



We now will now turn to look at the life and thought of Socrates. It was he who developed the philosophical process of thought and who focused on matters of great concern to humans. He was concerned with the question: How do I live a Good Life? He was concerned with questions of knowledge, truth, beauty and Goodness. He was executed for his beliefs and virtues. An interesting story and a life that produced such a great impact on the world that it is true to say that what Socrates did changed the world. If Socrates had not lived as he did you and I would not be as we are today. In fact we probably would not exist at all. His life influenced others who in turn provided ideas that influenced events in very significant ways with repercussions that extended through time around the globe.

SOURCES:

- ✚ **Xenophon-** Memorabilia and the Symposium from whom we learn of the every day details and colorful aspects of Socrates life, his wife and children. He presents Socrates as a popular ethical teacher and a promoter of common sense morality who strove to make others good men and citizens.
- ✚ **Aristophanes-** whose play, Clouds, used the name of Socrates in a comedy. He made fun of his friend in a farce. He presented a burlesque figure of Socrates.
- ✚ **Aristotle-** who tells us that Socrates never taught about anything relating to the idea of the eternal forms which was later developed by Plato.

🌈 **Plato-** who gives us a very detailed description of the Socratic method of questioning, the dialectic process of Philosophy and Socrates concern for virtue and truth.

Key events in Socrates Lifetime

480bc Anaxagoras arrives in Athens-invited to set up a "school"

Anaxagoras was the thinker who taught that the universe was made up of Mind and Matter. Mind or NOUS set it all in motion in the beginning and has very little to do with it afterwards. The sun was a ball of fire and not a god and the moon was a rock reflecting light and not a goddess. Athens invited him to town and set him up so that he would teach others about his ideas. He had considerable reputation. The Athenians enjoyed and valued the life of the mind. After it became apparent that Anaxagoras was not supportive of Athenian traditions he was charged with being an atheist, harmful to Athens and he escaped before he could be punished (executed). See below 450BC

479bc Xerxes, king of Persia, defeated at Plataea

This event enabled the Greeks and the Athenians , in particular, to focus more on their cultural advancement.

472. Aeschylus' drama the Persians performed at Pericles request

In this play the rule of reason over violence is promoted.

470. SOCRATES is born of Antiochid tribe, ward of Alopece

His father was a successful stone cutter and his mother a mid-wife.

Socrates spent most of his life speaking with his fellow Athenians and anyone else who wished to speak with him. He spoke about matters of great importance to him, he sought after answers to important questions. He was not a Sophist as he never charged anyone for any lessons concerning anything. He did not claim to know the answers. He did not attempt to win contests with prizes. He was seriously interested in learning about truth, beauty, goodness and virtue. He entered the public spaces of Athens each day to speak with and question his fellows and pursue after wisdom to know the difference between what he knew and what he did not know.

454. Aeschylus 'Orestes trilogy performed

450. Anaxagoras leaves Athens, fearing punishment, Archelaus succeeds him

445. Athens enjoys a "30 years peace" with Sparta

Free of fear of the arch rival, Athens could devote more time and resources to its own development.

433. Chaerephon consults the Oracle on Delphos-

Chaerephon is a well-to-do Athenian who journeys to the Oracle of Apollo at Delphi in order to ask a question. The temples were places that the Greeks could ask for assistance. From some surviving descriptions of events at the temples it appears that at many temples young girls would serve as vehicles for the transmission of the words of the divinities. Now the expressions of the oracles were somewhat ambiguous. There was a reason for this. Today something is called "oracular" and by that is meant: an oral answer that has the tone of authority and may be somewhat obscure or ambiguous. The petitioner would call upon the priest of the temple for assistance(for a fee) . The question would be sent to the deity. The temple virgins might enter into a trance (some say induced epileptic fit) and they would make strange sounds while appearing possessed by the deity. The petitioner would ask assistance from the priest who would interpret what the deity was saying through the utterances of the virgins. Two examples of such oracular sayings and their ambiguous nature.

1. King of Lydia went to Delphos and asked the god "Should I go to war with Cyrus , king of Persia?" The oracle responded with "If Croesus goes to war with Cyrus he shall bring down a mighty kingdom." Well with that the king returned to his kingdom and took his army and invaded Persia. King Cyrus sent his army after them and defeated the Lydians. King Croesus escaped. He returned to Delphos to express his anger at the god for misleading him. The priest of the temple pointed out that the god did not mislead but spoke the truth. King Croesus did bring down a mighty kingdom. His own!
2. Chaerephon goes to Delphos and asks "Who is the wisest?" He is told: "There is no one wiser than Socrates". He returns to Athens with the answer and seeks Socrates. He informs Socrates of the answer of the god. Socrates thinks there must

be some mistake. He does not believe he is wise at all. He sets out to learn from those who are truly wise. Perhaps, the god meant for Socrates to seek wisdom (Philosophy). As Socrates questions all those who claim to know important matters and those who were reputed to be wise, he finds that they do not know what they claim to know. While Socrates who claims to know nothing appears to be quite wise in admitting that he does not know. Socrates thinks that perhaps the god has used Socrates to teach humans a lesson: that the highest wisdom they can achieve is to admit their ignorance.

Meanwhile, there were those in Athens who thought themselves to be quite wise. There were the Sophists who would win debates and public speaking events and were thought to be wise. If any of these reported wise men were to go to the Temple at Delphos to complain about the expression of the god the priest of the temple could calm them by pointing out that the god did NOT say that Socrates was the wisest of all, no, only that there was no one wiser than Socrates. Surely these wise and powerful and wealthy individuals were just as wise as Socrates, the god did not want to list them all. That was all.

Socrates seeks after the wise to learn what their wisdom is and how one could acquire it. He questions those who claim to have knowledge. In the ION Socrates is questioning someone who has won a prize for public speaking (recitation and who thinks that because he has memorized some lines on a subject that he really understands what it is all about. Socrates questions show that he doesn't.

432. Peloponnesian war breaks out again

431. Pericles Funeral oration given in Thucydides History

431-430. Battle of Potidaea- Socrates and Alcibiades participate

Socrates left the town limits of Athens only three times in his entire life. All three times was as a soldier to defend Athens! Socrates acts heroically. Alcibiades is a handsome young man and great warrior, a soldier of fortune, who enjoys himself a great deal.

424. Socrates serves as a "hoplite" at Delium .

423. Aristophanes play Clouds.

Was first produced in the drama festival in Athens—the City Dionysia—in 423 BC, where it placed third. In this play, the author, a friend of Socrates, uses his name in a comedy that criticizes the Sophists. Many who see the play do not realize that the character named “Socrates” in the play did not depict the actual thinking of Socrates. It was burlesque and farce; an exaggerated comic depiction.

422. Socrates serves as a hoplite at the battle of Amphipolis

421. Nominal peace of Nicias which lasts for 2 to 3 years

416-415? Agathon wins first drama prize and feast is held afterwards

Alcibiades is disgraced in a "religious scandal". He and his friends are thought to have mutilated the statues in Athens and that of the god , Mercury.

Alcibiades flees Athens and works for the Spartans! He is a soldier of fortune working for the arch enemy. He seduces the wife of the king of Sparta while he was away. Alcibiades fled to Persia where he became a leader in their army.

Euripedes play the Trojan Woman is performed in which the very idea of warfare is criticized by showing the price paid for it by innocent beings.

413. Athens enters into warfare in Sicily against Syracuse

Coupd’etat in Athens- "Oligarchy of the 400" takes control

Aristophanes play Lysistrata is performed, in which the comedian makes fun of war.

407. Alcibiades is recalled to Athens only to leave shortly thereafter in disgrace again

406. Trial of the ten Athenian generals en bloc for negligence at the battle of Arginisai

Socrates is head of the panel of Judges and is sole dissenter. The mob wanted to have a trial for ten generals all at the same time and then to execute them all for their crimes against their men, the enemy and Athens. Socrates is chief judge of the court on that day and he refuses the demands of the mob because it was against Athenian Law to put all ten on trial at once, lest the guilt of many cover over the innocence of even one of the others. Socrates grants separate trials

Sophocles and Euripedes die



Socrates in Athens speaking with Plato. (Painting by Raphael.)

404/3 Athens capitulates to Sparta

The brutal Spartan commander, Lysander, appoints a Commission of Thirty to rule over Athens. They become the Terror, the "Tyranny of the Thirty". The tyrant would order Athenians arrested and then execute them or exile them and take their property. If there were those who criticized the Thirty who had money, prestige or power, the Thirty would order them to take part in these seizures or face the wrath of the Thirty. Socrates knew the Thirty. Several had listened to Socrates in discussions as they were growing up. Socrates was critical of their actions and expressed those criticisms. The Thirty wished to silence his criticisms. On one occasion Socrates is ordered to go with Meletus and arrest Leon of Salamis. Socrates dissents in the arrest of Leon of Salamis by the order of Critias and the Thirty. Meletus is in the group that carries out the arrest order. If Socrates had gone along with the scheme, he would have "blood on his hands" after being involved with the work of the Thirty and thus, they thought he would be silent. Socrates refused to cooperate with their nefarious schemes

and evil deeds. They wished to silence him and so they issued an edict that no one could teach public speaking. Thus, they thought they would silence Socrates from speaking in public. When Socrates heard of this edict, even that it was intended to silence him, he thought that there must be something wrong with the edict for it would appear to ban anyone from speaking in the presence of another human being, because it is through observing others speak that we learn. He refused to obey what was a defective decree. It appears the Thirty were going to take action against Socrates when a revolution took place.

403. Order is restored by a group that institutes a Democracy

Anytus, Meletus and Lycon lead the party and movement.

Amnesty is declared. The laws are revised and codified.

Meletus prosecutes the poet Andocides for "impiety" –Anytus defends him.

399. Meletus accuses Socrates of "impiety" and "corrupting the young"

Socrates looks for the basis of morality in reasoning and not in the simple repetition of the examples set out in the tales of the gods and goddesses.

Socrates appears for trial and makes his defense, his Apology. Socrates is found guilty, sentenced to die. In prison he is invited to flee and live in exile but refuses to do, and is executed by drinking hemlock.

He offers arguments for the existence and immortality of the soul in the last hours of his life.