**Lecture on Socrates: Notes**

**Socrates, 470/469—399 BCE, Plato, 428/7(424/403)—348/347 BCE, Aristotle, 384—322 BCE**

**Peloponnesian War between Sparta and Athens 431—404 BCE, especially 416—404: Athens loses.**

**Thirty Tyrants installed by Sparta. They kill 5% of Athens, but overthrown after 13 months.**

**Apologia = Eloquent defense of one’s values and life as in *Apologia Pro Vita Sua* by John Henry Newman, 1864, in England.**

**The Apology**

**Socrates brings up the old charges and stories told about him where he has been accused of being a sophist, a wise man, who speculates about the heavens and examines all things beneath the earth, things after death—But nobody can answer these questions.**

**The Sophists were teachers of rhetoric that charged money (but Socrates never does).**

**They taught pupils to argue from both points of view, pro and con (used today in law and debate).**

**They sell themselves to the highest bidder, making the worse case appear to be the better case (they are shysters) whereas Socrates searches for the true, better case.**

**They are agnostic about the gods and teach a moral relativism for each culture.**

**Aristophanes ridicules Socrates in *The Clouds,* teaching:**

**The gods do not exist.**

**Moral values are not fixed.**

**Make the worse case in argument appear to be the better case, thereby teaching a son verbal tricks so he can beat up his father—a comedy after all, played for laughs.**

**The New Charges:**

**Impiety against the gods and introducing new gods (and the political values of the state closely aligned with religious values).**

**Corruption of the youth because they imitated what he did in questioning their elders**

**Why these charges?**

**Charephon went to the Temple of Apollo, the god of wisdom, to ask the oracle at Delphi. “Is there any person wiser than Socrates?” The answer, “There is no one wiser.”**

**We remember that the oracle was always ambiguous as in the case of King Croesus who asked if he would win in going to war against Persia and King Cyrus the Great when the answer was, “If Croesus goes to war, he will destroy a great nation.” He did, his own nation.**

**So Socrates decides the oracle does not mean that he is wisest but that he should search for the wisest person so we could all learn from that person.**

**He goes to the leaders of the state. They get trapped by Socrates leading first one way and then another way so that the person contradicts himself. The youth loved laughing at the victims of Socrates.**

**He goes to the poets, Same results.**

**He goes to the artisans. Same results.**

**Socrates concludes:**

**Only the Divine is truly wise.**

**That is to say, human wisdom is worth little or nothing.**

***That is to say, Socrates is truly wise because he knows that he does not know whereas others are fools because they think they know but they do not know that they do not know.***

**Socrates’ Duty to the City-State and to the Divine**

**At Potidaea, Amphipolis, and Delium, Socrates obeyed his superiors and stayed true to the City State in battle.**

**Now, Socrates will stay true to the Divine who has appointed him to teach Athens about true wisdom and true virtue. He is the gadfly to Athens, understood as a noble steed, buzzing about the horse, telling Athens to be true to wisdom and virtue, not money and fame.**

**In doing so, Socrates is faithful to two moral principles that he does know, “that it is evil and base to do wrong (by violating one’s conscience) and to disobey my superior, whether he be man of god.” [Of course, there is the problem of what does one decide when these two principles conflict in their conclusions or there is conflict between a human superior and a divine superior!]**

**Socrates will obey Apollo, the god of wisdom. He will not cease from philosophy and from exhorting Athens to seek wisdom and virtue.**

**Socrates is judged guilty.**

**Meletus asks for the death penalty.**

**Socrates insults the jury:**

**By asking to be in the prytaneum, the house where the Olympic victor lived for one year with glory and honor. But Socrates asks for lifetime honor there.**

**By asking to pay a small fine, which is an insult to the jury, even though he later says that his friends can come up with a much larger penalty.**

**By refusing life without philosophy. He will not live a mere physical life because the unexamined life is not worth living.**

**Socrates is condemned to death by an even worse vote since he has insulted the jury.**

**Only an ignorant person could fear death because death is either an endless sleep or a life after death.**

**If endless sleep, there is nothing to be afraid of since it is a sound sleep without any dreams.**

**If life after death, Socrates can continue the best thing he has done in this life, which is to question the great heroes of Greek culture on true wisdom (Odysseus) and courage (Achilles).**

**This is a remarkable insight since he places the deepest continuity between the best in this life with the best in the afterlife. People often imagine afterlife as metaphorically filled with heavenly choirs and music precisely because music is one the best thing that we can do in this life!**

**Because of the insight of Socrates into the greatest importance of virtue and wisdom (and love) in our life, Socrates asks his friends to care for his sons and to correct them if they err, calling them back to true virtue, love, and wisdom.**

**“But now the time has come, and we must go hence: I to die and you to love. Whether life or death is better is known to God, and to God only.”**