphro, and do not hide your knowledge.

Euth. Another time, Socrates; for I am in a hurry, and must go now.

Soc. Alas! my companion, and will you leave me in despair? I was hoping that you would instruct me in the nature of piety and impiety; and then I might have cleared myself of Meletus and his indictment. I would have told him that I had been enlightened by Euthyphro, and had given up rash innovations and speculations, in which I indulged only through ignorance, and that now I am about to lead a better life.

The *Apology*

We have a couple accounts of the trial of Socrates (399 BCE), one written by Plato, and one by Xenophon. *Apology* doesn't mean "apology" as in Socrates will say that he is sorry, rather it means something like a 'defense'.

The Trial of Socrates

This trial is taking place in front of about 500 Athenian citizens, who are acting as the jury. Meletus, a poet, has brought the charges against Socrates-- he is officially charged with "not believing in the gods and corrupting the youth."

The Oracle at Delphi



Eugène
Delacroix:
*Lycurgus
Consulting the
Pythia* (1835)

“There is
none wiser
than
Socrates”



So why do people think Socrates is wise if he doesn't claim to be? Here we get the story of the Oracle at Delphi-- Chaerephon went to Delphi and asked the priestess of Apollo if there was anyone wiser than Socrates, and the answer came back that there was no one wiser.



Socrates thought that this couldn't be right, because he didn't think that he was really all that wise-- so he set out to prove that this wrong, and to do this, all he had to do was find someone wiser than he was.

First attempt

So first he went to someone who had a reputation of being wise; but it turned out that this person wasn't wise, and when Socrates tried to explain this to him, instead of thanking Socrates, the person got upset.

So Socrates thought that he was better off than this person, because "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 think that he knows. I neither know nor think that I know."

Are the poets wise?

So next, Socrates tries to see if the poets are wise, but he finds out in talking to them that while the poets write good poetry, but they aren't really wise-- they can't explain what their poems mean.

What about craftspeople?

When he goes to talk to the artisans/craftspeople he finds that while **they do have a technical knowledge** about their craft (that is, *techne*) the problem is that the artisans think that knowing one thing means that they know everything-- including about virtue and a good human life.

Socrates discovers the meaning of the Oracle

Socrates says that proceeding like this "led to my having many enemies of the worst and most dangerous kind" ... and that he finally figured out what the god meant.

That Socrates is wise because he recognizes, that **he really isn't all that wise--** *that the kind of wisdom human beings can get isn't very much*; and keeping this in mind is to be as wise as is possible.

The Result of the Trial

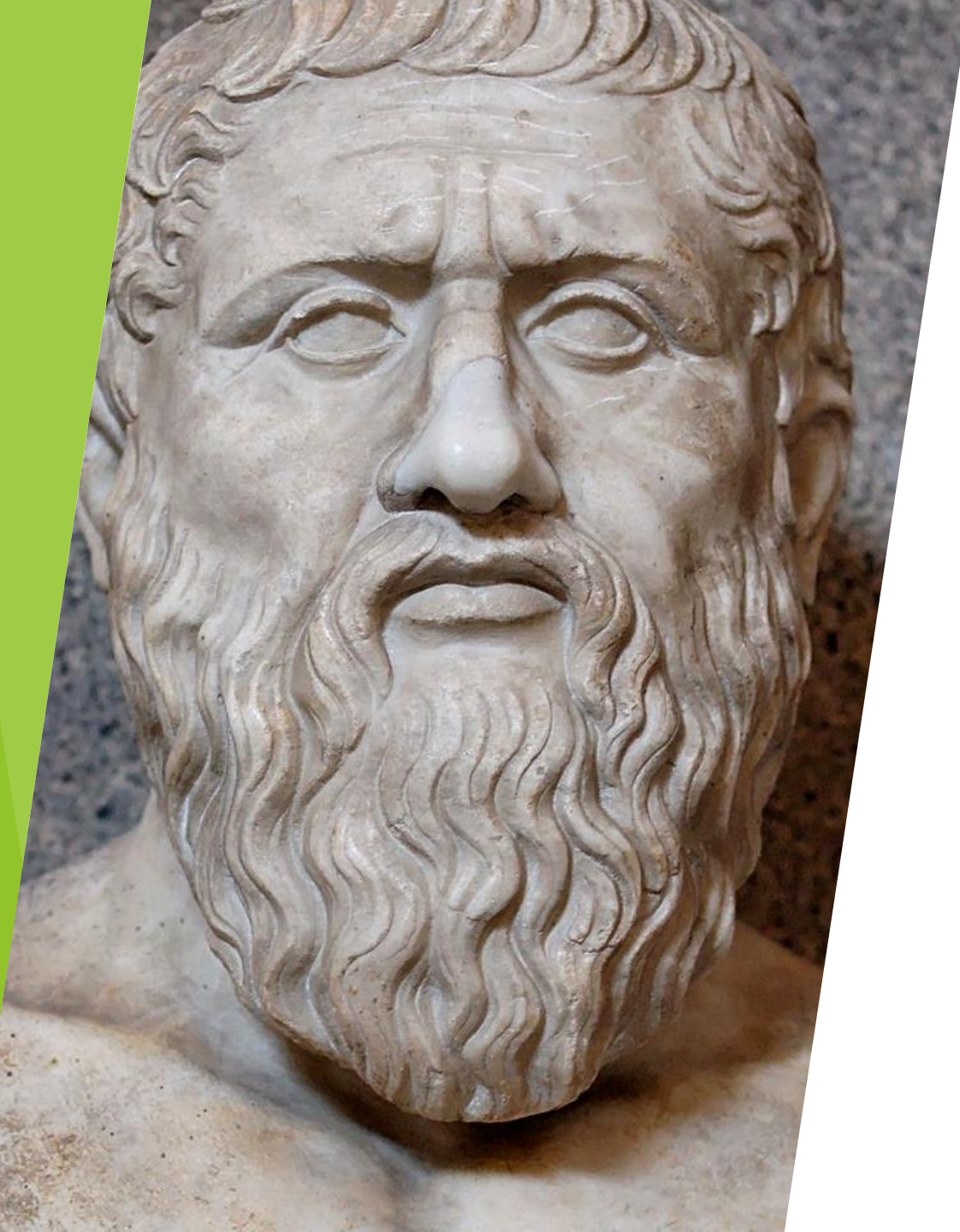
The jury finds Socrates guilty-- Socrates doesn't want to be exiled, because the same thing will happen in a new city; and he will be driven out wherever he goes The jury accepts Meletus' proposed punishment of death.

The Death of Socrates



Later, when his friends come to help him escape, Socrates refuses to go along with them out of loyalty to the city (this is the subject of the *Crito*), and he later carries out the death sentence by drinking hemlock.

Jacques-Louis David: *The Death of Socrates* (1787)



Plato
427-347
BCE

Plato's (429-347 BCE) Writings

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The *Meno*

Meno asks Socrates whether virtue can be taught. Socrates replies that he doesn't know what virtue is, so he doesn't know whether it can be taught or not. Meno says that there are different virtues for different people, but Socrates replies that he wants to know what virtue *in general* is. Meno replies with a list of virtues that include justice, courage, temperance, wisdom, and "greatness," but Socrates again replies that Meno still hasn't told him what these virtues have in *common* which makes them virtues—that is, what virtue is "in the universal."

The Paradox of Inquiry

Socrates says he is going to set out looking for virtue. Meno points out the following:

If you don't know what virtue is, how will you know when you've found it?

This is the "paradox of inquiry": If we knew what x was, we wouldn't need to look for it; but if we don't know what it is, we won't be able to recognize it when we find it.

Theory of Recollection

Plato's reply is to demonstrate that when we learn something we don't really learn something *new*, but rather we are *remembering* what we have forgotten. This idea stems from the fundamental division in Plato of the eternal "soul" which at one time was in the "realm of the Forms"—or pure ideas, on the one hand, and the temporal body which is in the *visible realm*.

The background of the slide is a book cover for Plato's Republic. The cover features a large, bright yellow sun in a sky over a cityscape. The title 'PLATO REPUBLIC' is written in white serif font at the top. At the bottom, it says 'Translated from the New Study Edition of the Greek Text, with Introduction and Commentary by C. D. C. Reeve'.

PLATO
REPUBLIC

The Republic

Topic: Justice. This means “ethical uprightness.”

10 Books

A middle writing of Plato- so Socrates functions mostly as *character* of Plato to express Plato’s ideas.