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Masters of Greek Thought: Plato, Socrates, and Aristotle

Course Guidebook

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Repeatedly recognized for excellence in teaching by the Emory University chapter of Phi Beta Kappa, Professor Bartlett has also received an award for excellence in teaching in the social sciences from the Center for Teaching and Curriculum at Emory and a "Crystal Apple" for excellence in undergraduate lecturing, an award voted on by the student body.

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Masters of Greek Thought: Plato, Socrates, and Aristotle

Scope:

This course will explore the thought of three profoundly influential thinkers in the Western tradition, thinkers whose very names call to mind the spirit of philosophizing or the "love of wisdom": Socrates (469–399 B.C.), Plato (*c*. 429–347 B.C.), and Aristotle (384–322 B.C.). The three are most obviously linked by their historical epoch and their common devotion to the search for truth. But they also share a more immediate bond, for Socrates was the teacher of Plato, and Plato in turn became the teacher of Aristotle. Taken together, then, Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle constitute one of the most remarkable flowerings of the human mind, and this course will explore their path-breaking attempts to grasp the world as it is in truth or "according to nature."

Socrates of Athens inaugurated a fundamentally new approach to philosophy, one we still acknowledge by speaking of all the thinkers before him as simply "the pre-Socratics." A brief examination of pre-Socratic thought will prepare us not only to see the new importance Socrates gave to moral concerns and questions (such as, "What is justice?" and "What is virtue?"), but also to reflect on the deepest reasons for his turning to such questions. Since Socrates himself did not write—we do not possess a single line from his own hand—we must first look for our knowledge of him to those of his contemporaries who both knew him and wrote about him. The earliest source of this kind is the great comic playwright Aristophanes (c. 457–385 B.C.), whose *Clouds* is at once a hilarious send-up of Socrates and a thoughtful critique of him (Lecture Two and Lecture Three). We then turn to the four Socratic writings of Xenophon (c. 428–354 B.C.), a student of Socrates who was both a remarkable military commander and a gifted man of letters (Lecture Three and Lecture Four). If Aristophanes's comic play is a searching examination and critique of Socrates, Xenophon's Socratic writings are an able defense of him and include a direct rebuttal of Aristophanes's criticisms.

We devote Lecture Six through Lecture Twenty-Four to Plato's presentation of Socrates, a clear indication of the great importance of Plato both in his own right and as an aid to our understanding of Socrates. Indeed, Plato indicates that to study Plato is to study his Socrates. In the 35 dialogues that have come down to us as his, Plato never speaks to us in his own voice; he

appears only once as one among many nonspeaking spectators at Socrates's trial, and he records not a single conversation between himself and Socrates. Our encounter with the Platonic Socrates begins by observing how Socrates presented himself to his potential students. The most fascinating example is Socrates's attempt to educate young Alcibiades, the ward of Athens's greatest democratic statesman, Pericles (Lecture Seven). Yet Socrates's efforts failed, and Alcibiades went on to have a hair-raising political career marked by jaw-dropping treachery.

Plato's presentation of Alcibiades as a would-be student leads naturally to his portrait of Socrates as a teacher of justice, for (to put it mildly) Alcibiades was deficient in his understanding of justice. Lecture Eight through Lecture Twelve will therefore be devoted to an examination of the *Republic*, the quintessential dialogue on justice. We turn next to Socrates's principal rivals as teachers, the sophists—represented by the most famous sophist of the day, Protagoras (Lecture Thirteen through Lecture Sixteen)—and the rhetoricians, represented by a celebrated practitioner, Gorgias (Lecture Seventeen through Lecture Nineteen). In the *Meno*—devoted to the comprehensive question, "What is virtue?"—we meet a young man who went on to become a notorious political criminal—and who boasted of being the student of none other than Gorgias (Lecture Twenty)!

Our treatment of Plato and his Socrates culminates in a discussion of the four dialogues concerned with the trial, imprisonment, and execution of Socrates (Lecture Twenty-One through Lecture Twenty-Four). What was it about Socrates's philosophizing that prompted the freest, most cosmopolitan city in ancient Greece to convict him on a charge of "corrupting the young" and "not believing in the gods of the city"? Is the tension between Socrates and his political community a product of simple misunderstanding? Of pernicious slander? Or is there a necessary tension between the philosopher as such and every political community, even a relatively tolerant democracy?

These political questions prompt us to turn to Plato's most famous student, Aristotle (Lecture Twenty-Five through Lecture Thirty-Five). For although Aristotle writes about nature as a whole, human as well as nonhuman, to a greater degree than did Plato, Aristotle in his own way continues the innovations of Socrates and Plato. In his *Nicomachean Ethics* (Lecture Twenty-Six through Lecture Thirty-One) and *Politics* (Lecture Thirty-Two through Lecture Thirty-Five), for example, Aristotle seeks to bring a new clarity and even scientific precision to our moral and political concerns. If Socrates is credited with being the founder of political philosophy, Aristotle

can lay claim to being the founder of political science. Among the most searching questions explored by the *Ethics* is how our strong desire to be happy, or to possess the greatest good for ourselves, co-exists with our equally strong desire to do the right thing or (in Aristotle's phrase) to "act nobly." Key to this inquiry is Aristotle's riveting portrait of the most excellent characteristics for any human being to possess—what he calls "virtues," both moral and intellectual—for the virtues promise us a life at once happy and admirable. In the *Politics*, Aristotle acknowledges the great importance of the political community to our moral education, and from this consideration he proceeds to analyze the various kinds of regimes; above all "the best regime." This best government is the capstone of Aristotle's philosophy of human affairs and provides a fascinating point of comparison with our own democracy. We will conclude by reflecting on the ways in which Aristotle was both indebted to and departed from his intellectual forefathers, Plato and Socrates—and on the debt we owe to all three thinkers.

Lecture One

Socrates and His Heirs

Scope: This lecture explains the material to be covered in the course as a whole, its purpose, and its guiding thesis. We will examine the key innovations and insights of three important philosophers: Socrates, his student Plato, and Plato's student Aristotle. Socrates was responsible for a fundamentally new way of philosophizing and, for all their originality, Plato and Aristotle were deeply indebted to Socrates. We will begin by examining two of Socrates's contemporaries who wrote about him—Aristophanes and Xenophon—and then turn at greater length to consider Plato's monumental portrait of his teacher. The final third of the course will be devoted to studying Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* and *Politics*, the two works of his in which the influence of Socrates is clearest. Studying Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle is worthwhile not only because they were among the architects of what we call "the West," but also because we may still learn from them things of vital importance to us as human beings—above all how to think about the questions, "How ought I to live?" and "What is the best way of life for a human being?"

Outline

I. The general purpose of the course is to explore some of the key ideas and innovations of Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle.

- **A.** The overarching thesis of the course is that Socrates was responsible for a fundamentally new way of philosophizing, and that Plato and Aristotle, though independent thinkers in their own right, were deeply indebted to him.
- **B.** Important links bind Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle.
  - **1.** Each is known as a philosopher, and each lived in roughly the same historical epoch.
  - **2.** Most important, Socrates was the teacher of Plato, who in turn became the teacher of Aristotle.
- **C.** Although this course presupposes no prior familiarity with these thinkers, it should also be of interest to those who have such familiarity.

1. Reading—and learning from—these philosophers is at once a humbling and an exhilarating experience, an experience that grows and deepens through time.
2. These great thinkers were concerned not only to grasp the world in truth for themselves; they were also concerned with helping those of us who are beginners make such progress.

II. The specific parts of the course and their relation to one another must first be made clear.

A. We will proceed chronologically, beginning with Socrates of Athens.

1. Socrates is probably the single most famous philosopher of all time. There is something noble and even heroic about him, since he chose to die rather than give up his search for the truth.
2. Socrates himself wrote nothing, so for our knowledge of him we must look to those of his contemporaries who knew and wrote about him.
3. We will begin with the earliest document we have concerning Socrates, Aristophanes's comic play titled *Clouds*.
4. Xenophon of Athens, a student and admirer of Socrates, devoted four writings to memorializing his teacher, and we will look briefly at each.

B. We turn next to Plato's remarkable portrait of Socrates.

1. Plato appears only once in his dialogues and never speaks in them; he instead focuses our attention squarely on Socrates, and we will follow his lead.
2. To begin to understand what sort of a teacher Socrates was and how he approached his students, we will turn to Plato's vivid account of Alcibiades.
3. Socrates's rivals as teachers were the sophists and the rhetoricians, and we will examine how he dealt with each group.
4. Our study of Plato will conclude with the dramatic portrayal of the trial, imprisonment, and execution of Socrates.

C. Aristotle is the only non-Athenian we are going to meet.

1. Aristotle was born in Stagira but moved to Athens as a young man to study, for some twenty years, with Plato.

2. The most obvious difference between Plato and Aristotle is Aristotle's far greater explicit attention to matters of natural science or natural philosophy.
3. Yet Aristotle, too, is rightly seen as also continuing the Socratic-Platonic focus on moral and political philosophy.
4. Aristotle's key contributions to the Socratic legacy are found in his *Nicomachean Ethics* and *Politics*, and we will examine what he called his "philosophy of human affairs."

III. Why should we be seriously concerned with the thought of those who lived more than 2,500 years ago?

A. It could well seem that the thought of Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle has been surpassed, at least in matters of science or technology, as well as religious faith and politics, and so has become superfluous.

B. In fact, to know what it means to be a part of Western culture, or how we got to the present day, it is essential to be familiar with the thought of Socrates and his heirs, for they helped lay the foundation for much of what is called "the West" today, including its focus on science and reason.

C. Many observers have been wondering if changes due to modern science are unqualifiedly good, a question that can no longer be taken for granted.

D. "How ought I to live?" is the most important question for a human being. The question remains vital today, and we would do well to explore not only the sources of guidance prevalent in our time but also those sources found to be worthwhile in earlier times, including—and especially—the thought of Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle.

Suggested Reading:

Bruell, "Xenophon," in *History of Political Philosophy.*

Klein, "Aristotle," in *Lectures and Essays.*

Strauss, "Plato," in *History of Political Philosophy.*

Questions to Consider:

1. What cause or causes might account for the strange fact that three great philosophers were produced over such a short period of time in a small corner of the world?

2. What might have prevented Socrates from writing, when his two best students, Plato and Xenophon, wrote a great deal? Could this difference point to some fundamental disagreement between them?

Lecture Two
The Socratic Revolution

Scope: This lecture explains some key concepts necessary to our examination of the Athenian philosopher Socrates. In the first of the lecture's two parts, we discuss the idea of "philosophy," especially in its relation to nature; the pre-Socratic efforts to discover the deepest cause responsible for the generation and existence of all things, be it atoms and void or some combination of fundamental elements (such as, earth, air, water, and fire); the necessary conflict between such philosophical inquiries and the authoritative explanations of the world that rely on the gods; and Socrates's characteristic turn away from scientific speculation and toward a conversational analysis of "the human things," or moral-political questions. In the second part, we discuss some characteristic features of ancient Greek comedy in general and Aristophanic comedy in particular, with specific attention to the comedy Aristophanes himself singled out as being his "wisest" work, the *Clouds*.

Outline

I. Socrates is of course a philosopher, but what does this designation signify?

- **A.** Central to the idea of philosophy or the philosopher is the concept of "nature."
  - **1.** The Greek verb from which our term "nature" is ultimately derived means simply "to grow," and the natural things are, in the first place, those that grow of their own accord.
  - **2.** The idea of nature or the natural becomes more precise when it is contrasted with the idea of the artificial—what exists as a result of art or craft (*technē*)—and that of the conventional or custom—what exists by convention or custom or law (*nomos*).
  - **3.** Philosophy requires that natural beings be distinguished from the artificial, on the one hand, and the conventional on the other, for only the natural things "exist" in the truest sense.
  - **4.** The pre-Socratic philosophers attempted in various ways to explain the existence and character of the world by discovering its deepest cause, in the combination of atoms and

the void, for example, or of fundamental elements (such as, earth, air, water, and fire).

B. All philosophizing, be it Socratic or pre-Socratic, is inherently controversial and even dangerous because it must deny the truth of the competing accounts of the deepest cause of things, accounts that look to a god or gods as the source of all things.

II. Socrates has in common with all philosophers the desire to understand the world in terms of nature, but he is clearly responsible for an innovation in the approach to this task, an innovation we recognize by marking all those thinkers before him as "the pre-Socratics."

A. The Latin philosopher and rhetorician Cicero and the Athenian philosopher Xenophon both provide very clear statements of the "turn" or revolution Socrates effected away from the physics of his predecessors and toward the scrutiny of moral and political questions.

B. The most important statement concerning Socrates's new orientation is found in Plato's *Phaedo*, set on the day of Socrates's execution, which reveals that Socrates's unique focus on moral questions or opinions was in fact preceded by a very great interest in natural philosophy: Socrates was once a pre-Socratic!

C. This fact supports a working hypothesis to be tested, namely that Aristophanes's *Clouds*, our earliest source for our knowledge of Socrates, presents Socrates before he made his life-altering turn toward moral questions.

III. To appreciate Aristophanes's *Clouds*, it is helpful to consider some general features of ancient Greek comedy.

A. Ancient Greek comedy is typically divided into three historical periods, Old Comedy, Middle Comedy, and New Comedy. Aristophanes is considered the greatest representative of Old Comedy. Old Comedy is distinguished by the active presence of the chorus, zany plots, mockery of prominent figures, and general irreverence.

B. The *Clouds* was entered in the City Dionysia competition of 423 B.C., where it placed last and was subsequently revised by Aristophanes.

1. In the central choral song or "parabasis," Aristophanes speaks to us directly and tells us that this is his wisest play, the one on which he lavished the most work. Like Socrates, Aristophanes

is concerned with wisdom and with understanding the truth about the most important things.

2. Aristophanes knows that his audience consists only partly of the shrewd; there are those who simply want to laugh and there are those who want both to laugh and to think. Combining comedy with both the concern for wisdom and the presentation of truth, he speaks to both the laughers and the thinkers.

Suggested Reading:

Bowie, *Aristophanes.*

Dover, *Aristophanic Comedy.*

Freeman, ed. *Ancilla to the Pre-Socratic Philosophers*.

Guthrie, *A History of Greek Philosophy, vol. 2: The Presocratic Tradition from Parmenides to Democritus.*

Kirk, Raven, and Schofield, eds. *The Pre-Socratic Philosophers*.

Questions to Consider:

1. In what ways has the tension between ancient science and Greek piety been overcome or done away with in the relation between modern science and contemporary religion? In what ways does (a version of) that tension persist?
2. Can it be said that there are any "wise" comedies today? If there are, what themes do they typically treat, and how do they differ from the theme or themes of Aristophanes's *Clouds*? If there are no "wise" comedies today, why might that be so?

Lecture Three
Aristophanes's Comic Critique of Socrates

Scope: In Aristophanes's comedic but wise treatment of Socrates in the *Clouds*, we see a rather old farmer who comes up with a scheme to rid himself of the crushing debts racked up by his horse-obsessed son: to send his wayward son to learn from Socrates, who apparently can teach you to speak so as to make any cause, just or unjust, triumph. The father and then the son both visit Socrates's secretive school, but only the latter succeeds there, for he abandons his interest in horsemanship altogether and becomes an admirer of Socrates. The father's initial joy at the prospect of eluding his creditors soon yields to despair at what his son has become, and he exacts his revenge by burning down Socrates's school. The *Clouds* levels two fundamental criticisms at Socrates: One, because the philosopher has failed to think through how dangerous, both to the family and to the political community, his study of nature is, he has failed also to be as cautious or prudent as he should be; and two, Socrates claims to know more than he in fact does, when he boasts that he knows the divine things plainly, including that "Zeus doesn't even exist."

Outline

I. We begin with an outline of the plot of Aristophanes's *Clouds*.

- **A.** The farmer Strepsiades conceives of a way to rid himself of the debts incurred by his horse-obsessed teenager, Pheidippides: to send the young man to that strange school in the city that teaches clever speaking.
- **B.** When his ever-rebellious son refuses to attend, poor Strepsiades himself must attempt to learn the Socratic wisdom—with disastrous results.
- **C.** Strepsiades now forces his son to attend Socrates's school, this time with very different results: Young Pheidippides abandons his interest in horses!
  - **1.** According to Pheidippides, wisdom is the only criterion for ruling, so he, the son, is now the rightful ruler of the father; the boy may beat his father to improve him.

2. Strepsiades rebels, however, when this same logic is applied to the boy's mother.

D. Strepsiades burns down Socrates's school to avenge his son's corruption.

E. The function of "the clouds" in the play is somewhat elusive, but they seem to symbolize both (concealing) rhetoric and the study of nature itself.

II. To grasp Aristophanes's critique of Socrates, it is best to examine some of the events of the play in more detail.

A. Strepsiades's tour of the school includes an account of three very strange experiments Socrates himself conducted, none involving human beings or human concerns and each revealing Socrates's scientific interests.

B. Socrates teaches, in addition to natural science, an amazingly frank theological doctrine, according to which Zeus, the greatest of the Greek gods, does not exist.

1. Strepsiades attempts to salvage the orthodox view by discussing the causes of rain, thunder, and lightning, but to each of these Socrates has a response that is convincing to Strepsiades.
2. It becomes clear that Strepsiades lacks a nature suitable for philosophy, and Socrates sends him packing.

C. The core of the education of Pheidippides takes place offstage, but we do witness the important debate between Just Speech and Unjust Speech.

1. The case for Just Speech seems first to rest on the goodness of justice for others. He also speaks of the goodness of justice for the just people themselves.
2. Unjust Speech denies that there are gods who are aware of sacrifice and reward it.

III. What is the message or teaching of Aristophanes's *Clouds*?

A. It is incorrect to begin from the supposition that Aristophanes was an enemy of Socrates.

1. Plato presents Socrates and Aristophanes as being perfectly friendly with one another in his *Symposium* and, in his way, Aristophanes pays Socrates a high compliment by making him the focus of his "wisest" comedy.

2. It is important to bear in mind that it is the farmer Strepsiades who is the most unjust, the most crooked, and much more a corrupter of the young than Socrates.

B. Aristophanes does issue a prescient warning about the recklessness of Socrates's self-presentation and his rhetoric, and about the reaction such recklessness will one day provoke.

1. Socrates's student says that it is forbidden to speak of what goes on in the school, but he proceeds to do so at considerable length to the stranger Strepsiades.
2. Socrates himself blurts out the truth about Zeus!
3. Aristophanes shows his own far greater prudence by having Hermes appear onstage at the end of the play and exhort the audience to be pious.

C. A deeper criticism is that Socrates was a boaster—that is, that he claimed to know things he may not have known in fact.

1. Has Socrates earned the right to claim, as he does, that he knows how the divine matters truly are and in particular that Zeus does not exist?
2. Above all, can Socrates really claim to know the truest or deepest causes of such events as thunder and lightning, or does Strepsiades, dull as he may be, point to a genuine problem for Socratic philosophizing about natural causation?

Suggested Reading:

Aristophanes and Plato, *Four Texts on Socrates.*

Plato, *Symposium.*

Strauss, "The Problem of Socrates," in *The Rebirth of Classical Political Rationalism.*

Vander Waerdt, "Socrates in the *Clouds*," in *The Socratic Movement*.

Questions to Consider:

1. How might Just Speech have made a more vigorous and more convincing defense of the way of life he is meant to represent?
2. Does the action of the *Clouds* tend, on balance, to support the charge that Socrates was a "corrupter of the youth"?

Lecture Four

Xenophon's Recollections of Socrates

Scope: The second source of our knowledge of Socrates is the four Socratic writings of Xenophon, one of the most attractive authors of antiquity. To begin to appreciate the special charms of Xenophon, however, we must first take up the question of his changing reputation through the centuries and his peculiar or idiosyncratic manner of writing. After a period of neglect in the 19th century, Xenophon is once again attracting serious scholarly study and is once again highly regarded, as a writer and thinker, as he was in antiquity. His writing is characterized by a gentle wit and irony, one that prefers to emphasize the good things while downplaying—but not quite ignoring—the bad or nasty side of life. Such refinement, once it is seen as the product of a comprehensive understanding and not naiveté, can make Xenophon's writing all the more attractive. Of the four writings he devoted to the subject of Socrates, the longest is the *Memorabilia* (or *Recollections*), which attempts to establish Socrates's justice, in the sense both of his obedience to the law and for helping others. Particularly striking here is the emphasis Xenophon places on Socrates's "continence" or moderation, roughly speaking, the capacity for self-denial. But given the apologetic or defensive purpose of the *Memorabilia* as a whole, Xenophon is somewhat reluctant to make clear what goal or purpose such moderation is meant to serve, presumably the preservation of Socrates's freedom to philosophize.

Outline

I. To appreciate Xenophon today, it is helpful to cast a glance at his reputation through the ages and to note the importance of his unusual manner of writing.

- **A.** Xenophon's reputation in antiquity—in ancient Rome in particular—was very high, both as a thinker and as a writer or rhetorician.
- **B.** High praise of Xenophon can be found in the early modern period as well, for example in the writings of the Earl of Shaftesbury and Edward Gibbon.

C. But everything depends on the proper appreciation of Xenophon's manner of writing.

  1. Xenophon himself states the principle that it is better to stress the good or pleasant things rather than the bad or unpleasant things, a principle he clearly follows.

  2. Xenophon's descriptions of cities and of the fate of the traitor Meno serve as informative examples of his manner of writing.

II. How does Xenophon present himself in his relation to Socrates?

A. The two great characters in Xenophon's writings are Cyrus the Great and Socrates, and Xenophon himself seems to fall somewhere between them, leading neither a simply political life nor a simply private one.

  1. Xenophon chooses to report only two conversations between himself and Socrates, and in each Socrates is critical of Xenophon!

  2. In this way, Xenophon presents himself as a Socratic, even if he does not follow Socrates's advice to the letter. It is this flexibility in following the Socratic way that may make Xenophon an attractive teacher to us today.

B. Xenophon presents Socrates in four writings, the longest of which is the *Memorabilia*.

  1. The *Memorabilia*'s purpose is to defend Socrates against the official charges brought against him, and to present the more general arguments: Socrates did not break the law, and he was good because he helped others.

  2. It is in arguing that Socrates was good because he was a benefactor that Xenophon can seem rather pedestrian, but it is crucial to see that Xenophon himself suggests that the standard of goodness in question is a vulgar one, or that he is speaking to the opinion held by the many, that is, the very people accusing Socrates.

  3. Xenophon indicates gracefully the rather "low ceiling" of the *Memorabilia* by merely alluding to a conversation between Socrates and Plato but declining to present that conversation directly.

III. To see Socrates in his capacity as a true philosopher and not merely as a practical advisor, we must reflect on the strange Socratic virtue that Xenophon here stresses more than any other, that of "continence" or moderation.

A. Socrates had the extraordinary capacity to deny himself pleasures and to withstand pain.

  1. This capacity is confirmed also by Plato and Aristophanes, who both present Socrates as able to withstand freezing cold, hunger, and bedbugs.

  2. Socrates alone, in the *Symposium*, is able to stay up all night drinking and never lose his composure.

B. It would be more precise to say that Socrates's continence may have two causes: either an indifference to the pleasures in question, or the capacity to withstand or turn away from the pull of such pleasures.

  1. In the case of the latter, the crucial question is why Socrates would have denied himself pleasures (or withstood pain). For the sake of what, precisely, did Socrates practice his fabled continence?

  2. One answer immediately comes to mind: Socratic continence is not practiced as an end in itself or for its own sake but rather to think or philosophize better in efforts to lead a better life.

  3. Socratic continence is not, in the final analysis, properly considered self-sacrifice, but is closer to the training a champion athlete must undergo—for the sake of a final victory.

Suggested Reading:

Bruell, "Xenophon," in *History of Political Philosophy.*

———, "Xenophon and His Socrates," in *Memorabilia*.

———, Xenophon, *Memorabilia*.

Questions to Consider:

1. Is Xenophon correct to say that equating the good human being with one who benefits us is inadequate or flawed?

2. The portraits of Socrates in the *Clouds* and in the *Memorabilia* agree as to his remarkable continence or self-control. What other important similarities are there and what differences?

Lecture Five
Xenophon and Socratic Philosophy

Scope: Thus far we have stressed what has been called the Socratic "turn" or "revolution"—Socrates's break with the scientist-philosophers before him which took the form of a new and more serious interest in moral and political concerns. That decisive break was occasioned by Socrates's recognition of a problem pointed to in the *Clouds*: that he could not in fact give a convincing account of the cause of things in terms of natural necessity, an inability that means the orthodox religious account of those things might well have been correct. To salvage the possibility of philosophy, then, Socrates embarked on what he called his "second sailing." In studying Xenophon's Socratic writings, we of course must look for evidence of both the difficulty Socrates once encountered and his strategy to overcome it. The single most important writing in this respect is the *Oeconomicus* (or *Skilled Household Manager*), Xenophon's account of the fateful day when Socrates began his intensive examination of moral opinions, especially as these pertain to beliefs about the gods. In this way the *Oeconomicus* also proves to be Xenophon's response to the *Clouds*, a response that is not without its own comic touches.

Outline

I. In examining Xenophon's Socratic writings, we must keep in mind the overarching puzzle of the Socratic "turn" toward the examination of moral and political opinions.

- **A.** Socrates admits in Plato's *Phaedo* what Xenophon and (elsewhere) Plato go to some lengths to downplay or conceal, namely that Socrates did, in fact, have in his youth a very great interest in the "inquiry into nature."
- **B.** Any defender of Socrates would necessarily have to conceal this fact, since the ancient inquiry into nature was wholly incompatible with the orthodox view of the gods, and failure to accept that orthodoxy was a crime punishable by death.
  - **1.** To trace the happenings of the world—birth, life, death—to impersonal nature is to deny the existence of the gods and their effective agency.

2. Socrates's "second sailing" is his attempt to settle, in a new way, the question of cause, and hence the question of the existence of gods.

II. How does Xenophon present the Socratic turn and the crisis or uncertainty that prompted it?

- **A.** In the *Symposium*, an immensely charming work, Xenophon has a character criticize Socrates, and he has Socrates "refuted" by a devoutly religious character, Hermogenes.
- **B.** In the first chapter of the *Memorabilia*, Xenophon attempts to clear Socrates of the charge of not believing in the gods of the city, and so he there must take up the question of whether or not Socrates pursued natural philosophy.
    1. Xenophon's apparently sweeping denial of such interest on Socrates's part proves, on closer inspection, to be quite nuanced.
    2. Socrates maintained a lifelong interest in nature, but he pursued that interest in a new way.
    3. The *Memorabilia* has to be understood as a work of defensive rhetoric, meant to vindicate Socrates's justice in the narrow sense of his having been innocent of the charges brought against him.

III. In the *Oeconomicus*, Xenophon presents Socrates's response to the crisis caused by his inability to know the natural causes of things. This response takes the form of his new interest in examining the most serious moral and political opinions that guide those who believe that gods are the truest cause in the cosmos.

- **A.** In the first six chapters, Xenophon narrates a conversation Socrates once had with the young and rather wayward son of his friend Crito, named Critoboulus, on the subject of household management.
    1. Poor as he is, the continent Socrates really is richer than the extremely wealthy Critoboulus!
    2. These sections are an excellent example of the masterful way Socrates is able to speak to the concerns of his interlocutors and to bring them to see the need to change their lives in important respects.
- **B.** Because Socrates himself is not a household manager or a farmer, he is compelled to teach Critoboulus by relating to him a

conversation he once had with a perfect gentleman-farmer, one Ischomachus.

1. An overview of the action of the *Oeconomicus* suggests that it is Xenophon's muted response to Aristophanes's *Clouds*.
2. Ischomachus is a "gentleman," that is, a *kaloskagathos*, one who combines a dedication to what is "noble" (*kalos*) with a concern for what is "good" (*agathos*).
3. The most important theme in Socrates's conversation with Ischomachus emerges early, that of his view of the gods.
4. Ischomachus is convinced that there are gods who reward and punish us, but he has observed that they do not always do so as we might wish or even deserve.
5. Ischomachus's impressive dedication to what is noble carries with it the greater hope that, in his case, the gods will reward him as he deserves to be rewarded.

Suggested Reading:

Ambler, "On the *Oeconomicus*," in *The Shorter Socratic Writings*.

Bartlett, "On the *Symposium*," in *The Shorter Socratic Writings*.

Pangle, Thomas L. "Socrates in the Context of Xenophon's Political Writings," in *The Socratic Movement*.

Xenophon, *Memorabilia*, Book I, chap. 1.

———, *Oeconomicus*, in *The Shorter Socratic Writings*.

———, *Symposium*, in *The Shorter Socratic Writings*.

Questions to Consider:

1. Is there any sense in which Socrates might be considered the "skilled household manager" referred to in the title?
2. How might Ischomachus's view of the rewards and punishments meted out by the gods be compared with that of Job in the Hebrew Bible?

Lecture Six

Plato's Socrates and the Platonic Dialogue

Scope: We turn now to the single most important source of our knowledge of Socrates, his student Plato. Of the 35 dialogues that have come down to us from antiquity as Plato's, almost all feature Plato's teacher Socrates, and none features Plato himself in a speaking role. To begin our study of the wonders of the Platonic dialogue, we must first take up the question of how to read Plato and, closely allied with this, reflect on the unique literary form that is the Platonic dialogue. In the final part of the lecture, we turn to consider some first impressions of Plato's Socrates and discuss in particular the trait for which the latter is famous or notorious, his irony.

Outline

I. It is helpful to begin with a brief survey of the various approaches to reading Plato.

- **A.** The modern study of Plato was for many years influenced by German classical philology, or the modern science of the Greek and Latin languages.
  - **1.** A particularly influential philologist was Friedrich Schleiermacher, who undertook a translation of the Platonic dialogues into German and made many thoughtful observations on the dialogue form.
  - **2.** Karl Friedrich Hermann, another German philologist, issued a call for investigating not the order in which the dialogues are best read, but the order in which Plato wrote them, on the supposition that Plato's thought must have undergone a transformation.
  - **3.** According to the modern results of this approach, the dialogues fall into three distinct periods: the early, middle, and late dialogues.
- **B.** The developmental approach to Plato is not the only one, however, and can be questioned on several grounds.
  - **1.** We do not know and never will know with certainty the order of the dialogues' composition.

2. Traits said to belong to the early dialogues are in fact also found in the late ones—the active presence of a Socrates very much concerned with moral questions, for example.
3. Plato himself gives no indication that his thought underwent a fundamental change, whereas he does indicate clearly that Socrates's thought underwent such a change.
4. One result of the developmental approach to Plato has been the questioning of the authenticity of dialogues widely accepted in antiquity as Plato's.
5. There was indeed widespread consensus in antiquity as to which dialogues were authentically Plato's, as Thrasyllus and Diogenes Laërtius indicate.

C. A second general approach to Plato, also traceable to Schleiermacher, focuses especially on the dialogue form, and hence the fact that the many arguments recorded in the dialogues are always shaped by their dramatic or conversational context.

II. Reflecting on the peculiarities of the dialogue form, which Plato perfected, is central to the task of interpreting Plato.

A. Whereas Socrates wrote nothing because he held (in the *Phaedrus*) all writing to be defective, Plato did write, evidently because he thought the dialogue form solved the problems his teacher had identified. According to Socrates, all writings do not respond to questions posed to them, as can an interlocutor; and writings speak indiscriminately to all alike.

B. The conversations recorded in the 35 dialogues always have a specific setting, a time, a place, and a specific group of speakers with particular characteristics, interests, strengths, and weaknesses, and in reading the arguments we must be sensitive to the demands or limits imposed on the speakers by their setting.

1. For example, Socrates argues in the *Protagoras* that virtue cannot be taught and in the *Meno* that it can be taught, a contradiction resolvable when one takes into account the very different audiences in each dialogue.
2. The great medieval Islamic philosopher Alfarabi tells an intriguing allegorical story meant to characterize the way Plato wrote.

III. As a final preparation for our study of the individual dialogues, we can begin from some first impressions of Socrates in Plato, especially Socrates's notorious irony.

A. Socrates is probably best known for the "Socratic method" of teaching—and for his irony.

1. The Socratic method is also his art of conversational analysis or, as he called it, "dialectic," his masterful way both of bringing out his interlocutor's opinions and of demonstrating their inner contradictions.

2. Socratic irony is the habit of saying less than one thinks or of concealing one's wisdom, what Aristotle suggests is a graceful or refined vice.

B. Plato's choice of Socrates as his spokesman, a person who is not altogether frank, suggests the challenge of reading Plato. It is helpful, when reading the Platonic dialogues today, to keep in mind that latter-day inquirer, Dostoyevsky's great detective Porfiry Petrovich, in *Crime in Punishment*, who was based on none other than Socrates.

Suggested Reading:

Alfarabi, "Plato's *Laws*," in *Medieval Political Philosophy*.

Klein, *A Commentary on Plato's Meno*, especially pp. 3–31.

Schleiermacher, *Schleiermacher's Introductions to the Dialogues of Plato*.

Questions to Consider:

1. What concerns or obstacles might have prompted Socrates to practice irony?

2. Aristotle lists irony as a vice, if a refined one, and mentions Socrates as an example of an ironist. Can the practice of irony be defended? How might Plato respond to Aristotle?

Lecture Seven

Socrates as Teacher—Alcibiades

Scope: With this lecture we begin our study of Plato and his presentation of Socrates. Because we, too, are interested in becoming the students of Socrates, we will begin by looking at the way Plato presents Socrates as a teacher of students, actual or potential. The most obvious place to begin is with Socrates's attempts to teach Alcibiades, a historical figure who went on to have an astounding—and highly controversial—political career in the Peloponnesian War. Plato devotes four dialogues to Socrates's relationship with Alcibiades, and we will look at each of these, paying particular attention to the *Alcibiades I* and to Alcibiades's famous speech about Socrates, recorded in Plato's *Symposium*. Since Alcibiades makes plain that Socrates ultimately disappointed him, and vice versa, we have to try to discover precisely what Socrates attempted to teach Alcibiades, and what he in turn failed to learn from Socrates.

Outline

I. To begin to understand Socrates, it is best to consider how Plato presents Socrates as a teacher.

II. Socrates's attempts to educate the young and gifted Alcibiades, chronicled in four dialogues, are a good place to begin.

- **A.** Alcibiades, a historical figure, was among the most astonishing men in antiquity.
  - **1.** At a young age, he was elected as a general in the Peloponnesian War and helped conduct Athens's daring attack on Sicily.
  - **2.** His extravagant private life and profligate spending aroused envy and suspicion.
  - **3.** Thucydides's portrait of him is largely sympathetic and suggests that Athens might have triumphed in Sicily had it kept Alcibiades in command.
- **B.** Plato's account of Socrates's relations with Alcibiades begins with the *Alcibiades I*.

1. The dialogue shows Socrates's first conversation with Alcibiades, and shows how Alcibiades was curious about, and even open to, a Socratic education.
2. By focusing on Alcibiades's already great ambitions, and by pointing out his unthinking and half-hearted indifference to justice (above all), Socrates led him to think that his ambitions could be satisfied only by spending time with Socrates.

C. The continuation of Socrates's attempt to educate Alcibiades is found in the *Alcibiades II, Protagoras*, and *Symposium*.
1. In *Alcibiades II*, we see clearly both Alcibiades's great ambition to rule the world and his great uncertainty as to why that goal is supremely good, since in fact it competes with some of his other, less clear goals.
2. The *Protagoras* portrays Alcibiades in the company of other teachers and suggests that Alcibiades's hopes for a Socratic education are dimming.
3. Alcibiades's famous speech in the *Symposium* confirms that although Alcibiades was deeply impressed by Socrates, above all by his amazing moderation or continence, he never learned the key lesson Socrates tried to point out to him concerning the importance of justice.

Suggested Reading:

Bruell, "Alcibiades I" and "Alcibiades II," in *On the Socratic Education*.

Forde, "On the *Alcibiades I*," in *The Roots of Political Philosophy,* pp. 222–39.

Pangle, *Alcibiades I*, in *The Roots of Political Philosophy*.

Plato, *Alcibiades II* and "Alcibiades's Speech from the *Symposium*," in *Socrates and Alcibiades: Four Texts*.

———, *Protagoras.*

Thucydides, *The Peloponnesian War*, Books VI–VIII.

Questions to Consider:

1. Why might Plato have devoted such attention to the singular figure of Alcibiades—who, after all and by his own admission, was not a successful student of Socrates's?

2. What role might Alcibiades's very grand political ambitions have played in initially attracting Socrates to him? How might such ambitions bespeak a depth and seriousness of soul?

Lecture Eight

Socrates and Justice—*Republic*, Part 1

Scope: From the *Alcibiades I* we are naturally led to the *Republic*, one of Plato's most famous dialogues, the theme of which is the all-important question, "What is justice?" This lecture begins by noting some of the most prominent features of the *Republic* that appear at first glance, including its title, its setting, its cast of characters, and the action or drama with which it begins. Socrates and his friends first attempt to find an adequate definition of "justice," beginning with the elderly Cephalus. When he proves unable to defend his commonsensical view that "justice" means telling the truth and giving back what you owe, his able son Polemarchus takes over. Just when it seems that the group has reached a happy consensus about justice, the rhetorician Thrasymachus heaps contempt on their discussion and challenges Socrates to refute the contention that justice is for fools: It is nothing other than the advantage of the stronger against the weaker. In this vivid way, Plato shows us that the search for an adequate definition of "justice" is no exercise in mere wordplay, but must include some response to those who think that "justice," however defined, is bad for the just themselves.

Outline

I. We continue our inquiry into Socrates as a teacher by considering his account of justice in the *Republic*.

II. Let's begin by simply recording some initial impressions of the *Republic*.

- **A.** The dialogue is the second longest of the dialogues and is among the four narrated by Socrates himself.
- **B.** The traditional English title, *Republic*, might be better rendered as "Regime" or "Form of Government."

III. It is important to analyze the famous opening of the dialogue, paying particular attention to the action or drama that unfolds there.

- **A.** The dialogue will take place in Athens's port, the Piraeus, where a novel religious festival happens to be taking place.

B. The scene shifts to the home of the elderly Cephalus, father of Polemarchus and an old acquaintance of Socrates, whose account of old age prompts the first definition of "justice."

   1. Cephalus defines "justice" as telling the truth and giving back what you owe.

   2. Socrates's counterexample—should you return a weapon to an unbalanced friend?—shows the limits of Cephalus's definition.

C. Polemarchus defends an amended definition, according to which justice is helping friends and harming enemies, a very political understanding of "justice."

IV. At this point the rhetorician Thrasymachus enters and drastically alters the tone of the conversation, for he attacks both Socrates and justice.

A. According to Thrasymachus, Socrates is being ironic when he denies knowing what justice is, but in any case Thrasymachus will tell him: Justice is merely the advantage of the stronger in the political community, and law is the codification of that advantage.

B. Socrates initially offers two arguments in rebuttal.

   1. Don't all rulers make mistakes in legislating and so sometimes unintentionally act for the benefit of the ruled?

   2. Don't the practitioners of all arts, strictly speaking, look to the good of those they act upon—the good of the patient, in the case of medicine?

C. This latter prompts Thrasymachus to give his longest speech in the book, meant to teach the naïve Socrates how the world really works.

   1. The political art is like the shepherd's art: The shepherd cares for the sheep only to slaughter them!

   2. "Tyranny" is just the name for the most successfully unjust person, and all would like to be a tyrant—if they thought they could get away with it.

D. Socrates responds by insisting that all practitioners of an art really do look to the good of the art's recipient, and that is why all also demand a wage, or also practice the wage-earning art in addition.

E. Although Socrates succeeds in silencing Thrasymachus, the latter is responsible for a deepening of the inquiry into justice, which must now include the question of its goodness.

Suggested Reading:

Plato, *Republic*, Book I.

Stauffer, *Plato's Introduction to the Problem of Justice*.

Questions to Consider:

1. Does Socrates succeed in refuting Thrasymachus—or merely in silencing him? If the latter, why might Thrasymachus put up with such treatment?
2. Of the three "official" definitions of "justice" in Book I—those of Cephalus, Polemarchus, and Thrasymachus—which do you find most persuasive and why?

Lecture Nine

The Case against Justice—*Republic*, Part 2

Scope: The chief purpose of this lecture is to set forth the full challenge Socrates faced to defend justice. We turn first to the conclusion to Thrasymachus's powerful and vehement argument against the goodness of justice, as well as Socrates's attempts to rebut it. Socrates himself states that he is not satisfied with what has been said, however, because they have been proceeding without a clear definition of "justice." Yet before they can arrive at such a definition, Socrates first entertains two somewhat different but quite riveting attacks on justice from none other than Glaucon and Adeimantus, Plato's brothers, who admire justice greatly. But they have been hearing for some time arguments against justice, of the kind the group has just heard from Thrasymachus, and they are eager to have Socrates refute them once and for all. Accordingly, each delivers the strongest case he can against justice because they, in contrast to Thrasymachus, want to hear the strongest case for justice.

Outline

I. We must complete our examination of Socrates's conversation with Thrasymachus and then consider in some detail two additional criticisms of justice, the first leveled by Glaucon, the second by his brother Adeimantus.

- **A.** Socrates makes three arguments to rebut, and finally to silence, Thrasymachus.
  1. The first is a logically bad argument, according to which we *are* that which we are *like*—an argument that makes Thrasymachus blush.
  2. Isn't it necessary for even the unjust city to practice justice within its borders, as a gang of robbers must practice justice among its members?
  3. Justice is the virtue or excellence of soul.
- **B.** Yet Socrates himself indicates that he is not satisfied with his defense of justice because they must first ask what justice is before they can know whether it is good.

II. Glaucon launches a stinging attack on justice, in the hope that Socrates will refute it and so defend justice as Glaucon wishes it to be defended.

- **A.** Glaucon challenges Socrates to prove that justice is good by itself, without recourse to the good that may come from the practice of justice.
- **B.** Since most people think that justice is by nature bad for you but that suffering it is worse, they agree to act justly toward one another, not because justice is good but because they are afraid of suffering injustice.
- **C.** The myth of the ancestor of the notorious usurper Gyges, who found a ring that made its wearer invisible and hence immune to punishment, proves that we all would commit injustice if we could only get away with it.
- **D.** To prove that justice is held to be inherently bad, Glaucon posits the perfectly just man with the reputation for perfect injustice and the perfectly unjust man with the reputation for perfect justice: Which would you prefer to be?

III. Adeimantus, Glaucon's brother, also hopes Socrates will prove that justice is choice-worthy for its own sake and not for any external rewards.

- **A.** More than Glaucon, Adeimantus is concerned with the rewards for justice said to come from the gods. Would we be just if there were no great rewards promised to us in the next life?
- **B.** Yet sometimes the gods do not reward the just or punish the unjust, so why be just?
- **C.** As for the punishment of injustice at the hands of gods, precisely the authoritative accounts of the gods in Homer and Hesiod suggest, that with prayers and other supplications, the gods can be bribed.
- **D.** Both brothers find the arguments against justice to be distressingly strong, and both hope Socrates can refute the arguments they have put forward.

Suggested Reading:

Bloom, "Interpretive Essay," in *The Republic*, ed. Bloom.

Plato, *Republic*, Book II.

Questions to Consider:

1. Although both Glaucon and Adeimantus attack justice, how do their specific arguments differ? What might account for those differences?
2. Of the three arguments against justice—those of Thrasymachus, Glaucon, and Adeimantus—which do you find most persuasive, and why?

Lecture Ten

Building the Best City—*Republic*, Part 3

Scope: Socrates proposes to discover what justice is and hence whether it is good by building the best city "in speech," for it will be easier to spot justice in the bigger thing first—the political community—before looking for it in the smaller thing, the individual. Yet the fact that the *Republic* does not end in Book IV, with its official definition of "justice", but continues for six more books, suggests that this definition does not solve all the difficulties on the table. It does, however, help us see with greater clarity the problem of justice: Justice must include a sense of duty or obligation, to a whole greater than oneself, as Socrates's captured beautifully in his account of political justice. But justice must also be good and even a very great good for the just themselves, which Socrates captured very well in his account of individual justice. By the end of Book IV, however, the challenge of Thrasymachus remains: Can the two senses of justice be put together into a coherent whole?

Outline

I. Socrates proposes to discover what justice is and hence its goodness by building the best city "in speech."

- **A.** The city has its roots in the satisfaction of our most basic needs—food, shelter, and clothing. Glaucon, however, shows why we cannot rest satisfied with so limited a community, for he calls it a "city of sows."
- **B.** The city must accordingly undergo a great expansion, and soon encounters the need for citizen-soldiers.
  - **1.** The need to create soldiers who will harm enemies but also help friends (or fellow citizens) introduces the all-important themes of education and philosophy.
  - **2.** The requisite education amounts to a rejection of much of Homer and the traditional view of Greek heroes (and gods).
- **C.** The education of the ruling class must differ from that of the guardians or soldiers.
  - **1.** It will be essential for the rulers to tell a two-part "noble lie" to encourage dedication to the community: that all were

literally born of the earth; and that all have metals placed in their souls that are in perfect accord with the class or station they occupy.

2. The guardians also will have no private families and no private property—a radical communism.

II. With the best city built, they must now search for justice in it.

A. They proceed first by process of elimination, discovering wisdom, moderation, and courage in the city and then in the individual; whatever is left over will have to be justice, both in the city and in the individual. This requires that the city and its parts be perfectly analogous to the individual (soul) and its parts—an analogy that Socrates himself suggests is questionable.

B. Political justice occurs when each part or class of the city does its own work well or "minds its own business"; and individual justice occurs when each part of the individual soul does its own work well or "minds its own business."

1. Socrates's strange decision to look for not one but two kinds of justice amounts to a repetition of the problem of justice rather than its resolution: We need to know that what the city demands of us is exactly the same as what the health of our individual soul requires.
2. Striking too is Socrates's subsequent denigration of political justice in favor of the justice of the individual soul.
3. Socrates's procedure here prompts one to see more clearly the problem of justice—of the goodness of justice—and isn't intended to resolve that problem yet.

Suggested Reading:

Ferrari, *City and Soul in Plato's Republic.*

Plato, *Republic*, Books III–IV.

Questions to Consider:

1. In what ways do Socrates's two definitions of "justice" accord with present-day common sense? In what ways are they novel or strange?
2. Although he remains silent, what might Thrasymachus say in response to Socrates's discovery of justice? Would he be entirely satisfied?

Lecture Eleven
Philosophers as Kings

Scope: This lecture will be devoted to exploring the chief subjects of books V–VII of the *Republic*, including the call for philosopher-kings; the doctrine of the ideas; and the famous Cave metaphor. To begin to understand these notoriously difficult sections, it is helpful to see that they are all a part of what Socrates means by the health of the individual soul, the definition of "justice" in the individual. In fact, with his call for philosopher-kings, Socrates quietly replaces the just human being with the philosopher as the manifestation of the healthy human being, a proposition that both the doctrine of the ideas and the Cave image are meant to explain. Socrates's ultimate aim in the *Republic* is a defense of philosophy, and it is here that we begin to see most clearly his defense strategy.

Outline

I. We now consider books V–VII of the *Republic*, which are devoted to explaining what Socrates means by the "health of the soul" that justice is intended to be or to supply.

- **A.** Socrates narrows and deepens the group's inquiry into education by focusing on the rulers' education rather than the soldiers' education. He asserts that the ills that plague cities will cease only with the coming together of absolute political power and wisdom, and issues his famous or notorious call for philosopher-kings.
- **B.** The overarching thesis of today's lecture is that Socrates now begins to introduce the truer or deeper theme of the *Republic*, that of philosophic education, and begins to demote the apparent theme of the book, justice. The first four books' inquiry into justice shows the necessary step to becoming open to philosophy and the philosophic life, just as the task of founding a city gives Socrates the opportunity to introduce philosophy as an apparently necessary means to achieving a politically worthy end.

II. Polemarchus insists that Socrates explains the demand that the soldiers have no private family or property.

A. In response, Socrates introduces three waves: the equality of male and female natures; the abolition of the private family; and the rule of philosopher-kings.
    1. Socrates signals that it is a grave question whether philosophers would ever be accepted as kings and therefore whether the good or just city could ever come into being.
    2. The founding of the best city in speech in the *Republic* is intended to set forth a pattern in the mind's eye that will, at most, lead to private or individual reform, the reform of the individual soul.

III. Socrates then elaborates on the differences between the philosopher and the non-philosopher.
  A. The most fundamental difference between the two can be understood in terms of knowledge, and the famous doctrine of the ideas in the *Republic* is meant to clarify this difference.
    1. The doctrine of the ideas admits of two quite different interpretations.
    2. One such interpretation is that the ideas are quasi-mystical beings, eternally subsisting in a world wholly apart from our own.
    3. The ideas can also begin to explain the everyday (if puzzling) experience we have of classifying the various things we come in contact with according to kinds.
  B. The famous Cave metaphor is also meant to explain the difference between the philosopher and the non-philosopher.
    1. It is necessary first simply to describe the Cave and its details.
    2. The Cave is a metaphor for the political community as such.
    3. The puppeteers are the fabricators of the authoritative beliefs and opinions characteristic of every community, be they poets or others.
    4. The philosopher is the only one in the Cave who has broken free of the chains of conventional opinion and looks at the world as it is, in the light cast not by a fire but by the natural sun.

Suggested Reading:

Annas, *An Introduction to Plato's Republic*.

Plato, *Republic*, Books V–VII.

Strauss, “On Plato’s *Republic*.” In *The City and Man*.

Questions to Consider:

1. Scholars disagree over whether or not Plato meant the regime as he described it in the *Republic* to be a practical blueprint for reform. How plausible does it seem that Plato intended the city “in speech” to be realized one day?
2. Are there any contemporary applications of, or counterparts to, the Cave image, for which the *Republic* is justly famous?

Lecture Twelve

Socrates as Teacher of Justice

Scope: Thrasymachus had praised the life of injustice over the life of justice, the latter, according to him, being fit only for the foolish and the weak. In the last three books of the *Republic*, Socrates turns to consider injustice and so prepares the way for his own comparison of justice with injustice, which constitutes his final answer to Thrasymachus. We will begin with Socrates's vivid portrait of one of the defective kinds of regimes, namely democracy, and then turn to his comparison of the life of injustice at its peak, the life of the tyrant, with that of the life of justice at its peak, the life of the philosopher. Finally, we will look in some detail at the beautiful and quite powerful myth with which the *Republic* ends, the Myth of Er, the purpose of which is to strengthen the case for justice and leading a just life.

Outline

I. The final section of the *Republic*, Books VIII–X, is united by its turn to the general topic of injustice, as preparation for a comparison between the just and unjust lives. We will focus especially on Socrates's account of democracy, one of the defective regimes; his comparison between the life of the tyrant as the embodiment of injustice with that of the philosopher; and finally the powerful Myth of Er.

II. Socrates now returns to the topic of injustice, which he had been about to discuss when Polemarchus compelled him to explain the abolition of the private family.

- **A.** The intervening discussion of philosophy has moderated somewhat Glaucon's moral zeal.
- **B.** Socrates discusses the rise of defective regimes and individuals, without indignation and even with some humor. Even the best regime in speech they have been describing would one day collapse, according to the cycle of regimes Socrates describes here.

III. Socrates's intriguing account of democracy in Book VIII deserves our attention.

- **A.** Despite its being a clearly defective regime, democracy makes possible a very attractive way of life, full of variety and different human types—including of course the philosopher.
- **B.** The democratic individual can succumb to the charm of dilettantism, however, pursuing many things at once and none seriously.

IV. Book IX chiefly compares the just way of life, represented by the philosopher, with the unjust way of life, represented by the tyrant, to determine which life is better.

- **A.** Socrates makes three arguments to establish the inferiority of the unjust or tyrannical way of life.
  - **1.** The tyrant is less virtuous than the philosopher, and happiness is coextensive with virtue.
  - **2.** The philosopher's life is 729 times more pleasant than that of the tyrant's: Philosophy wins even on hedonistic grounds.
  - **3.** The philosopher's pleasures are also truer and purer than those of the tyrant's.
- **B.** Although Glaucon is now convinced of justice's goodness, understood as the health of one's own soul, the necessity of the last book, Book X, of the *Republic*, with its powerful myth, suggests that the case is not as airtight as he thinks.

V. The Myth of Er attempts to make up for the deficiencies of the argument of the *Republic*.

- **A.** Book X as a whole falls into two parts, the first devoted to a discussion of poetry, the second to the myth and its interpretation.
  - **1.** The discussion of poetry here is a return to that topic, when in books II and III Socrates had been quite critical of Homer and Hesiod.
  - **2.** Here Socrates adopts a much gentler tone toward grieving the loss of a child; here he acknowledges that death is indeed a bad thing.
  - **3.** Most of us are in need of tragic poetry because it speaks to a deep longing or need of the soul that is not otherwise met—as Glaucon's case suggests.
  - **4.** Glaucon clearly remains torn between the concern for his own good, which he takes justice to be, and the willingness to sacrifice his own good for the sake of justice.

B. The *Republic* concludes with the telling of the Myth of Er.
    1. Glaucon's hopes for justice require a belief in the immortality of soul.
    2. Socrates reintroduces the wages of justice, something Glaucon and Adeimantus had strictly forbidden him to discuss.
    3. The myth relates a dazzling account of the order of the entire cosmos and the fate of our souls after death, including the punishment of the unjust and the opportunity for the just to choose their next life.

VI. As the beginning and the end of the *Republic* indicate, our concern for justice and just self-sacrifice is related to our concern for immortality.

A. Socrates's guiding purpose in the *Republic* is to demonstrate that the problem of justice is of fundamental importance to us as human beings: We are deeply attached and attracted to something, the precise character of which is surprisingly elusive.

B. We are attracted to an understanding of justice that involves dedication to others and the willingness to sacrifice our own good to the common good.

Suggested Reading:

Howland, *The Republic: The Odyssey of Philosophy*.

Plato, *Republic*, Books VIII–X.

Rosen, *Plato's Republic: A Study*.

Questions to Consider:

1. Is Socrates's reintroduction of the external rewards for justice defensible? Why is Glaucon now, in Book X, perfectly willing to hear of those rewards, when in Book II he had so emphatically insisted on excluding them?
2. How might Socrates's praise and criticism of democracy be applied to contemporary democracy? Are there ways in which the American founders attempted to forestall the dangers of (direct) democracy as Socrates depicts them here?

Lecture Thirteen

Socrates versus the Sophists

Scope: With this lecture, we continue our inquiry into Socrates as a teacher. One of the devices Plato uses to inform us about Socrates is to contrast him with his closest competitors, the sophists and rhetoricians, the famous itinerant teachers of subjects both practical and theoretical. By far the most famous sophist in antiquity was Protagoras, and the whole of this lecture is devoted to an examination of the Platonic dialogue named after him. After some introductory remarks about the *Protagoras* and its curious opening sections, we will consider Socrates's introductory, but very revealing, conversation with Protagoras, in which Socrates questions whether Protagoras can really teach, as he claims to, the art of good citizenship or the skills specific to politics. We will also consider in some detail Protagoras's subtle and subversive response, which takes the form of a creation myth and for which the dialogue is rightly famous. In it Protagoras not only makes the case for studying with sophists but also reveals, to his potential students, his radical criticisms of justice, orthodox piety, and moderation.

Outline

I. In the *Protagoras*, Plato depicts a meeting between Socrates and the most famous sophist, or itinerant teacher, of the day. Our discussion will fall into three parts: the opening of the dialogue; Socrates's initial conversation with Protagoras; and Protagoras's justly famous myth.

II. The beginning of the *Protagoras*, including its opening scenes, are revealing of the theme and purpose of the dialogue.

- **A.** The *Protagoras* is a performed dialogue, but the bulk of it consists of Socrates's narration to an unnamed comrade, who seems more interested in gossip than philosophy.
- **B.** Young Hippocrates seeks out Socrates's help in becoming a student of the famous sophist, now in town.
  - **1.** Socrates's conversation with the politically ambitious Hippocrates reveals that the latter knows amazingly little of Protagoras.

2. The drama of the *Protagoras* consists in Socrates's attempts to steer Hippocrates clear of studying with Protagoras.
3. The stage is now set for the confrontation between Socrates and Protagoras, in the home of the wealthy Callias.

III. Socrates's initial conversation with Protagoras demonstrates that each is a very clever and careful speaker.

A. Socrates signals to Protagoras that young Hippocrates is rich and ambitious, if not exceptionally bright.

B. Protagoras presents himself openly as a sophist, a dangerous thing to do, yet he admits that he makes use of "precautionary measures" to protect himself.

C. Protagoras promises to teach "good counsel" concerning the student's own affairs and how to make the student "most powerful" in politics.

1. Protagoras's claim is morally ambiguous: Does he teach good citizenship or how to fleece the common good?
2. Socrates challenges Protagoras only by wondering whether what Protagoras claims to teach is in fact teachable.

IV. To defend himself and to attract students, Protagoras gives a long and dazzling speech that includes his famous myth of Prometheus and Epimetheus.

A. The myth relates the creation of the human race, assigned by Zeus to Prometheus ("Forethought") but unfortunately carried out by Epimetheus ("Afterthought").

B. Since Zeus has given to all a sense of justice and shame, all rightly participate in politics. Yet Protagoras can teach political virtue better than most, so it makes sense to study with him.

C. Between the lines, Protagoras indicates that we are by nature or by gods left alone and unprotected, that the political virtues of justice, piety, and moderation have to be literally beaten into us, and that the true virtues—which he teaches—are wisdom and courage.

D. Protagoras teaches to his (best) students the falsity of the belief in Zeus and the merely conventional character of justice and piety.

Suggested Reading:

Coby, *Socrates and the Sophistic Enlightenment.*

Goldberg, *A Commentary on Plato's Protagoras.*

Plato, *Meno*, ed. Bartlett.

———, *Protagoras,* ed. Bartlett.

Questions to Consider:

1. Plato chose to present Socrates's conversation with Protagoras in the frame of a performed dialogue between Socrates and a certain unnamed companion. Why might Plato have made this decision? What does that opening portion add to the dialogue as a whole?
2. Protagoras admits or insists that the practice of sophistry is dangerous and can arouse the ire of those in the cities he visits. What in his remarks thus far might explain—and even justify—that ire?

Lecture Fourteen
Protagoras Undone

Scope: This lecture is principally concerned with Socrates's complex response to Protagoras and his eventual victory over him. Socrates begins somewhat strangely, by probing whether (according to Protagoras) virtue is some one thing or whether it is composed of essentially different parts. This question strikes Protagoras as being entirely innocuous, until it dawns on him, a little too late, that his holding the virtues to be separate means that wisdom and justice need not go together: Socrates practically forces him to admit that the wise as such are not necessarily just! We will also consider the concluding section of the dialogue, in which Socrates reveals—to us and to Protagoras—that the sophist's "sophisticated" contempt for justice and noble self-sacrifice cannot be squared with his genuine admiration of courage and the courageous. Even Protagoras, then, has failed to search his heart adequately, and he remains a far more moral man than he realizes.

Outline

I. An overview of the dialogue thus far suggests that Protagoras is a teacher of injustice who argues that the political virtues of justice and piety are merely conventional and hence unnatural.

II. Socrates's response to Protagoras's great speech appears at first to be concerned with trivialities, but eventually it raises the sensitive and fundamental question of the goodness of justice.

- **A.** Socrates first asks if, according to Protagoras, the virtues are all one, or if there are separate and distinct virtues.
  - **1.** Protagoras holds that the virtues are separate one from the other, with wisdom being the greatest of them.
  - **2.** As Socrates forces Protagoras to admit, this means that wisdom and justice need not go together; the wise, who know the truth about things, may dispense with justice!
- **B.** Socrates himself argues that virtue is in fact one, to the growing consternation of Protagoras.

III. Socrates sees to it that the conversation continues on terms agreeable to him, and he now turns to examine Protagoras's view of, and attachment to, courage.

- **A.** Socrates insists, and Protagoras initially denies, that courage and knowledge are linked; courage would be the knowledge of what is and what is not truly frightening, that is, bad for you.
- **B.** Socrates also insists that "the many" hold to a consistent hedonism, and so the knowledge of the courageous and cowardly in particular would be the knowledge of what is and what is not truly pleasant.
- **C.** Socrates thus tries to strip courage of its noble character and make of it the capacity to calculate well one's own pleasure.
  - **1.** This Protagoras cannot tolerate, for he actually admires the noble self-sacrifice of the courageous—even if he laughs at such nobility in the case of justice.
  - **2.** In this way Socrates brings out that even the sophisticated Protagoras has moral concerns or attachments that he has not thought through fully.

Suggested Reading:

Bartlett, "On the 'Protagoras," in Barlett, ed., "*Protagoras" and "Meno."*

de Romilly, *The Great Sophists in the Age of Periclean Athens.*

Schiappa, *Protagoras and Logos.*

Questions to Consider:

1. In what ways does the "drama" or "action" of the dialogue contribute to our understanding of the arguments? When, for example, does Protagoras begin to get annoyed, and why?

2. Why might Protagoras remain attached to the moral virtue of courage, when he indicates that he has rejected justice as mere convention? What is it about courage that he in particular might find especially appealing?

Lecture Fifteen

Socrates versus the Rhetoricians

Scope: From Socrates's encounter with the most famous sophist of the day, we naturally turn to Socrates's conversation with the most famous rhetorician, Gorgias. Although that conversation is only the first and shortest of what prove to be three conversations recorded in the *Gorgias*, it is in some ways the most fundamental. We will begin by looking at Socrates's initial conversation with Gorgias, where they arrive at a definition of "rhetoric," according to which it is the art of persuading an audience of something without, however, teaching them the truth about it. We will consider next Gorgias's long speech, which is intended to be a sort of advertisement for his art and a demonstration of it. Finally, we will examine Socrates's response to that advertisement, and bring out where Gorgias too proves not to be all that he claims.

Outline

I. Plato's *Gorgias* records Socrates's conversation with the most famous rhetorician of the day, Gorgias.

- **A.** Gorgias was a historical figure, hailing from Leontini on the island of Sicily (c. 483–376 B.C.).
  - **1.** The title is at once sensible and puzzling—for Socrates's conversation with Gorgias is both very important and the briefest of the three recorded.
  - **2.** The dialogue is performed, rather than narrated, in contrast to the *Protagoras*.

II. The opening scenes and Socrates's initial conversation with Gorgias set the stage for the heart of their conversation.

- **A.** Socrates arrives too late to hear Gorgias's dazzling set speech, though he is eager to speak to Gorgias.
- **B.** Socrates first asks: What is the power of Gorgias's art?
  - **1.** Socrates keeps repeating, because Gorgias fails to answer, the question of what rhetoric is about.
  - **2.** He finally wrests from Gorgias the response that rhetoric promises to make you capable of persuading law courts and

political assemblies about what is and is not just, so as to gain rule over others.

III. Socrates now invites Gorgias to deliver his "infomercial," promoting the power of rhetoric by means of rhetoric itself.

- **A.** Rhetoric is so powerful that it can permit you to triumph over anyone—even those with a specific skill, like medicine.
- **B.** But of course you should never blame a teacher of rhetoric if this great skill is misused by a student. If a student does misuse it, then by all means bring him up on charges or expel him.
- **C.** The defects in Gorgias's "infomercial" indicate the serious limitations of his rhetoric, even his rhetoric about rhetoric!
  - **1.** Gorgias protects himself by saying that the city should punish anyone who abuses rhetoric—but then he claims that rhetoric is so powerful that it can convince any jury or political mob of anything.
  - **2.** We can understand why Gorgias had been cagey about answering Socrates's questions. Gorgias's rhetoric promises the world; and he has to make this promise clear enough to entice students, but not so clear as to be run out of town (or worse).

IV. Socrates's response to Gorgias punishes him without blowing his cover entirely.

- **A.** Socrates forces Gorgias to say that any potential students of rhetoric will have to know (and practice!) justice before embarking on an education in rhetoric.
  - **1.** Far from being an education in attaining the heights of political power, rhetoric now appears to be a moralistic education in justice.
  - **2.** Socrates thus inflicts a punishment on Gorgias by dimming his attractiveness to potential students.
  - **3.** Might Socrates's refusal to expose Gorgias fully be criticized on moral grounds?
- **B.** The next sections of the dialogue are intended in part to demonstrate to Gorgias how dangerous or reckless his teaching is.

Suggested Reading:

McComiskey, *Gorgias and the New Sophistic Rhetoric.*

Plato, *Gorgias*, ed. Nichols.

Wardy, *The Birth of Rhetoric*.

Questions to Consider:

1. It is clear that Socrates eagerly sought out the conversation with Gorgias. What might Socrates have hoped to learn or gain from such a conversation? Might Socrates himself be in need of a kind of rhetoric?

2. On what grounds, if any, might Socrates's reluctance to expose Gorgias entirely be defended?

Lecture Sixteen
Rhetoric and Tyranny

Scope: Socrates's conversation with Gorgias comes to an end when the young and brash Polus interjects himself into the proceedings: Unlike the too-squeamish Gorgias, he, Polus, will say the truth and hold back nothing. Rhetoric, according to him, is the art of persuading others so that you yourself may exercise the greatest possible power without fear of punishment. To drive home his point, he praises as supremely happy a certain notorious tyrant, who is as happy as he is unjust. With this argument, the *Gorgias* turns away from rhetoric and toward the question of the goodness of justice. Whereas Socrates insists, to Polus's initial dismay, that committing injustice is the greatest evil for a human being, Polus maintains that successful or unpunished injustice is a very great good. Yet Socrates masterfully demonstrates that Polus retains a lingering respect for justice—he thinks it is noble, if not profitable—a respect that demonstrates his failure to have thought through what it would mean to live according to the principles he thinks he holds.

Outline

I. The second major section of the *Gorgias* consists of Socrates's conversation with the young and brash Polus, an admirer of Gorgias.

II. Polus insists that Socrates state his own view of rhetoric, and—amazingly enough—Socrates complies.

- **A.** Rhetoric, he maintains, is the false or merely pleasure-producing counterpart in the soul to the art of justice. Socrates thus makes clear his view that rhetoric (and sophistry) are mere "knacks" and not true arts.
- **B.** By comparing rhetoric with justice, Socrates sets up the later discussions of justice, which prove to be central.

III. Polus defends rhetoric by appealing to the example of great rhetoricians and politicians who exercise great power and therefore do what they want.

- **A.** Socrates responds by questioning whether the powerful really do what they want—namely to benefit themselves—for this would require that they know what is truly good for themselves.
  - **1.** Polus's rather low view of what is good, namely getting to push people around, is here confirmed.
  - **2.** Just as winning the lottery might give us more power, it would not inform us about how best to use that power.
- **B.** According to Socrates, to be powerful in the ordinary sense and to have a mistaken view of what's good is a recipe for misery. Polus can neither refute it nor accept it, and he revolts.

IV. Socrates now insists that the powerful would attain the truly good things, only if they act justly, for acting justly is the greatest good, acting unjustly the greatest evil.

- **A.** Polus is flabbergasted at the suggestion that, if one has to choose, better to suffer than to do injustice. He defends his view of the superiority of (successful) injustice to justice by relating the story of the murderous tyrant Archelaus.
- **B.** Polus even laughs at Socrates's incredibly naïve thought that it is better to suffer just punishment than to get away with one's injustice.

V. Socrates now turns to refute Polus, in three stages.

- **A.** Polus contends that injustice is profitable or advantageous, though it is of course shameful or ignoble. Doing injustice, then, is of course shameful, but it is advantageous.
- **B.** Polus agrees that what is shameful or ignoble must be either unpleasant or unprofitable, thus revealing his opinion or hope that what is noble must be either pleasant or profitable.
  - **1.** Polus thus shows himself to hold to the moral view that justice, because it is noble, must somehow also be better (or more pleasant) for you in the end.
  - **2.** An example from Plato's *Laws* confirms that this is the common view of justice.
- **C.** Socrates now applies the conclusion—that doing justice is nobler and therefore more profitable than doing injustice—to the case of rhetoric.
  - **1**. Rhetoric, properly used, should see to it that we ourselves pay the just penalty if we should commit an injustice.

2. We should see to it that our loved ones also pay the just penalty, and that our enemies get off scot-free, to suffer the penalties inherent in unpunished injustice.

Suggested Reading:

Plato, *Gorgias*, ed. James Nichols.

Stauffer, *The Unity of Plato's Gorgias*.

Questions to Consider:

1. Common sense may rebel at the thought that we should see to it that our loved ones always pay the just penalty for injustice. On what grounds might it reject this idea? What would Socrates say in response?
2. Does Socrates here prove that doing injustice is worse than suffering it? If so, how? If not, why does Polus agree to his arguments here?

Lecture Seventeen

Callicles and the Problem of Justice

Scope: Much of this lecture is devoted to the third and final part of Plato's *Gorgias*, which contains Socrates's lengthy conversation with Callicles. However, we will begin with a summary of what we've learned thus far in *Gorgias,* and how its theme of justice develops and eventually becomes even more important than its initial theme of rhetoric.

Then turning our attention to Callicles, we begin with a consideration of his quite sophisticated view of what is just by nature, according to which the strong dominate the weak naturally and therefore justly, we will also reflect on what might have led him to adopt this harsh view of the world. We will also examine Callicles's quite harsh criticism of philosophy in general and of Socrates in particular, linking this criticism with his view of justice. The dialogue concludes with Socrates's criticism of the principle that apparently guides Callicles's life, that of hedonism, or the view that the greatest good for a human being is pleasure. For all of his sophistication, Callicles too remains devoted to justice, and his moral hopes about the world explain his anger at what he perceives to be the injustice of his lot in life and that of Socrates's likely fate at the hands of "the many."

Outline

I. A summary of the dialogue to this point is useful.

- **A.** Gorgias's definition of "rhetoric" must be contrasted with Socrates's. Already in Socrates's cross-examination of Gorgias, the problem of justice appears, for Gorgias claims to teach how to get the better of any jury or political gathering.
- **B.** Polus's brash interjection confirms that Socrates's apparent refutation of Gorgias was not a real one.
  1. Polus maintains that justice is noble but disadvantageous; injustice shameful but advantageous.
  2. Socrates succeeds in tripping up Polus because he (also) believes that whatever is noble must in the end also be advantageous.

3. The proper use of rhetoric is to see to it that we undergo just punishment.
4. Socrates is thus able to defend the position that justice is good, injustice bad, and that it is better to suffer, if one must, than to do injustice.

II. Callicles now declares his intention to overturn Socrates's outrageous arguments.

A. Socrates's arguments are in fact contrary to the way everyone lives.

B. Callicles accuses Polus of being too sensitive to shame, just as Polus had accused Gorgias of being sensitive to shame, and his argument will avoid this fault.

1. Polus should have said that justice is noble and injustice shameful merely by convention; by nature justice is noble because good, injustice shameful because bad.
2. In his long speech, Callicles also gives a fascinating account of the origin of justice in the conventional agreements of the weak, fashioned in response to their weakness in the face of the strong.
3. Justice by nature is the stronger or superior, receiving more good things than the weak or inferior, as political life and the animal world prove.

C. In response, Socrates first asks whether by "superior" Callicles means only "stronger."

1. Socrates points out that Callicles ought to hold to be naturally just the acts of the democratic many, who collectively are able to subdue the (supposedly) superior and hence stronger few; he ought to say that democracy is by nature just.
2. Callicles saves his argument by insisting that he does not mean merely "stronger" when he says "superior," but refers to those distinguished by wisdom and courage as well.

III. What might have led Callicles to accept so extreme a view of justice and the world?

A. Callicles's second or revised position forces him to acknowledge a chasm between the way the world is and the way it ought to be; democracy shouldn't rule, but does.

B. Callicles's initial position—roughly, "might makes right"—saves the cause of justice in the world by assuring that the result of every

power struggle is necessarily just—whoever comes out on top by that very fact deserves to be on top.

C. Callicles cannot stick to his initial harsh view because he admires something other than brute strength.

IV. Callicles also issues a stinging critique of Socrates and philosophy as a way of life.

A. Although philosophy is good for the young, no adult should waste time with it since it leaves one defenseless against unjust attack.

B. Socrates sparks Callicles's concern and even anger because Callicles fears Socrates will be just another superior human being unjustly crushed by the inferior.

C. Callicles may speak of the rule of the lions and of great political men, but in practice he lives by currying the favor of the democratic many. He is a vivid example of one who feels he must serve those whom he despises, and this is a recipe for a kind of misery marked by self-contempt.

V. Socrates now introduces the doctrine of hedonism, to which Callicles believes he adheres.

A. According to Callicles, the good life consists in the satisfaction of the greatest number of the most intense desires.

B. Socrates pursues several strategies to try to dislodge Callicles from his hedonism.

1. Callicles is not persuaded by a religious myth critical of pleasure-seeking.
2. He is not persuaded either by the argument that pleasure-seeking is finally unpleasant.
3. Socrates's shocking example of pleasure-seeking prompts Callicles to condemn certain pleasures on grounds other than pleasure itself.
4. Callicles is in his way a deeply moral man who fails to see clearly, let alone think through, his own moral hopes.

C. The final section of the dialogue attempts, by means of a myth, to reconcile Callicles somewhat to the world as it is.

Suggested Reading:

Plato, *Gorgias*, ed. Nichols.

Plochmann and Robinson, *A Friendly Companion to Plato's Gorgias.*

Questions to Consider:

1. Why might Socrates have sought out Gorgias's expertise?
2. Are there any counterparts today to the ancient sophists and rhetoricians? If so, is their influence generally a beneficial or a harmful one?
3. There are clear indications in the text that Gorgias is paying close attention to Socrates's conversations with both Polus and Callicles. What might Gorgias learn from witnessing Socrates's careful exposition of the confusions of Polus and Callicles, respectively?

Lecture Eighteen
What is Virtue? *Meno*, Part 1

Scope: The *Meno* is clearly connected with both the *Protagoras* and the *Gorgias*. The *Protagoras* culminates in Socrates's assertion that it is necessary to ask the comprehensive question—"What is virtue?"—which happens to be the guiding question of the *Meno*; and we soon discover that young Meno has been the student of none other than Gorgias. The *Meno* as a whole falls into three parts, the first and longest part consisting of Meno's three attempts, with Socrates, to discover an adequate definition of "virtue" or to answer the question, "What is virtue?" For although Meno wants to know first how virtue is acquired, Socrates insists that they must know first what it is, a surprisingly difficult question. In his attempts to define "virtue," which we will track carefully in this lecture, Meno continually vacillates between understanding virtue as the greatest good for ourselves, on the one hand, and as the greatest good for which we should be willing to give up our own greatest good, on the other. To quell Meno's growing frustration, Socrates introduces his famous—and puzzling—doctrine of knowledge as recollection of truths gained in a prior existence.

Outline

I. We may begin with some preliminary observations about the *Meno*.

- **A.** The dialogue is clearly connected with both the *Protagoras* and *Gorgias*.
- **B.** It is a performed dialogue with four characters.
- **C.** The dialogue falls into three parts of uneven length.
  - **1.** Socrates's initial conversation with Meno attempts to define "virtue."
  - **2.** The democratic statesman and future accuser of Socrates, Anytus, arrives.
  - **3.** Socrates then returns to converse with Meno, but this time in Anytus's presence.

II. Meno's attempts, with Socrates's help, to arrive at a satisfactory definition of "virtue" ultimately fail.

A. The virtue or excellence specific to each—man, woman, child, elder—is determined by the task or work appropriate to each, as determined by the whole to which we contribute.

   1. Meno leaves it unclear whether such virtue will be good also for the virtuous themselves.

   2. Is virtue the goal, or is virtue the means by which we ourselves become good?

B. Meno's second definition of "virtue" is that it is the capacity to rule people, a definition that owes something to Meno's teacher, Gorgias.

   1. Socrates brings out that Meno means by "virtue" only ruling people justly.

   2. Meno therefore wants to rule, and he wants to be just, but why limit the pursuit of rule at all?

C. Virtue is now the capacity to desire "the noble things" and to be capable of supplying them.

   1. This definition attempts to put the noble elements of the first definition together with the concern for one's own good seen in the second.

   2. Meno believes that what is noble must be good for you. Serving the city nobly and justly would therefore be good for you.

   3. Virtue now seems to be the capacity to desire the truly good things and to be able to supply them.

   4. Here Socrates states his famous dictum that all vice is ignorance.

   5. Meno has a very limited view of the noble and hence good things, and he cannot quite stick to the view of virtue now on the table. How might he have been able to stick to it?

III. Meno now rebels, despairing of the possibility of rational argument entirely.

A. Socrates must now encourage Meno to press on in their inquiry.

   1. According to what certain poets, priests, and priestesses say, the soul has seen all things in previous lives and therefore also knows what virtue is.

   2. That preexisting but dormant knowledge must now be recollected and so become knowledge once again.

B. Although Socrates proves none of these assertions, he does succeed in getting Meno to continue.

Suggested Reading:

Klein, *A Commentary on Plato's Meno.*

Plato, Meno, in Bartlett, ed., *"Protagoras" and "Meno."*

———, Protagoras, in Bartlettt, ed., *"Protagoras" and "Meno."*

Questions to Consider:

1. Of the three official definitions of "virtue" Meno offered (and Socrates amended), which is the most immediately persuasive or appealing?

2. In his exasperation, Meno states a paradox, according to which we can only inquire into things we already know—and so have no need of inquiring into them. Is there any way around this paradox?

Lecture Nineteen

Can Virtue Be Taught? *Meno*, Part 2

Scope: In the first of this lecture's three parts, we will take a closer look at the "recollection doctrine" of knowledge and its supposed proof, namely Socrates's famous conversation with one of Meno's slaves. Since the recollection doctrine prompts Meno not to give up the quest for a definition of "virtue," the dialogue is permitted to continue, and in the next section Socrates does answer Meno's original question as to whether virtue is teachable. Socrates being Socrates, however, does not do so in an entirely straightforward way: Socrates says yes, virtue is teachable, but then suddenly suggests that maybe virtue isn't teachable after all. An important ambiguity in the term "virtue," present since Meno's attempts to nail down a definition, explains Socrates's own contradictory answers here: Everything depends on what one means by "virtue." For only if the virtue in question is rational can it be taught, strictly speaking. After considering this ambiguity, and the quite dramatic appearance of the democratic statesman Anytus, we will conclude, in the third section of the lecture, by offering some general observations about the *Meno*—about both the dialogue and the man after whom it is named.

Outline

I. The "recollection doctrine" of knowledge in the *Meno* requires further consideration.

- **A.** To demonstrate the truth of the proposition that all knowledge is but recollection of things learned in a previous existence, Socrates examines one of Meno's slaves in matters of geometry, something the slave never learned in this life.
- **B.** This conversation proves only that the slave has learned basic concepts of the Greek language, not that his immortal soul learned them in a previous life. The slave finally comes up with a correct answer only because Socrates asks what are known as "leading questions."

II. Meno now insists on addressing his original question, as amended by Socrates: What must virtue be, if it is to be teachable?

- **A.** Virtue must be knowledge, or rational, if it is to be teachable.
  - **1.** The knowledge that virtue consists in would permit things of contingent goodness (for examples, money, power) to be good for one in fact.
  - **2.** Socrates goes so far as to say that all the individual virtues would be virtue only if guided by this knowledge of the good.
  - **3.** The happiness of the virtue is the explicit standard by which to judge virtue.
- **B.** Now Socrates suggests that in fact virtue may not be teachable after all!
  - **1.** Socrates stresses "virtue" understood as dedication or service to others.
  - **2.** The arrival of the rather testy Anytus, who here represents the city of Athens, confirms that the city asserts its own view of virtue, and is certain of its meaning and obligations.
- **C.** The *Meno* is sometimes taken to be an epistemological dialogue, concerned with how we know what we know.
  - **1.** This is correct, but the very political setting of the conversation shows that every epistemological question is also a political one, for our community shapes our opinions, starting with what we take to be objective knowledge.
  - **2.** The very political characters of Meno and Anytus remind us of the importance of the community or "cave."
- **D.** In the dialogue's final section, and to placate Anytus, Socrates attempts to stake out a middle ground, according to which the (politically) virtuous do what they do from divine allotment rather than knowledge.

III. Understanding the *Meno* requires some attention to the character of Meno himself**.**

- **A.** Shortly after the dramatic date of the dialogue, Meno went on to become a notorious traitor and political criminal, who Persia's king eventually executed.
- **B.** Why in the world would Plato have Meno star in the principal dialogue on virtue?
  - **1.** Meno's political career confirms his low and narrow understanding of what is good.

2. Plato may also be putting before our eyes the fact that virtue can be taught in only a very limited way, for the proper student must have a good nature.

IV. Summary of, and conclusion to, the *Meno.*

A. The *Meno* presents the problem of virtue in the fact that we are attracted at once to a selfless dedication to others and to our own truest good or happiness, and these need not be simply compatible.

B. The dialogue also sketches what a consistent view of virtue might look like, according to which it is the knowledge necessary to possess for ourselves the truly good things.

C. The *Meno* also presents the source of the competing view of virtue, that of the city, which demands our dedication and service to it.

D. The dialogue may also point toward the deepest source of Meno's confusion about virtue, namely his concern for immortality or his longing for it.

Suggested Reading:

Bartlett, "On the *Meno*," in Bartlett, ed., "*Protagoras" and "Meno."*

Bruell, "Meno," in On the Socratic Education.

Plato, Meno, in Bartlett, ed., *"Protagoras" and "Meno."*

———, Protagoras, in Bartlettt, ed., *"Protagoras" and "Meno."*

Questions to Consider:

1. Are there any tell-tale signs in the dialogue warning of Meno's subsequent political career?
2. Could Socrates have done more to prevent Meno from developing into the notorious political criminal he became?

Lecture Twenty

The Trial of Socrates I—*Euthyphro*

Scope: With this lecture, we begin to treat the four-dialogue sequence devoted to Socrates's trial, conviction, and execution. The *Euthyphro* is set on the steps of the courthouse that Socrates is about to enter to attend a preliminary hearing prior to his trial. The question treated in the dialogue is of obvious importance to that trial, for he and Euthyphro discuss the question, "What is piety?"

We will begin with an account of the dialogue's most prominent features, especially the surprising circumstances surrounding it. Second, we will take up in turn each of the main arguments concerning piety. Third and finally, we'll consider a summary of the dialogue showing the general approach Socrates took to the challenge that orthodox piety poses to the philosophic life, the life of reason.

Outline

I. The *Euthyphro* is the first of four dialogues devoted to the trial and execution of Socrates.

- **A.** The tension between the philosopher and his political community is arguably Plato's focus in all the dialogues, but especially in the *Euthyphro*, the *Apology of Socrates*, the *Crito*, and the *Phaedo*.
- **B.** The dialogue asks the question, "What is piety?" This question has both a theoretical and a moral-political significance.
  - **1.** The question concerning piety is linked with the question of whether gods or nature are the fundamental cause.
  - **2.** Since Athens demanded that its citizens worship the correct gods in the correct way, the question of what piety is and what it demands also has a moral-political significance.

II. What features of the dialogue strike us at first glance?

- **A.** The dialogue is performed rather than narrated, but there is no indication that anyone other than Socrates and Euthyphro is present or overhearing their remarks.
- **B.** The circumstances are important, set as it is on the steps of the courthouse.

1. Whereas Socrates is present to defend himself, Euthyphro is there to prosecute his father on a charge of murder!
2. Euthyphro is certain that justice demands his action, and by what the gods themselves do or have done.
3. Socrates makes the suggestion that he should become Euthyphro's student in piety, since he seems so certain of what it is.

III. Socrates cross-examines Euthyphro's first and second attempts at a definition of "piety."

A. Euthyphro has offered a description, rather than a definition, of "piety," by appealing to the example of his own present actions. It becomes clear that Euthyphro accepts the whole of the orthodox accounts of the gods, and that Socrates does not accept them.

B. Euthyphro suggests that piety is what is dear to (or beloved by) the gods. Yet the gods fight among themselves over what is noble, just, and good, and so give conflicting indications of what is dear to them or pious.

C. Socrates wonders whether the gods love pious because it is pious or whether it is pious because the gods love it.

1. Euthyphro maintains that the gods love pious because it is pious.
2. The crucial question at stake in these complex formulations is this: Is there some standard to which the gods look with approval or disapproval on something, or do they by fiat simply establish something as "pious"?
3. The case of Abraham and the binding of Isaac, in the Hebrew Bible, is a helpful example of what is at stake.

D. A problem still remains, for Euthyphro has referred to "the pious" in his definition of it, and so has left it undefined.

1. Piety now appears to be a subset of the category justice: Piety is what we owe to the gods.
2. Euthyphro thus confirms the centrality of the concern for justice in his concern for piety.

IV. Summary of and conclusion to the *Euthyphro*.

A. The *Euthyphro* presents Plato's most direct account of Socrates's inquiry into the sensitive question, "What is piety?"

1. Socrates is clearly not among the orthodox believers.

2. The dialogue shows the general approach Socrates took to the challenge that orthodox piety poses to the philosophic life, by beginning from Euthyphro's own deepest concerns—his embrace of piety and his great concern for justice.
3. The connection between justice and piety suggests that a philosopher who inquired into the human opinions about justice could well come to a new and better understanding of piety.

B. Here we come to the deepest theoretical significance of the so-called Socratic turn away from the scientific doctrines of his predecessors and toward the opinions expressed "in speech."

Suggested Reading:

Plato, *Euthyphro*, in West and West, eds. and trans., *Four Texts on Socrates*.

Stokes, *Dialectic in Action.*

Versenyi, *Holiness and Justice.*

Questions to Consider:

1. Why might Plato have chosen to present the most direct conversation about piety by means of a conversation with a fellow who, while well disposed toward Socrates, is the subject of ridicule among his fellow citizens?
2. Plato leaves it unclear whether Euthyphro was entering the courthouse or leaving it as the dialogue opens, and so he leaves it unclear what effect the conversation with Socrates might have had on him. Does the course of the conversation strike you as sufficient for dissuading Euthyphro from prosecuting his father?

Lecture Twenty-One

The Trial of Socrates II—*Apology*, Part 1

Scope: With this lecture we begin our two-part treatment of what is probably the most famous and most widely read document in the history of Western philosophy, Plato's *Apology of Socrates to the Jury*. After a few introductory remarks, we will begin to consider the first and longest part of the dialogue—what might be called the defense speech proper—in which Socrates attempts to refute the official charges against him. Yet it is striking how little he says about the two main charges against him. He never once asserts that he does believe in the gods in whom the city believes; and he never quite denies that there are young people who follow him and who learn from him, which amounts to an admission that he is indeed an influential teacher. More intriguing still is his insistence that there are earlier charges against him—dating back to Aristophanes's *Clouds!* In dealing with these earlier accusers, Socrates gives a fascinating account of what prompted him one day to become the philosopher notorious for his cross-examinations of others, which amounts to the admission that he was once a philosopher in another, pre-Socratic sense.

Outline

I. To approach the dialogue next in the dramatic order, the *Apology of Socrates*, it is helpful to begin from the most apparent considerations.

- **A.** The title *Apology* means here "defense speech" and is not at all an admission of wrongdoing, as Socrates's speech will make quite clear.
- **B.** The dialogue is performed, with Socrates and, briefly, his accuser Meletus, speaking, though in a sense the Athenian people too are characters in the dialogue. The dialogue is at once Socrates's most public conversation by far and the only one at which Plato is said to be present.

II. The first and longest part of the *Apology* consists of Socrates's defense speech.

- **A.** To understand the present accusers, Socrates must first address the older and more effective accusers, chief among them Aristophanes

in his *Clouds*. Socrates flatly denies that he knows anything of natural science, on the one hand, or human or political virtue, on the other.

B. Socrates then takes up the official, or current, charges against him.

1. To the charge that he corrupts the young, Socrates cross-examines Meletus and shows him to be ignorant, a demonstration of the confounding (and irksome!) arguments of Socrates.

2. To the charge of impiety, Socrates entices Meletus into asserting that Socrates is really an atheist: He therefore must believe in both unorthodox gods and no gods at all, which is impossible.

C. We must step back and look more closely at some of Socrates's arguments here. Socrates says both more and less than first appears, for he never affirms his belief in the orthodox gods, and he makes clear that he has studied natural science and has a large and devoted following among the young.

III. The theoretical core of Socrates's defense speech is contained in a digression that occurs between the accounts of the first and second accusers.

A. To explain why the first accusers slandered him, Socrates tells of the fateful day when Chaerephon asked the Delphic oracle whether anyone was wiser than Socrates, and the Oracle responded that no one was wiser; Socrates set out to disprove this pronouncement.

B. His quest to refute the Oracle constituted a turning point in his life, and prompted him to begin the cross-examinations of his fellow citizens that so aroused their ire.

C. Socrates conveniently fails to tell us what he was doing before responding to the Oracle, such that Chaerephon (and the Oracle) would think he was the wisest man. The *Clouds* is a comic representation of the pre-Socratic Socrates, who was engaged in natural science or natural philosophy.

IV. Socrates was a most clever speaker who addressed himself simultaneously to two different audiences, represented here by the many and by Plato.

Suggested Reading:

Bruell, "Apology of Socrates" in *On the Socratic Education*.

Plato, *Apology of Socrates to the Jury*, in West and West, eds., *Four Texts on Socrates.*

Reeves, *Socrates in the Apology.*

Questions to Consider:

1. Why might Plato have chosen to include himself in this dialogue, alone of the 35 dialogues that have come down to us as his?
2. How well does Socrates's summary of the *Clouds* in the *Apology* square with the text of Aristophanes's play? What does Socrates stress, and what does he omit?

Lecture Twenty-Two
The Trial of Socrates III—*Apology*, Part 2

Scope: The deepest and most revealing section of the *Apology* thus far is contained in Socrates's digression concerning his mission to refute the Delphic oracle's statement that no one is wiser than Socrates. The most important section of the rest of the dialogue is contained in a digression that is chiefly devoted to establishing Socrates's justice, not only in the sense that he broke no law, but in the higher sense that he is dedicated to the good of others. More specifically, we will begin by considering Socrates's second digression here and see what it tells about Socrates and his life. Second, we will look briefly at the two remaining sections of the dialogue: Socrates's remarks after he has been convicted, on the one hand, and his remarks after he has been sentenced to death, on the other. Third and finally, we will reflect on the astonishingly persuasive defense of Socrates laid out in the *Apology of Socrates*. Though this defense did not succeed in the immediate circumstances, it has proved persuasive through the subsequent centuries and even millennia.

Outline

I. The *Apology of Socrates* is meant to establish Socrates's justice in the two-fold sense of his having obeyed the law and of his being concerned with the good of others.

- **A.** The portion of the *Apology* discussed thus far, including the "first digression," is intended to address Socrates's legal justice.
- **B.** The remainder of the dialogue, including the "second digression," is intended to establish Socrates's justice in the much more far-ranging and impressive sense of his being devoted to the good of others; in other words, his philanthropy.

II. Socrates's second digression is crucial for understanding the power of the *Apology*.

- **A.** In response to an objection he himself raises, Socrates states that a good man will consider only justice of a given action, never whether he risks danger or death thereby.

1. Socrates now presents his cross-examinations as "ordered by the god" and for the benefit of his fellow Athenians, whereas before he had sought to refute the Oracle and so vindicate his self-understanding.
2. The very great ability of this part of the *Apology* to move us depends on the belief that those who deserve a reward will receive it; and that the true basis of such deserving is noble self-sacrifice.
3. Socrates here supports that belief, going so far as to say that from virtue comes money and all good things; and that no real harm can come to a good man.
4. These two arguments may not be fully compatible, however.

B. Socrates has not been consistent in his statements of what motivates him.

1. Sometimes he speaks of calculations of what is best for himself, sometimes what is best for Athens, even at the cost of his own life, sometimes of both.
2. We can simply stay where we are stationed by another, or we can stay where we think it is best to remain—a fundamentally different alternative.

C. Socrates also mentions here his famous *daimonion* or "little divine thing."

1. Oddly enough, Socrates had said nothing about it when rebutting the charges of religious heterodoxy.
2. Whereas the Delphic oracle had prompted Socrates to undertake an extremely dangerous mission, the *daimonion*'*s* only function is to warn him away from danger; to seek Socrates's own good.
3. The legitimizing of the concern for Socrates's own good permits him to make some surprising statements, for example, that he never entered politics because he would have died long ago had he done so.

III. The two remaining sections concern Socrates's remarks after he has been convicted and those after he has been condemned to death.

A. Crucial here is attempting to follow Socrates's confusing remarks about death.

1. Socrates's most common assertion here is that he is ignorant of what death is and so cannot know whether it is not bad, or

indeed whether it may not be the greatest good; hence there is no reason to fear.

2. If Socrates was ignorant of death, would it necessarily alleviate any fear of death? It seems the very idea of not knowing if we will lose everything we enjoy when we die that can lead to fear.
3. Yet Socrates also states or implies that death is bad and hence something to be avoided.

B. After his condemnation, Socrates again addresses the matter of death to those who convicted him and to those who acquitted him.

1. To those who acquitted him, and who may feel badly about the trial's result, Socrates takes a remarkably gentle tone.
2. Death must be one of two things: either like an endless, dreamless sleep or a migration to another place.

IV. We may conclude with some general remarks about the *Apology* and its influence.

A. The result of Socrates's trial, and the *Apology* itself, make clear that the reputation of philosophy, even in sophisticated democratic Athens, was not a good one.

B. Plato managed to transform the reputation of the philosopher from corrupter to noble martyr, an exaggeration of the truth.

C. Socrates himself states his rhetorical strategy. Since it is the hardest of all things to persuade the audience that an unexamined life isn't worth living, he instead argues that he lives as he does in obedience to the god—though some who hear this will think he is being ironic.

Suggested Reading:

Brickhouse and Smith, *Socrates on Trial*.

Plato, *Apology of Socrates to the Jury*, in West and West, eds. and trans., *Four Texts on Socrates*.

Questions to Consider:

1. Xenophon, in his *Apology of Socrates to the Jury*, argues that Socrates thought it better to die and so resolved to speak to the jury in such a way as to ensure his conviction. Can such a thesis be maintained on the basis of Plato's *Apology*?

2. Socrates's opening denial of being a clever speaker is refuted by the *Apology* as a whole. Does this cast a shadow on Socrates's innocence or guilt? If you had been a member of the jury, how might you have voted?

Lecture Twenty-Three
The Trial of Socrates IV—*Crito*

Scope: This lecture is devoted to exploring the third of the four dialogues devoted to portraying the final days of Socrates: Plato's *Crito*. The conversation recorded in the *Crito* takes place in the very early morning in Socrates's jail cell between the prisoner and his old friend. We will consider first Crito's arguments to Socrates to escape, then Socrates's own arguments in response; and, third, the arguments of the laws of Athens—here given voice by Socrates—against escape. There are serious reasons to doubt whether Socrates's arguments directed at his well-meaning but unphilosophic friend can be regarded as expressing his own views, or whether the arguments of the laws do so. Still, it is undeniable that Socrates abided by the conclusion of those arguments, namely to submit to his execution, and we will conclude with some tentative suggestions concerning his own reasons for doing so, chief among them his concern for his own reputation and, by extension, that of philosophy through the ages.

Outline

I. The *Crito* is the third of the four dialogues dealing with Socrates's trial and execution.

- **A.** The title points to Socrates's only interlocutor here, his old companion Crito.
- **B.** The setting suggests the dialogue's subject matter, whether Socrates should escape from prison; the dialogue is performed rather than narrated, thus putting us once removed from Socrates's private thoughts.
- **C.** Crito brings bad news: that Socrates's execution may now proceed.

II. Crito is now intent on convincing Socrates to flee and so save his life.

- **A.** What will people think of Crito if he fails to aid his friend now?
- **B.** No harm will come to us, your friends, if we help you escape; and it will be possible for you to find a hospitable place elsewhere.
- **C.** Justice demands that you not betray your sons by accepting to die, and so it would be shameful for you to remain. Crito finds it much

harder than does Socrates to be unconcerned with the opinion of the many.

D. Socrates responds by appealing to his famous argument that one should be concerned only with noble and just action, and never repay an injustice with an injustice.

1. This position reminds us of the one he adopted in the *Gorgias*.

2. The argument is of course meant to be persuasive to Crito, in this context.

3. But if Socrates's conviction is unjust, why would escape be unjust?

III. Socrates now conjures up the laws of Athens to speak to Crito directly.

A. Scholars disagree over whether the laws represent Socrates's own views.

B. The laws are responsible for Socrates's existence and well-being and so deserve obedience in return.

C. The laws also permit citizens to leave, and to try to persuade them if one thinks they are in error: Socrates has stayed, and he failed to persuade the jury. It is useful to compare this doctrine with the modern "social contract" theories of Thomas Hobbes, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, and others.

D. The arguments of the laws leave Crito literally speechless.

IV. How does Socrates come to cite the laws in the *Crito*?

A. It is strange that Socrates here relies heavily on the laws, when in the *Apology* he had ridiculed Meletus's recourse to them.

1. By comparing the state into which he is induced by listening to the laws to that of a Corybantic frenzy, Socrates suggests that their arguments are not simply rational.

2. The laws, as distinguished from Socrates, do appeal to what is good or advantageous, in contrast to justice.

B. It is undeniable, of course, that Socrates did act in compliance with laws.

1. Xenophon argues that Socrates chose to die when he did, and so to avail himself of the "easiest of deaths."

2. He surely did escape the decline characteristic of old age.

3. Such goods as he gave up by dying were perhaps made up for by the benefits thereby conferred on Socrates's reputation and, by extension, on the reputation of philosophy itself.

Suggested Reading:

Allen, *Socrates and Legal Obligation.*

Plato, *Crito*, in West and West, eds. and trans., *Four Texts on Socrates.*

Stokes, *Dialectic in Action.*

Questions to Consider:

1. How might the most impressive arguments in the *Apology* have been undermined, had Socrates agreed to escape?
2. Socrates's arguments in the *Apology* criticizing the laws (as distinguished from justice) seem incompatible with the argument he states here in the name of the laws. Are there any ways to reconcile the two positions?

Lecture Twenty-Four
The Socratic Revolution Revisited—*Phaedo*

Scope: We turn now to the fourth and final of the dialogues devoted to Socrates's trial and execution, Plato's *Phaedo*, which all but ends with the moving description of Socrates's death. In the great bulk of the *Phaedo*, prior to this death scene, Socrates attempts to demonstrate that the soul is immortal. Accordingly, we will treat that demonstration and its significance. Yet we recall, from Lecture Two, that the *Phaedo* also includes Socrates's very striking confession of his early interest in natural philosophy. Here Socrates not only admits that he was indeed a "pre-Socratic" philosopher, but also tells us why he inaugurated the change in philosophy that has come to be considered Socratic philosophizing. Our study of the *Phaedo*, then, will have two main purposes: to discuss the arguments for the immortality of soul, and to revisit Socrates's extremely important autobiographical remarks. Both of these purposes together permit us to grasp somewhat better the nature of the change that Socrates brought about in his attempt to understand the world as it is.

Outline

I. The *Phaedo* is not only the fourth and final dialogue concerned with Socrates's trial, but also the place where Socrates himself addresses his famous turn from natural science to philosophizing "in the speeches."

- **A.** We will examine first Socrates's famous arguments for the immortality of soul.
- **B.** Important, too, is his autobiographical account of his own philosophizing.

II. Socrates attempts to prove to his companions that philosophy is the best way of life because the philosopher has most reason to be of good hope in the face of death, the soul being immortal and the philosopher being most deserving of immortality.

- **A.** Socrates's fundamental argument is that death will free the philosopher of the distorting effects of the body and so permit his soul finally to attain a true grasp of the world.

1. This depends on a radical depreciation of this world and of all (so-called) knowledge gained through sense perception, a controversial proposition.
2. Socrates also argues that the philosopher most deserves immortality.

B. Plato suggests that we long most for immortality, even more than for knowledge.

1. But what then becomes of the argument that the philosopher is the most deserving?
2. Perhaps Plato means for us to wonder whether what the philosopher longs for most is knowledge or, like all human beings, immortality.

III. Socrates's companions point out that he has merely assumed, not proved, the immortality of the soul, and so they press him to prove it.

A. As the setting indicates, those present have a strong incentive to accept Socrates's arguments, since the man they admire most is about to die.

B. According to Socrates's first argument, all things come into being out of their contraries, the dead out of the living and the living out of the dead. Socrates begs the question by assuming that the dead "are" or continue to exist in some way.

C. Cebes introduces the second argument for immortality, what he says is Socrates's usual one, seen in the *Meno*, that all knowledge is but recollection of things learned in a previous life or lives.

1. Socrates himself didn't introduce this argument here because it requires reliance on precisely sense perception, which he had denigrated in his first argument.
2. The recollection argument also insists that we can know the truth about things in this life!

D. Socrates's third argument is that the soul is most like that which is least likely to scatter or disperse, namely the unseen and noncomposite.

1. This argument depends on a logical fallacy.
2. To this point, Socrates has failed to persuade his audience of the immortality of soul.

IV. In responding to Cebes and Simmias on the matter of generation and corruption, Socrates is compelled to give an account of his own philosophical journey.

A. Socrates became dissatisfied with the attempts of other philosophers to explain how all things come into being and perish (causality).
    1. Here the example of the cause of water is useful: Do we really understand the nature of water by understanding it as the union of certain atoms and the void?
    2. What in any case is responsible for the coming into being, and the union, of hydrogen and oxygen?
    3. There are those who deny that nature is the fundamental cause of anything, because the gods are the fundamental cause.
    4. The deepest purpose of Socrates's moral cross-examinations, or his turn to "the speeches," was to test the supposed evidence in favor of the view that the gods must be the truest causes.

B. Not physics or cosmology, but moral and political philosophy may hold the key to the mystery of the nature of cause, the great theoretical question to which Socrates devoted his life.

Suggested Reading:

Ahrensdorf, *The Death of Socrates and the Life of Philosophy.*

Plato, *Phaedo*, ed. Brann, et al.

Stern, *Socratic Rationalism and Political Philosophy.*

Questions to Consider:

1. In what ways might the singular setting of the *Phaedo* contribute to—or detract from—the arguments, strictly speaking?
2. At what points in his lengthy conversation with his young friends does Socrates make most progress or convince them most? Why?

Lecture Twenty-Five
Aristotle and the Socratic Legacy

Scope: This lecture inaugurates the third and final section of our course, the section devoted to the thought of Plato's greatest student, Aristotle. Today's introductory lecture will accomplish the following four tasks: first, to sketch some of the highlights of Aristotle's biography, of his life and work. We will then offer some provisional suggestions concerning the relation between Aristotle on the one hand, and Socrates and Plato on the other, and the sense in which one can speak of Aristotle as heir to the Socratic legacy. Third, we will make the case why we in the 21st century might turn with serious interest to the study of Aristotle, not as a mummified relic or merely historical artifact, but as a living source of guidance who can help us grapple, here and now, with some of the most fundamental human questions. Finally, and as a preparation for the next lecture, we will consider Aristotle's somewhat strange manner of writing—a manner that makes special demands on us, his readers.

Outline

I. We turn now to consider the life and thought of Plato's greatest student, Aristotle.

- **A.** Aristotle was simply "the Philosopher" for many of the greatest Islamic, Jewish, and Christian thinkers of the Middle Ages. Maimonides, Alfarabi, Averroes, and Avicenna all testify to Aristotle's greatness.
- **B.** Even the early modern philosopher Thomas Hobbes, who—by the very act of declaring Aristotle "Enemy Number One"—attests to Aristotle's great importance.
- **C.** Aristotle was born in Stagira and subsequently studied for some 20 years with Plato in Athens.
  - **1.** He also is said to have been the tutor of young Alexander the Great.
  - **2.** He subsequently returned to Athens to found his own school, the Peripatetics.

D. Like Socrates, Aristotle faced impiety charges. Unlike Socrates, Aristotle fled Athens to avoid "sinning against philosophy a second time," as he famously said. He died about a year later.

E. Aristotle's extant writings are remarkable for their depth and breadth, covering topics in natural science as well as moral and political philosophy.

II. What is the relation between Aristotle and the Platonic-Socratic philosophy?

A. The very fact that Aristotle wrote on natural science suggests his distance from either Plato or Socrates: He was far more willing to present himself as a natural philosopher.

1. It is a long question whether this fact points to a deep theoretical difference.

2. We may begin where Aristotle explicitly discusses Socrates, that is, in his moral and political writings.

B. There is some prima facie evidence to suggest that Aristotle was indeed indebted to Socrates and Plato, however much he may have departed from them in certain respects.

1. The four explicit references to Socrates in the *Ethics* suggest the seriousness with which Aristotle treated Socratic thought.

2. Will the method Aristotle uses in the *Politics* and *Nicomachean Ethics* owe some debt to Socrates?

3. Aristotle's discussion of Plato in the *Ethics* and *Politics*, and his critique of the *Laws* and *Republic,* is thorough but also intentionally limited, proceeding in the manner of a sober statesman rather than a philosopher.

III. The case for turning to study Aristotle today with serious intent must be made.

A. We may begin from a political reason to study Aristotle today.

1. The United States is a liberal democracy devoted to the protection of the individual's right to pursue happiness, but for that very reason it declines to tell us how best to exercise that right or in what happiness consists.

2. Citizens of a liberal democracy are therefore very much in need of a liberal education, an education devoted to exploring the human good and the character of human happiness.

3. Aristotle's moral and political thought has, as it were, no other purpose than the inquiry into the human good and human happiness, and is therefore relevant to us today.

B. It might be objected that Aristotle's thought is too much the product of a long-ago era to be applicable today. The proof will be in the pudding, but Aristotle did not simply parrot the dominant views of his day, as his list of the various virtues—some of which he notes were without names—makes clear.

IV. Before turning to the *Ethics*, we must remark on Aristotle's manner of writing.

- **A.** All three authors examined to this point—Aristophanes, Xenophon, and Plato—make special demands on us as readers.
- **B.** Like the writers studied thus far, Aristotle, too, makes specials demands on his readers.
  1. It might seem, since Aristotle wrote treatises and not plays or dialogues, that he speaks to us directly and in his own name.
  2. This appearance is not entirely accurate, for Aristotle, too, availed himself of many literary devices.
  3. Aristotle often will report the views of others without making it entirely clear where he himself stands.
  4. Aristotle's argument often develops gradually, and one apparent answer to a question will eventually be shown to be inadequate and so be retracted.
  5. Within the limits of a treatise, then, Aristotle's manner of writing proves to be "dialectical," that is, imitating his teacher's teacher.

Suggested Reading:

Chroust, *Aristotle: New Light on His Life and Some of His Lost Works.*

Klein, "Aristotle." In *Lectures and Essays.*

Lord, ed. "Introduction," in *Politics*.

Questions to Consider:

1. Why might Aristotle have felt freer than did either Socrates or Plato to discuss openly matters of natural science? Might he have in some way benefited from Plato's rhetorical achievement?
2. Why might Aristotle have fled Athens when charged with impiety, when Socrates chose to stay?

Lecture Twenty-Six

The Problem of Happiness—*Ethics* 1

Scope: This lecture is devoted to an analysis of the first book of the *Nicomachean Ethics*. This is the proper place to begin our study of Aristotle's political philosophy, above all because Book I offers a penetrating account of our longing for happiness, the final end of all our strivings; it speaks with great precision and great beauty of what we mean when we give voice to our deepest hope for happiness. It also offers a remarkable sketch of the serious alternatives available to us in our attempts to find happiness. The order of topics taken up in this lecture will mirror very closely the parts of Aristotle's own argument in Book I of the *Ethics*. We will turn first to his introductory discussion of happiness and the good; then follow out his exploration of the meaning of the term "happiness"; and then finally explore some of the questions that Aristotle's challenging account of happiness leaves for us to ponder, chief among them the sway that chance or fortune holds over our lives.

Outline

I. The *Nicomachean Ethics* is the best place to begin our study of Aristotle's moral and political thought.

- **A.** This is so most obviously because it serves as the introduction to the whole of his political philosophy, which he sets forth in the *Ethics* and *Politics* taken together.
- **B.** The first book of the *Ethics* falls into three clear parts.
  1. Chapters 1–3 concern the nature of human happiness as the object of our striving.
  2. Chapters 4–12 constitute Aristotle's sustained inquiry into what happiness might be.
  3. Chapter 13 effects the transition from happiness to virtue, the subject of the next five books.

II. "Happiness" is the name for that good we seek for its own sake and for no other reason.

- **A.** Aristotle begins his whole philosophy of human affairs by inquiring into the character of the good we seek.

B. All arts and activities point toward some good to be achieved, and it would seem that the art or activity that aims at the human good is politics.

   1. Yet this rousing endorsement of political life cannot be Aristotle's last word on the matter, in part because he argues that the answer we are given by our political community is not adequate.
   2. Aristotle stresses the power of the political community to shape our opinions about what the human good is.

III. Aristotle now turns to conduct a subtle inquiry into happiness and the identity of the human good.

A. He begins with a survey of opinions about happiness, be it pleasure, wealth, or honor.

1. All three possibilities are rejected in turn.
2. Particularly striking here is Aristotle's rejection of the attainment or practice of virtue as the good we seek.

B. Aristotle begins again in Chapter 7, with a more detailed exploration of the meaning of "happiness."

1. Happiness is that good, the possession of which we believe will leave us in need of nothing: It is the complete and self-sufficient good.
2. Aristotle's famous definition of "happiness" is that it is an activity of soul in accord with virtue, although he doesn't state yet which activity or, therefore, which virtue.
3. He also adds the important qualification that a happy life must be a complete one, not cut short by accident or misfortune.
4. Might the dedication to virtue somehow overcome the problem of accident or misfortune and so permit us to be happy in the full sense?

C. Aristotle gradually reveals that at least some of our hopes for happiness may not be realizable. Mustn't the awareness of our exposedness to chance cast a shadow on any possible happiness?

IV. Aristotle is most concerned to raise the fundamental questions concerning happiness. Chief among these is the question of the possibility of an afterlife and of watchful gods. Aristotle returns to the importance of virtue, moral virtue but also contemplative or theoretical virtue.

Suggested Reading:

Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book I, ed. Sachs.

Cooper, *Reason and Human Good in Aristotle.*

Tessitore, *Reading Aristotle's Ethics.*

Questions to Consider:

1. How well does the contemporary use of the word "happiness" accord with Aristotle's description of it in *Ethics,* Book I?

2. Why is Aristotle's introduction of the requirement that a happy life also be a "complete" one—for "one swallow does not make a spring"—prove to be of fundamental importance to his argument as a whole?

Lecture Twenty-Seven
Introduction to Moral Virtue—*Ethics* 2

Scope: This lecture is devoted to exploring the idea of moral virtue, chiefly in the second and third books of the *Nicomachean Ethics*. It is necessary, to begin with, to say a few words about the idea of virtue in general and its two subspecies in particular, moral and intellectual virtue, a division for which Aristotle himself is responsible. We then turn to consider what is probably the most famous part of Aristotle's ethical teaching, that of virtue understood as a mean between two extremes—courage, for example, being a mean between the extreme of cowardice on the one hand, and recklessness on the other. We conclude with some remarks on Aristotle's intriguing account of voluntary and involuntary actions, or what we might call moral responsibility.

Outline

I. Aristotle is credited with the discovery or invention of "moral virtue," in contrast to intellectual or contemplative virtue.

A. Plato spoke instead of vulgar or political virtue on the one hand, and philosophic or true virtue on the other.

B. By taking as seriously as he did the virtues of action or character, Aristotle was less immediately radical than Plato.

C. Aristotle's sketch of the two-part soul leaves ambiguous the rational status of moral virtue. Are the moral virtues themselves rational, or do they merely listen to reason?

D. Aristotle begins his discussion of moral virtue in Book II with an account of how moral virtue comes into being, before turning to discuss opinions about what moral virtue is.

1. Moral virtue comes into being through habit or habituation, not teaching, and although we have a natural capacity for moral virtue, the virtues are not simply natural.
2. The puzzling character of moral virtue is suggested by the two examples he gives here of the eye and the trained horse.
3. We acquire the virtues by performing the relevant virtuous activities; just as we are made able to lift weights by lifting weights, so early attention to correct habits is essential.

4. In response to the objection that to become virtuous, we must already be virtuous, Aristotle distinguishes three criteria that any truly morally virtuous action would have to meet: The act must be done knowingly, be chosen for its own sake, and be done "steadily," not on a whim.
5. Particularly important here is the demand that the action be done for its own sake—rather than for the happiness of the doer.

II. Aristotle's doctrine of moral virtue as a mean is justly famous.

- **A.** This doctrine bears on the complex question of how the morally virtuous know what to do in a given circumstance, and it suggests, at least, that moral virtue admits of precise analysis.
- **B.** It remains to be seen, however, whether it accomplishes all that it seems to.
- **C.** The mean falls between the excess and the deficiency, not as a mathematical mean but as one relative to us.
  1. The example of the athletic trainer hitting upon the mean suggests that the standard is the good of those who choose the mean: Is this true of moral virtue?
  2. What is the relevant activity in the case of moral virtue, comparable to athletic training?
- **D.** Aristotle's official definition of "virtue" is merely formal and runs the risk of being circular.

III. The final topic is whether we are rightly praised or blamed for our virtues, or whether we are responsible for our virtues and our vices.

- **A.** In contrast to Socrates, Aristotle's answer seems clearly to be that we are responsible for the condition of our characters and hence for our virtues and vices.
- **B.** Yet the path to this conclusion is surprisingly roundabout.
  1. That an action is done willingly proves not to be decisive.
  2. Key is whether, in deliberating about the means to the given end we seek, we can be held responsible.
  3. The third of the three objections to Aristotle's own position is probably the most important: Are we really responsible for the way the good, which we cannot but pursue, appears to us?

C. Aristotle notes that the question of moral responsibility is of interest to both private persons and to legislators, and for political purposes it is necessary to affirm the doctrine of moral responsibility.

Suggested Reading:

Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Books II–III.

Bostock, *Aristotle's Ethics.*

Broadie, *Ethics with Aristotle.*

Questions to Consider:

1. How well does the doctrine of the mean account for the various virtues? Can a case be made that the moral virtues, being difficult, are really extremes?
2. What is the import of the fact, noted by Aristotle, that moral responsibility is an important *political* question? How might this fact affect his stance toward such responsibility?

Lecture Twenty-Eight

The Principal Moral Virtues—*Ethics* 3–5

Scope: This lecture is devoted to exploring some of the most intriguing or perplexing aspects of the moral virtues. Aristotle maintains that there are eleven—and only eleven!—moral virtues, and we will begin by simply enumerating them, in the order in which Aristotle lists them, together with their corresponding vices. Our focus then shifts to three particular virtues: courage, magnanimity, and justice. Courage is the first moral virtue Aristotle treats, but it proves not to be the most impressive one: magnanimity, or "greatness of soul," and Justice both lay claim to that title, and each represents the peak of the tendencies inherent in moral virtue or in the concern for moral virtue: the greatness of one's own soul or its full development, and the correct dedication to the good of others, even at great cost to oneself.

Outline

I. We will first examine the eleven moral virtues, and their corresponding vices, as Aristotle presents them.

A. Aristotle maintains that there are eleven, and only eleven, moral virtues.

1. Courage, cowardice and recklessness.
2. Moderation, licentiousness and insensitivity.
3. Liberality, stinginess and profligacy.
4. Magnificence, vulgarity and shabbiness.
5. Magnanimity, vanity and smallness of soul.
6. Ambition, lack of ambition and too much ambition.
7. Gentleness, irascibility and unirascibility.
8. Truthfulness, bragging and irony.
9. Wittiness, buffoonery and boorishness.
10. Friendliness, obsequiousness and surliness.
11. Justice.

B. The list is striking both for what it includes and for what it excludes.

1. Aristotle includes wittiness and magnanimity, for example, but excludes things like toleration, compassion, and piety.

2. A sense of shame is explicitly not a virtue, for it is inappropriate for someone with a good nature who has been raised properly.
3. Aristotle does not simply parrot the views of his day, since he is compelled to coin names for some virtues and vices.
4. Aristotle's exposition of the virtues clearly follows an order.

II. We turn now to consider in more detail three of the moral virtues.

A. The first virtue that Aristotle treats is courage.

1. Aristotle here stresses that "What is noble?" is the end of the morally virtuous person's actions, and not, for example, his or her own good.
2. Courage is a somewhat complicated mean between two extremes.
3. Aristotle refuses to praise courage for its contribution to the political community, relying instead on its noble character as an end in itself.
4. Aristotle does note that one who is courageous may be aware of the nobility of his or her own soul and so may be "full of hope."

B. Magnanimity, or "greatness of soul," one of the two virtues concerned with honor, is probably the strangest virtue to us.

1. The magnanimous man claims great honors for himself, and deserves them.
2. Whereas the sense of deserving is barely hinted at in the case of courage, here it is the central focus.
3. Aristotle's famous description of the magnanimous man is quite intriguing—and perhaps slightly comic.

C. Aristotle's lengthy treatment of justice is complex, and our discussion of it will be preliminary.

1. The first five chapters are devoted to exploring the question, "What is justice?"
2. "Justice" in fact means both obedience to the law, or general justice, and gaining only one's share of what is good, or partial justice.
3. Partial or particular justice can be divided into distributive and corrective justice.
4. The goal of just action is attaining (one's share of) the good things, which proves to make justice as a mean somewhat problematic.

5. The purpose of the concluding sections of Book V is to lessen the moral indignation of those in a community who may feel that they have been done an injustice in some respect, not least by his doctrine of the just by nature.

Suggested Reading:

Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Books III–V.

Collins, *Aristotle and the Rediscovery of Citizenship.*

Salkever, *Finding the Mean: Theory and Practice in Aristotelian Political Philosophy.*

Questions to Consider:

1. If we were to sketch a list of the moral virtues most prized today, how would our list likely differ from Aristotle's?
2. Does magnanimity have a counterpart today? Is it present, but under a different name? Or is it a kind of excellence that we have lost sight of?

Lecture Twenty-Nine

Prudence, Continence, Pleasure—*Ethics* 6–7

Scope: This lecture is devoted to exploring the three main topics that appear in books VI and VII of the *Nicomachean Ethics*: the intellectual virtue that is prudence, or practical judgment (*phronesis*); the somewhat strange capacity called "continence" or "self-control"; and, finally, a lengthy discussion of pleasure. Prudence is the capacity to know what means are best to achieve a given end, namely morally virtuous action. Continence, by contrast, is not a virtue at all, neither moral nor intellectual, yet it may serve the cause of virtue: Continence is the capacity to withstand the pain of unsatisfied desire. As such, it bears a close resemblance to the moral virtue of moderation, for both are concerned with our response to pleasures. Accordingly, Aristotle turns to consider the case for pleasure as the proper goal of human life.

Outline

I. The first of the three topics taken up in books VI and VII is the intellectual virtue of prudence, or practical judgment.

- **A.** With Book VI, we turn from the moral virtues to another class of virtues, that of intellectual or contemplative virtue.
- **B.** Aristotle had prepared the discussion of prudence by noting, in Book II, that the morally virtuous person acts "in accord with right reason," without however explaining this.
  1. Aristotle now stresses the prudent or morally virtuous person's problem of knowing what the target of the mean is.
  2. Prudence is concerned with knowledge of things that can be other than what they are, and that bear on the well-being of our lives as a whole.
  3. Aristotle's account of precisely how prudence operates remains somewhat mysterious and mostly reproduces the lack of clarity characteristic of the morally virtuous themselves.
  4. Rather than knowledge, an opinion or a conviction might point to the target, thus making it truly unknowable.

II. Aristotle's intriguing account of continence occurs after the discussion of the moral virtues, which means that this capacity is not simply a moral one.

A. Continence is the capacity to withstand the pain of unsatisfied desire. Whereas the moderate person won't have the desires, the continent person will have them but be able to withstand them.

B. Much of Aristotle's discussion is given over to a related defect, incontinence.

1. Incontinence is the inability to withstand a given desire, or the phenomenon of "giving in to temptation."

2. Aristotle is particularly interested in the role knowledge or opinion may play in our giving in to temptation and, in this context, takes up Socrates's relevant argument in the *Protagoras*.

3. Aristotle's final position here comes very close to the Socratic position.

III. Aristotle turns, in the final chapters of Book VII, to a discussion of pleasure.

A. The fact that continence is needed suggests that we must at times resist some pleasures, but this is compatible with the view that pleasure is the greatest good for a human being, or hedonism. A reminder of Aristotle's discussion of pleasure thus far is useful.

B. Perhaps because he has left moral virtue behind, Aristotle can now engage in a more serious analysis of hedonism. The discussion of pleasure, here and in Book X, follows the discussion of moral virtue and surrounds the discussion of friendship in books VIII and IX.

C. Aristotle begins with a survey of opinions about pleasure, from the most hostile to the least.

1. Aristotle not only elaborates on the arguments against pleasure, he also responds to them: He therefore criticizes the critics of pleasure!

2. One such argument against pleasure is the theoretical one that the good we seek cannot be a process of coming into being but a completed state; since the experience of pleasure is such a process, it therefore cannot be the good.

3. Critics of pleasure also make moral arguments, for example, that pursuing pleasure is bestial or childish.

4. Aristotle also responds to the kind of argument made by Glaucon in the *Republic*, that the just man on the rack must nonetheless be happy.

D. By the end of Book VII, Aristotle has not permitted the critics of pleasure to win, though neither has he argued that pleasure is in fact the good we seek.

Suggested Reading:

Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Books VI–VII.

Sparshott, *Taking Life Seriously: A Study of the Argument of the Nicomachean Ethics.*

Urmson, *Aristotle's Ethics.*

Questions to Consider:

1. Is Socrates's account of what happens when we "give in to temptation," a convincing one? Does Aristotle prove to disagree with him in any important respect?
2. What considerations might account for Aristotle's nuanced, and changing, account of pleasure, from Book I to Book VII? Are we justified in calling Aristotle a hedonist?

Lecture Thirty

Friendship—*Ethics* 8–9

Scope: This lecture is devoted to exploring books VIII and IX of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, which are dedicated to a single topic: friendship. Our investigation of friendship will focus on three questions or problems. First, what are the various kinds of friendship according to Aristotle, and what constitutes the best or peak friendship? Second, why does Aristotle's inquiry into friendship suddenly take a distinctly political turn, and what does Aristotle's comparison of kinds of friendship with kinds of political regimes mean to teach us about both? Third and finally, we will consider a problem we have seen in Aristotle's presentation of moral virtue, a problem that returns in the discussion of friendship. We are clearly drawn toward both our own good or happiness on the one hand, and to nobility or right action for its own sake on the other. Just as we seek to be happy in and through friendship on the one hand, but also, in the best friendships, at least, we seek the good of the friend for the friend's sake, as Aristotle insists. How does Aristotle resolve this apparent tension between our aims in friendship?

Outline

I. Books VIII and IX of the *Ethics* are wholly devoted to a single topic, friendship.

- **A.** No other topic in the *Ethics* is treated at comparable length.
- **B.** The terminology here must be clarified, since the Greek term *philia* is a somewhat more plastic term than is "friend."
- **C.** Our discussion will focus on three questions or problems: What are the various kinds of friendship, including the peak? Why does Aristotle's discussion suddenly take a very political turn? And what precisely is the good aimed at in friendship?

II. Aristotle offers a careful typology of the different kinds of friendship.

- **A.** Aristotle notes that friendship either is, or is accompanied, by virtue.
    - **1.** Yet the friendship now under discussion is clearly different from the minor social virtue discussed in Book IV.

2. Since “virtue” is an ambiguous term in Aristotle, pointing to both intellectual and moral excellence, the virtue accompanying friendship, too, is ambiguous.
3. Friendship even seems to be superior to moral virtue, to justice in particular.

B. Friendship has a natural root, as seen in the relations between parents and children.

1. The three things that elicit friendly feelings are the good, the pleasant, and the useful.
2. The good with which we are most concerned seems linked to our own needs.

C. The peak of friendship will be between those who are themselves good or virtuous and wish for their friend’s good for his or her own sake.

1. Such friends will be roughly equal to one another.
2. The peak friendship seems to be both perfectly selfless, since each desires the other’s good, and perfectly selfish, since the true friend is a very great good for the one befriended.

III. Aristotle’s discussion of friendship takes an unexpectedly political turn, by comparing friendships to kinds of regimes.

A. Aristotle’s key point is that friendship, which has its first locus in the family, is more natural than any political association.

B. Aristotle offers here a catalogue of regime types, which he will repeat and modify in the *Politics*. The good regimes are kingship, aristocracy, and timocracy—based on a property qualification, followed by the perversions of each of these: tyranny, oligarchy, and, the least bad of the bad regimes, democracy.

C. Aristotle offers a parallel between the kinds of friendships and the kinds of regimes. Yet the parallel cannot be pushed too far, and private friendships seem more natural than the political associations.

IV. The discussion of friendship brings to a head the tension between the concern for one’s own good and the concern for the good of others that is present throughout the *Ethics*.

A. This difficulty appears in the form of the question whether we would wish for our friend the greatest good imaginable—to become a god.

1. The fulfillment of such a wish would destroy the friendship, and so we would not wish this for our friend: We want to possess the friend for ourselves.
2. We wish the good of a friend partly for the friend's own sake, but also partly for our own.

B. Aristotle probes this question of our concern for the good in his account of friendship with oneself.
1. Arguing dialectically, Aristotle maintains that we should love ourselves and so pursue the truly noble and good things for ourselves.
2. Precisely the desire to attain what is noble is a desire to possess for oneself the greatest good.

Suggested Reading:

Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Books VIII–IX.

Pangle, Lorraine Smith. *Aristotle and the Philosophy of Friendship.*

Questions to Consider:

1. What works of literature treat the tension between private friendship and political obligation?
2. What broader theoretical or philosophic purpose does Aristotle's surprisingly long and complex account of friendship serve? How does it contribute to the *Ethics* as a whole?

Lecture Thirty-One

Philosophy and the Good Life—*Ethics* 10

Scope: This lecture considers the 10th and final book of Aristotle's study of character and the good life, Book X of the *Nicomachean Ethics*. The 10th book has a very clear outline: The first five chapters are devoted to a second treatment of pleasure and, more precisely, of the question whether pleasure is the greatest good for a human being, the most pleasant life being the best life simply. The next three chapters—chapters 6, 7, and 8—can lay claim to being the peak or climax of the book as a whole, for they treat intellectual virtue, especially in its relation to happiness or the good life for a human being. Aristotle explicitly praises the activity of intellectual or contemplative virtue over that of moral virtue, and he goes so far as to suggest that the philosophic activity is the closest model we can follow to the gods themselves—for what other activity is worthy of gods? He even suggests that a kind of providence may attend those who philosophize—for what activity could be dearer to the gods than it?

Outline

I. The final book of the *Ethics*, Book X, treats two distinct themes, the status of pleasure in the good life and intellectual virtue.

II. Why does Aristotle think it necessary to turn again to pleasure?

- **A.** Here, too, Aristotle begins by introducing the two parties to the controversy concerning pleasure, the hedonists and the anti-hedonists.
  - **1.** He notes an important division within the anti-hedonists, between those who sincerely oppose pleasure and those who do so insincerely or rhetorically, for a practical purpose.
  - **2.** Aristotle criticizes only the insincere anti-hedonists, though the fault lies with the intellectual habits of the many.
- **B.** Eudoxus was a sincere hedonist, believed largely on account of his austere habits rather than his arguments.
  - **1.** There is such a thing as philosophical hedonism.
  - **2.** Any discussion of hedonism must speak to both moral and theoretical arguments.

C. Aristotle then offers in his own name an account of pleasure.

   1. The activity of each of the senses is naturally accompanied by pleasure when the sense is in the best condition and when that which it acts upon is in the best condition.

   2. Such natural pleasure may complete the activity, but is secondary to it or follows upon it.

   3. What is true of the senses is true also of thinking or contemplation.

   4. The good or best life will indeed be pleasant, but given the variety of pleasure, it is by itself an uncertain guide to the good life.

   5. How can we know which is the best human activity, whose natural pleasures will therefore also be the best?

III. Aristotle now argues that intellectual virtue is superior to moral virtue and hence that contemplation is superior to action.

A. Aristotle now returns to the standard of judging the various lives not seen since Book I: happiness.

   1. What activity do we pursue for its own sake, which is in this sense "self-sufficient," a more limited meaning than that seen in the discussion of self-sufficiency in Book I?

   2. But if self-sufficiency is the standard, why not spend one's life in play, which we pursue only for its own sake?

   3. The activity we are seeking must be serious and connected with virtue, an ambiguous term in Aristotle.

B. Aristotle argues for the superiority of theoretical or contemplative virtue to moral virtue.

   1. The intellect, and the things the intellect grasps, which cannot be other than what they are, are most excellent.

   2. We can engage in contemplation most continuously.

   3. The act of understanding is inherently pleasant.

   4. The contemplative activity is most marked by self-sufficiency, in the sense that it least of all needs external goods, including other human beings.

   5. In sharp contrast to the political life, the life of contemplative virtue requires leisure, the freedom from busyness.

C. Yet here, too, Aristotle introduces the same problem of chance or misfortune that had posed such difficulties in Book I.

   1. The human intellect or its perfection is the most divine thing in us.

2. The intellect is most “us.”
3. To strive to perfect the intellect is to strive to become immortal, insofar as that is possible.
4. Going together with this quasi-theological praise of the philosophic life is the toughest critique yet of the moral life.
5. Aristotle concludes by suggesting that the philosophic activity is closest to the activity characteristic of the god, and that there may even be a kind of providence attending the philosophers.

Suggested Reading:

Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book X, Chapters 1–8.

Kraut, *Aristotle on the Human Good.*

Questions to Consider:

1. Why might Aristotle have thought it necessary to present his inquiry into pleasure gradually, in two or three distinct stages?
2. How convincing do you find Aristotle’s arguments in favor of contemplative virtue and, hence, the philosophic life, arguments in which the entire *Ethics* may be said to culminate? Is his critique of the political life in particular convincing?

Lecture Thirty-Two

The Political Animal—*Politics* 1–2

Scope: Since Aristotle himself, at the end of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, makes the case for turning from the analysis of character to political life, we will follow his lead by turning from the *Ethics* to the *Politics*. This lecture will comprise three main parts: First, an examination of the case for precisely this turn to the examination of political life; second, a sketch of Aristotle's famous but also complex argument in the first book of the *Politics*, that human beings are "political animals" by nature; and third, a consideration of Aristotle's *Politics,* Book II, where his critique of various regimes have claimed to be the best, regimes both actual and imagined, including the regime of Plato's *Republic*.

Outline

I. In turning from the *Ethics* to the *Politics*, we must consider Aristotle's argument for making that turn.

- **A.** In contrast to what the sophists maintain, speeches or arguments have only a limited ability to persuade human beings, especially those without good natures, and so habituation and coercion are required.
  - **1.** If the family is the first place in which we acquire our moral habits, our families are in turn shaped by the character of the political community in which they are found.
  - **2.** For those serious about virtue, then, a consideration of political life is essential.
- **B.** Thus, the end of the *Nicomachean Ethics* prepares us for the beginning of the *Politics*.

II. The first book of the *Politics* is devoted to establishing the famous proposition that a human being is by nature a "political animal."

- **A.** By "political" Aristotle does not mean any specific kind of government, but that association, beyond the family or a grouping of families, dedicated to securing not only life but the good life for its members.

B. Thomas Hobbes attacked Aristotle's proposition directly because, to Hobbes, we are less political than bees or ants, who require no laws or agreements to build and maintain communities.

   1. The difference between Hobbes and Aristotle is traceable to their different understandings of "nature," be it the lowest common denominator or the rarely attained peak.

   2. For Aristotle, we are the political animals because we are the animals equipped with speech or reason: Reason permits us to form opinions about justice, which are the heart of any political community, properly speaking.

   3. Hobbes drew the necessary consequence of the premise that we are not naturally political, namely that there is nothing just or unjust by nature.

C. Aristotle's assertion of our naturally political character, while true, proves to be highly qualified or nuanced.

   1. The assertion that the city is natural is controversial also to those who claim, as many did in Aristotle's time, that the city is divine, its laws god-given.

   2. After arguing that the city is natural, Aristotle turns to examine the three kinds of rule characteristic of the household, the building block of the city: slave mastery, the art of acquisition (moneymaking), and spousal/parental rule.

   3. According to Aristotle's dialectical inquiry into slavery, the existing practice of slavery in the cities is unnatural, a fact that casts a shadow on the simple naturalness of the city.

   4. The same holds true of the practice of moneymaking in the cities: while the natural standard of acquisition is the correct one, it is impossible in political life as political life is and will be lived.

   5. If the city helps fulfill our natural human potential, it is not simply natural but necessarily relies on unnatural practices, a thought that is important when reading Aristotle's account of the "best regime": Can even the best community fulfill the highest of which human nature is capable?

III. In Book II of the *Politics*, Aristotle introduces the idea of the "regime" and surveys opinions about the best regime, actual or theoretical.

A. The idea of the "regime" or form of government shows that the preceding discussion of "the city" has been too abstract.

B. There are several important differences between Aristotle's political science and contemporary political science.

   1. Aristotle's political science is thoroughly evaluative or normative, concerned above all with the best regime.

   2. Aristotle begins his inquiry into the best regime in a Socratic manner, by surveying the most important opinions about it.

C. These opinions point to three actual regimes (Sparta, Crete, and Carthage) and three regimes "in speech" (Plato's *Republic,* Plato's *Laws*, and the innovations of Phaleus and Hippodamus). Aristotle is critical of each of these, and so the inquiry into the best regime must continue.

Suggested Reading:

Ambler, "Aristotle's Understanding of the Naturalness of the City." *Review of Politics* 47:163–85. 1985.

Aristotle, *Politics*, Books I–II, ed. Carnes Lord.

Questions to Consider:

1. Whom do you find more persuasive on the question of the naturalness of the political association and of our participation in it—Hobbes or Aristotle?
2. What is most striking about Aristotle's reading of Plato's *Republic*? In what ways is that reading persuasive, and in what ways limited or circumscribed?

Lecture Thirty-Three

Justice and the Common Good—*Politics* 3

Scope: Our main task today is to investigate the arguments of Book III of the *Politics*, which is probably the single most important book of the *Politics,* and certainly its most difficult. It has three clear parts: first, an inquiry into the citizen and citizenship; second, an analysis of the regime in its relation to justice and the common good; and third, an account of kingship in general and a certain kind of absolute kingship in particular. We will consider each of these in turn, but endeavor to show also how each fits together so as to form a sustained argument about the limits to the justice that can be found in any community.

Outline

I. Before turning to consider Book III of the *Politics*, a summary of the ground covered thus far is useful.

- **A.** Aristotle first makes the case for the need for a consideration of political life, growing out of the concern for virtue and the limits of speech or reason in cultivating it.
- **B.** Aristotle's concern with politics is from the very beginning normative, or concerned with better and worse.
- **C.** He also begins from the proposition that the city is by nature and we are by nature political animals.
  - **1.** Thomas Hobbes was to criticize this very argument centuries later.
  - **2.** In his day, Aristotle's argument flew in the face of those who claimed that the cities were due to the intervention of gods, not nature.
  - **3.** Aristotle's argument for the naturalness of the city proves to be complex, for the city depends on two arts or practices that prove to be quite unnatural, those of slavery and moneymaking.
  - **4.** The political life may be necessary to our natural development, but is it exhaustive of the highest possibilities of our nature?

II. The first five chapters of Book III are devoted to analyzing the idea of the citizen.

- **A.** Aristotle begins by wondering who or what is responsible for a given act after a revolution, for example. Is it the regime or the city or the nation?
    1. It is to address this question that Aristotle turns to consider who the citizen is, the much more political building block of the city than is the household.
    2. Aristotle's definition of the "citizen" takes into account not only who is a citizen—the functions of a citizen—but also who should be a citizen or who deserves to be.
    3. The regime determines the identity of the city or nation through time.
    4. Two considerations emerge, higher and lower, that a regime should consider when determining citizenship: the survival of the regime and its promotion of living well.
    5. Aristotle here raises the delicate question of whether the good citizen and the good human being are ever one and the same.
- **B.** Aristotle asserts that the virtue of the good citizen will coincide with the virtue of the good human being only in the case of the citizen of the best regime who also participates in rule.

III. The central chapters of Book III, on the common good, are both the most fundamental and most difficult.

- **A.** Aristotle offers his famous six-fold classification of regimes.
    1. There are two axes of this classification: first, the number of those in office—one, few, or many; and second, justice—do they look to the common good or to their own good?
    2. Just as the criterion of number proves to need clarification, so too does the stress on the common good, or justice.
- **B.** All regimes, even the defective ones, make a sincere appeal to justice or the common good, as they understand it.
    1. All agree that equals should have equal goods; those who are unequal should have unequal goods.
    2. The intense disagreements concern what the standard of adjudication is and who meets it.
    3. Aristotle himself shows that the proper standard is the contribution made to virtue, not wealth or freedom.

C. The single most puzzling feature of Aristotle's discussion is his refusal to endorse the justice of aristocracy. Instead, he considers it one of the defective regimes.
   1. One difficulty is that the virtuous are few, and to exclude the vast majority of inhabitants from political life threatens the existence of the community.
   2. In fact, the strongest case for the rule of democracy rests on its greater power or sheer numbers.
   3. The more troubling difficulty with aristocracy is that it, too, would be unlikely to yield power to one person of outstanding virtue, as it should do according to its own stated principle.
   4. Even the aristocrats, then, are more concerned with their own good than with impartial justice.

IV. Aristotle concludes Book III with a discussion of kingship, and especially the absolute kingship of the one best human being.

A. Aristotle explores the question of whether the rule of the one best human being, who in a sense clearly deserves to rule, could ever be just in the two-fold sense of preserving the community and giving to each his due.

B. Aristotle not only surprises us by not endorsing aristocracy, but he raises a doubt whether such absolute rule would be good for the king himself.

Suggested Reading:

Aristotle, *Politics*, Book III, ed. Carnes Lord.

Collins, *Aristotle and the Rediscovery of Citizenship.*

Questions to Consider:

1. What might Thrasymachus make of Aristotle's complex analysis of justice or the common good in Book III of the *Politics*?

2. How might Aristotle's critique of political justice prepare us for the turn to the best regime and, with it, the praise of the theoretical over the practical life?

Lecture Thirty-Four

Aristotle's Political Science—*Politics* 4–6

Scope: Books IV, V, and VI of Aristotle's *Politics* are sometimes referred to as the "practical" books, since they are most concerned with the actual practice of political life in general and with analyzing in particular the most common kinds of regime, oligarchies and democracies. For the time being, then, Aristotle abandons the standard or goal that has guided him in books II and III—the simply best regime—and looks instead to the variety of lesser kinds of communities that actual statesmen are most likely to encounter. In Book IV, Aristotle sketches the best practicable regime, which is based on the rule of the middle class. Book V is concerned with the causes of revolution and the ways to preserve regimes. And Book VI attempts to make the case, to democratic and oligarchic partisans, that moderation and the rule of law are goods they, too, should cherish.

Outline

I. Books IV, V, and VI of the *Politics* are sometimes referred to as the "practical" books and deal with the kinds of regimes most frequently encountered in actual political life.

II. Political science can speak of the best regime simply, the best regime in given circumstances, or the best regime possible in the most frequently encountered circumstances, and Aristotle is now concerned with this last category.

- **A.** Here again we see the inherently normative or evaluative character of Aristotle's political science.
- **B.** Aristotle never suggests that we should always aim to bring about the best regime simply but should soberly consider the given circumstances or limits to what can be accomplished.
- **C.** In contrast to the impression left by his classification of regimes in Book III, Aristotle here acknowledges the great variety of democratic and oligarchic regimes.
- **D.** The variety of regimes is traceable to the strength or weakness of the various elements within a community.

1. These are the farmers, manual artisans, marketers or salesmen, manual laborers, soldiers, the well-off, the magistrates, and the judiciary.
2. Missing from this list is attention to the gods, or the priesthood, and we will have to see how Aristotle treats this as a political institution.

E. There are four kinds of democracy and four kinds of oligarchy.

1. Like Thomas Jefferson, Aristotle prefers the moderate democracy based on the rule of farmers, who are too busy to meddle much in politics.
2. Similarly, Aristotle prefers the moderate oligarchy based on a modest property assessment, accompanied by the rule of law.
3. Aristotle prefers throughout the moderate form of regime governed by laws.

F. Aristotle also treats tyranny briefly and, at greater length, "polity," a mixed regime featuring elements of both democracy and oligarchy.

1. The moderate mixing of disparate elements points to one of Aristotle's key standards, that of the stability of a regime.
2. Aristotle notes, as if in passing, that the priesthood should not be considered a political office, a modest attempt on his part to separate the influence of belief in gods on political life.

III. The principal topics of Book V are the preservation and destruction of the various regimes.

A. Disputes about justice, above all, threaten the stability or longevity of regimes.

1. Aristotle lists three general causes of regime change and 11 specific causes.
2. Here we see Aristotle's hardnosed realism, so to speak, or his careful description of political life as it is.
3. Intriguing is his additional account of the role love affairs and marriage squabbles can play in political unrest, as well as convictions about the gods—sub-political and supra-political causes respectively.

B. Aristotle details how best to preserve both democracy and oligarchy.

1. Despite their being defective regimes, Aristotle prefers the political stability they may bring to the instability of idealistic revolution.

2. His general advice is that each should be willing to moderate the application of its own principle—freedom or wealth—in order to secure their own power.

C. Aristotle also advises kings and even tyrants on how to preserve their regimes.

1. Aristotle clearly held that there would always be tyrannies, and so his advice takes the form of urging them to calculate their own advantage and so to rule more moderately and gently than they otherwise might.
2. His example of the Spartan kingship suggests that the king ought to be willing to curtail his power in order to preserve it.

IV. The chief purpose of Book VI is to "sell" the foregoing advice to democrats and oligarchs.

A. Consider the case of the American Founding, which was in one sense a very democratic undertaking, but with strong elements of aristocracy, explicitly promoted (in *The Federalist Papers*) not on democratic but on republican grounds.

B. In Book VI, Aristotle repeats many of the points made in books IV and V, this time more from the partisans' point of view.

1. Hence, he speaks much more frequently now of justice, rather than calculations of stability.
2. Whereas earlier he had praised the rule of farmers, or the agrarian democracy, on the grounds that farmers have too little time to meddle in politics, he now praises this regime in terms of the nobler qualities of the farmers themselves.

Suggested Reading:

Aristotle, *Politics*, Books IV–VI, ed. Lord.

Lord, "Aristotle." In *History of Political Philosophy.*

Questions to Consider:

1. Where might the United States fall in Aristotle's classification of regimes? Is it an aristocracy, a democracy, or a "polity"?
2. Can Aristotle's willingness to give advice to tyrants be justified or defended?

Lecture Thirty-Five
The Best Regime—*Politics* 7–8

Scope: This lecture examines the final two books, VII and VIII, of Aristotle's *Politics*. Both are devoted exclusively to a discussion of the simply best regime or the regime in accord with what "one would pray for," a concept that has guided Aristotle's political science from the very beginning but becomes its focus only now. Our discussion will closely follow Aristotle's own: first, an inquiry into the good life that must be the goal of the best regime; second, a look at the "stuff," or the material, out of which the best regime will be formed; third, the nature of the regime itself or the form that "stuff" must take; and finally, the crucial topic of education in the best regime, the subject of all of Book VIII.

Outline

I. Aristotle's inquiry into the "best regime" begins with an examination of the best way of life, the goal of the best regime.

- **A.** Aristotle makes clear, at the beginning of the *Ethics* and *Politics*, the importance of what is good to moral-political thought and life.
  - **1.** Although Aristotle begins by bowing to the claim of every community to secure for its citizens the good life, he proves to reject that claim at face value.
  - **2.** This rejection of the political good as "the good" is bound to show up in his discussion of the best regime, of the peak of which political life is capable.
- **B.** The good life is the necessary target at which the best regime aims.
  - **1.** Aristotle here proceeds dialectically, entertaining the views of both democratic and oligarchic partisans.
  - **2.** The debate assumes that the political life is the best life, even as it makes clear that that assumption is not a necessary one.
  - **3.** Aristotle's suggestion that virtue produces happiness lacks the subtlety of his earlier discussions though, here too, he stresses the need to be independent of the things of fortune, or to imitate the god.
  - **4.** What is true of the best individual will be true of the best city, apparently, and so the virtuous city will be the happy one.

5. One must choose between the political and the philosophic lives, and he now praises the philosophic life in terms acceptable to politics: It, too, is an active way of life, and contemplation is very much an activity.
6. Yet can any city engage in contemplation in the manner of the best individual?

II. Aristotle now takes up the "stuff," or building blocks out of which the best regime will be built.

- **A.** Most important here is the consideration of the size of the best regime.
  1. The best regime must be able to be surveyed with the naked eye so that all may care for the virtue of all.
  2. The American Founders, following the French philosopher Montesquieu, argued that the new republic devoted to liberty can and must be on a vast scale.
  3. Whereas Aristotle's small best regime looks to the promotion of virtue as its end, the large modern republic looks to the protection of individual liberty.

III. Aristotle turns next to consider the regime itself, or the form that is to be imposed on the matter.

- **A.** Since virtue requires leisure for its cultivation, farmers cannot be citizens of the best regime.
- **B.** Priests must be "fifth and first" in the best regime, a nice statement of the ambiguity with which Aristotle treats them. The priesthood will be occupied only by the elderly, who are "worn out with age."
- **C.** Aristotle solves the problem of rule and succession by having the fathers rule while the sons are soldiers, the latter confident that the rule will fall to them as they mature.
- **D.** The stated end of the best regime also undergoes an important shift from virtue to leisure.
  1. "Leisure" for Aristotle is the most, not the least, serious part of our lives and is not equivalent to play.
  2. Leisure is the political counterpart to or stand-in for philosophy; it represents the closest the political community can come to philosophizing.

IV. The unifying theme of Book VIII is education, and here we come to understand better what Aristotle means by "leisure."

A. Just as leisure is a halfway house between virtue and philosophy, so the education sketched in Book VIII is between a simply political indoctrination on the one hand, and a truly philosophic education on the other.

B. The specific focus of this education is "music," that is, the concerns of the Muses. This education instills respect for things that are or appear to be ends in themselves and that do not issue in obviously useful things—let alone the increase in power or political prestige.

C. Although in the U.S., there is stress on technical or practical education, Aristotle's influence can be glimpsed in the persistence of liberal education and the cultivation of intellectual activities that are ends in themselves.

Suggested Reading:

Aristotle, *Politics*, Books VII–VIII, ed. Carnes Lord.

Bartlett, "The Limits of Enlightenment: Aristotle's *Politics*" in *The Idea of Enlightenment*.

Lord, *Education and Culture in the Political Thought of Aristotle*.

Questions to Consider:

1. What are the most important similarities and differences between the United States and the somewhat strange regime sketched in Books VII and VIII of the *Politics*?
2. It seems clear on reflection that the simply best way of life according to Aristotle is the (necessarily private) one of contemplative virtue. In what ways does his own "best regime" bow to this life or attempt, within the limits of the possible, to imitate it?

Lecture Thirty-Six

Concluding Reflections

Scope: The advent of Socrates of Athens marked a pivotal moment in the history of Western philosophy. It has been our task to begin to understand the innovation for which Socrates is responsible. Dissatisfied with the efforts of the pre-Socratics to discover the elemental causes of all things and so to disprove the claim that gods are responsible for the world, Socrates turned to a new conversational or dialectical examination of moral and political opinion—his characteristic activity. Plato and Xenophon vividly portrayed this characteristic, which so irked his fellow citizens that it brought about his execution. Plato is obviously an inheritor of the Socratic legacy, for he took great pains to portray his teacher. But Aristotle too owed a debt to Socrates inasmuch as he combined a comprehensive interest in nature with the painstaking analysis of moral and political opinion, in a manner reminiscent of his teacher's teacher. Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle together constitute one of the highest peaks of Western thought, one which richly repays the efforts needed to ascend it.

Outline

I. It will be helpful to begin with an overview of the ground covered thus far.

- **A.** Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle are of course among the giants of the history of philosophy in the West.
- **B.** Their influence and reputation are still accessible to us, despite the rebellion against them led by the great early modern philosophers.
- **C.** The still-relevant division between the pre-Socratic and Socratic varieties of philosophy suggests that the advent of Socrates was a pivotal moment.
- **D.** Socrates's two most immediate heirs are Plato and Aristotle.

II. What then was new or strange about Socrates?

- **A.** To answer this question, we can look first at the early accounts of Socrates and his teaching.

1. Aristophanes's *Clouds*, the earliest extant document concerning Socrates, presents someone at first unrecognizable in Plato and Xenophon.
2. Crucial to understanding this fact is Socrates's autobiographical remarks in Plato's *Phaedo*, where Socrates confesses to having been a natural philosopher but who grew dissatisfied with that approach to the problem of causality.
3. Perhaps then the Socrates we see in the *Clouds* is precisely the younger Socrates, when he was still a natural scientist.
4. Aristophanes criticizes Socrates for being dogmatic on the question of gods and for being remarkably reckless in his rhetoric.

B. These criticisms permit us to understand why Plato and Xenophon stressed what they did in their respective portraits of Socrates.

1. Both Xenophon and Plato, it is true, quietly admit Socrates's interest in natural science.
2. Yet Xenophon is concerned to make Socrates likable by making him appear helpful and quite ordinary.
3. Plato's Socrates is much cagier than Aristophanes's on the question of the existence of the gods.

C. If Socrates's interests continued to be philosophic, in what then consisted his novelty or innovation?

1. Socrates's deepest purpose for cross-examining his fellow citizens was to "refute the Oracle."
2. Socrates abandoned the attempt of his fellow scientist-philosophers to give a complete account of the cosmos and of how everything comes into and perishes by speaking of the fundamental elements (for example, atoms).
3. Socrates turned instead to "the speeches," or to the expression of the opinions about the most important things, above all about the gods as the fundamental causes in and of the world.
4. Socrates's innovation consists in the new theoretical importance of moral-political philosophy, as is clear in Plato's *Euthyphro* and Xenophon's *Oeconomicus*, for example.

D. The chief purpose of our examination of these difficult texts has been to raise the questions that Socrates thought fundamental, not to answer them.

III. Aristotle is properly seen as the heir to the Socratic-Platonic legacy.

A. On the surface, Aristotle seems very different from Socrates or Plato.

1. His manifest interest in natural science puts him closer to the Socrates of the *Clouds* than that of Plato or Xenophon.

2. It is possible that, thanks to the labors of Plato, Aristotle felt greater freedom to address questions of natural science openly.

3. Aristotle proves to share Socrates's very great interest in moral and political matters.

B. The closest point of contact between Aristotle and Socrates can be seen in the *Ethics* and *Politics*.

1. Aristotle's painstaking investigation and critique of moral virtue is akin to Socrates's own investigation of the virtues of his fellow citizens.

2. Both Aristotle and Socrates unambiguously praise the contemplative life over the life of political or moral virtue.

3. This conclusion is confirmed by the discussion of the "best regime" in the last two books of the *Politics*.

C. Aristotle's ceaseless inquiry into the world is modeled on Socrates's own and continues to serve us well as a model.

Suggested Reading:

Bruell, "On Plato's Political Philosophy" in *Review of Politics,* Vol. 56:2, 1994, pp. 261–282.

Strauss, "What is Political Philosophy?"

Questions to Consider:

1. Why might Aristotle have felt greater freedom to publish works dealing directly with natural science or philosophy than did Socrates or Plato? How might Plato's prior writings have earned for Aristotle such freedom?

2. What remains of the Socratic legacy today? Can it be glimpsed in the contemporary quarrels between "creationists" and "evolutionists"?

Timeline

All Dates are B.C.

c. 610	Birth of Anaximander of Miletus, said to have written the first philosophical treatise in prose.
c. 515	Birth of Parmenides of Elea, among the most important of the "pre-Socratic" philosophers.
c. 500	Birth of the philosopher Anaxagoras of Clazomenae; beginning of Old Comedy.
c. 493	Birth of the philosopher Empedocles of Sicily.
490	The Persians launch a naval attack against the Greek cities; Greek victory in the battle of Marathon.
c. 485	Birth of Protagoras of Abdera, a leading sophist.
c. 483	Birth of Gorgias of Leontini, the leading teacher of rhetoric of his day.
480	The Persians, under Xerxes, invade Greece again; Athenians are compelled to abandon their city and take to the seas; decisive Greek victory in the battle of Salamis.
479	Defeat of the Persian army at Plataea and of the Persian navy at Mycale; the construction of Athens's defensive walls (Long Walls) begins under the direction of Themistocles.
478	Establishment of the Delian League.
469	Birth of Socrates of Athens.
c. 460	Birth of Democritus, a philosopher and proponent of atomic theory.

c. 457	Birth of the comic playwright Aristophanes.
450	Pericles's leadership of the Athenian democracy begins; approximate date of the birth of Alcibiades.
447	Construction of the Parthenon begins.
445	The Long Walls are completed.
431	War of the Peloponnesians and Athenians begins, chronicled by Thucydides.
430	Annual invasions of Attica, the area surrounding Athens, begin; plague devastates Athens.
429	Death of Pericles; approximate year of the birth of Plato.
c. 428	Birth of Xenophon of Athens.
423	Performance of the first version of Aristophanes's Clouds at the City Dionysia.
421	Temporary cessation of the Peloponnesian War (the so-called "Peace of Nicias").
415	Athens launches the staggeringly ambitious, and ultimately catastrophic, invasion of Sicily.
412	Mass revolt of Athenian subjects and allies.
411	The Four Hundred seize power in Athens, and thus the democracy is overthrown.
404	The end of the Peloponnesian War, surrender of Athens, destruction of the Long Walls; Sparta installs a puppet

	regime in Athens, known as the Thirty Tyrants; date usually assigned for the beginning of Middle Comedy; death of Alcibiades, by assassination.
403	Restoration of democracy in Athens.
399	Trial, conviction, and execution of Socrates in Athens.
395–393	The rebuilding of the Long Walls in Athens.
c. 386	Plato founds the Academy in Athens.
c. 385	Death of Aristophanes.
c. 384	Birth of Aristotle.
382	Birth of Philip II of Macedon.
378	Second Athenian League established.
376	Death of Gorgias.
c. 354	Death of Xenophon.
351	The great orator Demosthenes of Athens begins his campaign warning of the dangers posed by Philip II of Macedon.
347	Death of Plato.
c. 339–168	Hellenistic Age: Greek empires of the Macedonian kings.
338	Battle of Chaeronea; Alexander the Great of Macedon, son of Philip II, visits Athens.
336	Assassination of Philip II.
335	Aristotle founds the Lyceum in Athens.
334	Alexander of Macedon begins his campaign to conquer Asia.

323 .... Death of Alexander the Great; Athens participates in a revolt against Macedonian rule.

322 .... Death of Aristotle.

Glossary

agathos: The Greek word usually translated as "good." According to Plato and Aristotle, all human beings seek to know and to attain "the good" (*to agathon*), accordingly the highest object of human striving. The great question of Platonic and Aristotelian philosophy may be said to be the identity or content of "the good."

apologia: Although the English word "apology" is obviously related to it, this Greek term means in the first place "defense speech." Thus Plato's *Apology of Socrates* (as well as Xenophon's *Apology of Socrates to the Jury*) has nothing whatever to do with Socrates's admission of guilt and expression of remorse for his life, but—quite to the contrary!—is a spirited and even defiant defense of his way of life.

City Dionysia: An important Athenian festival and theatrical competition in honor of the god Dionysus. The festival attracted spectators from all over Greece. Lyric choruses, tragedies, and comedies were all performed; Aristophanes's *Clouds* is said to have had its first performance at this festival.

continence: As he is presented by Plato and especially Xenophon, Socrates was remarkable for his capacity to resist the attractive pull of pleasure and the repulsive push of pain. This capacity seems to have been necessary to conduct the philosophic life to its fullest, and should not be confused with asceticism or austerity for its own sake.

daimonion: Plato defines a *daimon* (or *daemon*) as a divine being communicating between human beings and gods—in the *Symposium* Socrates identifies Eros as such a *daimon*—and a *daimonion* means literally a "little *daimon*," a "little divine thing." Socrates claimed to have had such a divine thing, in the form of a voice or sign, come to him from his youth to warn him away from any action likely to harm him. In the *Apology*, Socrates claimed that he was prevented from entering Athenian public life by his *daimonion.*

Delphic oracle: The most important prophetic oracle in Greek antiquity was located in the city of Delphi. Those who sought guidance from the god Apollo would come to his priestess, called the Pythia, who would give replies, often quite cryptic, while in a state of frenzy (a state the cause of which is much debated today). In the *Apology of Socrates*, Socrates claimed that a question posed by Chaerephon to the Pythia or Delphic oracle about

Socrates's wisdom prompted him to begin his notorious, and ultimately fatal, cross-examinations of his fellow citizens.

hermeneutics: The branch of philosophy devoted to examining the principles of the interpretation of texts. The term derives from the ancient Greek verb *hermeneuo*, meaning "to interpret or explain."

irony: Socrates became famous or notorious for his irony (Greek: *eironeia*), that is, the concealment of one's true thoughts and, in particular, of one's wisdom. Socrates's irony most often took the form of professions of utter ignorance of a given subject and the corresponding insistence that his interlocutor address it. In his *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle lists irony as a vice (but one characteristic of refined people, as distinguished from the vice of boasting, for example, characteristic of many; he gives only Socrates as an example of an ironist).

kalos/to kalon: An important term in Socrates's political philosophy that cannot be captured by a single English word; it can refer to physical beauty, moral beauty (i.e., nobility), or what is (as a result) admirable. According to Aristotle, the proper goal of moral action is "the noble" and not some other, tangible reward apart from the action itself.

kaloskagathos: The standard Greek term for an upstanding citizen of good character, usually translated "gentleman." The term is actually composed of two parts, the noble (*kalos*) and the good (*agathos*); the "gentleman," or person of moral decency, acts for the sake of what is noble and is himself good.

music: Literally, the things pertaining to or characteristic of the Muses, the daughters of Zeus. These include "music" in our sense, but also the arts more generally. A rough modern equivalent to the ancient Greek conception of music would be "culture."

nature: Arguably the central concept in ancient philosophy. Philosophy, or "the love of wisdom," is the attempt to replace opinions about the most important things with knowledge of them, and knowledge is possible only if the world (or aspects of it) is characterized by a fixed or necessary order not of human creation. "Nature" is the term used by the philosophers to designate such order or necessity. The Greek word (*phusis* or *physis*) is linked with the verb (*phuō*) meaning in the first place "to grow"; the things that grow have a necessity governing them that is independent of either human production or opinion. The philosopher's task is to discover the "natural necessities" governing the world.

New Comedy: Scholars divide ancient comedy into three historical epochs, Old, Middle, and New. The dates of New Comedy are somewhat controversial, but some hold that the death of the playwright Philemon, around 264 B.C., marks its conclusion.

nomos: A Greek term of fundamental importance to Socratic philosophy, it designates "law." *Nomos* is written law, as well as unwritten law in the form of custom or convention. *Nomos* must be distinguished from the natural, on the one hand, and the artificial (i.e., the product of art or *technē*) on the other.

oikos: The Greek word for "house" or "household." In conjunction with the term *nomos* ("law" or "custom"), it forms the term from which is derived the English word "economics," literally, the laws governing the household, or household management. The title of Xenophon's important dialogue *Oeconomicus* refers to the skilled economist or household manager.

Old Comedy: flourished over the course of the 5th century B.C.; Middle Comedy is usually placed in the period from 404 to 321 B.C. Aristophanes is held to be the greatest of the practitioners of Old Comedy.

parabasis: The technical term in Old Comedy for the stepping forward of the chorus to address the audience. In the *Clouds*, Aristophanes takes the unusual step of using parabasis to address the audience directly and in his own name.

peripateo: The Greek term for "walking about." Adherents of Aristotle's school were known as Peripatetics, perhaps because of their teacher's reported habit of strolling about while conversing.

philosophia: Literally, "love of wisdom," the Greek term designates not only an intellectual pursuit but an entire way of life, the chief purpose of which is the attainment of such knowledge as is available to the human mind.

phronesis: In Plato, the term, here translated as "prudence," is a general one referring to intellectual understanding or knowledge. The term came to have a more precise or narrow meaning in Aristotle, however, who meant by it the intellectual capacity needed to act virtuously; moral virtue supplies the end to which *phronesis*, or prudence, supplies the necessary knowledge—the knowledge, that is, of the acts appropriate to a given circumstance which would fulfill the demands of moral virtue.

polis: The independent political community characteristic of ancient Greece, typically ruled either democratically or oligarchically. Usually translated by "city" or "city-state," the *polis* must be distinguished from the nation or empire, for example.

regime: The most fundamental political category in Aristotle's political thought, the "regime" (Greek: *politeia*) refers to the organizing principle of a given kind of government, be it the rule of many, the few, or one, either for the sake of the common good or for the ruler's benefit alone. The title of Plato's *Republic* is actually *Politeia*, literally, "the Regime."

rhetoric: The art of persuasive speech, usually in political settings (courtrooms, assemblies, or congresses) and for political purposes. The most famous teacher of rhetoric in antiquity was Gorgias. In the Platonic dialogue named after that famous teacher, Socrates is critical of rhetoric and in fact denies that it is an art at all, but maintains that rhetoric is instead a mere "knack" that permits one to flatter one's listeners and so persuade them without teaching them.

Socratic dialectic: The most striking feature of the Platonic and Xenophontic dialogues that feature Socrates is his uncanny ability to elicit from his interlocutors their deepest and most guiding opinions—and to demonstrate that those opinions are often flawed and even self-contradictory. The term "dialectic" derives from the Greek verb for conversing (*dialegesthai*). Socrates's unique art of conversational analysis or scrutiny of the opinions of others was dubbed "dialectic."

sophist*:* Any number of itinerant teachers of subjects ranging from military tactics to mathematics to metaphysics. Often quite famous and very well paid, the sophists also attracted considerable controversy—could they really teach what they claimed to teach? Is what they claimed to teach worth learning? The sophists are treated seriously, but critically, in the pages of Plato.

technē: The root of our word "technology," the Greek term refers in the first place to any art or craft, and especially the handicrafts: weaving, shoemaking, carpentry, and the like. In Greek philosophy, the term is to be distinguished from nature, on the one hand, and law or convention (*nomos*) on the other.

theologia: Literally, an account or argument (*logos*) pertaining to a god (*theos*). The first known use of the term, from which our "theology" is of course derived, is found in Adeimantus's speech in Book II of the *Republic*.

thumos: In Plato's famous account of the three-part soul in the *Republic*, *thumos* (or *thymos*) is a kind of spirited anger, aroused especially when one's desire for something is thwarted. It is the task of the education of the guardians both to cultivate such anger, in the city's defense, and to curtail or channel it so that it will never be turned against the soldiers' fellow citizens.

timē: Meaning in the first place simply "honor," *timē* also refers to a political office. In Aristotle's classification of regimes, a "timocracy" is a system whereby offices are assigned on the basis of a property assessment, hence a timocracy is closely akin to an oligarchy.

virtue: The most common translation of the Greek word *arête*. It denotes a thing excellent of its kind, be it animate or inanimate; in Greek it is possible to speak of a "virtuous" human being, horse, or table. Aristotle in his *Nicomachean Ethics* identifies two kinds of virtue or excellence pertaining to human beings: excellence in character, or moral virtue, and excellence in understanding, or intellectual virtue.

Biographical Notes

Alcibiades: One of the most colorful and controversial figures of antiquity (c. 450–404 B.C.), Alcibiades was the son of an Athenian general and statesman and was raised by his uncle, Pericles, the leading democratic statesman of Athens. An extremely able military commander and leader in his own right, Alcibiades proved unable to curb his extravagant way of life and soon fell afoul of the democratic authorities in Athens during the fateful expedition, in the course of the Peloponnesian War, to subdue the island of Sicily. Alcibiades subsequently fled to Sparta, where his shrewd advice did considerable damage to Athens, and then on to Persia. He thus fought on three different sides in the course of a single war. That Alcibiades as a youth associated with Socrates caused some trouble for Socrates, a fact both Plato and Xenophon address.

Anaxagoras: Though not an Athenian by birth, Anaxagoras is said to have been the first philosopher to reside in Athens (c. 500–428 B.C.). He appears to have been a friend and teacher of Pericles, and only the political power of the latter was able to free Anaxagoras from his imprisonment on a charge of impiety. The details of his physics are uncertain, but he clearly falls among the "pre-Socratic" philosophers who attempted to give rational explanations of the cosmos and its observable motions.

Anaximander: One of the "pre-Socratic" philosophers (c. 610–540 B.C.), Anaximander is credited with having written the first philosophic treatise in prose (as distinguished from poetry). He reflected on the nature of the cosmos, its causes, the paths of the planets, and is said to have introduced the gnomon, or blade of the sundial, into Greece, and drawn the first map of the earth.

Apollo: Son of Zeus and Leto, Apollo was a Greek god most associated with music, archery, prophecy, medicine, and the tending of herds and flocks. Of his several oracular shrines—places where suppliants could receive from Apollo answers to important questions, through the agency of a priestess—the most important was located at Delphi.

Aristophanes: The greatest of the ancient Greek comic playwrights, Aristophanes was a native Athenian. His dates are uncertain, but he was probably born no earlier than 457 B.C. and probably died around 385 B.C. Eleven of his plays survive, and we know the titles of some thirty-two others. He called his *Clouds* the "wisest" of his plays, and its central character is none other than Socrates.

Aristotle: Called simply "the Philosopher" by the great medieval commentators, Aristotle of Stagira (384–322 B.C.) came to Athens as a young man to study with Plato, and there he remained until the latter's death in about 348–47 B.C. He subsequently founded his own school of philosophy and wrote many philosophical treatises of great profundity and astonishing variety.

Athena: Daughter of Zeus, Athena was chiefly associated with philosophy or wisdom, weaving and other crafts, and war; she was also the patron goddess of Athens. Although accounts of her birth differ, the most famous such account holds that she was born without a mother from the head of Zeus.

Cicero: Roman statesman, rhetorician, and philosopher, Cicero (106–43 B.C.) represents the rare combination of excellence in matters theoretical and practical or political. His writings are a rich source of information concerning the various philosophical schools of antiquity, including the Socratics.

Cyrus the Great: Founder of the Persian Empire, Cyrus is the subject of what is perhaps the first novel, Xenophon's *The Education of Cyrus*. He represents the peak of the political life, according to Xenophon, and so must be studied in conjunction with Socrates, Xenophon's teacher, as well as the peak of the philosophical way of life, to whom Xenophon devoted four writings.

Democritus: Born in Abdera around 460 B.C., Democritus is perhaps best known today as the proponent of atomism—the view, that is, that the world is made up of atoms and void. Though never mentioned by Plato, he is referred to repeatedly and respectfully by Aristotle.

Diogenes Laërtius: His dates are extremely uncertain, but he probably lived in the first half of the 3rd century A.D. He wrote a compendium of the lives and doctrines of the most famous philosophers—a fascinating, useful, but sometimes unreliable source.

Dionysus: According to the Greek poet Hesiod, Zeus and Semele (sometimes called Thyone) were the parents of the popular god Dionysus, whose concerns included wine and the theater.

Empedocles: Hailing from Sicily (c. 493–433 B.C.), Empedocles is among the pre-Socratics, and combined interests in philosophy, politics, and rhetoric. About 350 verses of his poem *On Nature* survive, the most important of his extant writings. He speaks of four eternal roots or

fundamental elements—fire, air, water, and earth—that combine, dissolve, and re-combine, under the force of Love and Strife, to produce the life and death of all mortal things.

Epimetheus: A Titan and brother to Prometheus, his name means "Afterthought." According to the version of the myth told by Protagoras in Plato's *Protagoras*, the bumbling Epimetheus was unfortunately entrusted with the care and provision of the first human beings, and it fell to Prometheus to try to undo the damage done us by Epimetheus's unintentional neglect of human beings.

Alfarabi: An Islamic philosopher of great learning and influence, Alfarabi (c. A.C. 872–951) was deeply immersed in the thought of both Plato and Aristotle and wrote important commentaries on each, in addition to philosophical, scientific, and medical treatises of his own. Alfarabi was sometimes called "the Second Teacher"—second only to Aristotle.

Gibbon, Edward: Best known for his monumental *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, Gibbon (1737–1794) was an important and influential man of letters whose broad learning and impressive prose style were (and are) greatly admired.

Gorgias: The most famous rhetorician or teacher of rhetoric in Greek antiquity (c. 483–376 B.C.). Very little remains of his written work—most notably a speech in praise of Helen and the *Defense of Palamedes*—but Plato presents him as an impressive, if flawed, figure in the dialogue that bears his name, the third longest of Plato's dialogues.

Heracles (Hercules): Son of Zeus and Alcmene, Heracles was a Greek god renowned for his great courage, strength, and wits. Characters in Plato will sometimes swear by Heracles, a strong or emphatic oath.

Heraclitus: His principal treatise, believed to have been written c. 500 B.C., survives in short but numerous fragments. In it he draws special attention to *logos* (speech, reason, discourse) as key to grasping the nature of the cosmos, and he speaks powerfully of the importance of self-knowledge or self-awareness to philosophy and hence to human life.

Hermann, Karl Friedrich: Born at Frankfurt-am-Main in 1804, Hermann was an immensely learned and influential scholar of classical antiquity, with special interests in Greek antiquities and ancient philosophy. He published *Geschichte und System der Platonischen Philosophie* [*History and System of Platonic Philosophy*] in 1839 and an edition of the *Platonic Dialogues* (6 vols., 1851–1853). He died in 1855.

Hesiod: One of the earliest and most influential epic poets in Greece, Hesiod is often coupled with Homer as having been responsible for teaching the Greeks about their gods. Three poems attributed to him have survived: the *Theogony*, an account of the origin and genealogies of the gods; the *Works and Days*, which among other things makes the argument, directed in the first place toward his wayward brother Perses, in favor of a life of hard work and dedication to justice; and the *Shield*, a short narrative poem concerning Heracles's fight with Cycnus.

Leucippus: Although his dates are uncertain, Leucippus is credited as the originator of atomic theory in the second half of the 5th century B.C. He is closely associated with his fellow atomist Democritus, two of whose works are sometimes attributed to Leucippus.

Meno: Born to a prominent family in Pharsalus in the region of Thessaly, Meno was appointed at a young age to a military command in the army that went on, in 401 B.C., to attempt to topple Artaxerxes II of Persia, under the direction of the latter's brother, Cyrus. This attempt failed badly, however, and where Xenophon attempted to rescue the Greek soldiers stranded in foreign and hostile territory, Meno betrayed them in the hopes of gaining the favor of the Persian king. He thus became known as one of the great political traitors and is excoriated accordingly by Xenophon in his *Anabasis*. That Plato named *the* dialogue on virtue after him demonstrates that Plato, too, is capable of a kind of irony.

Parmenides: Hailing from Elea, Parmenides was the most important member of the school of Eleatic philosophers. In a lengthy didactic poem of which large sections survive, Parmenides investigates the meaning of "to be" and maintains that whatever can be known must of necessity be and cannot admit of "non-being." Plato pays Parmenides the very great compliment of featuring him, in the dialogue named after him, in a lengthy conversation with the young Socrates, who appears to have learned from this great philosopher.

Pericles: An outstanding Athenian statesman (c. 495–429 B.C.) who led the democracy as it entered the Peloponnesian War. Pericles himself died shortly after the war's commencement in 431, and the governance of the city fell into the hands of less able, and less respected, men. His most famous speech as a public figure, a funeral oration for fallen soldiers, is recorded in Thucydides's *The War of the Peloponnesians and Athenians*. Pericles is noteworthy also as the uncle and guardian of Alcibiades.

Plato: The greatest of the students of Socrates and the one most responsible for our knowledge of Socrates, Plato of Athens (c. 429–347 B.C.) wrote thirty-five dialogues that have come down to us as his (though the authenticity of as many as ten of these has been doubted at one time or another). Plato himself never speaks in the dialogues, and he appears only once, as a member of the audience at Socrates's trial. After Socrates's death in 399, Plato founded his Academy outside the walls of Athens, where Aristotle was to become a devoted student.

Prometheus: A Titan and brother to Epimetheus, Prometheus is perhaps best known for his cleverness—his name means roughly "Forethought"—and for his concern for the human race. It is he who stole fire from the gods as a gift to mankind, such that they might make better use of the technical arts and so provide for themselves what the gods had failed to provide.

Protagoras: The most famous and successful sophist of antiquity, Protagoras of Abdera (dates uncertain; born c. 485 B.C.) openly practiced as a sophist for many decades. Plato devotes two dialogues to him and his thought: the *Protagoras*, which focuses on his moral teaching, and the *Theaetetus*, in which Socrates repeats, for the now-dead Protagoras, the sophist's famous doctrine that "man is the measure of all things," which amounts to a radical theoretical relativism: the world cannot be known, except as the world appears to each.

Schleiermacher, Friedrich: An immensely learned and influential theologian, Schleiermacher (1768–1834) is sometimes referred to as "the father of modern Protestant theology." Instrumental in developing modern textual criticism of the New Testament, Schleiermacher also applied his talents to the texts of Plato, translating many of the dialogues into German and writing introductions to them of great penetration and insight.

Shaftesbury, Third Earl of (Anthony Ashley Cooper): An important philosopher and writer, Shaftesbury (1671–1713) was both student and friend of the philosopher John Locke, and though he came to reject much of Locke's doctrine, including the idea of a social contract and hedonistic egoism, they remained on good terms. His best known work today is his *Characteristics of Men, Manner, Opinions, and Times* (first published in 1711), a fascinating compendium of his thoughts.

Socrates: Probably the most famous philosopher of all time, Socrates of Athens (469–399 B.C.) is still remembered today not only for his relentless questioning of himself and others, in an attempt to discover the truths most important to human life, but also for his trial, conviction, and execution at

the hands of his fellow Athenian citizens. Although he wrote nothing himself, two of his students, Xenophon and Plato, have left behind detailed accounts of their teacher's doings and sayings. Aristotle, too, speaks of Socrates with some frequency, though the latter had died before Aristotle could have met him.

Thrasymachus: Hailing from Chalcedon (flourished c. 430–400 B.C.), Thrasymachus was a sophist and rhetorician and is today best known for his remarkable appearance in the first book of Plato's *Republic*. There he maintains that justice is nothing other than the advantage of the politically stronger, dressed up in the garb of conventional respectability and meant to fool the weak.

Thucydides: An Athenian general and philosopher-historian, Thucydides (dates uncertain; born c. 460–455 B.C.) wrote a single work, the account of the war of the Peloponnesians and Athenians that raged from 431–404 B.C. The latter chapters of that work detail, among many other things, Alcibiades's entrance into Athenian, and indeed Greek and Persian, political affairs.

Whitehead, Alfred North: A British mathematician, logician, and philosopher, Whitehead (1861–1947) is best known for his work in logic and the philosophy of science. Together with Bertrand Russell, he wrote *Principia Mathematica*, an extremely influential three-volume work. From 1924 until 1937, he taught at Harvard University.

Xenophon: An Athenian military commander and student of Socrates, Xenophon (c. 428–354 B.C.) combined very great practical abilities with very great literary and theoretical gifts. Four of his writings are devoted to his teacher Socrates, the others to various political and historical topics.

Zeus: The chief of the Olympian gods, "father of gods and human beings," as Hesiod called him. Characters in Plato will often swear by Zeus when they wish to emphasize a point or assure their interlocutors of their sincerity.

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