Socrates in Athens
Learning Goals of this Section

• Beginnings of Philosophy
• Introduction to Plato’s Writings
• Difference between Substance and Method
• Substantive Themes: the theory of forms, doctrine of recollection, difference between knowledge and belief, nature of virtue, relationship between the citizen and the State
• Methodological Issues: defining one’s terms, the proper form of a definition, the nature of true argumentation, the value of elenchus, the hypothetical method
Ancient Greece and the Pre-Socratics
The Mediterranean
Ancient Greece
Miletus

Thales
(c. 624-545 BCE)
Thales: Everything is Water

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Thales: Everything is Water

• Explains Nature in terms of Nature.
Thales: Everything is Water

- Explains Nature in terms of Nature.
- Separates Reality from Appearance.
A Few Other Pre-Socratics

Xenophanes
(c.570-c.480 BCE)

If cattle and horses had hands ….
horses would draw the forms of the gods like horses,
and cattle like cattle.
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Heraclitus
(c.544-c.480 BCE)

You can’t step in the same river twice.

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Humans are the measure of all things.

Protagoras
(c.490-c.420 BCE)

Humans are the measure of all things.
Socrates and his Followers
Ancient Greece

Delphi
Athens
Sparta
Sources for the Historical Socrates

Xenophon (c.430-c.355 BCE)
Plato (427-347 BCE)
SOCRATES (469-399 BCE)
Aristotle (384-322 BCE)
Aristophanes (450-387 BCE)
The unexamined life is not worth living.

Socrates
(469-399 BCE)
What we are discussing is no small matter, but the manner in which we ought to conduct our lives.

“Let no non-geometers enter”

Plato’s Academy
Humans, by their nature, desire to know.
Alexander (356-323 BCE)
The Socratic Lineage

- 469 BCE
- 399
- 347
- 322
- 427
- 384
- 356
- 323
- 322

Timeline:
- 469 BCE
- 427
- 399
- 384
- 356
- 347
- 323
- 322
School of Athens

Raphael (1483-1520), Scuola di Atene (1509-1510)
School of Athens (detail)

Raphael (1483-1520), Scuola di Atene (1509-1510)
Plato’s Apology and the role of Philosophers
Socrates and his Accusers

**Earlier Accusers**
1. Socrates is “a student of all things in the sky and below the earth …”
2. “… who makes the worse argument appear the stronger” (18b-c).

**Current Accusers** (Meletus, Anytus, and Lycon)
1. “Socrates is guilty of corrupting the young…”
2. “… and of not believing in the gods in whom the city believes, but in other new divinities” (24b).
Socrates and the Sophists

1. Sophists presented themselves as teachers; Socrates claimed he knew nothing, so had nothing to teach.
2. Sophists took fees; Socrates did not.
3. Sophists traveled from city to city; Socrates stayed in Athens.
4. Sophists were skeptics; Socrates was skeptical.
5. Sophists practiced rhetoric; Socrates practiced dialectic.
1. Sophists presented themselves as teachers; Socrates claimed he knew nothing, so had nothing to teach.

We can teach you many practical things!

All I know is that I know nothing.
2. Sophists took fees; Socrates did not.

So what’s the big deal here? It’s how we feed ourselves…

I’m doing my duty to the gods; for this I will accept no money.
3. Sophists traveled from city to city; Socrates stayed in Athens.

What? We go wherever there are paying students…

I was attached to this city by the god, to rouse the Athenians from their sleep.

Protagoras
C.490-C.420 BCE

Gorgias
C.485-C.380 BCE

Socrates
469-399 BCE
4. Sophists were skeptics; Socrates was skeptical.

All is mere opinion; so let my opinion be the one that prevails!

There is a truth to be found, but it appears that you’ve not yet found it.

Skepetesthai: (Greek) let us examine it
5. Sophists practiced rhetoric; Socrates practiced dialectic.

I can persuade an audience to believe P one day, and not-P the next day. Such are my skills!

Together, through patient discussion, the two of us will seek the truth.
1. Discovering **intellectual error**: “They do not know what they think they know.”

2. Highlighting **moral error**: “They do not care that they do not know.”

3. The philosopher’s role: To serve society as a gadfly serves a horse.

4. Virtue is knowledge: To know the good is to desire the good.

5. The Philosopher as Post-Troglodyte.

6. Understanding as the source of human dignity.
The Oracle at Delphi

“Know thyself”
[γνῶθι σεαυτόν]
The Philosopher as Post-Troglodyte
Jean-Paul Sartre 
(1905-1980)

• French existentialist philosopher, playwright, novelist.
• Nobel Prize for Literature (1964), which he refused to accept.
• “Existence precedes essence” — slogan of existentialist philosophy.
The Spanish Civil War
(1936-39)

Pablo Picasso (1881-1973) painted *Guernica* (1937) in memory of the massacre, by aerial bombardment, of the Basque village of Guernica on April 27th, 1937 — a bombing practice carried out on behalf of General Franco by Hitler’s German air force. The city burned for three days; sixteen hundred people were killed.