



Socrates

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Amid the destruction of all ideals of truth and morality, which was brought about by the Sophists, there appeared in Athens the figure of Socrates, who was destined to restore order out of chaos, and to introduce sanity into the disordered intellectual life of the time. Socrates was born about 470 B.C. in Athens. His father was a sculptor, his mother a midwife. Very little is known of his early years and education, except that he took up his father's occupation as a sculptor. In later years some statues used to be shown at the Acropolis in Athens, which were said to be the work of Socrates. But comparatively early in life he deserted his profession in order to devote himself to what he considered his mission in life, philosophy. He spent his entire life in Athens, never departing from it, save for short periods on three occasions, when he served in military expeditions in the Athenian army. For from twenty to thirty years he laboured at his philosophical mission in Athens, until, in his seventieth year, he was charged with denying the national gods, introducing new gods of his own, and corrupting the Athenian youth. On these charges he was condemned to death and executed.

The personal appearance of Socrates was grotesque. He was short, thick-set, and ugly. As he grew older he became bald; his nose was broad, flat, and turned up; he walked with a peculiar gait, and had a trick of rolling his eyes. His clothes were old and poor. He cared little or nothing for external appearances.

Socrates believed that he was guided in all his actions by a supernatural voice, which he called his "daemon." This voice, he thought, gave him premonitions of the good or evil consequences of his proposed actions, and nothing would induce him to disobey its injunctions. Socrates constructed no philosophy, that is to say, no system of philosophy. He was the author of philosophical tendencies, and of a philosophic method. He never committed his opinions to writing. His method of philosophizing was purely conversational. It was his habit to go down every day to the market place in Athens, or to any other spot where people gathered, and there to engage in conversation with anyone who was ready to talk to him about the deep problems of life and death. Rich or poor, young or old, friend or stranger, whoever came, and would attend, could listen freely to the talk of Socrates. He took no fees, as the Sophists did, and remained always a poor man. He did not, like the Sophists, deliver long speeches, tirades, and monologues. He never monopolised the conversation, and frequently it was the other party who did most of the talking, Socrates only interposing questions and comments, and yet remaining always master of the conversation, and directing it into fruitful channels. The conversation proceeded chiefly by the method of question and answer, Socrates by acute questions educating, bringing to birth, the thoughts of his partner, correcting, refuting, or developing them.

In carrying on this daily work, Socrates undoubtedly regarded himself as engaged upon a mission in some way supernaturally imposed upon him by God. Of the origin of this mission we have an account in the "Apology" of Plato, who puts into the mouth of Socrates the following words: "Chairephon made a pilgrimage to Delphi and had the audacity to ask this question

from the oracle He actually asked if there was any man wiser than I. And the priestess answered, No When I heard the answer, I asked myself: What can the god mean? what can he be hinting? For certainly I have never thought myself wise in anything, great or small. What can he mean then, when he asserts that I am the wisest of men? He cannot lie, of course: that would be impossible for him. And for a long while I was at a loss to think what he could mean. At last, after much thought, I started on some such course as this. I betook myself to one of the men who seemed wise, thinking that there, if anywhere, I should refute the utterance, and could say to the oracle: 'This man is wiser than I, and you said I was the wisest.' Now when I looked into the man—there is no need to give his name—it was one of our citizens, men of Athens, with whom I had an experience of this kind--when we talked together I thought, 'This man seems wise to many men, and above all to himself, but he is not so'; and then I tried to show that he thought he was wise, but he was not. Then he got angry with me and so did many who heard us, but I went away and thought to myself, 'Well, at any rate I am wiser than this man: probably neither of us knows anything of beauty or of good, but he thinks he knows something when he knows nothing, and I, if I know nothing, at least never suppose that I do. So it looks as though I really were a little wiser than he, just in so far as I do not imagine myself to know things about which I know nothing at all.' After that I went to another man who seemed to be wiser still, and I had exactly the same experience, and then he got angry with me too, and so did many more. Thus I went round them all, one after the other, aware of what was happening and sorry for it, and afraid that they were getting to hate me."

In this passage we can see, too, the supposed origin of another peculiar Socratic feature, the Socratic "irony." In any discussion, Socrates would, as a rule, profess himself to be totally ignorant of the matter in hand, and only anxious to learn the wisdom possessed by his interlocutor. This professed ignorance was not affectation. He was genuinely impressed with the notion that not only he, but all other men, live for the most part in ignorance of the things that are the most important to be known, the nature of goodness, beauty, and truth. He believed that the self-styled knowledge of the wise was, for the most part, nothing but pretentious ignorance. Nevertheless, he used this profession of ignorance as a weapon of offence, and it became in his hands a powerful rhetorical instrument, which he used with specially telling effect against those who, puffed up with their own importance and wisdom, pretended to knowledge which they did not possess. Such hollow pretence of knowledge met with uncompromising exposure at the hands of Socrates. With such persons he would open the conversation with a confession of his own ignorance and an expression of his desire to learn the wisdom, which, he knew, they possessed. In their eagerness to show off their knowledge, they would, perhaps, rush into the breach with some very positive assertion. Socrates would express himself as delighted with this, but would add that there were one or two things about it which he did not fully understand, and he would proceed, with a few dexterous questions, to expose the hollowness, the shallowness, or the ignorance of the answers.

It was chiefly the young men of Athens who gathered round Socrates, who was for them a centre of intellectual activity and a fountain of inspiration. It was this fact which afterwards formed the basis of the charge that he "corrupted the youth." He was a man of the noblest character and of the simplest life. Accepting no fees, he acquired no wealth. Poor, caring nothing for worldly goods, wholly independent of the ordinary needs and desires of men, he devoted himself exclusively to the acquisition of that which, in his eyes, alone had value, wisdom and virtue. He was endowed with the utmost powers of physical endurance and moral strength. When he served with the army in the Peloponnesian war, he astonished his fellow-soldiers by his bravery, and his cheerful endurance of every hardship. On two occasions, at considerable risk to himself, he saved the lives of his companions. At the battle of Delium

it is said that Socrates was the only man who kept his head in the rout of the Athenians. He was an excellent companion, and though simple in his habits, and independent of all material pleasures, never made a fetish of this independence, nor allowed it to degenerate into a harsh asceticism. Thus, he needed no wine, but yet, if occasion called for it, he not only drank, but could drink more than any other man without turning a hair. In the "Banquet" of Plato, Socrates is depicted sitting all night long drinking and talking philosophy with his friends. One by one the guests succumbed, leaving only Socrates and two others, and at last, as the dawn broke, these two also fell asleep. But Socrates got up, washed himself, and went down to the market place to begin his daily work.

In his seventieth year he was tried on three charges: (1) for denying the national gods, (2) for setting up new gods of his own, (3) for corrupting the youth. All these charges were entirely baseless. The first might well have been brought against almost any of the earlier Greek thinkers with some justice. Most of them disbelieved in the national religion; many of them openly denied the existence of the gods. Socrates, almost alone, had refrained from any such attitude. On the contrary, he always enjoined veneration towards the gods, and urged his hearers, in whatever city they might be, to honour the gods according to the custom of that city. According to Xenophon, however, he distinguished between the many gods and the one creator of the universe, who controls, guides, and guards over the lives of men. The second charge appears to have been based upon the claim of Socrates to be guided by a supernatural inner voice, but whatever we may think of this claim, it can hardly constitute good ground for a charge of introducing new gods. The third charge, that of corrupting the youth, was equally baseless, though the fact that Alcibiades, who had been a favourite pupil of Socrates, afterwards turned traitor to Athens, and led, moreover, a dissolute and unprincipled life, no doubt prejudiced the philosopher in the eyes of the Athenians. But Socrates was not responsible for the misdeeds of Alcibiades, and his general influence upon the Athenian youth was the very opposite of corrupting.

What then were the real reasons for these accusations? In the first place, there is no doubt that Socrates had made many personal enemies. In his daily disputations he had not spared even the most powerful men in Athens, but had ruthlessly laid bare the ignorance of those who pretended to be wise. There is, however, no reason to believe that the three men who actually laid the charges, Melitus, Lycon, and Anytus, did so out of any personal animosity. But they were men of straw, put forward by more powerful persons who remained behind the scenes. In the second place, Socrates had rendered himself obnoxious to the Athenian democracy. He was no aristocrat in feeling, nor was he a supporter of the vested interests and privileges of the few. But he could not accommodate himself to the mob-rule which then went by the name of democracy. The government of the State, he believed, should be in the hands of the wise, the just, and the good, those competent and trained to govern, and these are necessarily the few. He himself had taken no part in the political life of the time, preferring to guide by his influence and advice the young men on whom some day the duties of the State would devolve. On two occasions only did he take an active part in politics, and on both occasions his conduct gave great offence. Both these incidents are recounted in a passage in Plato's "Apology," which I will quote. The first incident refers to the aftermath of the battle of Arginusae. The Athenian fleet had gained a victory here, but lost twenty-five ships of war, and the whole of the crews of these ships were drowned. This was attributed to the carelessness of the generals, and there was great indignation in Athens, upon their return whither the generals were put upon their trial. According to the law of Athens each accused had to be given a separate trial, but in their eagerness to have the generals condemned, the judges in this instance decided to try them all in a body. "You know, men of Athens," says Socrates in the "Apology," "that I have never held

any other office in the State, but I did serve on the Council. And it happened that my tribe, Antiochis, had the Presidency at the time you decided to try the ten generals who had not taken up the dead after the fight at sea. You decided to try them in one body, contrary to law, as you all felt afterwards. On that occasion I was the only one of the Presidents who opposed you, and told you not to break the law; and I gave my vote against you; and when the orators were ready to impeach and arrest me, and you encouraged them and hooted me, I thought then that I ought to take all the risks on the side of law and justice, rather than side with you, when your decisions were unjust, through fear of imprisonment or death. That was while the city was still under the democracy. When the oligarchy came into power, the Thirty, in their turn, summoned me with four others to the Rotunda, and commanded us to fetch Leon of Salamis from that island, in order to put him to death: the sort of commands they often gave to many others, anxious as they were to incriminate all they could. And on that occasion I showed not by words only, that for death, to put it bluntly, I did not care one straw--but I did care, and to the full, about doing what was wicked and unjust. I was not terrified then into doing wrong by that government in all its power; when we left the Rotunda, the other four went off to Salamis and brought Leon back, but I went home. And probably I should have been put to death for it, if the government had not been overthrown soon afterwards.”

But there was a third, and greater reason, for the condemnation of Socrates. These charges were brought against him because the popular mind confused him with the Sophists. This was entirely absurd, because Socrates in no respect resembled the Sophists, either in the manner of his life or in the tendency of his thought, which was wholly anti-sophistical. But that such a confusion did exist in the popular mind is clearly proved by “The Clouds” of Aristophanes. Aristophanes was a reactionary in thought and politics, and, hating the Sophists as the representatives of modernism, he lampooned them in his comedy, “The Clouds.” Socrates appears in the play as the central character, and the chief of the Sophists. This was entirely unjust, but it affords evidence of the fact that Socrates was commonly mistaken for a Sophist by the Athenians. Aristophanes would not have ventured to introduce such a delusion into his play, had his audience not shared in it. Now at this time a wave of reaction was passing over Athens, and there was great indignation against the Sophists, who were rightly supposed to be overturning all ideals of truth and goodness. Socrates fell a victim to the anger of the populace against the Sophists.

At the trial Socrates conducted himself with dignity and confidence. It was usual in those days for an accused person to weep and lament, to flatter the judges, to seek indulgence by grovelling and fawning, to appeal for pity by parading his wife and children in the court. Socrates refused to do any of these things, considering them unmanly. His “defence” was, indeed, not so much a defence of himself as an arraignment of his judges, the people of Athens, for their corruption and vice. This attitude of Socrates certainly brought about his condemnation. There is every reason to believe that if he had adopted a grovelling, even a conciliatory tone, he would have been acquitted. As it was, he was found guilty by a bare majority. The law enacted that, when the charge was proved, those who had brought the accusation should first propose the penalty which they thought fitting; then the accused himself should propose an alternative penalty. It was for the judges to decide which of the two should be inflicted. The accusers of Socrates proposed the death-penalty. Here again Socrates might have escaped by proposing at once some petty punishment. This would have satisfied the people, who were only anxious to score off the troublesome philosopher and pedant. But Socrates proudly affirmed that, as he was guilty of no crime, he deserved no punishment. To propose a penalty would be to admit his guilt. Far from being a guilty person, he considered himself in the light of a public benefactor, and as such, if he were to get his deserts, he proposed that he should be publicly honoured by being

given a seat at the President's table. Nevertheless, as the law forced him to propose a penalty, he would, without prejudice to his plea of innocence, suggest a fine of thirty minas. This conduct so exasperated the judges that he was now condemned to death by a large majority, about eighty of those who had previously voted for his acquittal now voting for his execution.

Thirty days elapsed before he was executed, and these days were spent in prison. His friends, who had free access to him, urged him to escape. These things were possible in Athens. Anaxagoras had apparently escaped with the help of Pericles. A little silver in the hands of the jailguards would probably have settled the matter. Socrates could fly to Thessaly, where the law could not reach him, as Anaxagoras had fled to Ionia. But Socrates steadily refused, saying that to flee from death was cowardly, and that one ought to obey the laws. The law had decreed his death, and he must obey. After thirty days, therefore, the poison cup was brought to him, and he drank it without flinching. Here is Plato's account of the death of Socrates, which I quote from the "Phaedo." In detail it cannot be considered historical, but we may well believe that the main incidents as well as the picture it gives us of the bearing and demeanour of the philosopher in his last moments, are accurate representations of the facts.

"He rose and went into a chamber to bathe, and Crito followed him, but he directed us to wait for him. We waited, therefore, conversing among ourselves about what had been said, and considering it again, and sometimes speaking about our calamity, how severe it would be to us, sincerely thinking that, like those who are deprived of a father, we should pass the rest of our lives as orphans. When he had bathed and his children were brought to him, for he had two little sons and one grown up, and the women belonging to his family were come, having conversed with them in the presence of Crito, and given them such injunctions as he wished, he directed the women and children to go away, and then returned to us. And it was now near sunset; for he spent a considerable time within. But when he came from bathing he sat down and did not speak much afterwards: then the officer of the Eleven came in and standing near him said, 'Socrates, I shall not have to find that fault with you that I do with the others, that they are angry with me, and curse me, when, by order of the archons, I bid them drink the poison. But you, on all other occasions during the time you have been here, I have found to be the most noble, meek and excellent man of all that ever came into this place; and, therefore, I am now well convinced that you will not be angry with me. Now, then, for you know what I came to announce to you, farewell, and endeavour to bear what is inevitable as easily as possible.' And at the same time, bursting into tears, he turned away and withdrew. And Socrates, looking after him, said, 'And thou too, farewell, we will do as you direct.' At the same time, turning to us he said 'How courteous the man is; during the whole time I have been here he has visited me, and conversed with me sometimes, and proved the worthiest of men; and how generously he weeps for me. But come, Crito, let us obey him and let some one bring the poison, if it is ready pounded, but if not let the man pound it.'

"Then Crito said, 'But I think, Socrates, that the sun is still on the mountains, and has not yet set. Besides, I know that others have drunk the poison very late, after it had been announced to them, and have supped and drunk freely, and some even have enjoyed the objects of their love. Do not hasten them, for there is yet time.'

"Upon this Socrates replied, 'These men whom you mention, Crito, do these things with good reason, for they think they shall gain by so doing, and I too with good reason, shall not do so; for I think I shall gain nothing by drinking a little later, except to become ridiculous to myself, in being so fond of life, and sparing of it when none any longer remains. Go then,' he said, 'obey, and do not resist.'

"Crito having heard this, nodded to the boy that stood near. And the boy having gone out, and stayed for some time, came, bringing with him the man that was to administer the poison,

who brought it ready pounded in a cup. And Socrates, on seeing the man, said, 'Well, my good friend, as you are skilled in these matters, what must I do?' 'Nothing else,' he replied, 'than when you have drunk it walk about, until there is a heaviness in your legs, then lie down; thus it will do its purpose.' And at the same time he held out the cup to Socrates. And he having received it very cheerfully, Echecrates, neither trembling, nor changing at all in colour or countenance, but, as he was wont, looking steadfastly at the man, said, 'what say you of this potion, with respect to making a libation to anyone, is it lawful or not?' 'We only pound so much, Socrates,' he said, 'as we think sufficient to drink.' 'I understand you,' he said, 'but it is certainly both lawful and right to pray to the gods that my departure hence thither may be happy; which therefore I pray, and so may it be.' And as he said this he drank it off readily and calmly. Thus far, most of us were with difficulty able to restrain ourselves from weeping, but when we saw him drinking, and having finished the draught, we could do so no longer; but in spite of myself the tears came in full torrent, so that, covering my face, I wept for myself, for I did not weep for him, but for my own fortune, in being deprived of such a friend. But Crito, even before me, when he could not restrain his tears, had risen up. But Apollodorus even before this had not ceased weeping, and then, bursting into an agony of grief, weeping and lamenting, he pierced the heart of everyone present, except Socrates himself. But he said. 'What are you doing, my admirable friends? I indeed, for this reason chiefly, sent away the women, that they might not commit any folly of this kind. For I have heard that it is right to die with good omens. Be quiet, therefore, and bear up.'

"When we heard this we were ashamed, and restrained our tears. But he, having walked about, when he said that his legs were growing heavy, lay down on his back; for the man so directed him. And at the same time he who gave him the poison, taking hold of him, after a short interval examined his feet and legs; and then having pressed his foot hard, he asked if he felt it; he said that he did not. And after this he pressed his thighs; and thus going higher he showed us that he was growing cold and stiff. Then Socrates touched himself, and said that when the poison reached his heart he should then depart. But now the parts around the lower belly were almost cold; when uncovering himself, for he had been covered over, he said; and they were his last words. 'Crito, we owe a cock to AEsculapius; pay it, therefore, and do not neglect it.' 'It shall be done,' said Crito, 'but consider whether you have anything else to say.'

"To this question he gave no reply; but shortly after he gave a convulsive movement, and the man covered him, and his eyes were fixed, and Crito, perceiving it, closed his mouth and eyes.

"This, Echecrates, was the end of our friend, a man, as we may say, the best of all of his time that we have known, and moreover, the most wise and just."

Our knowledge of the teaching of Socrates is derived chiefly from two sources, Plato and Xenophon, for the peculiarities of each of whom allowances must be made. Plato in his dialogues makes Socrates the mouthpiece of his own teaching, consequently the majority of the tenets to which Socrates is made to give expression are purely Platonic doctrines of which the historical Socrates could never even have dreamed. It might, therefore, seem at first sight that there is no possibility of ascertaining from Plato's dialogues any trustworthy account of the ideas of Socrates. But on closer inspection this does not turn out to be correct, because the earlier dialogues of Plato were written before he had developed his own philosophy, and when he was, to all intents and purposes, simply a disciple of Socrates, bent only upon giving the best expression to the Socratic doctrine. Even in these Socratic dialogues, however, we have what is no doubt an idealized portrait of Socrates. Plato makes no pretence of being merely a biographer or historian. The incidents and conversation, although they are no doubt frequently founded upon facts, are, in the main, imaginary. All we can say is that they contain the gist and substance of the philosophy of Socrates. The other source, Xenophon, also has his peculiarities.

If Plato was an idealizing philosopher, Xenophon was a prosaic and matter of fact man of affairs. He was a plain, honest soldier. He had no great insight into any philosophy, Socratic or otherwise. He was not attached to Socrates primarily as a philosopher, but as an admirer of his character and personality. If Plato puts the teaching of Socrates too high, Xenophon puts it too low. But, in spite of this, Xenophon's Memorabilia contains a mass of valuable information both about the life and the philosophical ideas of Socrates.

The Socratic teaching is essentially ethical in character. In this alone did Socrates bear any resemblance to the Sophists. It was the Sophists who had introduced into Greek philosophy the problem of man, and of the duties of man. And to these problems Socrates also turns his exclusive attention. He brushes aside all questions as to the origin of the world, or the nature of the ultimate reality, of which we have heard so much in the philosophies of the earlier thinkers. Socrates openly deprecated such speculations and considered all such knowledge comparatively worthless as against ethical knowledge, the knowledge of man. Mathematics, physics, and astronomy, he thought, were not valuable forms of knowledge. He said that he never went for walks outside the city, because there is nothing to be learnt from fields and trees.

Nevertheless the ethical teaching of Socrates was founded upon a theory of knowledge, which is quite simple, but extremely important. The Sophists had founded knowledge upon perception, with the result that all objective standards of truth had been destroyed. It was the work of Socrates to found knowledge upon reason, and thereby to restore to truth its objectivity. Briefly, the theory of Socrates may be summarized by saying that he taught that ***all knowledge is knowledge through concepts***. What is a concept? When we are directly conscious of the presence of any particular thing, a man, a tree, a house, or a star, such consciousness is called perception. When, shutting our eyes, we frame a mental picture of such an object, such consciousness is called an image or representation. Such mental images are, like perceptions, always ideas of particular individual objects. But besides these ideas of individual objects, whether through sense-perception or imagination, we have also general ideas, that is to say, not ideas of any particular thing, but ideas of whole classes of things. If I say "Socrates is mortal," I am thinking of the individual, Socrates. But if I say "Man is mortal," I am thinking, not of any particular man, but of the class of men in general. Such an idea is called a general idea, or a concept. All class-names, such as man, tree, house, river, animal, horse, being, which stand, not for one thing, but for a multitude of things, represent concepts. We form these general ideas by including in them all the qualities which the whole class of objects has in common, and excluding from them all the qualities in which they differ, that is to say, the qualities which some of the objects possess, but others do not. For example, I cannot include the quality whiteness in my general idea of horses, because, though some horses are white, others are not. But I can include the quality vertebrate because all horses agree in being vertebrate. Thus a concept is formed by bringing together the ideas in which all the members of a class of objects agree with one another, and neglecting the ideas in which they differ.

Now reason is the faculty of concepts. This may not, at first sight, be obvious. Reason, it might be objected, is the faculty of arguing, of drawing conclusions from premises. But a little consideration will show us that, though this is so, yet all reasoning is employed upon concepts. All reasoning is either deductive or inductive. Induction consists in the formulation of general principles from particular cases. A general principle is always a statement made, not about a particular thing, but about a whole class of things, that is, about a concept. Concepts are formed inductively by comparing numerous examples of a class. Deductive reasoning is always the opposite process of applying general principles to particular cases. If we argue that Socrates must be mortal because all men are so, the question is whether Socrates is a man, that is to say, whether the concept, man, is properly applied to the particular object called Socrates. Thus

inductive reasoning is concerned with the formation of concepts, deductive reasoning with the application of them.

Socrates, in placing all knowledge in concepts, was thus making reason the organ of knowledge. This was in direct opposition to the principle of the Sophists, who placed all knowledge in sense-perception. Now since reason is the universal element in man, it follows that Socrates, in identifying knowledge with concepts, was restoring the belief in an objective truth, valid for all men, and binding upon all men, and was destroying the Sophistic teaching that the truth is whatever each individual chooses to think it is. We shall see this more clearly if we reflect that a concept is the same thing as a definition. If we wish to define any word, for example, the word man, we must include in our definition only the qualities which all men have in common. We cannot, for example, define man as a white-skinned animal, because all men are not white-skinned. Similarly we cannot include "English-speaking" in our definition, because, though some men speak English, others do not. But we might include such a quality as "two-legged," because "two-legged" is a quality common to all human beings, except mere aberrations and distortions of the normal type. Thus a definition is formed in the same way as a concept, namely, by including the common qualities of a class of objects, and excluding the qualities in which the members of the class differ. A definition, in fact, is merely the expression of a concept in words. Now by the process of fixing definitions we obtain objective standards of truth. If, for example, we fix the definition of a triangle, then we can compare any geometrical figure with it, and say whether it is a triangle or not. It is no longer open to anyone to declare that whatever he chooses to call a triangle is a triangle. Similarly, if we fix upon a definition of the word man, we can then compare any object with that definition, and say whether it is a man or not. Again, if we can decide what the proper concept of virtue is, then the question whether any particular act is virtuous can only be decided by comparing that act with the concept, and seeing if they agree. The Sophist can no longer say, "whatever seems to me right, is right for me. Whatever I choose to do is virtuous for me." His act must be judged, not by his subjective impressions, but by the concept or definition, which is thus an objective standard of truth, independent of the individual. This, then, was the theory of knowledge propounded by Socrates. Knowledge, he said, is not the same thing as the sensations of the individual, which would mean that each individual can name as the truth whatever he pleases. Knowledge means knowledge of things as they objectively are, independently of the individual, and such knowledge is knowledge of the concepts of things. Therefore the philosophizing of Socrates consisted almost exclusively in trying to frame proper concepts. He went about enquiring, "What is virtue?" "What is prudence?" "What is temperance?"--meaning thereby "what are the true concepts or definitions of these things?" In this way he attempted to find a basis for believing in an objectively real truth and an objectively real moral law.

His method of forming concepts was by induction. He would take common examples of actions which are universally admitted to be prudent, and would attempt to find the quality which they all have in common, and by virtue of which they are all classed together, and so form the concept of prudence. Then he would bring up fresh examples, and see whether they agreed with the concept so formed. If not, the concept might have to be corrected in the light of the new examples.

But the Socratic theory of knowledge was not a theory put forward for its own sake, but for practical ends. Socrates always made theory subservient to practice. He wanted to know what the concept of virtue is, only in order to practise virtue in life. And this brings us to the central point of the ethical teaching of Socrates, which was the identification of virtue with knowledge. Socrates believed that a man cannot act rightly, unless he first knows what is right, unless, in fact, he knows the concept of right. Moral action is thus founded upon knowledge, and must

spring from it. But not only did Socrates think that if a man has not knowledge, he cannot do right. He also put forward the much more doubtful assertion that if a man possesses 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. All men seek the good, but men differ as to what the good is. "No man," said Socrates, "intentionally does wrong." He does wrong, because 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 again, "he is better than a man who does so unintentionally." For the former has in him the essential condition of goodness, knowledge of what goodness is, but the latter, lacking that knowledge, is hopeless.

Aristotle, in commenting upon this whole doctrine, observed that Socrates had ignored or forgotten the irrational parts of the soul. Socrates imagined that everybody's actions are governed solely by reason, and that therefore if only they reasoned aright, they must do right. He forgot that the majority of men's actions are governed by passions and emotions, "the irrational parts of the soul." Aristotle's criticism of Socrates is unanswerable. All experience shows that men do deliberately do wrong, that, knowing well what is right, they nevertheless do wrong. But it is easy to see why Socrates made this mistake; he was arguing only from his own case. Socrates really does appear to have been above human weakness. He was not guided by passions, but by reason, and it followed as the night follows the day, that if Socrates knew what was right, he did it. He was unable to understand how men, knowing the right, could yet do the wrong. If they are vicious, he thought, it must be because they do not know what is right. The criticism of Aristotle is thus justified. Yet for all that, the theory of Socrates is not to be too quickly brushed aside. There is more truth in it than appears at first sight. We say that a man believes one thing and does another. Yet it is a matter of question what a man really believes, and what is the test of his belief. Men go to church every Sunday, and there repeat formulas and prayers, of which the main idea is that all earthly riches are worthless in comparison with spiritual treasures. Such men, if asked, might tell us that they believe this to be true. They believe that they believe it. And yet in actual life, perhaps, they seek only for earthly riches, and behave as if they thought these the supreme good. What do such men really believe? Do they believe as they speak, or as they act? Is it not at least arguable that they are really pursuing what they believe to be good, and that, if they were genuinely convinced of the superiority of spiritual treasures, they would seek them, and not material riches? This at least is what Socrates thought. All men seek the good, but the many do not know what the good is. There is certainly truth in this in many cases, though in others there can be no doubt that men do deliberately what they know to be evil.

There are two other characteristic Socratic propositions which flow from the same general idea, that virtue is identical with knowledge. The first is, that virtue can be taught. We do not ordinarily think that virtue can be taught like arithmetic. We think that virtue depends upon a number of factors, prominent among which are the inborn disposition of a man, heredity, environment, modified to some extent by education, practice, and habit. The consequence is that a man's character does not change very much as he grows older. By constant practice, by continual self-control, a man may, to some extent, make himself better, but on the whole, what he is he remains. The leopard, we say, does not change his spots. But as, for Socrates, the sole condition of virtue is knowledge, and as knowledge is just what can be imparted by teaching, it followed that virtue must be teachable. The only difficulty is to find the teacher, to find some one who knows the concept of virtue. What the concept of virtue is--that is, thought Socrates, the precious piece of knowledge, which no philosopher has ever discovered, and which, if it were only discovered, could at once be imparted by teaching, whereupon men would at once become virtuous.

The other Socraticism is that “virtue is one.” We talk of many virtues, temperance, prudence, foresight, benevolence, kindness, etc. Socrates believed that all these particular virtues flowed from the one source, knowledge. Therefore knowledge itself, that is to say, wisdom, is the sole virtue, and this includes all the others.

This completes the exposition of the positive teaching of Socrates. It only remains for us to consider what position Socrates holds in the history of thought. There are two sides of the Socratic teaching. In the first place, there is the doctrine of knowledge, that all knowledge is through concepts. This is the scientific side of the philosophy of Socrates. Secondly, there is his ethical teaching. Now the essential and important side of Socrates is undoubtedly the scientific theory of concepts. It is this which gives him his position in the history of philosophy. His ethical ideas, suggestive as they were, were yet all tainted with the fallacy that men are governed only by reason. Hence they have exercised no great influence on the history of thought. But the theory of concepts worked a revolution in philosophy. Upon a development of it is founded the whole of Plato’s philosophy, and, through Plato, the philosophy of Aristotle, and, indeed, all subsequent idealism. The immediate effect of this theory, however, was the destruction of the teaching of the Sophists. The Sophists taught the doctrine that truth is sense-perception, and as the perceptions of different individuals differ in regard to the same object, it followed that truth became a matter of taste with the individual. This undermined all belief in truth as an objective reality, and, by similar reasoning, faith in the objectivity of the moral law was also destroyed. The essential position of Socrates is that of a restorer of faith. His greatness lay in the fact that he saw that the only way to combat the disastrous results of the Sophistic teaching was to refute the fundamental assumption from which all that teaching flowed, the assumption, namely, that knowledge is perception. Against this, therefore, Socrates opposed the doctrine that knowledge is through concepts. To base knowledge upon concepts is to base it upon the universality of reason, and therefore to restore it from the position of a subjective seeming to that of an objective reality.

But though Socrates is thus a restorer of faith, we must not imagine that his thought is therefore a mere retrogression to the intellectual condition of pre-Sophistic times. It was, on the contrary, an advance beyond the Sophists. We have here, in fact, an example of what is the normal development of all thought, whether in the individual or the race. The movement of thought exhibits three stages. The first stage is positive belief, not founded upon reason; it is merely conventional belief. At the second stage thought becomes destructive and sceptical. It denies what was affirmed in the previous stage. The third stage is the restoration of positive belief now founded upon the concept, upon reason, and not merely upon custom. Before the time of the Sophists, men took it for granted that truth and goodness are objective realities; nobody specially affirmed it, because nobody denied it. It seemed obvious. It was, thus, not believed on rational grounds, but through custom and habit. This, the first stage of thought, we may call the era of simple faith. When the Sophists came upon the scene, they brought reason and thought to bear upon what had hitherto been accepted as a matter of course, namely law, custom, and authority. The first encroachment of reason upon simple faith is always destructive, and hence the Sophists undermined all ideals of goodness and truth. Socrates is the restorer of these ideals, but with him they are no longer the ideals of simple faith; they are the ideals of reason. They are based upon reason. Socrates substituted comprehending belief for unintelligent assent. We may contrast him, in this respect, with Aristophanes. Aristophanes, the conservative, the believer in the “good old times,” saw, as clearly as Socrates, the disastrous effects worked by the Sophists upon public morals. But the remedy he proposed was a violent return to the “good old times.” Since it was thought which worked these ill effects, thought must be suppressed. We must go back to simple faith. But simple faith, once destroyed by thought, never returns either to

the individual, or to the race. This can no more happen than a man can again become a child. There is only one remedy for the ills of thought, and that is, more thought. If thought, in its first inroads, leads, as it always does, to scepticism and denial, the only course is, not to suppress thought, but to found faith upon it. This was the method of Socrates, and it is the method, too, of all great spirits. They are not frightened of shadows. They have faith in reason. If reason leads them into the darkness, they do not scuttle back in fright. They advance till the light comes again. They are false teachers who counsel us to give no heed to the promptings of reason, if reason brings doubt into our beliefs. Thought cannot be thus suppressed. Reason has rights upon us as rational beings. We cannot go back. We must go on, and make our beliefs rational. We must found them upon the concept, as Socrates did. Socrates did not deny the principle of the Sophists that all institutions, all ideals, all existing and established things must justify themselves before the tribunal of reason. He accepted this without question. He took up the challenge of thought, and won the battle of reason in his day.

The Sophists brought to light the principle of subjectivity, the principle that the truth must be *my* truth, and the right *my* right. They must be the products of my own thinking, not standards forcibly imposed upon me from without. But the mistake of the Sophists was to imagine that the truth must be mine, merely in my capacity as a percipient creature of sense, which means that I have a private truth of my own. Socrates corrected this by admitting that the truth must be my truth, but mine in my capacity as a rational being, which means, since reason is the universal, that it is not my private truth, but universal truth which is shared by and valid for all rational beings. Truth is thus established as being not mere subjective appearance, but objective reality, independent of the sensations, whims, and self-will of the individual. The whole period of Socrates and the Sophists is full of instruction. Its essential lesson is that to deny the supremacy of reason, to set up any other process of consciousness above reason, must inevitably end in scepticism and the denial of the objectivity of truth and morality. Many theosophists and others, at the present day, teach the doctrine of what they call "intuition." The supreme kind of religious knowledge, they think, is to be reached by intuition, which is conceived as something higher than reason. But this is simply to make the mistake of Protagoras over again. It is true that this so-called intuition is not merely sense-perception, as was the case with Protagoras. It is, however, a form of immediate spiritual perception. It is immediate apprehension of the object as being present to me, as having *thereness*. It is therefore of the nature of perception. It is spiritual and super-sensuous, as opposed to material and sensuous, perception. But it makes no difference at all whether perception is sensuous or super-sensuous. To place the truth in any sort of perception is, in principle, to do as Protagoras did, to yield oneself up a helpless prey to the subjective impressions of the individual. I intuit one thing; another man intuits the opposite. What I intuit must be true for me, what he intuits true for him. For we have denied reason, we have placed it below intuition, and have thereby discarded that which alone can subject the varying impressions of each individual to the rule of a universal and objective standard. The logical conclusion is that, since each man's intuition is true for him, there is no such thing as an objective truth. Nor can there be such a thing, in these circumstances, as an objective goodness. Thus the theory must end in total scepticism and darkness. The fact that theosophists do not, as a matter of fact, draw these sceptical conclusions, simply means that they are not as clear-headed and logical as Protagoras was.

W.T. Stace. *A Critical History of Greek Philosophy*. London: MacMillan and Co., 1920.

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