Gorgias--About the Dialogue
Edited by Steven Weiss
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Gorgias

Gorgias (Γοργίας)

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Gorgias /ˈɡɔrdʒiəs/ (Greek: Γοργίας, Ancient Greek: [gorgías]; "the Nihilist"; c. 485 – c. 380 BC),[1] Greek sophist, pre-socratic philosopher and rhetorician, was a native of Leontini in Sicily. Along with Protagoras, he forms the first generation of Sophists. Several doxographers report that he was a pupil of Empedocles, although he would only have been a few years younger. "Like other Sophists he was an itinerant, practicing in various cities and giving public exhibitions of his skill at the great pan-Hellenic centers of Olympia and Delphi, and charged fees for his instruction and performances. A special feature of his displays was to invite miscellaneous questions from the audience and give impromptu replies."[2] His chief claim to recognition resides in the fact that he transplanted rhetoric from his native Sicily to Attica, and contributed to the diffusion of the Attic dialect as the language of literary prose.

Life

Gorgias originated from Leontini, a Greek colony in Sicily, and what is often called the home of Spartan rhetoric. It is known that Gorgias had a father named Charmander and two siblings – a brother named Herodicus and a sister who dedicated a statue to Gorgias in Delphi (McComiskey 6-7).

He was already about sixty when in 427 he was sent to Athens by his fellow-citizens at the head of an embassy to ask for Athenian protection against the aggression of the Syracusans. He subsequently settled in Athens, probably due to the enormous popularity of his style of oratory and the profits made from his performances and rhetoric classes. According to Aristotle, his students included Isocrates.[3] (Other students are named in later traditions; the Suda adds Pericles, Polus, and Alcidamas,[4] Diogenes Laërtius mentions Antisthenes,[5] and according to Philostratus, "I understand that he attracted the attention of the most admired men, Critias and Alcibiades who were young, and Thucydidus and Pericles who were already old. Agathon too, the tragic poet, whom Comedy regards as wise and eloquent, often Gorgianizes in his iambic verse").[6]

Gorgias is reputed to have lived to be one hundred and eight years old (Matsen, Rollinson and Sousa, 33). He won admiration for his ability to speak on any subject (Matsen, Rollinson and Sousa, 33). He accumulated considerable wealth; enough to commission a gold statue of himself for a public temple.[7] After his Pythian Oration, the Greeks installed a solid gold statue of him in the temple of Apollo at Delphi (Matsen, Rollinson and Sousa, 33). He died at Larissa in Thessaly.
Rhetorical innovation

Gorgias ushered in rhetorical innovations involving structure and ornamentation and the introduction of paradoxologia – the idea of paradoxical thought and paradoxical expression. For these advancements, Gorgias has been labeled the ‘father of sophistry’ (Wardy 6). Gorgias is also known for contributing to the diffusion of the Attic dialect as the language of literary prose. Gorgias was the first orator to develop and teach a "distinctive style of speaking." (Matsen, Rollinson and Sousa, 33).

Gorgias’ extant rhetorical works (Encomium of Helen, Defense of Palamedes, On Non-Existence, and Epitaphios) come to us via a work entitled Technai, a manual of rhetorical instruction, which may have consisted of models to be memorized and demonstrate various principles of rhetorical practice (Leitch, et al. 29). Although some scholars claim that each work presents opposing statements, the four texts can be read as interrelated contributions to the up-and-coming theory and art (technê) of rhetoric (McComiskey 32). Of Gorgias’ surviving works, only the Encomium and the Defense are believed to exist in their entirety. Meanwhile, there are his own speeches, rhetorical, political, or other. A number of these are referred to and quoted by Aristotle, including a speech on Hellenic unity, a funeral oration for Athenians fallen in war, and a brief quotation from an Encomium on the Eleans. Apart from the speeches, there are paraphrases of the treatise "On Nature or the Non-Existent." These works are each part of the Diels-Kranz collection, and although academics consider this source reliable, many of the works included are fragmentary and corrupt. Questions have also been raised as to the authenticity and accuracy of the texts attributed to Gorgias (Consigny 4).

Gorgias’ writings are both rhetorical and performative. He goes to great lengths to exhibit his ability of making an absurd, argumentative position appear stronger. Consequently, each of his works defend positions that are unpopular, paradoxical and even absurd. The performative nature of Gorgias’ writings is exemplified by the way that he playfully approaches each argument with stylistic devices such as parody, artificial figuration and theatricality (Consigny 149). Gorgias’ style of argumentation can be described as poetics-minus-the-meter (poiêsis-minus-meter). Gorgias argues that persuasive words have power (dunamis) that is equivalent to that of the gods and as strong as physical force. In the Encomium, Gorgias likens the effect of speech on the soul to the effect of drugs on the body: “Just as different drugs draw forth different humors from the body – some putting a stop to disease, others to life – so too with words: some cause pain, others joy, some strike fear, some stir the audience to boldness, some benumb and bewitch the soul with evil persuasion” (Gorgias 32).

Gorgias also believed that his “magical incantations” would bring healing to the human psyche by controlling powerful emotions. He paid particular attention to the sounds of words, which, like poetry, could captivate audiences. His florid, rhyming style seemed to hypnotize his audiences (Herrick 42). Gorgias' legendary powers of persuasion would suggest that he had a somewhat preternatural influence over his audience and their emotions. Unlike other Sophists, such as Protagoras, Gorgias did not profess to teach arete (excellence, or, virtue). He believed that there was no absolute form of arete, but that it was relative to each situation (for example, virtue in a slave was not virtue in a statesman) His thought was that rhetoric, the art of persuasion, was the king of all sciences, since it was capable of persuading any course of action. While rhetoric existed in the curriculum of every Sophist, Gorgias placed more prominence upon it than any of the others.

Much debate over both the nature and value of rhetoric begins with Gorgias. Plato’s dialogue entitled Gorgias presents a counter-argument to Gorgias’ embrace of rhetoric, its elegant form, and performative nature (Wardy 2). The dialog attempts to show that rhetoric does not meet the requirements to actually be considered a tekhne but is a somewhat dangerous "knack" to possess both for the orator and for his audience. This is because it gives the ignorant the power to seem more knowledgeable than an expert to a group.
On the Non-Existent

Gorgias is the author of a lost work: On Nature or the Non-Existent. Rather than being one of his rhetorical works, it presented a theory of being that at the same time refuted and parodied the Eleatic thesis. The original text was lost and today there remain just two paraphrases of it. The first is preserved by the philosopher Sextus Empiricus in Against the Professors and the other by the anonymous author of On Melissus, Xenophanes, and Gorgias. Each work, however, excludes material that is discussed in the other, which suggests that each version may represent intermediary sources (Consigny 4). It is clear, however, that the work developed a skeptical argument, which has been extracted from the sources and translated as below:

1. Nothing exists;
2. Even if something exists, nothing can be known about it; and
3. Even if something can be known about it, knowledge about it can't be communicated to others.
4. Even if it can be communicated, it cannot be understood.

The argument has largely been seen as an ironic refutation of Parmenides' thesis on Being. Gorgias set out to prove that it is as easy to demonstrate that being is one, unchanging and timeless as it is to prove that being has no existence at all. Regardless of how it "has largely been seen" it seems clear that Gorgias was focused instead on the notion that true objectivity is impossible since the human mind can never be separated from its possessor.

"How can anyone communicate the idea of color by means of words since the ear does not hear colors but only sounds?" This quote, written by the Sicilian philosopher Gorgias, was used to show his theory that 'there is nothing', 'if there were anything no one would know it', 'and if anyone did know it, no one could communicate it'. This theory, thought of in the late 5th century BC, is still being contemplated by many philosophers throughout the world. This argument has led some to label Gorgias a nihilist (one who believes nothing exists, or that the world is incomprehensible, and that the concept of truth is fictitious). For the first main argument where Gorgias says, "there is no-thing", he tries to persuade the reader that thought and existence are not the same. By claiming that if thought and existence truly were the same, then everything that anyone thought would suddenly exist. He also attempted to prove that words and sensations couldn’t be measured by the same standards, for even though words and sensations are both derived from the mind, they are essentially different. This is where his second idea comes into place.

Rhetorical works

Encomium of Helen

The Encomium of Helen is considered to be a good example of epideictic oratory and was supposed to have been Gorgias' "show piece or demonstration piece," which was used to attract students (Matsen, Rollinson and Sousa, 33). In their writings, Gorgias and other sophists speculated "about the structure and function of language" as a framework for expressing the implications of action and the ways decisions about such actions were made" (Jarratt 103). And this is exactly the purpose of Gorgias' Encomium of Helen. Of the three divisions of rhetoric discussed by Aristotle in his Rhetoric (forensic, deliberative, and epideictic), the Encomium can be classified as an epideictic speech, expressing praise for Helen of Troy and ridding her of the blame she faced for leaving Sparta with Paris (Wardy 26).

Helen – the proverbial "Helen of Troy" – exemplified both sexual passion and tremendous beauty for the Greeks. She was the daughter of Zeus and Leda, the Queen of Sparta, and her beauty was the direct cause of the decade long Trojan War between Greece and Troy. The war began after the goddesses Hera, Athena, and Aphrodite asked Paris (a Trojan prince) to select who was the most beautiful of the three. Each goddess tried to influence Paris’ decision, but he ultimately chose Aphrodite who then promised Paris the most beautiful woman. Paris then traveled to Greece where he was greeted by Helen and her husband Menelaus. Under the influence of Aphrodite, Helen allowed Paris to persuade her to elope with him. Together they traveled to Troy, not only sparking the war, but also a popular and literary tradition of blaming Helen for her wrongdoing. It is this tradition which Gorgias confronts in the Encomium.
The Encomium opens with Gorgias explaining that “a man, woman, speech, deed, city or action that is worthy of praise should be honored with acclaim, but the unworthy should be branded with blame” (Gorgias 30). In the speech Gorgias discusses the possible reasons for Helen’s journey to Troy. He explains that Helen could have been persuaded in one of four ways: by the gods, by physical force, by love, or by speech (logos). If it were indeed the plan of the gods that caused Helen to depart for Troy, Gorgias argues that those who blame her should face blame themselves, “for a human’s anticipation cannot restrain a god’s inclination” (Gorgias 31). Gorgias explains that, by nature, the weak are ruled by the strong, and, since the gods are stronger than humans in all respects, Helen should be freed from her undesirable reputation. If, however, Helen was abducted by force, it is clear that the aggressor committed a crime. Thus, it should be he, not Helen, who should be blamed. And if Helen was persuaded by love, she should also be rid of ill repute because “if love is a god, with the divine power of the gods, how could a weaker person refuse and reject him? But if love is a human sickness and a mental weakness, it must not be blamed as mistake, but claimed as misfortune” (Gorgias 32). Finally, if speech persuaded Helen, Gorgias claims he can easily clear her of blame. Gorgias explains: “Speech is a powerful master and achieves the most divine feats with the smallest and least evident body. It can stop fear, relieve pain, create joy, and increase pity” (Gorgias 31). It is here that Gorgias compares the effect of speech on the mind with the effect of drugs on the body. He states that Helen has the power to "lead" many bodies in competition by using her body as a weapon (Gumpert, 74). This image of "bodies led and misled, brought together and led apart, is of paramount importance in Gorgias' speech,” (Gumpert, 74).

The Encomium demonstrates Gorgias’ love of paradoxologia. The performative nature of the Encomium requires a reciprocal relationship between the performer and the audience, one which relies on the cooperation between the deceptive performer and the equally deceived audience (Wardy 36). Gorgias reveals this paradox in the final section of the Encomium where he writes: “I wished to write this speech for Helen's encomium and my amusement” (Gorgias 33). Additionally, if one were to accept Gorgias’ argument for Helen’s exoneration, it would fly in the face of a whole literary tradition of blame directed towards Helen. This too is paradoxical. While Gorgias primarily used metaphors and paradox, he famously used "figures of speech, or schemata,” (Matsen, Rollinson and Sousa). This included balanced clauses (isocolon), the joining of contrasting ideas (antithesis), the structure of successive clauses (parison), and the repetition of word endings (homoeoteleuton) (Matsen, Rollinson and Sousa, 33). The Encomium shows Gorgias' interest in argumentation, as he makes his point by "systematically refuting a series of possible alternatives;” (Matsen, Rollinson and Sousa, 33). It is an encomium of the "rhetorical craft itself, and a demonstration of its power over us,” (Gumpert, 73).

**Defense of Palamedes**

In the Defense of Palamedes Gorgias describes logos as a positive instrument for creating ethical arguments (McComiskey 38). The Defense, an oration that deals with issues of morality and political commitment (Consigny 38), defends Palamedes who, in Greek mythology, is credited with the invention of the alphabet, written laws, numbers, armor, and measures and weights (McComiskey 47).

In the speech Palamedes defends himself against the charge of treason. In Greek mythology, Odysseus – in order to avoid going to Troy with Agamemnon and Menelaus to bring Helen back to Sparta – pretended to have gone mad and began sowing the fields with salt. Palamedes got Odysseus to disclose this information by throwing his son Telemachus in front of the plow. Odysseus, who never forgave Palamedes for making him reveal himself, later accused Palamedes of working with the Trojans. Soon after, Palamedes was condemned and killed (Jarratt 58).

In this epideictic speech, like the Encomium, Gorgias is concerned with experimenting with how plausible arguments can cause conventional truths to be doubted (Jarratt 59). Throughout the text, Gorgias presents a method for composing logical (logos), ethical (ethos) and emotional (pathos) arguments from possibility, which are similar to those described by Aristotle in Rhetoric. These types of arguments about motive and capability presented in the Defense are later described by Aristotle as forensic topoi. Gorgias demonstrates that in order to prove that treason
had been committed, a set of possible occurrences also need to be established. In the *Defense* these occurrences are as follows: communication between Palamedes and the enemy, exchange of a pledge in the form of hostages or money, and not being detected by guards or citizens. In his defense, Palamedes claims that a small sum of money would not have warranted such a large undertaking and reasons that a large sum of money, if indeed such a transaction had been made, would require the aid of many confederates in order for it to be transported. Palamedes reasons further that such an exchange could neither have occurred at night because the guards would be watching, nor in the day because everyone would be able to see. Palamedes continues, explaining that if the aforementioned conditions were, in fact, arranged then action would need to follow. Such action needed to take place either with or without confederates; however, if these confederates were free men then they were free to disclose any information they desired, but if they were slaves there was a risk of their voluntarily accusing to earn freedom, or accusing by force when tortured. Slaves, Palamedes says, are untrustworthy. Palamedes goes on to list a variety of possible motives, all of which he proves false.

Through the *Defense* Gorgias demonstrates that a motive requires an advantage such as status, wealth, honour, and security, and insists that Palamedes lacked a motive (McComiskey 47-49).

**Epitaphios (or Athenian funeral oration)**

This text is considered to be an important contribution to the genre of epitaphios. During the 5th and 4th centuries BC, such funeral orations were delivered by well-known orators during public burial ceremonies in Athens, whereby those who died in wars were honoured. Gorgias’ text provides a clever critique of 5th century propagandist rhetoric in imperial Athens and is the basis for Plato’s parody, *Menexenus* (Consigny 2).

**Critics**

Plato is one of Gorgias’ greatest critics. Plato’s dislike for sophistic doctrines is well known, and it is in his eponymous dialogue that both Gorgias himself as well as his rhetorical beliefs are ridiculed (McComiskey 17).

In the *Gorgias*, Plato distinguishes between philosophy and rhetoric, characterizing Gorgias as an orator who entertains his audience with his eloquent words and who believes that it is unnecessary to learn the truth about actual matters when one has discovered the art of persuasion (Consigny 36). In the dialogue, Gorgias responds to one of Socrates’ statements as follows: “Rhetoric is the only area of expertise you need to learn. You can ignore all the rest and still get the better of the professionals!” (Plato 24).

Gorgias, whose *On Non-Existence* is taken to be critical of the Eleatic tradition and its founder Parmenides, describes philosophy as a type of seduction, but he does not deny philosophy entirely, giving some respect to philosophers (Consigny 37).

Plato answers Gorgias by reaffirming the Parmenidean ideal that being is the basic substance and reality of which all things are composed, insisting that philosophy is a dialectic distinct from and superior to rhetoric (Wardy 52).

Aristotle also criticizes Gorgias, labeling him a mere Sophist whose primary goal is to make money by appearing wise and clever, thus deceiving the public by means of misleading or sophistic arguments (Consigny 36).
References

[4] Suda, Gorgias
[5] Diogenes Laërtius, vi. 2

Sources

- This article incorporates text from a publication now in the public domain: Chisholm, Hugh, ed. (1911). *Encyclopædia Britannica* (11th ed.). Cambridge University Press.

External links

- *Encomium on Helen*: Greek text (http://www.classicpersuasion.org/pw/gorgias/helenuni.htm) and English translation (http://www.classicpersuasion.org/pw/gorgias/helendonovan.htm)
- Gorgias (http://www.gottwein.de/Grie/vorsokr/VSGorg02.php), selected texts (from Plato's dialogue entitled "Gorgias") in Greek (with German translation and vocabulary notes)
Socrates (Σωκράτης)

Socrates (Σωκράτης; Greek pronunciation: [sɔːkrətɛs], Sōkrātēs; c. 469 BC – 399 BC) was a classical Greek Athenian philosopher. Credited as one of the founders of Western philosophy, he is an enigmatic figure known chiefly through the accounts of later classical writers, especially the writings of his students Plato and Xenophon, and the plays of his contemporary Aristophanes. Many would claim that Plato's dialogues are the most comprehensive accounts of Socrates to survive from antiquity.[2]

Through his portrayal in Plato's dialogues, Socrates has become renowned for his contribution to the field of ethics, and it is this Platonic Socrates who also lends his name to the concepts of Socratic irony and the Socratic method, or elenchus. The latter remains a commonly used tool in a wide range of discussions, and is a type of pedagogy in which a series of questions are asked not only to draw individual answers, but also to encourage fundamental insight into the issue at hand. It is Plato's Socrates that also made important and lasting contributions to the fields of epistemology and logic, and the influence of his ideas and approach remains strong in providing a foundation for much western philosophy that followed.

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**Socrates**

**Born**
- c. 469 / 470 BC
  - Deme Alopece, Athens

**Died**
- 399 BC (age approx. 71)
  - Athens

**Nationality**
- Greek

**Era**
- Ancient philosophy

**Region**
- Western philosophy

**School**
- Classical Greek

**Main interests**
- Epistemology, ethics

**Notable ideas**
- Socratic method, Socratic irony
**Biography**

The Socratic problem

An accurate picture of the historical Socrates and his philosophical viewpoints is problematic: an issue known as the Socratic problem.

As Socrates did not write philosophical texts, the knowledge of the man, his life, and his philosophy is entirely based on writings by his students and contemporaries. Foremost among them is Plato; however, works by Xenophon, Aristotle, and Aristophanes also provide important insights.\(^3\) The difficulty of finding the "real" Socrates arises because these works are often philosophical or dramatic texts rather than straightforward histories. Aside from Thucydides (who makes no mention of Socrates or philosophers in general) and Xenophon, there are in fact no straightforward histories contemporary with Socrates that dealt with his own time and place. A corollary of this is that sources that do mention Socrates do not necessarily claim to be historically accurate, and are often partisan (those who prosecuted and convicted Socrates have left no testament). Historians therefore face the challenge of reconciling the various texts that come from these men to create an accurate and consistent account of Socrates' life and work. The result of such an effort is not necessarily realistic, merely consistent.

Plato is frequently viewed as the most informative source about Socrates' life and philosophy.\(^4\) At the same time, however, many scholars believe that in some works Plato, being a literary artist, pushed his avowedly brightened-up version of "Socrates" far beyond anything the historical Socrates was likely to have done or said; and that Xenophon, being an historian, is a more reliable witness to the historical Socrates. It is a matter of much debate which Socrates Plato is describing at any given point—the historical figure, or Plato's fictionalization. As Martin Cohen has put it, Plato, the idealist, offers "an idol, a master figure, for philosophy. A Saint, a prophet of the 'Sun-God', a teacher condemned for his teachings as a heretic."\(^5\)

It is also clear from other writings and historical artifacts, however, that Socrates was not simply a character, or an invention, of Plato. The testimony of Xenophon and Aristotle, alongside some of Aristophanes' work (especially *The Clouds*), is useful in fleshing out a perception of Socrates beyond Plato's work.

Life

Details about Socrates can be derived from three contemporary sources: the dialogues of Plato and Xenophon (both devotees of Socrates), and the plays of Aristophanes. He has been depicted by some scholars, including Eric Havelock and Walter Ong, as a champion of oral modes of communication, standing up at the dawn of writing against its haphazard diffusion.\(^6\)

Aristophanes' play *The Clouds* portrays Socrates as a clown who teaches his students how to bamboozle their way out of debt. Most of Aristophanes' works, however, function as parodies. Thus, it is presumed this characterization was also not literal.

According to Plato, Socrates' father was Sophroniscus\(^7\) and his mother Phaenarete,\(^8\) a midwife. Though she was characterized as undesirable in temperament, Socrates married Xanthippe,\(^9\) who was much younger than he. She bore for him three sons, Lamprocles, Sophroniscus and Menexenus. His friend Crito of Alopece criticized him for abandoning his sons when he refused to try to escape before his execution.\(^11\)

It is unclear how Socrates earned a living. Ancient texts seem to indicate that Socrates did not work. In Xenophon's *Symposium*, Socrates is reported as saying he devotes himself only to what he regards as the most important art or occupation: discussing philosophy. In *The Clouds* Aristophanes portrays Socrates as accepting payment for teaching...
and running a sophist school with Chaerephon, while in Plato's *Apology* and *Symposium* and in Xenophon's accounts, Socrates explicitly denies accepting payment for teaching. More specifically, in the *Apology* Socrates cites his poverty as proof he is not a teacher. According to Timon of Phlius and later sources, Socrates took over the profession of stonemasonry from his father. There was a tradition in antiquity, not credited by modern scholarship, that Socrates crafted the statues of the Three Graces, which stood near the Acropolis until the 2nd century AD.[12] Several of Plato's dialogues refer to Socrates' military service. Socrates says he served in the Athenian army during three campaigns: at Potidaea, Amphipolis, and Delium. In the *Symposium* Alcibiades describes Socrates' valour in the battles of Potidaea and Delium, recounting how Socrates saved his life in the former battle (219e-221b). Socrates' exceptional service at Delium is also mentioned in the *Laches* by the General after whom the dialogue is named (181b). In the *Apology*, Socrates compares his military service to his courtroom troubles, and says anyone on the jury who thinks he ought to retreat from philosophy must also think soldiers should retreat when it seems likely that they will be killed in battle.

In 406 he was a member of the Boule, and his tribe the Antiochis held the Prytany on the day the Generals of the Battle of Arginusae, who abandoned the slain and the survivors of foundered ships to pursue the defeated Spartan navy, were discussed. Socrates was the Epistates and resisted the unconstitutional demand for a collective trial to establish the guilt of all eight Generals, proposed by Callixeinus. Eventually, Socrates refused to be cowed by threats of imprisonment and imprisonment and blocked the vote until his Prytany ended the next day, whereupon the six Generals who had returned to Athens were condemned to death.

In 404 the Thirty Tyrants sought to ensure the loyalty of those opposed to them by making them complicit in their activities. Socrates and four others were ordered to bring a certain Leon of Salamis from his home for unjust execution. Socrates quietly refused, his death averted only by the overthrow of the Tyrants soon afterwards.

**Trial and death**

Socrates lived during the time of the transition from the height of the Athenian hegemony to its decline with the defeat by Sparta and its allies in the Peloponnesian War. At a time when Athens sought to stabilize and recover from its humiliating defeat, the Athenian public may have been entertaining doubts about democracy as an efficient form of government. Socrates appears to have been a critic of democracy, and some scholars interpret his trial as an expression of political infighting.

Claiming loyalty to his city, Socrates clashed with the current course of Athenian politics and society.[13] He praises Sparta, archrival to Athens, directly and indirectly in various dialogues. One of Socrates' purported offenses to the city was his position as a social and moral critic. Rather than upholding a status quo and accepting the development of what he perceived as immorality within his region, Socrates questioned the collective notion of "might makes right" that he felt was common in Greece during this period. Plato refers to Socrates as the "gadfly" of the state (as the gadfly stings the horse into action, so Socrates stung various Athenians), insofar as he irritated some people with considerations of justice and the pursuit of goodness.[14] His attempts to improve the Athenians' sense of justice may have been the source of his execution.

According to Plato's *Apology*, Socrates' life as the "gadfly" of Athens began when his friend Chaerephon asked the oracle at Delphi if anyone was wiser than Socrates; the Oracle responded that no-one was wiser. Socrates believed what the Oracle had said was a paradox, because he believed he possessed no wisdom whatsoever. He proceeded to test the riddle by approaching men considered wise by the people of Athens—statesmen, poets, and artisans—in order to refute the Oracle's pronouncement. Questioning them, however, Socrates concluded that, while each man thought he knew a great deal and was wise, in fact they knew very little and were not wise at all. Socrates realized that the Oracle was correct, in that while so-called wise men thought themselves wise and yet were not, he himself knew he was not wise at all, which, paradoxically, made him the wiser one since he was the only person aware of his own ignorance. Socrates' paradoxical wisdom made the prominent Athenians he publicly questioned look foolish, turning them against him and leading to accusations of wrongdoing. Socrates defended his role as a gadfly until the
end: at his trial, when Socrates was asked to propose his own punishment, he suggested a wage paid by the government and free dinners for the rest of his life instead, to finance the time he spent as Athens’ benefactor. He was, nevertheless, found guilty of both corrupting the minds of the youth of Athens and of impiety ("not believing in the gods of the state"), and subsequently sentenced to death by drinking a mixture containing poison hemlock. According to Xenophon's story, Socrates purposefully gave a defiant defense to the jury because "he believed he would be better off dead". Xenophon goes on to describe a defense by Socrates that explains the rigors of old age, and how Socrates would be glad to circumvent them by being sentenced to death. It is also understood that Socrates also wished to die because he "actually believed the right time had come for him to die."

Xenophon and Plato agree that Socrates had an opportunity to escape, as his followers were able to bribe the prison guards. He chose to stay for several reasons:

1. He believed such a flight would indicate a fear of death, which he believed no true philosopher has.
2. If he fled Athens his teaching would fare no better in another country as he would continue questioning all he met and undoubtedly incur their displeasure.
3. Having knowingly agreed to live under the city's laws, he implicitly subjected himself to the possibility of being accused of crimes by its citizens and judged guilty by its jury. To do otherwise would have caused him to break his "social contract" with the state, and so harm the state, an act contrary to Socratic principle.

The full reasoning behind his refusal to flee is the main subject of the Crito.

Socrates' death is described at the end of Plato's Phaedo. Socrates turned down the pleas of Crito to attempt an escape from prison. After drinking the poison, he was instructed to walk around until his legs felt numb. After he lay down, the man who administered the poison pinched his foot. Socrates could no longer feel his legs. The numbness slowly crept up his body until it reached his heart. Shortly before his death, Socrates speaks his last words to Crito: "Crito, we owe a rooster to Asclepius. Please, don't forget to pay the debt." Asclepius was the Greek god for curing illness, and it is likely Socrates' last words meant that death is the cure—and freedom, of the soul from the body. Additionally, in Why Socrates Died: Dispelling the Myths, Robin Waterfield adds another interpretation of Socrates' last words. He suggests that Socrates was a voluntary scapegoat; his death was the purifying remedy for Athens' misfortunes. In this view, the token of appreciation for Asclepius would represent a cure for the ailments of Athens.

**Philosophy**

**Socratic method**

Perhaps his most important contribution to Western thought is his dialectic method of inquiry, known as the Socratic method or method of "elenchus", which he largely applied to the examination of key moral concepts such as the Good and Justice. It was first described by Plato in the Socratic Dialogues. To solve a problem, it would be broken down into a series of questions, the answers to which gradually distill the answer a person would seek. The influence of this approach is most strongly felt today in the use of the scientific method, in which hypothesis is the first stage. The development and practice of this method is one of Socrates' most enduring contributions, and is a key factor in earning his mantle as the father of political philosophy, ethics or moral philosophy, and as a figurehead of all the central themes in Western philosophy.
To illustrate the use of the Socratic method; a series of questions are posed to help a person or group to determine their underlying beliefs and the extent of their knowledge. The Socratic method is a negative method of hypothesis elimination, in that better hypotheses are found by steadily identifying and eliminating those that lead to contradictions. It was designed to force one to examine one's own beliefs and the validity of such beliefs. In fact, Socrates once said, "I know you won't believe me, but the highest form of Human Excellence is to question oneself and others."[17]

An alternative interpretation of the dialectic is that it is a method for direct perception of the Form of the Good. Philosopher Karl Popper describes the dialectic as "the art of intellectual intuition, of visualising the divine originals, the Forms or Ideas, of unveiling the Great Mystery behind the common man's everyday world of appearances."[18] In a similar vein French philosopher Pierre Hadot suggests that the dialogues are a type of spiritual exercise. "Furthermore," writes Hadot, "in Plato's view, every dialectical exercise, precisely because it is an exercise of pure thought, subject to the demands of the Logos, turns the soul away from the sensible world, and allows it to convert itself towards the Good."[19]

**Philosophical beliefs**

The beliefs of Socrates, as distinct from those of Plato, are difficult to discern. Little in the way of concrete evidence exists to demarcate the two. The lengthy presentation of ideas given in most of the dialogues may be deformed by Plato, and some scholars think Plato so adapted the Socratic style as to make the literary character and the philosopher himself impossible to distinguish. Others argue that he did have his own theories and beliefs, but there is much controversy over what these might have been, owing to the difficulty of separating Socrates from Plato and the difficulty of interpreting even the dramatic writings concerning Socrates. Consequently, distinguishing the philosophical beliefs of Socrates from those of Plato and Xenophon is not easy and it must be remembered that what is attributed to Socrates might more closely reflect the specific concerns of these thinkers.

The matter is complicated because the historical Socrates seems to have been notorious for asking questions but not answering, claiming to lack wisdom concerning the subjects about which he questioned others.[20]

If anything in general can be said about the philosophical beliefs of Socrates, it is that he was morally, intellectually, and politically at odds with his many of his fellow Athenians. When he is on trial for heresy and corrupting the minds of the youth of Athens, he uses his method of elenchos to demonstrate to the jurors that their moral values are wrong-headed. He tells them they are concerned with their families, careers, and political responsibilities when they ought to be worried about the "welfare of their souls". Socrates' assertion that the gods had singled him out as a divine emissary seemed to provoke irritation, if not outright ridicule. Socrates also questioned the Sophistic doctrine that arete (virtue) can be taught. He liked to observe that successful fathers (such as the prominent military general Pericles) did not produce sons of their own quality. Socrates argued that moral excellence was more a matter of divine bequest than parental nurture. This belief may have contributed to his lack of anxiety about the future of his own sons.

Socrates frequently says his ideas are not his own, but his teachers'. He mentions several influences: Prodicus the rhetor and Anaxagoras the philosopher. Perhaps surprisingly, Socrates claims to have been deeply influenced by two women besides his mother: he says that Diotima, a witch and priestess from Mantinea, taught him all he knows about eros, or love; and that Aspasia, the mistress of Pericles, taught him the art of rhetoric.[21] John Burnet argued that his principal teacher was the Anaxagorean Archelaus but his ideas were as Plato described them; Eric A. Havelock, on the other hand, considered Socrates' association with the Anaxagoreans to be evidence of Plato's philosophical separation from Socrates.
**Socratic paradoxes**

Many of the beliefs traditionally attributed to the historical Socrates have been characterized as "paradoxical" because they seem to conflict with common sense. The following are among the so-called Socratic Paradoxes:[22]

- No one desires evil.
- No one errs or does wrong willingly or knowingly.
- Virtue—all virtue—is knowledge.
- Virtue is sufficient for happiness.

The phrase Socratic paradox can also refer to a self-referential paradox, originating in Socrates' phrase, "I know that I know nothing noble and good".[23]

**Knowledge**

One of the best known sayings of Socrates is "I only know that I know nothing". The conventional interpretation of this remark is that Socrates' wisdom was limited to an awareness of his own ignorance. Socrates believed wrongdoing was a consequence of ignorance and those who did wrong knew no better. The one thing Socrates consistently claimed to have knowledge of was "the art of love", which he connected with the concept of "the love of wisdom", i.e., philosophy. He never actually claimed to be wise, only to understand the path a lover of wisdom must take in pursuing it. It is debatable whether Socrates believed humans (as opposed to gods like Apollo) could actually become wise. On the one hand, he drew a clear line between human ignorance and ideal knowledge; on the other, Plato's Symposium (Diotima's Speech) and Republic (Allegory of the Cave) describe a method for ascending to wisdom.

In Plato's Theaetetus (150a), Socrates compares himself to a true matchmaker (προμνηστικός promnestikós), as distinguished from a panderer (προἀγωγός proagogos). This distinction is echoed in Xenophon's Symposium (3.20), when Socrates jokes about his certainty of being able to make a fortune, if he chose to practice the art of pandering. For his part as a philosophical interlocutor, he leads his respondent to a clearer conception of wisdom, although he claims he is not himself a teacher (Apology). His role, he claims, is more properly to be understood as analogous to a midwife (μαῖα maia). Socrates explains that he is himself barren of theories, but knows how to bring the theories of others to birth and determine whether they are worthy or mere "wind eggs" (ἀνεμιαῖον anemiaion). Perhaps significantly, he points out that midwives are barren due to age, and women who have never given birth are unable to become midwives; they would have no experience or knowledge of birth and would be unable to separate the worthy infants from those that should be left on the hillside to be exposed. To judge this, the midwife must have experience and knowledge of what she is judging.
Virtue

Socrates believed the best way for people to live was to focus on self-development rather than the pursuit of material wealth. He always invited others to try to concentrate more on friendships and a sense of true community, for Socrates felt this was the best way for people to grow together as a populace. His actions lived up to this: in the end, Socrates accepted his death sentence when most thought he would simply leave Athens, as he felt he could not run away from or go against the will of his community; as mentioned above, his reputation for valor on the battlefield was without reproach.

The idea that there are certain virtues formed a common thread in Socrates' teachings. These virtues represented the most important qualities for a person to have, foremost of which were the philosophical or intellectual virtues. Socrates stressed that "virtue was the most valuable of all possessions; the ideal life was spent in search of the Good. Truth lies beneath the shadows of existence, and it is the job of the philosopher to show the rest how little they really know."

Politics

It is often argued that Socrates believed "ideals belong in a world only the wise man can understand", making the philosopher the only type of person suitable to govern others. In Plato's dialogue the Republic, Socrates openly objected to the democracy that ran Athens during his adult life. It was not only Athenian democracy: Socrates found short of ideal any government that did not conform to his presentation of a perfect regime led by philosophers, and Athenian government was far from that. It is, however, possible that the Socrates of Plato's Republic is colored by Plato's own views. During the last years of Socrates' life, Athens was in continual flux due to political upheaval. Democracy was at last overthrown by a junta known as the Thirty Tyrants, led by Plato's relative, Critias, who had been a friend of Socrates. The Tyrants ruled for about a year before the Athenian democracy was reinstated, at which point it declared an amnesty for all recent events.

Socrates' opposition to democracy is often denied, and the question is one of the biggest philosophical debates when trying to determine exactly what Socrates believed. The strongest argument of those who claim Socrates did not actually believe in the idea of philosopher kings is that the view is expressed no earlier than Plato's Republic, which is widely considered one of Plato's "Middle" dialogues and not representative of the historical Socrates' views. Furthermore, according to Plato's Apology of Socrates, an "early" dialogue, Socrates refused to pursue conventional politics; he often stated he could not look into other's matters or tell people how to live their lives when he did not yet understand how to live his own. He believed he was a philosopher engaged in the pursuit of Truth, and did not claim to know it fully. Socrates' acceptance of his death sentence, after his conviction by the Boule (Council), can also be seen to support this view. It is often claimed much of the anti-democratic leanings are from Plato, who was never able to overcome his disgust at what was done to his teacher. In any case, it is clear Socrates thought the rule of the Thirty Tyrants was also objectionable; when called before them to assist in the arrest of a fellow Athenian, Socrates refused and narrowly escaped death before the Tyrants were overthrown. He did however fulfill his duty to serve as Prytanis when a trial of a group of Generals who presided over a disastrous naval campaign were judged; even then he maintained an uncompromising attitude, being one of those who refused to proceed in a manner not supported by the laws, despite intense pressure. Judging by his actions, he considered the rule of the Thirty Tyrants less legitimate than the Democratic Senate that sentenced him to death.
Covertness

In the Dialogues of Plato, Socrates sometimes seems to support a mystical side, discussing reincarnation and the mystery religions; however, this is generally attributed to Plato. Regardless, this cannot be dismissed out of hand, as we cannot be sure of the differences between the views of Plato and Socrates; in addition, there seem to be some corollaries in the works of Xenophon. In the culmination of the philosophic path as discussed in Plato's Symposium, one comes to the Sea of Beauty or to the sight of "the beautiful itself" (211C); only then can one become wise. (In the Symposium, Socrates credits his speech on the philosophic path to his teacher, the priestess Diotima, who is not even sure if Socrates is capable of reaching the highest mysteries.) In the Meno, he refers to the Eleusinian Mysteries, telling Meno he would understand Socrates' answers better if only he could stay for the initiations next week. Further confusions result from the nature of these sources, insofar as the Platonic Dialogues are arguably the work of an artist-philosopher, whose meaning does not volunteer itself to the passive reader nor again the lifelong scholar. Plato himself was a playwright before taking up the study of philosophy. His works are, indeed, dialogues; Plato's choice of this, the medium of Sophocles, Euripides, and the fictions of theatre, may reflect the ever-interpretable nature of his writings, as he has been called a "dramatist of reason". What is more, the first word of nearly all Plato's works is a significant term for that respective dialogue, and is used with its' many connotations in mind. Finally, the Phaedrus and the Symposium each allude to Socrates' coy delivery of philosophic truths in conversation; the Socrates of the Phaedrus goes so far as to demand such dissembling and mystery in all writing. The covertness we often find in Plato, appearing here and there couched in some enigmatic use of symbol and/or irony, may be at odds with the mysticism Plato's Socrates expounds in some other dialogues. These indirect methods may fail to satisfy some readers.

Perhaps the most interesting facet of this is Socrates' reliance on what the Greeks called his "daemonic sign", an averting (ἀποτρεπτικός apotreptikos) inner voice Socrates heard only when he was about to make a mistake. It was this sign that prevented Socrates from entering into politics. In the Phaedrus, we are told Socrates considered this to be a form of "divine madness", the sort of insanity that is a gift from the gods and gives us poetry, mysticism, love, and even philosophy itself. Alternately, the sign is often taken to be what we would call "intuition"; however, Socrates' characterization of the phenomenon as "daemonic" may suggest that its' origin is divine, mysterious, and independent of his own thoughts.

Satirical playwrights

He was prominently lampooned in Aristophanes' comedy The Clouds, produced when Socrates was in his mid-forties; he said at his trial (according to Plato) that the laughter of the theater was a harder task to answer than the arguments of his accusers. Søren Kierkegaard believed this play was a more accurate representation of Socrates than those of his students. In the play, Socrates is ridiculed for his dirtiness, which is associated with the Laconizing fad; also in plays by Callias, Eupolis, and Telecleides. Other comic poets who lampooned Socrates include Mnesimachus and Ameipsias. In all of these, Socrates and the Sophists were criticised for "the moral dangers inherent in contemporary thought and literature".

Prose sources

Plato, Xenophon, and Aristotle are the main sources for the historical Socrates; however, Xenophon and Plato were direct disciples of Socrates, and they may idealize him; however, they wrote the only continuous descriptions of Socrates that have come down to us in their complete form. Aristotle refers frequently, but in passing, to Socrates in his writings. Almost all of Plato's works center on Socrates. However, Plato's later works appear to be more his own philosophy put into the mouth of his mentor.
The Socratic dialogues

The Socratic Dialogues are a series of dialogues written by Plato and Xenophon in the form of discussions between Socrates and other persons of his time, or as discussions between Socrates' followers over his concepts. Plato's *Phaedo* is an example of this latter category. Although his *Apology* is a monologue delivered by Socrates, it is usually grouped with the Dialogues.

The *Apology* professes to be a record of the actual speech Socrates delivered in his own defense at the trial. In the Athenian jury system, an "apology" is composed of three parts: a speech, followed by a counter-assessment, then some final words. "Apology" is a transliteration, not a translation, of the Greek *apologia*, meaning "defense"; in this sense it is not apologetic according to our contemporary use of the term.

Plato generally does not place his own ideas in the mouth of a specific speaker; he lets ideas emerge via the Socratic Method, under the guidance of Socrates. Most of the dialogues present Socrates applying this method to some extent, but nowhere as completely as in the *Euthyphro*. In this dialogue, Socrates and Euthyphro go through several iterations of refining the answer to Socrates' question, "...What is the pious, and what the impious?"

In Plato's Dialogues, learning appears as a process of remembering. The soul, before its incarnation in the body, was in the realm of Ideas (very similar to the Platonic "Forms"). There, it saw things the way they truly are, rather than the pale shadows or copies we experience on earth. By a process of questioning, the soul can be brought to remember the ideas in their pure form, thus bringing wisdom.

Especially for Plato's writings referring to Socrates, it is not always clear which ideas brought forward by Socrates (or his friends) actually belonged to Socrates and which of these may have been new additions or elaborations by Plato – this is known as the Socratic Problem. Generally, the early works of Plato are considered to be close to the spirit of Socrates, whereas the later works – including *Phaedo* and *Republic* – are considered to be possibly products of Plato's elaborations.

Legacy

Immediate influence

Immediately, the students of Socrates set to work both on exercising their perceptions of his teachings in politics and also on developing many new philosophical schools of thought. Some of Athens' controversial and anti-democratic tyrants were contemporary or posthumous students of Socrates including Alcibiades and Critias. Critias' cousin, Plato would go on to found the Academy in 385 BC, which gained so much notoriety that 'Academy' became the base word for educational institutions in later European languages such as English, French, and Italian. Plato's protege, another important figure of the Classical era, Aristotle went on to tutor Alexander the Great and also to found his own school in 335 BC- the Lyceum, whose name also now means an educational institution.

While Socrates was shown to demote the importance of institutional knowledge like mathematics or science in relation to the human condition in his Dialogues, Plato would emphasize it with metaphysical overtones mirroring that of Pythagoras – the former who would dominate Western thought well into the Renaissance. Aristotle himself was as much of a philosopher as he was a scientist with rudimentary work in the fields of biology and physics.

Socratic thought which challenged conventions, especially in stressing a simplistic way of living, became divorced from Plato's more detached and philosophical pursuits. This idea was inherited by one of Socrates' older students, Antisthenes, who became the originator of another philosophy in the years after Socrates' death: Cynicism. Antisthenes attacked Plato and Alcibiades over what he deemed as their betrayal of Socrates' tenets in his writings.

The idea of asceticism being hand in hand with an ethical life or one with piety, ignored by Plato and Aristotle and somewhat dealt with by the Cynics, formed the core of another philosophy in 281 BC – Stoicism when Zeno of Citium would discover Socrates' works and then learn from Crates, a Cynic philosopher. None of the schools however, would inherit his tendency to openly associate with and respect women or the regular citizen.
Later historical effects

While some of the later contributions of Socrates to Hellenistic Era culture and philosophy as well as the Roman Era have been lost to time, his teachings began a resurgence in both medieval Europe and the Islamic Middle East alongside those of Aristotle and Stoicism. Socrates is mentioned in the dialogue Kuzari by Jewish philosopher and rabbi Yehuda Halevi in which a Jew instructs the Khazar king about Judaism. al-Kindi, a well-known Arabic philosopher, introduced and tried to reconcile Socrates and Hellenistic philosophy to an Islamic audience, referring to him by the name 'Suqrat'.

Socrates' stature in Western philosophy returned in full force with the Renaissance and the Age of Reason in Europe when political theory began to resurface under those like Locke and Hobbes. Voltaire even went so far as to write a satirical play about the Trial of Socrates. There were a number of paintings about his life including Socrates Tears Alcibiades from the Embrace of Sensual Pleasure by Jean-Baptiste Regnault and The Death of Socrates by Jacques-Louis David in the later 18th century.

To this day, the Socratic Method is still used in classroom and law school discourse to expose underlying issues in both subject and the speaker. He has been rewarded with accolades ranging from numerous mentions in pop culture such as the movie Bill and Ted's Excellent Adventure and a Greek rock band to numerous busts in academic institutions in recognition of his contribution to education.

Criticism

Evaluation and reaction to Socrates has been undertaken with both historical and philosophical inquiry from the time of his death to the present day with a multitude of conclusions and perspectives. One of the initial criticisms levied against the philosopher was presented at his trial – that he was not the proponent of a philosophy but an individual with a method of undermining the fabric of Athenian society, a charge carried by the 500-man jury of Athenians that sentenced him to death. Although he was not directly prosecuted for his connection to Critias, leader of the Spartan-backed Thirty Tyrants, he was seen as a controversial figure, who mentored oligarchs who became abusive tyrants, and undermined Athenian democracy. The Sophist establishment he railed at in life survived him, but by the 3rd century BC, was rapidly overtaken by the many philosophical schools of thought that Socrates influenced.

Socrates' death is considered iconic and his status as a martyr of philosophy overshadowed most contemporary and posthumous criticism at the time. However, Xenophon attempts to explain that Socrates purposely welcomed the hemlock due to his old age using the arguably self-destructive testimony to the jury as evidence. Direct criticism of Socrates almost disappears at this point, but there is a noticeable preference for Plato or Aristotle over the elements of Socratic philosophy distinct from those of his students, even into the Middle Ages.

Modern scholarship holds that, with so much of the philosopher obscured and possibly altered by Plato, it is impossible to gain a clear picture of Socrates amidst all the seeming contradictions. That both Cynicism and Stoicism, which carried heavy influence from Socratic thought, were unlike or even contrary to Platonism further illustrates this. The ambiguity and lack of reliability serves as the modern basis of criticism – that it is near impossible to know the real Socrates. Some controversy also exists about claims of Socrates exempting himself from the homosexual customs of ancient Greece and not believing in the Olympian gods to the point of being monotheistic or if this was an attempt by later Medieval scholars to reconcile him with the morals of the era. However, it is still commonly taught and held with little exception that Socrates is the founder of modern Western philosophy, to the point that philosophers before him are referred to as pre-Socratic.
Ahmadiyya viewpoint

Mirza Tahir Ahmad (the fourth Caliph of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community) argued in his book Revelation, Rationality, Knowledge & Truth that Socrates was a prophet of the ancient Greeks. The apparent prophetic qualities of Socrates are indeed a subject for debate.²⁵ His constant reference to the oracle and how it performs the active function of a moral compass by preventing him from unseemly acts could easily be taken as a reference to— or substitute for revelation. Similarly, Socrates often refers to God in the singular as opposed to the plural and actively rejected the Greek pantheon of Gods and Goddesses unless citing them as examples of their falseness.²⁶

Notes

[3] Many other writers added to the fashion of Socratic dialogues (called Σικερακικοι λογοι) at the time. In addition to Plato and Xenophon, each of the following is credited by some source as having added to the genre: Aeschines of Sparta, Antisthenes, Aristippus, Bryson, Cebes, Crito, Euclid of Megara, and Phaedo. It is unlikely Plato was the first in this field (Vlastos, p. 52).
[4] There are several reasons this is the case. For one, Socrates is credited as an intellectual by almost every existing primary source. It is more likely then, that a fellow intellectual (i.e., Plato) would be more capable of understanding Socrates's ideas than a comic playwright, like Aristophanes. Furthermore, Socrates—as he is depicted by Xenophon's works—does nothing that would lead one to conclude he was a revolutionary or a threat to Athens (both Socrates and Xenophon served in military forces). Plato's Socrates behaves in ways that would explain why he was condemned for impiety (May, On Socrates).
[12] The ancient tradition is attested in Pausanias, 1.22.8 (http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/cgi-bin/ptext?lookup=Paus.+1.22.1); for a modern denial, see Kleine Pauly, "Socrates" 7; the tradition is a confusion with the sculptor, Socrates of Thebes, mentioned in Pausanias 9.25.3 (http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/cgi-bin/ptext?lookup=Paus.+9.25.1), a contemporary of Pindar.
[13] Here it is telling to refer to Thucydides (3.2.8.8) (http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/cgi-bin/ptext?lookup=Thuc.+3.2.8.8): "Reckless audacity came to be considered the courage of a loyal ally; prudent hesitation, specious cowardice; moderation was held to be a cloak for unmanliness; ability to see all sides of a question inaptness to act on any. Frantic violence, became the attribute of manliness; cautious plotting, a justifiable means of self-defense. The advocate of extreme measures was always trustworthy; his opponent a man to be suspected."
[20] Plato, Republic 336c & 337a, Theaetetus 150c, Apology 23a; Xenophon, Memorabilia 4.4.9; Aristotle, Sophistical Refutations 183b7.
[21] Plato, Menexenus 235e
[23] Apology of Socrates 21d.
[26] Greek Philosophy (http://www.alislam.org/library/books/revelation/part_1_section_5.html) – Al Islam
References


Further reading

External links

- Socrates (http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b007zp21) on In Our Time at the BBC. (listen now (http://www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/console/b007zp21/In_Our_Time_Socrates))
- Socrates (http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/socrates) entry by Debra Nails in the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy
- Socrates (https://inpho.cogs.indiana.edu/thinker/3919) at the Indiana Philosophy Ontology Project
- Greek Philosophy: Socrates (http://www.wsu.edu/~dee/GREECE/SOCRATES.HTM)
- Diogenes Laërtius, Life of Socrates, translated by Robert Drew Hicks (1925).
- Socrates Narrates Plato's The Republic (http://www.allphilosophers.com/index.html)
- Apology of Socrates, by Plato.
- Project Gutenberg e-texts on Socrates, amongst others:
  - The Dialogues of Plato (http://www.gutenberg.org/catalog/world/authrec?fk_authors=93) (see also Wikipedia articles on Dialogues by Plato)
  - The writings of Xenophon (http://www.gutenberg.org/catalog/world/authrec?fk_authors=543), such as the Memorabilia and Hellenica.
  - The satirical plays by Aristophanes (http://www.gutenberg.org/catalog/world/authrec?fk_authors=965)
  - Aristotle's writings (http://www.gutenberg.org/catalog/world/authrec?fk_authors=2747)
  - Voltaire's Socrates (http://www.gutenberg.org/etext/4683)
  - A free audiobook of the Socratic dialogue Euthyphro (http://librivox.org/euthyphro-by-plato/) at LibriVox (http://www.librivox.org)
  - Socratic Method Research Portal (http://www.socraticmethod.net)
  - Video on Socratic method (http://video.google.com/videoplay?docid=-2808374571100926940&hl=en&fs=true)
Polus

Polus (Greek: Πῶλος, "colt", c. 5th century BCE) is the nickname Plato gave to an Ancient Greek Athenian philosophical figure. He was a pupil of the famous orator Gorgias, and teacher of rhetoric from the city of Acragas, Sicily.

All that is known of Polus derives from the Socratic dialogues of Plato, which suggests he was an associate of Socrates. He features heavily in the Gorgias, a dialogue on the nature of rhetoric. Polus also appears in the Phaedrus and Theages dialogues, and book 1 of Aristotle's Metaphysics.

Other uses

Polus is also the Roman name for the Greek Titan Coeus, as well as the name of a military satellite launched by the Soviet Union.

External links


Chaerephon

Chaerephon (Greek: Χαιρεφῶν, Chairephōn, ca. 470–460 – 403-399 BCE), of the Athenian deme Sphettus, was an Ancient Greek best remembered as a loyal friend and follower of Socrates. He is known only through brief descriptions by classical writers and was "an unusual man by all accounts",[1] though a man of loyal democratic values.

Life

Chaerephon is mentioned by three writers of his time, all of whom were probably well acquainted with him: Aristophanes, Xenophon, and Plato. Considered together, these sources suggest that Chaerephon was a well-known, alert, energetic, engaging individual, possibly with a distinctive physical appearance and probably a bit of a "character", who moved easily in the social and intellectual circles of the day.

In Aristophanes

Chaerephon appears in three of Aristophanes' comic plays: The Clouds, The Wasps, and The Birds. The Clouds, produced in 423 BCE, portrays Socrates and his assistant Chaerephon as a pair of charlatans operating a pseudo-scientific school in Athens. Chaerephon is represented in The Clouds as pale and malnourished, a "living corpse", and it is sometimes inferred that he must have been a thin, unhealthy looking fellow in real life.[2] In The Wasps Chaerephon, or some visual caricature of him, has a brief, non-speaking role as an impartial witness. In The Birds he is nicknamed "the bat", possibly alluding to nocturnal habits, a bony appearance, or a sudden, excitable nature (as suggested in Plato's works, below).
In Xenophon

In his Memorabilia Xenophon includes Chaerephon in his list of the "true companions" of Socrates. Also in the Socratic inner circle, according to Xenophon, were Crito, Hermogenes, Simmias of Thebes, Cebes of Thebes, Phaedonides, and Chaerephon's younger brother Chaerecrates, although Xenophon acknowledges that there were others. Later in the Memorabilia, Xenophon recounts an exchange between Socrates and Chaerecrates on the occasion of a falling-out between the brothers. Socrates argues persuasively that Chaerecrates should make every effort to achieve a prompt reconciliation with his older brother Chaerephon.

In Plato

In Plato's Apology, an account of the Trial of Socrates in 399 BCE, Socrates calls Chaerephon his longtime friend and the friend of many present. Socrates says that Chaerephon is now deceased but indicates that his brother is in attendance at the trial. Socrates suggests that Chaerephon had a reputation for being impetuous and we learn that it was Chaerephon who journeyed to Delphi to ask the Delphic oracle who was the wisest of men. (The oracle replied that there was none wiser than Socrates.) Socrates also alludes to a period of exile which was endured by Chaerephon and some others present. This is sometimes taken as evidence that Chaerephon, unlike Socrates, was an active supporter of the Athenian Democracy and was persecuted on this account when the democracy was temporarily deposed after the defeat of Athens by Sparta.[3]

Chaerephon appears in two other Platonic dialogues: the Charmides and the Gorgias. At the start of the Charmides, Socrates returns to Athens from the military campaign at Potidaea and is greeted with great enthusiasm by Chaerephon who is described as "a wild man". This campaign concluded in 430 BCE (3 years before Plato's birth and 31 years before Socrates' death), but Plato is probably accurate in depicting the association of Chaerephon and Socrates as already well established. At the start of the Gorgias, Chaerephon and Socrates arrive late at an Athenian gathering for an evening of conversation with Gorgias, a famed Sophist. Socrates good-naturedly blames their lateness on Chaerephon, who chatted too long in the Agora. Chaerephon then says that Gorgias is a friend of his and, with some coaching by Socrates, he serves satisfactorily as Gorgias' initial interlocutor in the early part of the dialogue.

References


Bibliography

Callicles

Callicles (Greek: Καλλικλῆς c.484–late 5th century BCE) was an ancient Athenian political philosopher best remembered for his role in Plato's dialogue Gorgias, where he "presents himself as a no-holds-barred, bare-knuckled, clear-headed advocate of Realpolitik."[1]

Callicles is depicted as a young student of the sophist Gorgias. In the dialogue named for his teacher, he argues the position of an oligarchic amoralism, stating that it is natural and just for the strong to dominate the weak and that it is unfair for the weak to resist such oppression by establishing laws to limit the power of the strong. He asserts that the institutions and moral code of his time were not established by gods but by men who naturally were looking after their own interests.

Despite the scant surviving sources for his thought, he served as influential to modern political philosophy, notably including the thought of Friedrich Nietzsche.[2]

References

External links
• Callicles and Thrasy eachus (http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/callicles-thrasymachus/#5)
• Socrates v. Callicles (http://www.fordham.edu/philosophy/le/davenport/ethsum00/callicle.htm)

Socratic dialogue

Socratic dialogue (Greek: Σωκρατικὸς λόγος or Σωκρατικὸς διάλογος) is a genre of prose literary works developed in Greece at the turn of the fourth century BC, preserved today in the dialogues of Plato and the Socratic works of Xenophon - either dramatic or narrative - in which characters discuss moral and philosophical problems, illustrating a version of the Socratic method. Socrates is often the main character.

Most accurately, the term refers to works in which Socrates is a character, though as a genre other texts are included; Plato's Laws and Xenophon's Hiero are Socratic dialogues in which a wise man other than Socrates leads the discussion (the Athenian Stranger and Simonides, respectively). Likewise, the stylistic format of the dialogues can vary; Plato's dialogues generally only contain the direct words of each of the speakers, while Xenophon's dialogues are written down as a continuous story, containing, along with the narration of the circumstances of the dialogue, the "quotes" of the speakers.

According to a fragment of Aristotle, the first author of Socratic dialogue was Alexamenus of Teos, but we do not know anything else about him, whether Socrates appeared in his works, or how accurate Aristotle was in his antagonistic judgement about him. In addition to Plato and Xenophon, Antisthenes, Aeschines of Sphettos, Phaedo of Elis, Euclid of Megara, Simon the Shoemaker, Theocritus, Tissaphernes and Aristotle all wrote Socratic dialogues, and Cicero wrote similar dialogues in Latin on philosophical and rhetorical themes, for example De re publica.
Plato

Generally, the works which are most often assigned to Plato's early years are all considered to be Socratic dialogues (written from 399 to 387), but many of his Middle dialogues (written from 387 to 361, after the establishment of his Academy), and Later dialogues (written in the period between 361 and his death in 347) incorporate Socrates' character and are often included here as well.\[1\]

- First Alcibiades
- Second Alcibiades
- Apology
- Charmides
- Crito
- Cratylus
- Critias
- Epinomis
- Euthydemus
- Euthyphro
- Gorgias
- Hippias Major
- Hippias Minor
- Ion
- Laches
- Lysis
- Meno
- Parmenides
- Protagoras
- Phaedo
- Phaedrus
- Philebus
- Republic
- Sophist
- Statesman
- Symposium
- Theaetetus
- Timaeus

Xenophon

- Apology
- Hiero
- Memorabilia
- Symposium

Cicero

- De re publica

References


**Gorgias (dialogue)**

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**Gorgias** is a Socratic dialogue written by Plato around 380 BC. In this dialogue, Socrates seeks the true definition of rhetoric, attempting to pinpoint the essence of rhetoric and unveil the flaws of the sophistic oratory popular in Athens at this time. The art of persuasion was widely considered necessary for political and legal advantage in classical Athens, and rhetoricians promoted themselves as teachers of this fundamental skill. Some, like Gorgias, were foreigners attracted to Athens because of its reputation for intellectual and cultural sophistication. In the *Gorgias*, Socrates argues that philosophy is an art, whereas rhetoric is merely a knack. To Socrates, most rhetoric in practice is merely flattery. In order to use rhetoric for good, rhetoric cannot exist alone; it must depend on philosophy to guide its morality. Socrates, therefore, believes that morality is not inherent in rhetoric and that without philosophy, rhetoric is simply used to persuade for personal gain. Socrates suggests that he is one of the few (but not only)
Athenians to practice true politics (521d).

The characters

- Socrates, the philosopher
- Chaerephon, a friend of Socrates
- Gorgias, the rhetorician
- Polus, a student of Gorgias
- Callicles, an older rhetorician

Major themes

Definition of rhetoric

Socrates interrogates Gorgias in order to determine the true definition of rhetoric, framing his argument around the question format, "What is X?" (2). He asks, "…why don’t you tell us yourself what the craft you’re an expert in is, and hence what we’re supposed to call you?” (449e).

Throughout the remainder of the dialogue, Socrates debates about the nature of rhetoric. Socrates believes there are two types: "…one part of it would be flattery, I suppose, and shameful public harangue, while the other—that of getting the souls of the citizens to be as good as possible and of striving valiantly to say what is best, whether the audience will find it more pleasant or more unpleasant—is something admirable. But you’ve never seen this type of oratory…” (502e). Although rhetoric has the potential to be used justly, Socrates believes that in practice, rhetoric is flattery; the rhetorician makes the audience feel worthy because they can identify with the rhetorician's argument.

The question of techne: art vs. knack

Socrates and Polus debate whether rhetoric can be considered an art. Polus states that rhetoric is indeed a craft, but Socrates replies, "To tell you the truth, Polus, I don't think it's a craft at all” (462b). The dialogue continues:

"POLUS: So you think oratory's a knack?
SOCRATES: Yes, I do, unless you say it's something else.
POLUS: A knack for what?
SOCRATES: For producing a certain gratification and pleasure” (462c).

Socrates continues to argue that rhetoric is not an art, but merely a knack: "…it guesses at what's pleasant with no consideration for what's best. And I say that it isn't a craft, but a knack, because it has no account of the nature of whatever things it applies by which it applies them, so that it’s unable to state the cause of each thing” (465a).

The morality of rhetoric

Socrates discusses the morality of rhetoric with Gorgias, asking him if rhetoric was just. Socrates catches the incongruity in Gorgias statements: "well, at the time you said that, I took it that oratory would never be an unjust thing, since it always makes its speeches about justice. But when a little later you were saying that the orator could also use oratory unjustly, I was surprised and thought that your statements weren't consistent” (461a). To this argument, Gorgias "…is left wishing he could respond, knowing he cannot, and feeling frustrated and competitive. The effect of the 'proof' is not to persuade, but to disorient him".[2]

Socrates believes that rhetoric alone is not a moral endeavor. Gorgias is criticized because, "he would teach anyone who came to him wanting to learn oratory but without expertise in what's just…” (482d). Socrates believes that people need philosophy to teach them what is right, and that oratory cannot be righteous without philosophy.
Truth

Socrates continually claims that his methods of questioning are aimed at discovering the truth. He sarcastically compliments Callicles on his frankness because it helps expose the truth about oratory: "I well know that if you concur with what my soul believes, then that is the very truth. I realize that the person who intends to put a soul to an adequate test to see whether it lives rightly or not must have three qualities, all of which you have: knowledge, goodwill, and frankness" (487a). Truth can be found through deliberation with others, relaying to one another the knowledge in ones' soul in order to come to a conclusion about each other's beliefs.

At the same time, truth is not based upon commonly accepted beliefs. Socrates outlines a problem about truth when it is misaligned from public opinion: "you don't compel me; instead you produce many false witnesses against me and try to banish me from my property, the truth. For my part, if I don't produce you as a single witness to agree with what I'm saying, then I suppose I've achieved nothing worth mentioning concerning the things we've been discussing" (472c).

Summary

Introduction

The dialogue begins just after Gorgias has given a speech. Callicles says that Gorgias is a guest in his home, and has agreed to a private audience with Socrates and his friend Chaerephon. Socrates gets Gorgias to agree to his cross-examination style of conversation, asks him questions, and praises him for the brevity of his replies. Gorgias remarks that no one has asked him a new question in a long time, and when Socrates asks, assures him that he is just as capable of brevity as of long-windedness (449c).

Physical and intellectual combat compared

Gorgias admits under Socrates' cross-examination that while rhetoricians give people the power of words, they are not instructors of morality. Gorgias does not deny that his students might use their skills for immoral purposes (such as persuading the assembly to make an unwise decision, or to let a guilty man go free), but he says the teacher cannot be held responsible for this. He makes an argument from analogy: Gorgias says that if a man who went to wrestling school took to thrashing his parents or friends, you would not send his drill instructor into exile (456d-457c). He says that just as the trainer teaches his craft (techne) in good faith, and hopes that his student will use his physical powers wisely, the rhetorician has the same trust, that his students will not abuse their power.

Socrates says that he is one of those people who is actually happy to be refuted if he is wrong. He says that he would rather be refuted than to refute someone else because it is better to be delivered from harm oneself than to deliver someone else from harm. Gorgias, whose profession is persuasion, readily agrees that he is also this sort of man, who would rather be refuted than refute another. Gorgias has only one misgiving: he fears that the present company may have something better to do than listen to two men try to outdo each other in being wrong (458b-c). The company protests and proclaim that they are anxious to witness this new version of intellectual combat.

The debate about rhetoric

Socrates gets Gorgias to agree that the rhetorician is actually more convincing in front of an ignorant audience than an expert, because mastery of the tools of persuasion gives a man more conviction than mere facts. Gorgias accepts this criticism and asserts that it is an advantage of his profession that a man can be considered above specialists without having to learn anything of substance (459c). Socrates calls rhetoric a form of flattery, or pandering, and compares it to pastry baking and beautification (cosmetics). He says that rhetoric is to politics what pastry baking is to medicine, and what cosmetics are to gymnastics. All of these activities are aimed at surface adornment, an impersonation of what is really good (464c-465d).
Some have argued that Gorgias may have been uncharacteristically portrayed by Plato, because "...Plato's Gorgias agrees to the binary opposition knowledge vs. opinion" (82).[3] This is inaccurate because, "for Gorgias the sophist, all 'knowledge' is opinion. There can be no rational or irrational arguments because all human beliefs and communicative situations are relative to a kairotic moment" (83).[3]

The pitiful tyrant

Socrates then advances that "orators and tyrants have the very least power of any in our cities" (466d). Lumping tyrants and rhetoricians into a single category, Socrates says that both of them, when they kill people or banish them or confiscate their property, think they are doing what is in their own best interest, but are actually pitiable. Socrates maintains that the wicked man is unhappy, but that the unhappiest man of all is the wicked one who does not meet with justice, rebuke, and punishment (472e). Polus, who has stepped into the conversation at this point, laughs at Socrates. Socrates asks him if he thinks laughing is a legitimate form of refutation (473e). Polus then asks Socrates if putting forth views that no one would accept is not a refutation in itself. Socrates replies that if Polus cannot see how to refute him, he will show Polus how.

Socrates states that it is far worse to inflict evil than to be the innocent victim of it (475e). He gives the example of tyrants being the most wretched people on earth. He adds that poverty is to financial condition as disease is to the body as injustice is to the soul (477b-c). This analogy is used to define the states of corruption in each instance. Money-making, medicine, and justice are the respective cures (478a,b). Socrates argues that just penalties discipline people, make them more just, and cure them of their evil ways (478d). Wrongdoing is second among evils, but wrongdoing and getting away with it is the first and greatest of evils (479d). It follows from this, that if a man does not want to have a festering and incurable tumor growing in his soul, he needs to hurry himself to a judge upon realizing that he has done something wrong. Socrates posits that the rhetorician should accuse himself first, and then do his family and friends the favor of accusing them, so great is the curative power of justice (480c-e).

Socrates maintains that "supposing it is our duty to injure somebody, whether an enemy or anyone else—provided only that it is not against oneself that wrong has been done by such enemy, for this we must take care to avoid—but supposing our enemy has wronged some one else" (480e) you should contrive every means to see that he does not come before the judicial system. Because you want his soul to rot and fester, you should make sure he keeps and squanders his ill-gotten gains, and lives as long as possible in his wicked state. Polus and Callicles are both astounded at Socrates' position and wonder if he is just kidding (481b).

Callicles criticizes philosophy

Callicles observes that if Socrates is correct, people have life upside down, and are everywhere doing the opposite of what they should be doing. Socrates says he is in love with Alcibiades and philosophy, and cannot stop his beloveds from saying what is on their minds. While the statements of certain people often differ from one time to the next, Socrates claims that what philosophy says always stays the same (482b).

Callicles accuses Socrates of carrying on like a demagogue. He argues that suffering wrong is worse than doing it, that there is nothing good about being a victim. He further argues (as Glaucon does in the Gyges story in the Republic) that wrongdoing is only by convention shameful, and it is not wrong by nature. Then, he berates Socrates for wasting time in frivolous philosophy, saying there is no harm in young people engaging in useless banter, but that it is unattractive in older men. He tells Socrates that he is disgraceful, and that if anyone should seize him and carry him off to prison, he would be helpless to defend himself, saying that Socrates would reel and gape in front of a jury, and end up being put to death (486a,b). Socrates is not offended by this, and tells Callicles that his extraordinary frankness proves that he is well-disposed towards him (487d).

Callicles then returns to his defense of nature's own justice, where the strong exercise their advantages over the weak. He states that the natural man has large appetites and the means to satisfy them, and that only a weakling praises temperance and justice based on artificial law not natural. (483b, 492a-c).
Socrates calls Callicles a “desired touchstone” (486) and counters that not only "nomos" (custom or law) but also nature affirms that to do injustice is more disgraceful than to suffer it, that equality is justice (489a-b), and that a man such as Callicles’ ideal is like a leaky jar, insatiable and unhappy (494a). Socrates returns to his previous position, that an undisciplined man is unhappy and should be restrained and subjected to justice (505b).

**Socrates debates with himself**

Callicles becomes exasperated at the intellectual stalemate, and invites Socrates to carry on by himself, asking and answering his own questions (505d). He requests that his audience, including Callicles, listen to what he says and kindly break in on him if he says something that sounds false. If his opponent (whom he will be speaking for himself) makes a point, he agrees to concede to it (506a-c). Socrates proceeds with a monologue, and reiterates that he was not kidding about the best use of rhetoric, that it is best used against one's own self. A man who has done something wrong is wretched, but a man who gets away with it is even worse off (509b).

**Philosophy is a bitter draught**

Socrates argues that he aims at what is best, not at what is pleasant, and that he alone understands the technique of politics. He says that he enjoins people to take the bitter draughts, and compels them to hunger and thirst, while most politicians flatter the people with sweetmeats. He says of his trial that, "I shall be judged like a doctor brought before a jury of children with a cook as prosecutor" (521e). He says that such a pandering prosecutor will no doubt succeed in getting him sentenced to death, and he will be helpless to stop it. Socrates says that all that matters is his own purity of soul; he has maintained this, and it is the only thing that is really within his power (522d).

**The Judgment of Naked Souls**

Socrates ends the dialogue by telling Callicles, Polus, and Gorgias a story that they will regard as a myth, but which he regards as true (523a). He recounts that in the old days, Cronos judged men just before they died, and divided them into two categories. He sent good and righteous men to the Isles of the Blessed, and godless, unrighteous men to the prison of vengeance and punishment called Tartarus. These cases were judged badly because the men were judged while they were alive and with their clothes on, and the judges were fooled by appearances. Zeus fixed the problem by arranging for people to be dead, and stripped naked. The judge had to be naked too, so he could scan the souls of men without distractions.

Socrates adds that he has heard this myth, believes it, and infers from it that death is the separation of body and soul. He says that each retains after death the qualities it had in life, so that a fat, long-haired man will have a fat, long-haired corpse. If he was a scoundrel, he will bear the scars of his beatings. When the judge lays hold of some potentate, he will find that his soul bears the scars of his perjuries and crimes, because these will be branded on his soul (524b-525a).

Socrates remarks that some people are benefited by the pain and agony of their own punishments (525b) and by watching others suffer excruciating torture; but others have misdeeds that cannot be cured. He says that Homer pictures kings suffering eternally in Hades, but not the ordinary scoundrel, like Thersites. Socrates tells Callicles that this might sound like nonsense to him, an old wives’ tale, but warns him that when he is up before the judge on his own judgment day, he will reel and gape just like Socrates is currently doing. He finishes up by saying his ideas could be justly despised if anyone could come up with a better idea, but unfortunately, no one has.
Translations

- Walter Rangeley Maitland Lamb, 1927: [4]

References


Footnotes

- Plato, Gorgias, [505e]: "So that, in Epicharmus's phrase, 'what two men spake erewhile' I may prove I can manage single-handed". (http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/cgi-bin/ptext?lookup=Plat.+Gorg.+505e)

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