

## **Unit 3- The Good Life, Greek Ethics**

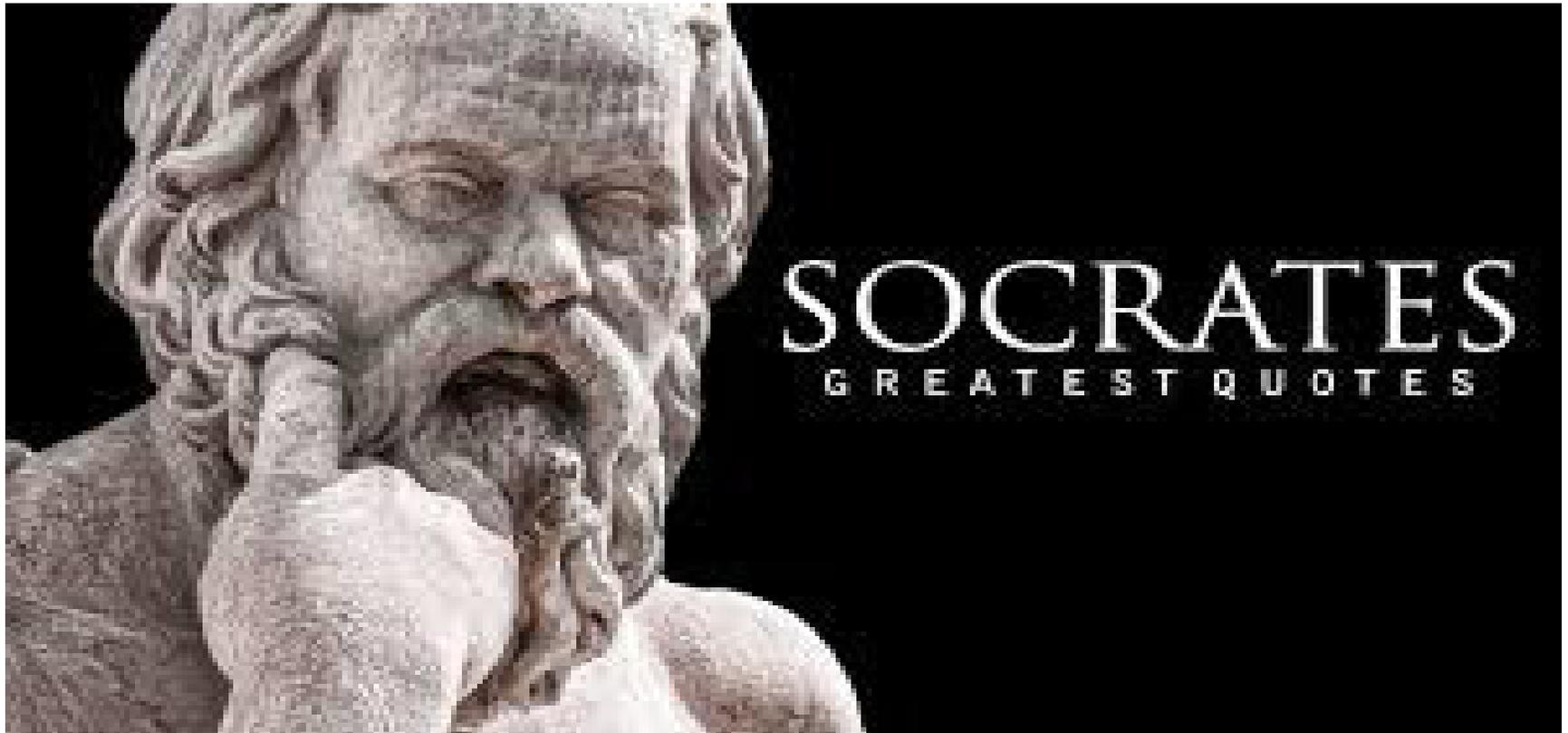
- a) Socratic Ethics- virtue is knowledge, can ethics be taught?**
- b) The four Virtues- Plato( in the context of Republic)**
- c) Ethics of Character- Aristotle**

# Greek Philosophers

- *Classical Western Philosophy Originated in ancient Greece. Greek philosophy is said to be divided into three periods which are as follows-*
- *Pre-Socratic- This period marks the rise of Greek philosophy. This period includes the Ionics, Xenophanes, Pythagoreans, Heraclitus, Eleatics and others*

- ***Sophists to Aristotle-*** This period includes both the contemporaries and predecessors of Socrates. This period includes **Socrates, Plato and Aristotle,**
- ***Post-Aristotelian-*** This period marks the decline of the national thought. The post-Aristotelian period marks the end of golden age of decay and dissolution. **This period includes the Stoics, the Epicureans and the Pyrrhonists.**

# Socrates



# Socrates Introduction

- Socrates' Life (470 - 399 B.C.)
- Socrates himself was born in Athens around 470 B.C. During the early part of his life, he seems to have followed in his father's footsteps, working as a sculptor.
- As for his education, it is said that he was a student of Anaxagoras, one of the famous early philosophers of Greece. At first he spent his time studying cosmology (or the study of the nature of reality) but later abandoned this field in order to devote himself almost exclusively to ethics.
- He came to believe that it was his mission to act as a kind of "gadfly" to the Athenian people, provoking them into recognizing their moral ignorance. Needless to say, his constant interrogation did not endear him to all of the citizens of Athens.

- While Socrates developed a following among many of the more idealistic young men of Athens--Plato, for example, was a devoted disciple of his--he soon incurred(experiencing something unpleasant) the wrath(extreme anger) of some of the most powerful men in the city.
- In 399 B.C. Socrates was put on trial for atheism (not believing in the gods of Athens) and corrupting the youth of the City (by teaching them to question everything).

# Socratic Method

- In Plato's early dialogues, the method of argumentation that Socrates uses is called the *elenchos* (eh-lenk-us) or examination.
- In these dialogues we rarely find Socrates lecturing or directly answering the questions; instead we find him asking questions of others in an attempt to lead them indirectly to the truth.
- He showed how argument, debate, and discussion could help men to understand difficult issues. Most of the issues he dealt with were only political on the surface. Underneath, they were moral questions about how life should be lived. Such is the influence of Socrates that philosophers before him are called the presocratic philosophers.

# Socratic Ethics

According to Socrates, virtue (high moral standard) is knowledge because:

- (1) all living things aim for their perceived good; and therefore
- (2) if anyone does not know what is good, he cannot do what is good because he will always aim for a mistaken target; but
- (3) if someone knows what is good, he will do what is good, because he will aim for what is good.

- Socratic theory of knowledge was not a theory put forward for its own sake but for practical ends. Socrates always made theory subservient(willing to obey others unquestionably) to practice.
- Socrates wanted to know what the concept of virtue is only in order to practice virtue in life.
- The major points of Socratic ethics are found in Plato's Apology . According to Socrates they are-

# 1. Tend thy soul

- Socrates said that care for wisdom and truth is the highest good. This is why I go about he says, persuading(do things with help of reason) old and young alike not to be concerned with money or your physical body, but first and foremost to care about improvement of soul.
- Not until you have persuade wisdom and truth or u think of money and fame or prestige or material comfort .
- Virtue does not come from money but from virtue comes money and everything from mankind(benefit for all human race) public or private.

## **2. It is better to suffer evil then to do evil**

If others harm us it is better to suffer evil than to do evil. For they harm our soul. The body is temporary, perishable and destructible. While soul is eternal, permanent and indestructible.

## **3. No person is truly happy unless he is virtuous**

Doing good action gives us a feeling of contentment (state of happiness and satisfaction) which will stay with us today and tomorrow but eternally virtue is the only way of happiness.

## **4. Virtue is its own reward**

- Doing good action itself is a reward. This is a deontological(action are good or bad on the clear set of rules) approach. Practice virtue he said not because it is right and not for any material reward but for its own sake.
- The central point of his ethical teaching was the identification of virtue with knowledge.

- Socrates believed that a man cannot act right unless he first knows what is right i.e. unless he knows the definition of right.
- Moral action is thus founded upon knowledge and must spring from it. But not only socrates thinks that if a man has no knowledge he cannot do wrong. All wrong doing arises from ignorance.

- If a man only knows what is right he must and will infallibly do what is right. No man says , socrates, “ intentionally does wrong”.
- He does wrong since he does not know the true concept of right, and being ignorant, thinks that what he is doing is good.

- If a man intentionally does wrong, said socrates then he is better than a man who does so unintentionally for the former has in him the essential condition of goodness while the latter lacking that knowledge, is hopeless.
- Finally, while acknowledging the idea “ virtue is knowledge” and emerging questions whether, it can be taught, then it will give rise to wisdom.

- But the problem is as socrates rightly point out, where does one find the right teacher of virtue?
- Here we draw certain conclusions that when it comes to knowledge, there cannot be extremes of good and bad knowledge, rather there are different shades as well as degrees of knowledge.
- The questions is how one finds scope for negotiations(reaching an agreement) and promotions of value based living.

- Yet, we admit virtue is good and the right guide is knowledge and true opinion – a principle which has soundness that stands firm not only just now but always.
- We talk of many virtues like temperance(control of your own behavior), prudence(discipline oneself), foresight(predictions of things happen in future) , kindness, benevolence etc.

- Socrates believed that all these particular virtues followed from one source, knowledge. So knowledge itself, that is to say wisdom the sole virtue and this includes all the others.
- Socrates believed that all the above mentioned virtues are different forms of one essence. Just as ornaments may be different but the metal is the same.
- To conclude, with the remark of winterband “ in socratic ethics happiness or wellbeing is necessary result of virtue.”