

## Apology/ Plato

### I. Charges against Socrates:

- 1) He studies things in the heavens and below the earth.

This charge identifies S as a 'natural philosopher'

Early societies are called archaic or originary societies – in these societies people make sense of the world and themselves in terms of the gods and by telling stories about the gods. In this case, the gods are the powers who fashion and rule the world. Some scholars refer to these societies as “mytho-poetic.” Hesiod’s *Theogony* is an example of this sort of account in Greece. Homer’s the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* are also examples of this sort of narrative. However, beginning around 585BC, various Greek philosophers attempted to make sense of the world in terms of various elements and ‘mechanical’ principles. For example, Anaximenes thought that all things were made of air through expansion and condensation. Later, Democritus thought that all things were made from tiny particles of matter (atoms). Philosophy, thus, was perceived as arising in opposition to traditional religious beliefs.

- 2) He makes the worse argument into the stronger (better) argument.

This argument identified Socrates with the Sophists. The Sophists were a group of orators who had discovered techniques of persuasion that allowed them to get a group of people to adopt the point of view of the sophists even though the Sophists might be ignorant of the subject matter about which they were speaking. These individuals went from city to city and in particular trained young men who wanted to gain political power. The Sophists were very distrusted by many in Athens.

- 3) Socrates is guilty of corrupting the young

This charge is a consequence of the other charges.

- 4) Socrates does not believe in the gods of the city.

This charge largely follows from the first charge. Early societies were theocracies since political power derived from the gods and in many cases political leaders might regard themselves as divine (as did various Roman emperors) or as able to trace their ancestry back to the gods (as did the Greek aristocracy). Ancient people did not usually care what gods people believed in so long as they gave due honor to the gods of the city in which they lived. Not to do so amounted to a kind of treason since it undercut the authority and legitimacy of a particular regime. By being accused of being a natural philosopher, Socrates was also accused of not believing in the gods of the city as was Anaxagoras a generation earlier. He regarded the sun as a hot rock, thus implicitly denying that it was Apollo and thus, implicitly denying the legitimacy of those who claimed to rule Greek cities because they could trace their ancestry back to Apollo. As mentioned in class, the early Christians were persecuted by the Romans in part because they refused to make any acknowledgement of the emperor as divine.

Theocracy – a community in which political power derives from the gods or the community is ruled by the gods. Theos (god)/arche (rule). Democracy – demos (people) /arche (rule)

### II. Socrates’ examination of the Athenians:

The Oracle at Delphi had told Socrates’ friend Charephon that there was no one wiser in Athens than Socrates. Socrates was skeptical of this claim and set out to disprove the Oracle. So, examined three particular groups of in Athens whose members often claimed to be wise or have knowledge.

The first group was the politicians and those who were prominent in public affairs. Socrates found that when he examined them about their views they could not clearly define or defend their views. Socrates was particularly concerned about moral and political questions: the nature of justice, how we should live our lives, etc. Socrates found that these people simply did not know what they claimed they knew. The conversation in the dialogue between Socrates and Meletus gives an example of Socratic examination.

The second group was the poets. Poets in ancient Greece played a special role in Greek society in that their poems often set forth the lives of the gods and how people should live. The poets were often thought to be inspired by the muses. However, Socrates found that when he examined them about the meaning of their poems that they could not satisfy his inquiries. He seemed to think that their poetry was the result of a kind of divine inspiration but not knowledge. Note that Socrates does not claim that what the poets taught was false but rather that they did not have knowledge about what they taught.

The third group was the artisans/craftspeople. With the rise of mathematics and detailed forms of observation, a number of crafts/arts arose in ancient Greece, especially Athens: medicine, ship building, architecture, etc. These arts were based upon a principled, rational knowledge. Socrates was impressed with the sort of knowledge that artisans had of their particular craft. He was, however, critical of them because they thought that their technical knowledge gave them knowledge of moral and political matters—the sorts of areas that would make one wise. But he found that they had no more knowledge in these areas than the politicians.

After examining these various groups, Socrates came to the conclusion that the Oracle might be correct. For Socrates at least did not claim to know what he did not know. He knew he was ignorant, whereas those Athenians who thought themselves wise, were ignorant of their ignorance.

The important question we need to raise is: what counts as knowledge for Socrates. How could people convince Socrates that they knew what they were talking about. In many ways, our Phil 050 class is an investigation of these two issues for philosophy generally. What counts as knowledge? What sorts of things do people have to do to show that they have knowledge of something.

### III. Socratic ignorance:

Ignorance of :

Something in particular such as sewing, brain surgery, calculus

or

ignorance of one's ignorance: thinking that you know something but don't

Ignorance of something in particular can be remedied through learning.

Ignorance of ignorance prevents learning which is the one remedy for ignorance.

For Socrates and Plato: Knowledge is always true, while belief can be true or false.

Note: when we realize that something we claimed to truly believe is not true, we say that our belief was false and not true. We do not say that we did have a belief. But when we realize that something we claimed to know is not true, we say we didn't know it, not that our knowledge was false.

For Socrates, philosophy is the only real prevention for ignorance of ignorance since philosophy is exactly that inquiry that is grounded in radical questioning. For him, the unexamined life is not worth living. That is, unless one has attained genuine knowledge, then if one stops raising questions, one will be trapped in thinking that one knows when one doesn't. This stance undermines human rationality which is a quest for meaning and knowledge but, given our limitations in this life, can never fully acquire it. It is in this sense that Socrates claims that the unexamined life is not worth living. For in such a life either we are simply uninterested in examining our beliefs about ourselves and the world—accepting those views as uncritically true—or we cut short the examination by thinking that we know when we don't know. In either way, we are stuck in ignorance, since we refuse to acknowledge it—and prevented from escaping

it. Since the only path out of ignorance is through education. People do not submit themselves to or see the need for education about something if they think they have knowledge.

Finally, the Athenian reaction to philosophy and a spirit of inquiry was not confined to them. One can think of the sorts of beliefs that generated the Scopes' "Monkey Trial", various inquisitions and religious persecutions in the West, etc, to see similar reactions.

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Ralph Ellison, "Prologue" to *The Invisible Man*

Invisibility:

Eye of the body – visible light (perceptible, sensible)

Invisible man as ghost or phantasm – something not visible to the bodily eyes (something not perceptible). This is not the IM's invisibility

Eye of the mind – intellectual light (rational)

IM is invisible in this sense because people refuse to 'see' him – that is, to recognize him as a human being.

Whites view the IM as denigrated: 'nigger': a terms that denies the humanity of the invisible man but does not give him any 'respectable ontological status.' He doesn't belong to any other kind of living being. He's 'subhuman' – more like an animal than a human. This is true of all terms of denigration. This sort of denigration is not just cognitive but also affective—that is, it is expressive of utter contempt and hatred. This is evident when we look at the sorts of terms that express denigration: 'bitch,' 'faggot,' or 'gook.'

An apparent example of this sort of denigration from the current war in Iraq:

Jody Casey left the army five days ago and came straight to join the vets. The 29-year-old is no pacifist; he still firmly backs the military but says that he is speaking out in the hope of correcting many of the mistakes being made. What upset him the most about Iraq? "The total disregard for human life," he says, matter of factly...

Casey told us how, from the top down, there was little regard for the Iraqis, who were routinely called "hajjis", the Iraq equivalent of "gook". "They basically jam into your head: "This is hajji! This is hajji!" You totally take the human being out of it and make them into a video game."

It was a way of dehumanising the Iraqis? "I mean, yeah - if you start looking at them as humans, and stuff like that, then how are you going to kill them?"

The Guardian UK / 29 March 2006. "If You Start Looking at Them as Humans, Then How Are You Gonna Kill Them?" By Inigo Gilmore and Teresa Smith

(It is important to note that hajji is an Arabic term of respect for someone who has made the pilgrimage to Mecca.)

As we will see later, stigmatization is essentially different from stereotyping since (1) stereotypes are not necessarily negative and (2) they don't imply a denial of the humanity of those who are stereotyped. The terms that are used for denigration are often quite distinct from those used for stereotyping. Moreover, as we discussed briefly and will discuss in more detail later in the course: when denigration and stigmatization of a group has sufficient social support, it can lead to 'ghettoization,' marginalization,

slavery, and in extreme cases 'extermination' (e.g., genocide) since those who are stigmatized and denigrated are viewed as fundamentally dangerous and 'out of control': they are perceived as threatening the very possibility of a meaningful human life.

The IM is invisible and, accordingly, lives at the margins of the white world. But he also lives at the margins of the black world (Harlem in this case). As we saw in class, the IM criticizes blacks like Louis Armstrong for thinking that they gain visibility among whites in virtue of their success. The IM thinks that this is a counterfeit success since, at bottom, whites refuse to acknowledge the humanity of blacks. As is evident in the 'dream sequence' while listening to a Louis Armstrong tune: "What Did I Do To Be so Black and Blue?" he is alienated from blacks because no one will deal with the questions that he raises. In this sense, he is like Socrates. Both are driven out of their society by relentlessly asking questions that people are not willing to pursue.

Finally, the IM wants visibility. He lives in a dwelling that is illuminated with 4000 light bulbs. But these don't provide the visibility he desires -- recognition as a human -- since that is an intellectual visibility and not a perceptible visibility. Recall, by stealing the electricity from the light company (owned by Whites) there is a vicarious kind of visibility that he can get if caught and brought to trial: namely, he can only be accused of a crime if his freedom, moral responsibility and, thus, humanity is acknowledged.