

## Review

I. Heraclitus: Logos unifies the world of multiplicity. Senses "bad witnesses" to reality. Reason is better witness. Few people capable of reasoning.

II. Pythagoras, Parmenides and Zeno: Full-blown rationalism: "thought and being are the same."

Pythagoras: "everything is really numbers". The world is literally structured mathematically.

Parmenides: reality is Single/One. Multiplicity is illusion. Change is impossible. Senses are not just "bad witnesses", they are NO WITNESS AT ALL. Judge reality by REASON ALONE. Manifest image is irrelevant.

Zeno: reinforces Parmenides claim that change is impossible. Use of reductio ad absurdum argument (take common sense beliefs, assume they are consistent with each other, then derive contradictions from them).

## I. The Decline of Pericles, Rise of the Sophists (500-400 BCE)

Four Threads b/t 500 & 400 BCE:

a. Rise of democracy based on citizen councils (rather than aristocratic councils)

b. Rise in the influence of the Sophists in Athenian life

c. Warfare with encroaching Persian powers, Sparta in the south, and at the borders of the growing Athenian empire (notably in southwestern Italy).

1. Notably, a series of defeats late in the 5th century BCE, which raised doubts among Athenians both about human power to control its own destiny, and about the democratic form of government which had been developing there.

d. Continuing influence of the nature philosophers on Greek attempts to understand and explain the world, particularly in Athens.

Effects of these Threads:

a. attacks on common sense beliefs (such as those mounted by Parmenides and Zeno, but also like those mounted by Sophists against the nature philosophers, against conventional conceptions of justice, etc.).

Commonplace things were being questioned everywhere: in intellectual matters, politics, even with respect to the form of political and economic power in Athens and Greece generally. An unsettled time (post-Periclean Athens faced a major defeat at the hands of both Sicily and then Sparta, and consequent loss of economic influence and control over the affairs affecting the city-state).

b. Rise of relativism and scepticism, both with respect to knowledge about the world, and knowledge of human affairs, morals, just forms of government, etc.

Segue into Socrates (concerned over the effects of Ionian physical explanation on moral and political judgments and questions). If you can explain the world in nonmythological terms, this has unexpected effects. One's oath's to the god's seem to ring hollow (if the sun is not Apollo on his chariot but a hot rock flying through the void, what point is there in swearing by it?). Because later presocratic thinkers like Democritus take the view, encouraged by the Eleatic metaphysicians, that we do not contact reality

by our senses (he in fact tried to make change possible, contra Parmenides, by arguing that there was a kind of non-being which existed, namely, the Void, and that change was explained by the motion and altering relations of atoms in this Void), many Athenians felt their link to reliable knowledge about the world had been cut (since the chief alternative form of explanation, the mythopoetic [and their concomitant moral claims on us] had been undermined). It is understandable that Socrates was chiefly worried about the emergence of moral relativism and protagorean "man is the measure of all things" principles in political life.

Relativism: there is no difference between opinion and truth. One person's view is just as good as any other. Arguments and explanations are as good as they seem, and there is nothing besides how they seem to go on in distinguishing them. Persuasive bad arguments are = persuasive good arguments.

Scepticism: we lack the necessary equipment to distinguish truth from falsehood, about knowledge of the world, and particularly when it comes to knowledge about what is moral/just/good in the individual or in a society.

Looking at relativism and scepticism, using cases.

Consider whether you think you can distinguish between truth and opinion in the following cases, and whether you think the sceptic is right in doubting that you can know the difference:

$2+2=4$  (is  $2+2=5$  just as good?)

The sun is shining upon Boulder now. (is "It is overcast in Boulder now" just as good?)

Jason Potter is 46 years old today, 2/7/96. ("Jason Potter is 56 years old today, 2/7/96")

If (P's arg. that change is impossible) has true premises, the conclusion is true.

I was morally justified in divorcing my wife after her infidelity.

Murder is wrong.

Democracy is a better form of government than oligarchy (rule by aristocracy).

God exists.

God is love.

That for which there is no argument, there is no reason to believe.

What the Presocratics left for P & A & S:

problem of the one and the many

problem of what the world is made of

problem of what being is

problem of how change is possible

problem of how to judge what counts as a good explanation for natural phenomena

problem of how to judge what is moral (the gods offer no help)

problem of how to judge what the right political form is

generally: to clarify the new-found rational methods of thought, argument and explanation, and to show how they were compatible with justice in both individuals and the polis.

Review: Presocratic Period--

Problems they left which we have not discussed:

(e) how to judge what is moral/just/pious/virtuous (the gods offer no help and custom is set aside)

(f) how to judge what the right political form is (democracy, plutocracy, what?)

## II. Introduction to Socrates (470-399 BCE)

Background: trained as stonecutter, poor, did military service for Athens.

Spent days in the agora engaging in dialogue with whomever wished or whom he could trap.

Lived in an unsettled time. He rightly saw that if you could explain the world in nonmythological terms, then many customary (and salutary) beliefs and customs would be undermined. Protagorean relativism: "man is the measure of all things". Why? Parmenides, Zeno, Democritus and others said reality was not available to us through sense experience. Many concluded that, therefore, knowledge was not possible to acquire, only opinion. We were lost in the world of appearances, in the world of illusion presented to us by our senses. Also moral relativism: the view that there are no objective standards of good and bad, but that good and bad are relative to the culture. Fact does not entail moral truth.

Socrates appalled--convinced that Protagorean and moral relativism were utterly false views. His method of attack was what we now call dialectic: a process of talking together to inspect our beliefs, in the hopes that we can correct false beliefs by looking at their implications, and detecting bad arguments. This process would lead, he thought, to the development of better opinions and eventually true opinions.

End in view: not absolute knowledge (the sort envisioned by many presocratics), but something between that and mere opinion.

One important part of this method is called elenchus, which simply is the word for the process of cross-examination which you will see Socrates employ in these discussions.

Socratic discussions always began when he discovered someone who thought they knew the truth about something of ethical importance: what is piety, justice, the good? He then would ask them to enlighten him, and invariably he discovered that they did not, after all, know what they claimed to know. He then would seek out others who might know better. This earned him the reputation as a gadfly (and a royal

pain in the a\_\_, since he always exposed the pretensions of people to knowledge they lacked) and also contributed to his demise, no doubt.

The basic method: offer an hypothesis on a matter of ethical importance (what is piety?). Apply elenchus to this, i.e., consider whether this claim "harmonizes" with other things we think that are related to the things mentioned in the hypothesis. If it does not harmonize, alter the hypothesis seeking to avoid whatever caused previous failures.

On to the Euthyphro (see other printouts).