Introduction to Plato

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1. Plato's Life and the "Golden Age of Greece:"

Plato lived from ~428 to ~348 B.C.E. His was one of the wealthy and politically powerful Athenian families, and he was a student of Socrates (~470-399 B.C.E.). While Plato uses Socrates as the "protagonist" of many of his dialogues, we can not just assume that Plato's Socrates (the "character" in the dialogues we will read) takes the "positions" and makes the "claims" which were taken and made by the historical Socrates. At the least, there is likely a large degree of convergence for the earliest of Plato's dialogues. Before we read him, however, we should carefully consider their character at the time they were written. In his "Plato," Gilbert Ryle maintains that:

> no contemporary testimony tells us how Plato and the many other writers of dialogues published their compositions. Nor have scholars given much consideration to the matter. What follows is a hypothesis, based on a lot of little individually tenuous clues. There was, of course, no printing in ancient Greece. Compositions published in book form[1] were individually written by scribes. There is the evidence of silence from Plato, Isocrates, and others that in Plato's day there were no libraries. Very likely there were no bookshops displaying stocks of ready-made handwritten books. We do not hear of anyone browsing in such a bookshop until half a century after Plato's death. The number of individual collectors of books must have been very small. Reading books was a fairly rare thing. Inside the Academy itself, the young Aristotle seems to have acquired the nickname "Reader" because he was exceptional in being a voracious reader.
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> The normal mode of publishing a composition, whether in verse or prose, was oral delivery to an audience. Conjecturally, the compositions of dialogue writers, including Plato, Antisthenes, Xenophon, and Aristotle, were no exception. The public got to know a new dialogue by hearing the author recite it. Normally, Plato orally delivered the words of his dramatic Socrates. The dialogues were dramatic in form because they were composed for semi-dramatic recitation to lay and drama-loving audiences, consisting largely of young men. A dialogue had therefore to be short enough not to tax the endurance of its audience. The only two mammoth dialogues...must have been intended for special audiences that would reassemble time after time to hear the successive installments.[2]

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[1] Of course, there were no "books" at the time. Scrolls would have been what was the state of the art at the time and bound pages weren't invented for another 600 years. "By the end of antiquity, between the 2nd and 4th centuries, the scroll was replaced by the codex. The book was no longer a continuous roll, but a collection of sheets attached at the back. It became possible to access a precise point in the text directly. The codex is equally easy to rest on a table, which permits the reader to take notes while he or she is reading. The codex form improved with the separation of words, capital letters, and punctuation, which permitted silent reading. Tables of contents and indices facilitated direct access to information. This form was so effective that it is still the standard book form, over 1500 years after its appearance"—"The History of Books," *Wikipedia,* https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_books#Greece_and_Rome , accessed on 03/13/17.

[2] Gilbert Ryle, "Plato," in *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy* v. 5, ed. Paul Edwards (N.Y.: Macmillan, 1967), pp. 314-333, p. 315.

Clearly, we need to stand back from these works and consider the time in which they were written as we study them! I believe that Plato wrote his dialogues for a pedagogic purpose. In his *Orators and Philosophers: A History of the Idea of Liberal Education*, Bruce Kimball maintains that:

> many generations prior to the "pedagogical century," the Hellenic concept of education had been founded upon the pursuit of ***aretē***[3] (excellence or virtue) defined according to the code of valor of the Attic-Ionian aristocracy. Central to this program was the **recitation of Homeric epic poetry**, both to provide technical instruction in language and, more importantly, to inculcate the knightly mores and noble ethic of the culture. Upon the disintegration of this tradition with the rise of democracy in the fifth century B.C.E., three principal groups responded with programs of education to prepare the free citizens for their new role in governing society.
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> ...Gorgias, Protagoras, Prodicus, and Hippias, taught the skills of composing, delivering, and analyzing a speech....These individuals acquired the name "wise man" or "teacher" (*sophistēs*), for **they claimed to teach a kind of wisdom (*sophia*) or *aretē*** [virtue] **that was political: the ideal methods for making one's point and winning arguments, that is, for participating in the democratic city-state**....
>
> A different response to the cultural disintegration came from those associated with Plato...who, looking back to Socrates' never-ending quest for truth, regarded intellectual culture and philosophy as the ideal for the education of the citizen....**Relying upon the Socratic belief that knowledge leads directly to virtue, he translated Homeric *aretē* into the pursuit of highest knowledge through dialectic**....
>
> Teaching next to Plato and sharing his concern over the deterioration of Athenian mores was **Isocrates** (436-338), who offered a third response both in his school and in his writings—chiefly *Against the Sophists* and *Antidosis*. Though often identified with the sophists, he is more properly distinguished from that group, as Plato acknowledged. This is because **Isocrates criticized the sophists for their emphasis on rhetorical display and technique at the expense of character ideals while he adopted, with very little analysis, the noble values of the past—the traditional standards of virtue recognized in epical heroes**—as the *aretē* of his educational ideal. Isocrates thus extolled the orator who would live out the noble virtues and persuade the free citizen of the democratic city-state to adhere to them.[4]

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[3] In its "reference" section Dictionary.Com characterizes *arête* as follows:

> …in its basic sense…[it] means "goodness" "excellence", "virtue" of any kind. In its earliest appearance in Greek, this notion of excellence was bound up with the notion of the fulfillment of purpose or function; the act of living up to one's full potential.
>
> The Ancient Greeks applied the term to anything: for example, the excellence of a chimney, the excellence of a bull to be bred and the excellence of a man. The meaning of the word changes depending on what it describes, since everything has its own peculiar excellence; the *arête* of a man is different from the *arête* of a horse….
>
> By the fourth and fifth centuries BC, *arête* as applied to men had developed to include quieter virtues, such as… (justice)… and (self-restraint)….
>
> In Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, "*arête"* is used mainly to describe heroes and nobles and their mobile dexterity, with special reference to strength and courage, but it is not limited to this….The excellence of the gods generally included their power, but, in the *Odyssey* (13.42), the gods can grant excellence to a life, which is contextually understood to mean prosperity. See Arete - Wikipedia (accessed on 09/12/23).

[4] Bruce Kimball, *Orators and Philosophers: A History of the Idea of Liberal /Education* (expanded edition) (N.Y.: College Entrance Examination Board, 1995), pp. 16-18. Emphasis has been added to the passage.

To clarify the Greek history before Plato's time further, in his *Battling the Gods: Atheism In The Ancient World*, Tim Whitmarsh maintains that:

> it was…the very diversity of **archaic Greece** that was its characteristic feature. There was no national hub, no capital, no single, stable core radiating Hellenism outward. Around 1,200 separate Greek *poleis* have been identified for the period between 650 and 323 BC, each with its own customs, traditions, and mode of governance…There were of course regional powers, but no single state exerted influence over the entirety.[5]
>
> The Greeks devoted an extra ordinary amount of energy to keeping the gods happy. But there were close limits to the power of human clerics. The job of priests was to sacrifice, not to pronounce on ethical or spiritual issues. The idea of a Greek priest or priestess using his or her influence to sway public debates of (for example) the definition of marriage or the treatment of the poor was unthinkable. Priesthood was a role within the community, not a spiritual calling.[6]

Greece was, fundamentally, an honor-based society, and honor was generated—for humans and gods alike—through success in competition with others. It is no accident that sport is one of the Greeks' most enduring legacies, for competitiveness lay at the very heart of the Greek concept of (particularly male) honor. Individuals can increase their own standing in the public's eyes only by decreasing that of another.[7]

The Homeric conception of *arête* emphasizes the virtues of ***wealth, courage, honor, civic concern, friendship, prosperity, and "the law of the claw."*** Think of it as the core cultural conception from the time of Homer [~800-700 B.C.E.] to the time of Plato, but recognize there will be changes of emphasis and so forth through such a long period.

Of course, like his teacher Socrates, **Plato wanted to *transform* his society, but they both wanted to do this through an educational activity. Many of their contemporaries did not understand this.** Evidence of the views of the historical Socrates comes from other writers than Plato, and we have good reason to believe that the picture presented in the early dialogues is a largely faithful portrait of the views of the historical Socrates—though of course (given the student-teacher relationship, and the fact that they share views which many would consider controversial, perverse, or wrong), not everyone would share Plato's veneration of Socrates. The Greek playwright Aristophanes provides a humorous characterization of Socrates in his play *Clouds*—staged in Athens at the Dionysian Festival in 423 B.C.E. where it took third place. In his "General Introduction" to Peter Meineck's translation of Aristophanes' *Clouds, Wasps, and Birds*, Ian Storey provides an excellent account of the role and production of comedies in ancient Athens at the time of Socrates. He notes that productions like that of *Clouds* were:

> ...state-sponsored productions. Especially at the City Dionysian [the festival of Athens for the deity Dionysus] the role of the city loomed large—no public business was transacted, the ten generals would enter formally and pour the opening libation, the *phoros* ("tribute") from the

[5] Tim Whitmarsh, *Battling the Gods: Atheism In The Ancient World* (NY: Knopf, 2015), pp. 19-20.
[6] *Ibid*., pp. 21-22.
[7] *Ibid*., p. 44.

> [other Greek] cities would be paraded formally through the theatre, benefactors of the city would be honored, and those whose fathers had died in battle would receive a suit of armor from the city when they came of age. Theatres in ancient Greece were large—that at Athens is estimated to have held fifteen thousand to seventeen thousand spectators—and thus the tragedies and comedies played to the state as audience. Drama was not the province of a few in a covered theatre; it was for the people as a larger body. We need to imagine a combination of the faithful gathered in Vatican Square on Easter Day, the crowds that fill the Mall on the Fourth of July, and the audiences on the opening night of a great summer blockbuster. Drama was intensely alive and intensely important to the people of Athens.[8]

The play revolves around a wealthy farmer, Strepsiades, whose has been placed deeply in debt by his son, Pheidippides. Strepsiades formulates the plan of going to Socrates who is portrayed as a Sophist (Aristophanes places the play in a school he calls the Socratic "Pondertorium") to learn the techniques of "The Inferior Argument" so that he can argue his way out of his debts. In the play Strepsiades meets a Chorus of "new deities" who preside over "new learning," and while he has trouble remembering anything (as he is an old man), his study of the "Inferior Argument" allows him to avoid his debts. The play shows that the consequences of the "new learning" are terrible, at the end the Chorus (the Clouds) reveals itself to be champions of the traditional deities, and Strepsiades burns down the Pondertorium. In his introduction to the play, Storey contends that Strepsiades:

> ...is the ideal sort to "take the piss" out of sophistic pretensions. The teaching scene...shows Aristophanes at his comic best where the less-than-bright Strepsiades foils every attempt by Socrates to teach him anything. Yet the scene depends on stretching the spectator's reactions in two opposite directions: he wants to be a sophos like Socrates...and at the same times wants to see the sophos taken down a rung or two. We admire Strepsiades' low cunning and desire not to pay his debts, but at the same time we wince at his essential dishonesty and insistence at learning the Inferior Argument.[9]

While scholars disagree about Aristophanes' "purpose" in the play, I side with Storey's view that his comic use of Socrates is meant to contain "more than a hint of appreciation for Socrates"[10] and for the "new learning," while portraying the Sophists in a rather bad light. Storey refers to a passage in Plutarch which "...records Socrates' alleged reaction to *Clouds*, "I feel that I am being made fun of by friends at a great party"....This may be how the joke was intended to be taken."[11]

The Athens of Plato's day was one of the most cultured and also one of the most politically and economically powerful of the City States which were the dominant form of political organization at the time in the West. In 408, however, Sparta (another powerful Greek city state) defeated Athens in a major battle, and this struck deep in the Athenian psyche. In 404, with the

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[8] Ian Storey, "General Introduction," in *Aristophanes 1: Clouds, Wasps, and Birds*, trans. Peter Meineck (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1998), pp. vii-xxxv, pp. xx-xxi. Cf., pp. xviii-xxxvi for Storey's full account of such productions.
[9] *Ibid*., pp. 2-7, p. 3.
[10] *Ibid*., p. 5.
[11] *Ibid*., p. 6.

aid of the Spartans, powerful oligarchs in Athens overthrew the political "democracy" and established rule by a group of thirty aristocrats (referred to as the "Thirty Tyrants" by the subsequent democracy) in power. They had a bloody and turbulent one-year rule. Two members of Plato's extended family were in this group. In 399 B.C.E., after the reinstitution of the democracy, Socrates was brought to trial (we learn more of this in the *Apology*) and condemned to die. After his death, Plato and some of his friends left Athens and traveled to Italy and Egypt (note that you can't think of the current political entities here any more than you can when you speak of "Ancient Greece") to continue their studies and learn more about other philosophers. Plato then returned to Athens where he founded a school (The Academy) on family land *about a mile outside the City walls*. There Plato taught philosophy for the rest of his life. He made several trips to Syracuse (another of the City States) at the request of the Regent and ruler, in an attempt to teach the ruler philosophy, but these efforts are not successful. Plato left his Academy to his sister's son, Speusippus, upon his death, and The Academy continued to exist as a center of study and philosophic teaching and learning until 529 C.E., when the Christian Emperor Justinian had it closed because it was a pagan institution. Founded in 387 B.C.E., the Academy lasted for 916 years![12] While many refer to the Athens of Plato's day as being in its "Golden Age," Plato would disagree--he thinks that civilization is falling apart—in the best of times there is no impetus to ask "What is right?" or "How should things be?" Plato has a passion for excellence, and he is a great fan of permanence and hierarchy. His "world-view" is characterized by an aristocrat's disdain for "the many."

2. Plato's faith in reason: man[13] is a rational animal:

Many Greek thinkers of Plato's era "began" the "development" of the now-common view of a *cosmos* (that is, the view that there is a rational, ordered character to reality—a *logos*—that what happens can be conceived of as happening according to a rational plan [laws of nature]).[14] This view is opposed to the then common world-view (which held that any putative plan would be inadequate, since there are unpredictable [or chance] acts [of the various deities] which do not [or at least, do not necessarily] follow any detailed or specific overall plan). The reception which Socrates receives in court, and some of the ancient portrayals of the thinkers

[12] If we were to conceive of it as a "university"—one might claim it is, the longest lasting Western one so far. This statement would be true until 2036 when the University of Bologna, which was founded in 1119 C.E. would take the crown. The medical school at Salerno is even older—it was founded in 850 C.E., but it was not a full university (the current one was incorporated, in fact, in 1970 C.E.). Bologna is generally considered the first "European" university. Daniel Del Castillo notes that al-Azhar University in Cairo was founded by the Fatimids (followers of Fatima, the daughter of the prophet Muhammad) in 970 C.E. and continues unto today—*cf.*, Daniel Del Castillo, "A 1,000-Year-Old University Takes on A New and Troubling Role," *The Chronicle of Higher Education* v. 47 (May 11, 2001), pp. A 47-48, p. A 47. Scholars do note that the site Plato founded was destroyed in 86 B.C.E., and while Platonic thought and teaching continued in Athens it was not until about 410 C.E. that a formal fixed location of the Academy is clearly established by philosophers who stylized themselves as the successors. Moreover it is not clear that the Academy always taught the breadth of topics to make it clearly a contender for university status. Whichever way one conceives of this, however, Plato clearly established a long-lived and significant educational institution.

[13] The question of who is covered by such a statement is a serious one. It is often said that 'man' in such contexts is meant to include all human beings—that it is used "generically" to cover both men and women. This question will be addressed more carefully as we proceed.

[14] I refer here to a broad period from Thales, who is widely regarded as the founder of the Ionian school of natural philosophy in the 580's B.C.E. up to Socrates and Plato in the 400s-350s B.C.E.

of the period clearly show that their views were by no means the common view of the world at the time.[15]

In his "Pre-Socratic Philosophy," W.K.C. Guthrie provides an excellent summary of this important aspect of these ancient Greek philosophic thinkers:

> pre-Socratic philosophy differs from all other philosophy in that it had no predecessors....Before them no European had set out to satisfy his curiosity about the world in the faith that its apparent chaos concealed a permanent and intelligible order, and that this natural order could be accounted for by universal causes operating within nature itself and discoverable by human reason. They had predecessors of a sort, of course. It was not accidental that the first pre-Socratics were citizens of Miletus, a prosperous trading center of Ionian Greeks on the Asiatic coast, where Greek and Oriental cultures met and mingled. The Milesian heritage included the myths and religious beliefs of their own peoples and their Eastern neighbors, and also the store of Egyptian and Babylonian knowledge—astronomical, mathematical, technological. Yet the Milesians consciously rejected the mythical and religious tradition of their ancestors, in particular its belief in the agency of anthropomorphic gods, and their debt to the knowledge of the East was not a philosophical one. That knowledge was limited because its aim was practical. Astronomy served religion; mathematics settled questions of land measurement and taxation. For these purposes the careful recording of data and the making of certain limited generalizations sufficed, and the realm of ultimate causes was left to dogmatism. For the Greeks knowledge became an end in itself, and in the uninhibited atmosphere of Miletus they gave free play to the typically Greek talent for generalization, abstraction, and erection of bold and all-encompassing explanatory hypotheses.
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> Consciously, the revolt of the Milesian philosophers against both the content and the method of mythology was complete. No longer were natural process to be at the mercy of gods with human passions and unpredictable intentions. In their place was to come a reign of universal and discoverable law. Yet a whole conceptual framework is not so easily changed. Poetic and religious cosmogonies had preceded the schemes of the Milesians, and the basic assumptions of these can be detected beneath the hypotheses of their philosophic successors. Nevertheless, the achievement of abandoning divine agencies for physical causes working from within the world itself can hardly be overestimated.[16]

The Milesian (often called the "Ionian") thinkers generally sought to understand the origins and mechanisms of the things in the world, and for this reason they are often called the *physologoi* and seen as the first true "physical scientists." For example, according to Charles Kahn, Anaximander (~610-~546 B.C.E.) was the author of the first geometrical model of the universe, a model characterized not by vagueness and mystery but by visual clarity and rational proportion, and hence radically different in kind from all known "cosmologies" of earlier literature and myth. The highly rational character of the scheme...is best indicated by Anaximander's explanation of the earth's stable position in the center: it remains at rest because of its equal distance from all points of the celestial circumference, having no reason to move in

[15] As the above remarks about Aristophanes suggest.

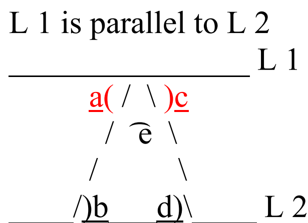
[16] W.K.C. Guthrie, "Pre-Socratic Philosophy," in *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy* v. 6, ed. Paul Edwards (N.Y.: Macmillan, 1967), pp. 441-446, pp. 441-442.

one direction rather than in another. This argument from symmetry contrasts not only with all mythic views but also with the doctrine ascribed to Thales [his teacher]: that the earth floats on water."[17] Similarly Anaxagoras (~500-~428 B.C.E.) determined the true cause of solar and lunar eclipses, and maintained that the shape of the Earth's shadow on the moon during a lunar eclipse shows that the Earth is round.

Many of these thinkers relied on human sensory experience to ground or justify their *knowledge* claims, but Plato contended that sense experience was unreliable and incapable of grounding certainty, which he took to be necessary for knowledge (rather than mere belief). For him ultimately our knowledge claims needed to be grounded in self-evident and absolutely certain principles. Traditional examples would be such truths as: "a whole is greater than its parts," "triangles are closed three-sided figures," bachelors are unmarried males of the age of consent," Moreover, whereas many of the Milesian (or Ionian) *physologoi* were interested in **cosmology** and **metaphysics**, Plato and Socrates were primarily concerned with **moral and social philosophy**—instead of seeking knowledge of the nature of the world, they sought knowledge to ensure **virtuous action** and **character**.

Plato contended that there were **unchanging, transcendent, absolute, overarching**, **objective, rational, and knowable "forms**," and he believed that we needed to understand them, and guide our conduct by them if we are to be able to live "the good life." Whereas the *physologoi* were largely concerned with knowledge as an end-in-itself, Socrates and Plato were concerned with achieving it because of its connection with virtue, justice, and human happiness.

For Plato rationality is best exemplified by Euclidean Geometry. Starting with **self-evident** notions like "point," "line," and "plane" one can use **deductive reasoning** to rationally prove things like "triangles have exactly 180º:



Alternate interior angles of parallel lines are equal, so a = b and c = d
Since a + e + c = 180º (sum of angles on a line)
we can clearly see that b + e + d = 180º (substituting equals: b for a and d for c).

Of course Plato has to use dialectical reasoning to identify the "simples" or "forms," and reasoning to connect them together. In geometry this was relatively easy, in thinking about piety, justice, obligation, *etc*. this becomes much more difficult. In the brief passage we will look at in Plato's *Meno*, Plato's Socrates argues that "no one can knowingly do wrong." If such an argument is securely grounded in self-evident truths and deductively developed he can contend that if individuals can be made knowledgeable, they could become virtuous.[18]

[17] Charles Kahn, "Anaximander," in *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy* v. 1, ed. Paul Edwards (N.Y.: Macmillan, 1967), pp. 117-118, p. 117.

In the *Euthyphro* he will suggest there is a **genus-species relationship**[19] between piety and justice—indicating something about the "simples or "forms." In the *Apology* we will learn how much value he attaches to the search for knowledge, and in the *Crito* we will further elaborate this and come to better understand his concept of *arête*. Perhaps the closest Plato comes to trying to show us a form is in his longest dialogue: The *Republic* but we will not get to that in this course.

I highly recommend Colin Well's "How Did God Get Started"[18] for a discussion of the development of the Ionian perspective and for a discussion of the development of the monotheistic idea of a deity—it provides an excellent characterization of the polytheistic perspective and of the development of both the "rational" and "monotheistic" perspectives in the ancient period, as well as a compelling account of how the two perspectives (of faith and reason) developed together.

3. Plato's view of the philosopher's methodology:

Plato offered a three-part method for uncovering knowledge of the rational order of the universe:

elenchus (refutation),
aporia (perplexity), and
dialectic.[19]

He holds that it is our *reason*, and not our *sensory experiences*, which uncovers (and justifies our claims to) knowledge.

4. Plato and the Forms:

If dialectic is the *process* of achieving knowledge, what does its ***object*** (the object of knowledge) look like?

Consider various different chairs and their *common characteristics*: the chairs in this room, a Louis XIV chair, a rocking chair, and a bean-bag.

Necessary and sufficient conditions[20]—e.g., for triangles. *Where* are triangles? Mathematical objects are *non-experiential* and we learn about them *via* reason. Sensory experience and copies of "Forms."

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[18] Colin Wells, "How Did God Get Started?", *Arion* v. 18 (Fall 2010). Available online at: http://www.bu.edu/arion/archive/volume-18/colin_wells_how_did_god_get-started/ .

[19] The central characteristic of this third "step" in the philosophers' overall procedure which marks it off is the fact that as individual philosophers advance their theories or beliefs here, they do so tentatively, critically, and publicly--or at least that is what they *should* do.

[20] The distinction between necessary and sufficient conditions may be made in a number of ways. Necessary conditions may be described as "those which must be there for an event to occur" (thus paying your parking fines is necessary for graduation), while sufficient conditions are conditions such that the event must occur (thus a direct double shotgun blast to the head is sufficient for death). Note that conditions may be sufficient without being necessary (as in the example), and that necessary conditions need not be sufficient (as in the example). An alternate

The Forms are conceived by him to be: *unchanging, absolute, transcendent, objective, rational, and knowable*—they provide the underlying constant basis (the criteria for) the changing things we are familiar with, they are the objects of knowledge, and they are *epistemically and ontologically prior to the particular things*.

5. Plato's view of man:

Plato's view of the nature of man—*psyche* [soul]—make it clear this is ***not* (at least not primarily) *a religious conception*—hearken to the *Euthyphro***.

Reason, the *emotions* or *passions*, and the *appetites*.

Martha Nussbaum maintains that "'emotions' is the more common modern generic term, while "passions" is both etymologically closer to the most common Greek and Latin terms and more firmly entrenched in the Western philosophical tradition....what I mean to designate by these terms is a genus of which experiences such as *fear, love, grief, anger, envy, jealousy*, and other relatives—but not bodily appetites such as hunger and thirst—are the species....This family of experience, which we call emotions as opposed to appetites, is grouped together by many Greek thinkers, beginning at least with Plato, and his account of the soul's middle part."[21]

Note that Plato's concern is with *society*—for him, *man is a social animal* (here we should note the economic, psychological, biological, and dialectical roots of this social facet of man).

'Man' and "men and women:" we must be careful in attributing either a feminist or a sexist character to Plato's views. In his *Republic*, Plato argues that men and women should have similar roles in the ideal state (that women as well as men would be rulers, soldiers, and workers—*cf*., 451c-456c). Nonetheless, in many passages he speaks in an extremely disparaging manner about women. As one reads Plato's works, one must critically examine what he says and consider whether or not he truly believes that they have the same nature (or natures), and whether or not he wishes to treat men and women "equally."[22] It may be helpful here for us to know something about the role women played in ancient Greek society if we are to be able to properly interpret what Plato has to say about their role. In this regard, John Gould's "Law, Custom and Myth: Aspects of the Social Position of Women in Classical Athens," is very helpful. Gould provides a clear-cut picture of the legal status of women at the time:

> a woman, whatever her status as daughter, sister, wife or mother, and whatever her age or social class, is *in law a perpetual minor*: that is, like a male minor, but throughout her life she

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way of drawing the distinction is to say that "*p* is a necessary condition for *q*" means "if *q* is true, then *p* is true" (symbolically *q*->*p*), while "*p* is a sufficient condition for *q*" means "if *p* is true, then *q* is true" (symbolically: *p*->*q*).

[21] Martha Nussbaum, *The Therapy of Desire: Theory and Practice in Hellenistic Ethics* (Princeton: Princeton U.P., 1994), p. 319.

[22] *Cf*., Lynda Lange, "The Function of Equal Education in Plato's Republic, in *The Sexism of Social and Political Theory: Women and Reproduction from Plato to Nietzsche*, eds. Lorenne Clark and Lynda Lange (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto, 1979), pp. 3-15) for a critique of Plato's sexist treatment of the nature of women. *Cf*., C.D.C. Reeve, "The Naked Old Women in the Palaesatra: A Dialogue Between Plato and Lashenia of Mantinea," in the *1992 Catalogue* of Hackett Publishing Company for a defense of Plato's treatment of the nature of women.

> was [always] in the legal control of a male *kyrios* who represented her in law. If unmarried she was in the *kyrieia* of her father, her brother(s) by the same father, or her paternal grandfather. Upon marriage a kind of divided *kyrieia* arose: the evidence seems to suggest that a father could dissolve his daughter's marriage, even against her wishes, whereas in other respects the husband acted as *kyrios*. On her husband's death she either passes to the *kyrieia* of her son(s) (if any) or reverts to that of her father if still alive: if her sons are minors she falls under the *kyrieia* of their *kyrios*. If she is pregnant on her husband's death she may (and perhaps must) remain in the *kyrieia* of whatever male affine will become her future child's guardian.[23]

Gould offers a summary of an ancient description of the good husband which was meant to be a straightforward and uncontroversial description of the normal relations between husband and wife:

> he describes the lay-out of his house, with its separate quarters for men and women, and how his wife, who was feeding their baby, frequently slept in the women's quarters so that she could feed and wash it in the night. The picture that emerges is...[of] *a wife who leads a private, sheltered life*, who goes out little...whose shopping is done by a slave woman; who, once her child is born, is no longer under her husband's surveillance, but who is not expected to be present when [he] brings home a male friend for an evening meal....evidence of eating and drinking together with males who are not kinsmen is frequently presented in Athenian law courts as establishing that a woman is...not a [proper] wife.[24]

Nussbaum "qualifies" this view in one important respect:

> ...in the world of fourth-century [B.C.E.] Athens, *hetairai* [courtesans, or mistresses] would be more likely than other women to be literate, and to have the freedom to move around at their own discretion....a recent papyrus discovery has confirmed Diogenes' report—long dismissed—that Plato taught two courtesans in his school....[such women could have enrolled] also in any of the three major Hellenistic schools [Epicurean, Stoic, and Skeptic]. The career of Pericles' mistress Aspasia illustrates the degree of sophistication and intellectual influence a women of the *hetaira* class could achieve, even in a culture as restrictive of women as Athens.[25]

Clearly, women in ancient Greece led a different sort of life than is the case today. The fact that Plato clearly, at times, talks of treating them in the same way as men are treated is enough (given this picture) to establish that there is certainly some positive reason for using 'man' in this context as speaking of human beings generally and not simply the male creatures of the species. Of course, given that he frequently speaks of women in a negative fashion, we should not just simply assert that "When we find him talking about 'man', what Plato really means to be talking about is 'human beings'."

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[23] John Gould, "Law, Custom and Myth: Aspects of the Social Position of Women in Classical Athens," in *The Journal of Hellenic Studies* v. 100 (1980), pp. 38-59, p. 43; emphasis added.
[24] *Ibid*., pp. 47-48, emphasis added.
[25] Martha Nussbaum, *The Therapy of Desire: Theory and Practice in Hellenistic Ethics, op. cit*., pp. 53-54.

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