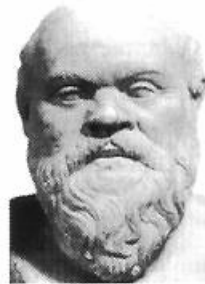


Socrates the Activist

Structure of the talk:

- Socrates: the evidence
- Intellectual climate
- The *Euthyphro*
- The *Apology*
- Theory and Practice
- Ordinary people
- What's the point?

Socrates



- Born 469 BC
- Died 399 (executed after trial)
- Wrote nothing
- Featured as character in fictional "Socratic Dialogues" written by his followers
- Plato's are the best
- "Early" dialogues + *Apology* (defence speech) are what I'm using

Trad Greek view of world

Gods (i) control physical world
(ii) lay down moral rules,
which include . . .

the 5 main virtues (*aretai*):



Justice, Piety, Courage, Self-control,
Wisdom

Dangerous new ideas

- Origins and workings of world explained as natural, rather than as god-caused (from c 600 BC)
- Moral and legal codes invented by men, not gods (from c 450 BC – held by some Sophists)

EUTHYPHRO DILEMMA

IS SOMETHING MORALLY RIGHT BECAUSE GOD COMMANDS IT, OR DOES GOD COMMAND IT BECAUSE IT IS MORALLY RIGHT?

Socrates and Euthyphro meet outside the Stoa Basileios

Definitions of "Piety"

- 1) What I'm doing now
- 2) What the gods favour
- 3) What all the gods favour
- 4) Subset of morality: tending to gods
- 5) Service to gods, as to a master
- 6) Paying the gods in exchange for what they give us



Features of dialogue

- Discussion, not exposition
- Arises out of practical problem
- Socrates asks expert for his opinion, which turns out to not to add up
- Ends in *aporia* (no agreement)



Rationale

- Oracle: Socrates is the wisest of them all
- Socrates: I'm very ignorant and stupid
- Mission 1: interrogate people to prove they are wiser than he is: fails, as they aren't
- Mission 2: interrogate people to show them they are not as wise as they think: still in progress

Two Similes

- Socrates is like a gadfly, goading a lazy horse (= people of Athens) into thinking about important things (*Apology*)



- Socrates is like a sting-ray, which numbs people into a state of confused helplessness (*Meno*)



Definitions 1

- Piety is what gods love: refuted by E's view of myths (*Euthyphro*)
- Courage is standing firm in battle: refuted by L's admission that you can fight bravely in retreat (*Laches*)
- Justice is giving back what you owe: refuted by mad friend example, which Cephalus accepts (*Republic*)

Definitions 2

Summary:

1. Definitions shown to be inconsistent with definer's other views
2. Belief system therefore incoherent

No one does wrong willingly

I steal the woman's watch . . .



- I just want it, and say so
- I deserve to have it, as I'm hard done by
- I just want it, but I justify my act by claiming to be hard done by

Socrates visits me in prison



1. You are putting possessions above your *psyche*, which is your real self and is harmed by bad deeds
2. Your reasoning is illogical, as I can prove
3. Either of the above, as appropriate

Targets

1. Those who mistakenly put their bodies and possessions above their *psyche* (= mind/soul)




2. Those who hold ill-thought-out views about moral concepts (and think they're wise)

Socrates and ordinary people

In Plato's dialogues, Socrates is always with other aristocratic men



BUT . . .

- He's central character in a comedy of 423 BC, which also parodies trendy beliefs of Sophists (*Clouds*, by Aristophanes)
- 
- In *Apology*, he assumes most of 501 jurors have heard him speak

Socrates on the Riots

1. He'd give no opinion of his own!
2. On hearing another's opinion, he'd challenge her to define the key words she was using
3. The opiner would be forced to contradict herself and realise she was confused

The unexamined life is not worth living

- Subject our beliefs to rigorous philosophical analysis
- When we find they aren't coherent, we think again!

Commencer à penser, c'est commencer d'être miné"

(Camus, *Le Mythe de Sisyphe*)

