

The Clouds



OLLI @ GMU

Winter, 2011

Times change. The vices of your age are stylish today.

The Clouds

*To invoke solely the weaker arguments and yet triumph
is an art worth more than a hundred thousand
drachmae.*

The Clouds

Clouds

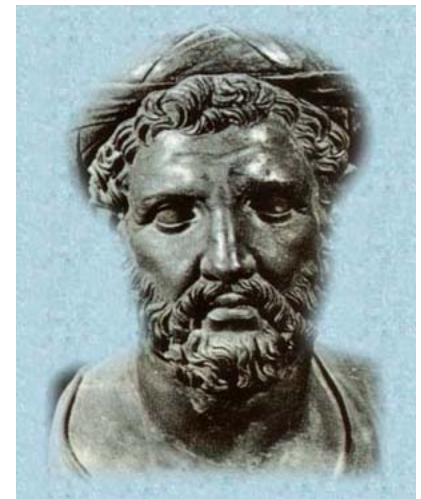
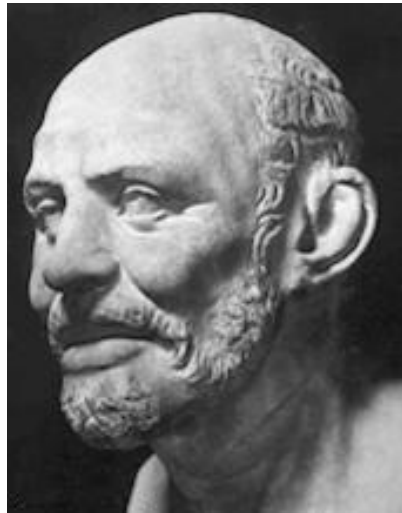
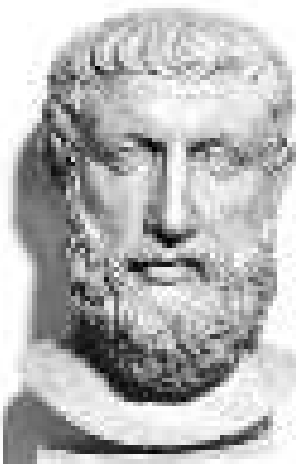
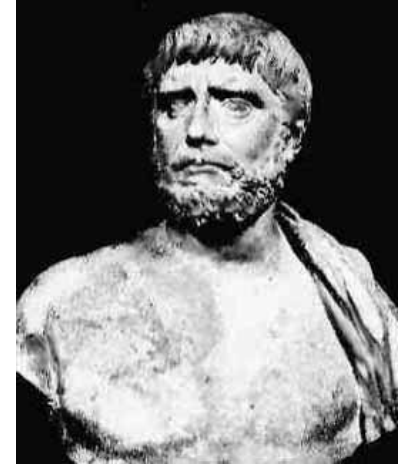
- To recap the play was first produced at the City Dionysia in 423 BC.
- Came in last of the three plays competing at the festival that year.
- To the authors distress.
- It was revised and it is this revised version we have.

- It is a witty, and deadly, commentary on the current state of intellectual fashions and education in Athens at this time.
- 7 or 8 years into the Peloponnesian War which ran from 431 – 404 BCE. With interruptions.
- A time of uncertainty and change and plague.
- “Normal” Athenian life is in turmoil.

- The play is our earliest view of Socrates and if it is not flattering it is not damning either.
- We also get quite a few references to the Pre-Socratics.
- And we hear a great deal about the Sophists and/or Rhetoricians.

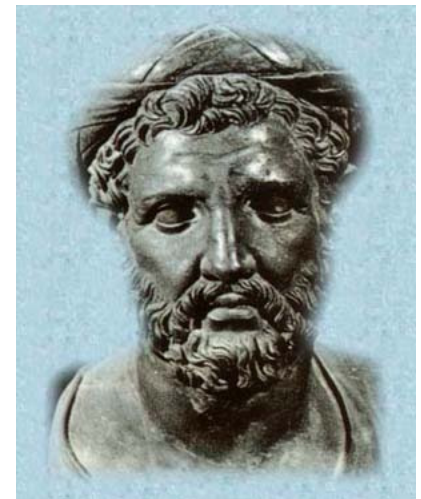
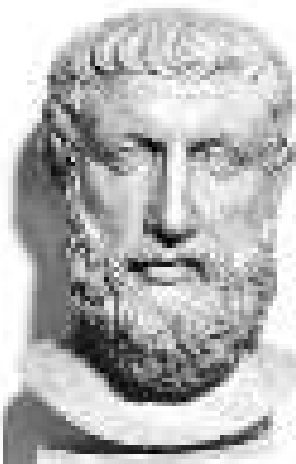
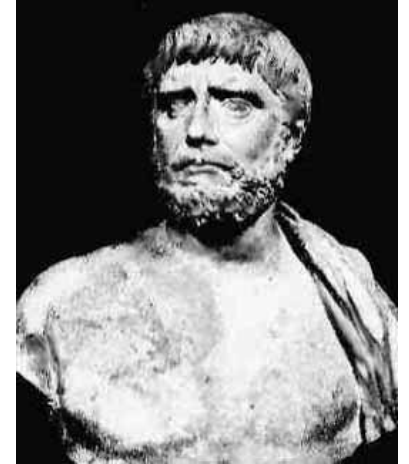
Pre – Socratics

- Before Socrates and the “Socratic Revolution” in philosophy we had the Pre-Socratics.



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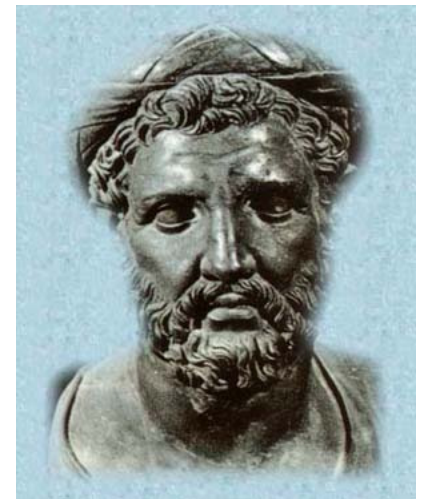
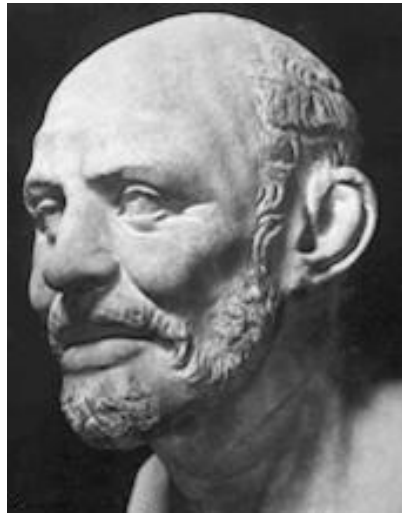
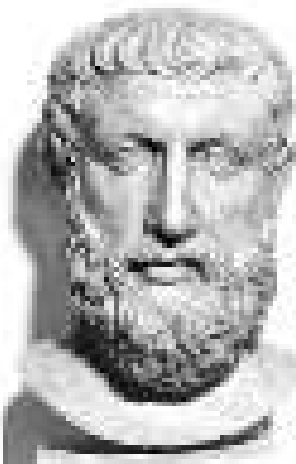
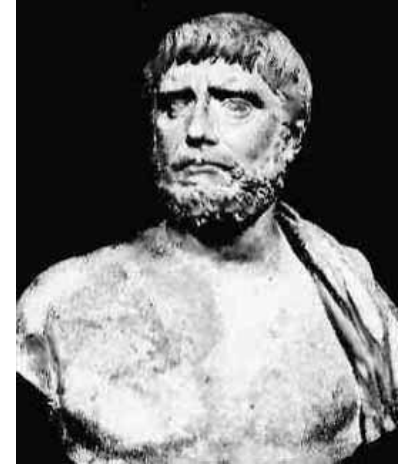
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- They had one common characteristic – They were rational thinkers.
- This does not mean that Greeks in general were rational and devoted to reason.
- They were as superstitious as we are.

- The theories the Pre-Socratics advanced were presented:

Not as pronouncements for the faithful to accept but as the;

Conclusions of arguments, as reasoned propositions for reasonable people to contemplate and debate.

- They were the first to subordinate assertion to argument and dogma to logic.

*All men have opinions, but few
men think.*

*Bishop Berkeley
(1685 – 1753)*



- This first “phase” of Greek philosophy was primarily concerned with understanding the natural world, the world of objects.
- With seeking to reduce the seeming complexity of the world to a finite number of “first principles”.

- Things can be said to exist in several ways:

By nature – as a tree,

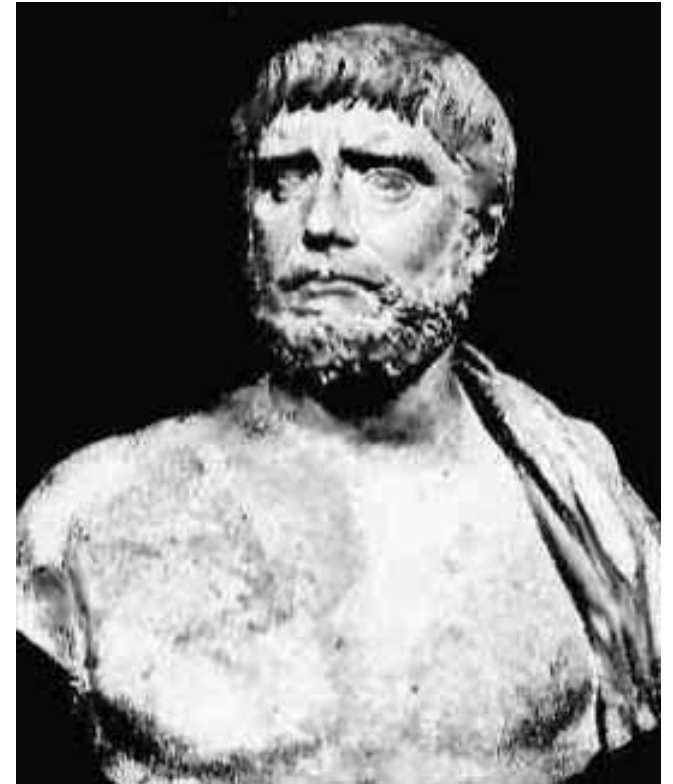
By art or craft – as a car,

By convention – as a belief or law.

- Attempts to replace what is conventionally believed (esp. when Gods are concerned) with explanations by nature are not always popular.

Thales of Miletus (624 – 547 BCE)

- Herodotus says that in 585 BCE Thales of Miletus predicted an eclipse of the sun.
- This prediction has traditionally marked the beginning of Philosophy in Western thought.

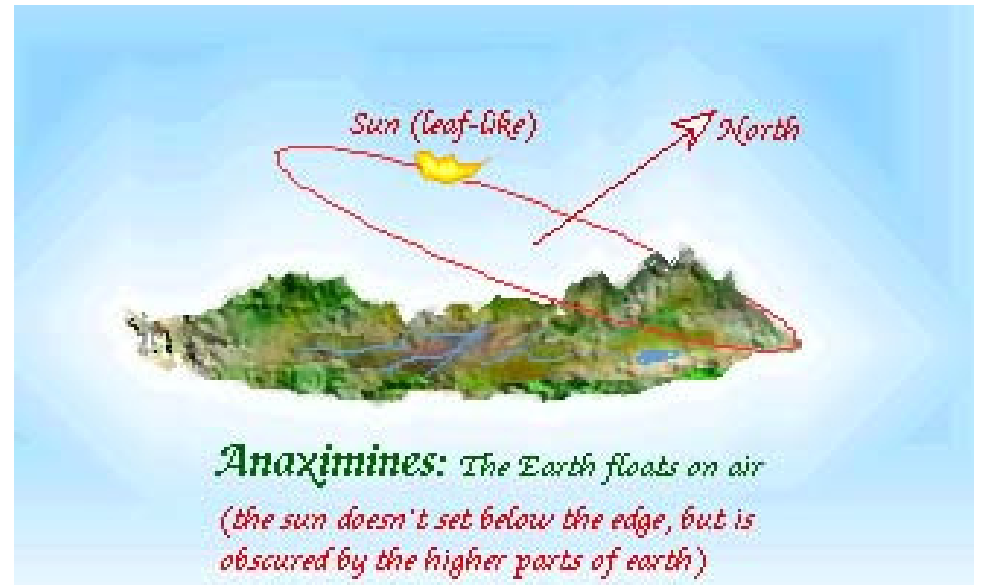


Aristotle tells us of four of Thales teachings:

- The earth rests on water. (*De Caelo* 294a28)
- Water is the *arche* of all things. (*Metaph.* 983b18)
- The magnet has a soul. (*De Anima* 405a19)
- All things are full of gods. (*De Anima* 411a7)

Anaximenes (585 – 525 BCE)

- First principle is air.
- Stars are attached “like nails” to the celestial vault which is solid crystalline material.
- Sun and stars do not pass under the earth but are hidden by the northern highest part.

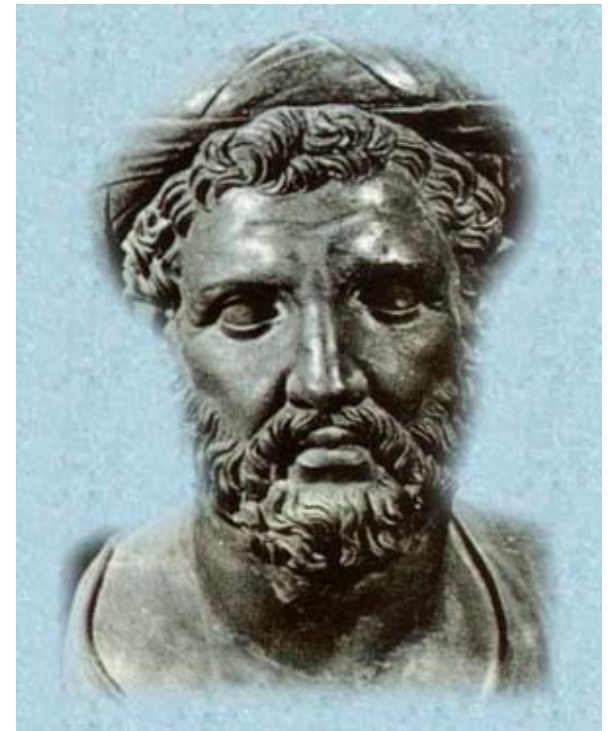


Xenophenes (570 – 480 BCE)

- Air above the earth is unlimited.
- Sun, stars, comets are fiery clouds formed by moist exhalations which are ignited by their motion.
- Stars go out every morning and new ones are created every evening.
- Moon is a compressed cloud, has its own light and goes out every month.

Pythagoras (582 – 496 BCE)

- The Pythagoreans were aware of the periodic numerical relations of the planets, moon, and sun.
- The celestial spheres of the planets were thought to produce a harmony called the Music of the Spheres.
- Pythagoreans believed the earth was in motion and that the laws of nature could be derived from pure mathematics. Number is the *arche*.



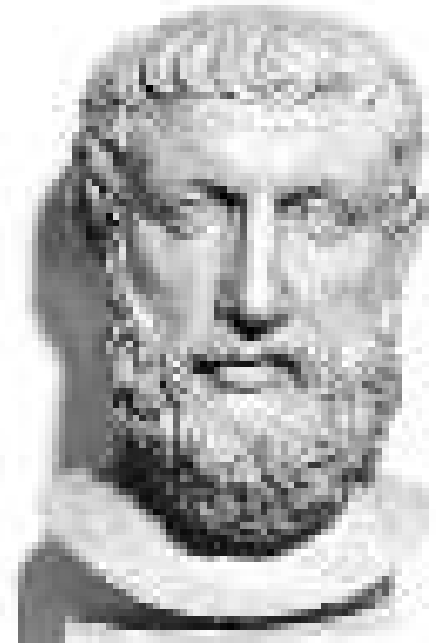
Heraclitus of Ephesus (540 – 475 BCE)

- Nothing is at rest – all is Becoming.
- All things derive from Fire(?) – constant movement.
- Worlds come and go – are absorbed back into the fire and are born again.
- All is flux.



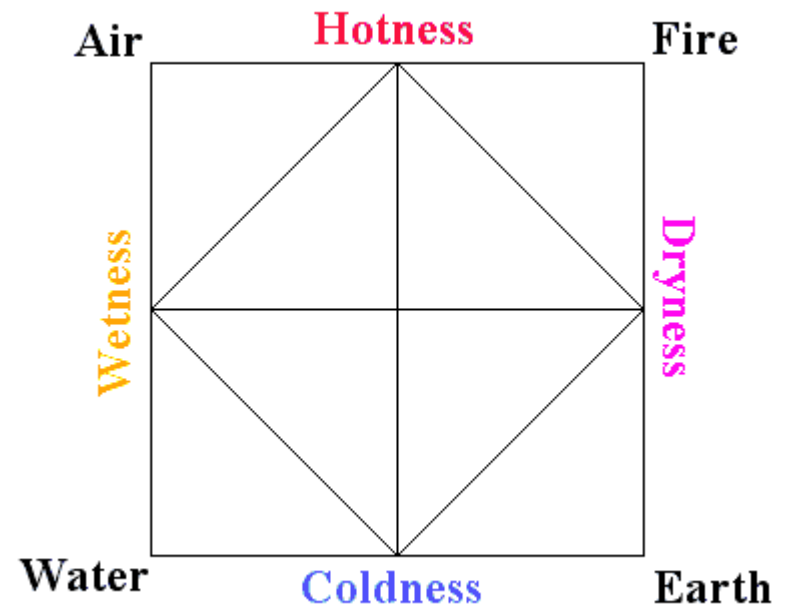
Parmenides (510 – 440? BCE)

- Being is and non-being, Becoming, is not.
- It is, or, it is not. If it is, it is one or more than one. If it is not, it is not.
- Nothing comes from Nothing.



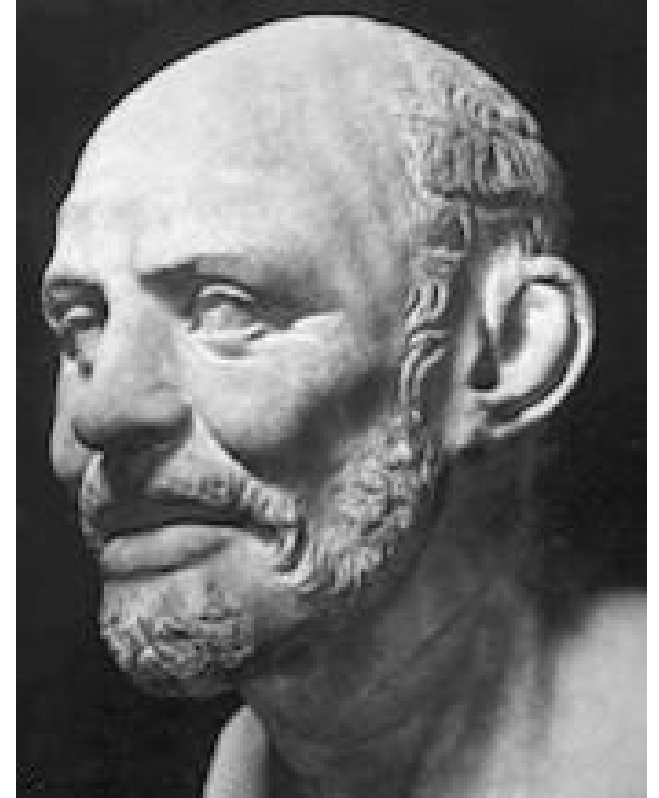
Empedocles of Agrigentum (490 – 430 BCE)

- Combined Ionian, with Pythagoreans and Eleatic.
- Elements, E, A, F, W.
- These elements are moved and joined and separated by two motive forces:
Love and Discord – which alternately predominate.
Being and Becoming



Democritus (460 – 370 BCE)

- Everything is composed of Atoms and a Void.
- By the combination and separation of these atoms the generation and destruction of all things are caused reconciling Being and Becoming.



Anaxagoras (500 – 428 BCE)

- First Athenian Philosopher, born in Klazomene.
- Assumes, unlike Empedocles and the Atomists that all qualitative differences of things already exist in the primary elements.



- A large meteorite fell in 467. Since it fell in day time he decided it came from the sun and so the sun was red hot metal.
- All this didn't sit well with the folks of Athens and he was a friend of Pericles. He was tried and acquitted of “impiety” but he had to leave Athens.



These folks were wrong. Or were they?

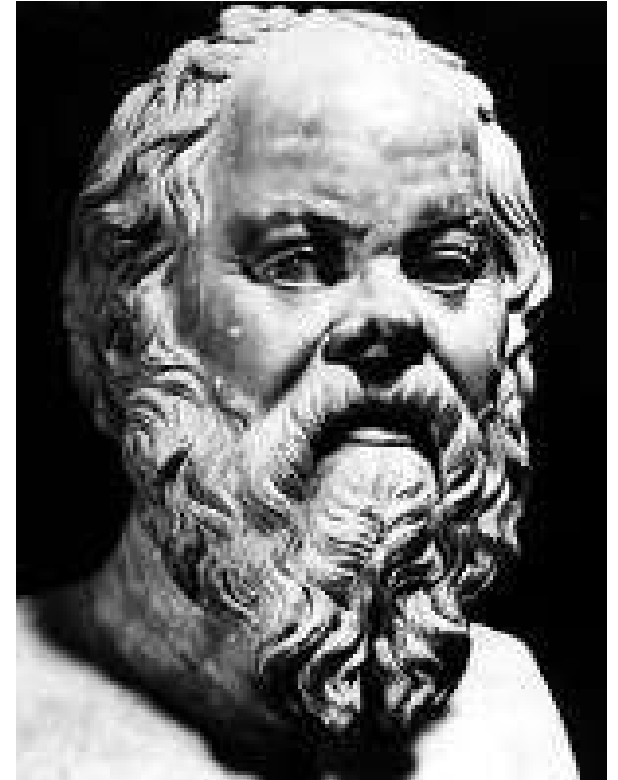
- Our earth floats on a molten core.
- We solve everything with mathematics.
- We have atoms and voids.
- We have 100+ elements, mix them together in different ways to get everything else.

Socrates (469 – 399 BCE)

- Is known to us, from Plato, mostly for changing the focus of Philosophy from:

Concern for the Natural World
to;

Concern for Human Beings.



The “What is it?” Question

- Socrates asked this very simple question that revolutionized philosophy: “What is it?”
- It is asked about significant moral or aesthetic qualities (e.g., justice, courage, wisdom, temperance, beauty).

Socrates claimed that you cannot answer a question about virtue (“Can Virtue be taught?”) (“Is Virtue good?”) until you have answered a more fundamental question: “What is Virtue?”

In general, he thought that a person’s having knowledge involving a concept, “X”, depends upon his knowing the correct answer to the “What is X?” question.

Note this is “Knowledge”, not “Opinion”.

- To have Knowledge implies that there must be Truth.
- Socrates believed this. That there are Truths. Knowledge. Universals.
- He is opposed to the Sophists (and to Relativists).
- Sophists were teachers of rhetoric who taught how to win an argument and argue anything.

- Sophism is a rejection then of “truth”.
- It is “merely” a matter of who can muster the best, actually, the most convincing arguments.
- Relativists hold that what is true or just is true or just “merely” by convention.
- Relativists hold there are no Universals.

Protagoras – *Man is the measure of all things.*

- (this is simplified to the point of scandal.)

- However, a Sophist does not, normally, deny Knowledge, a form of a universal.
- After all they get paid (well) to teach a form of knowledge, rhetoric, that has value everywhere.
- Socrates believes that “truth” can be determined by proper examination. It is not just a matter of argument.
- And he opposed relativism.

- In Plato we also get a Socrates who:

Believes in the Gods, (but will question what piety is);

Wanders around the Agora and “confronts” people;

Accepts no fees; and

Is dirty.

- He is famous for saying the only thing he knew was that he didn't know anything and for “teaching” virtue.

As for me, all I know is that I know nothing...

Republic 345(b)

I am the wisest man alive, for I know one thing, and that is that I know nothing...

Apology

I do nothing but go about persuading you all, old and young alike, not to take thought for your persons or your properties, but and chiefly to care about the greatest improvement of the soul. I tell you that virtue is not given by money, but that from virtue comes money and every other good of man, public as well as private. This is my teaching, and if this is the doctrine which corrupts the youth, I am a mischievous person.

Apology, 30a-b

- And he can be a bit annoying:

*But Socrates, **I** have no way of telling you what I have in mind. For whatever proposals we put forward keep somehow moving around and won't stay put.*

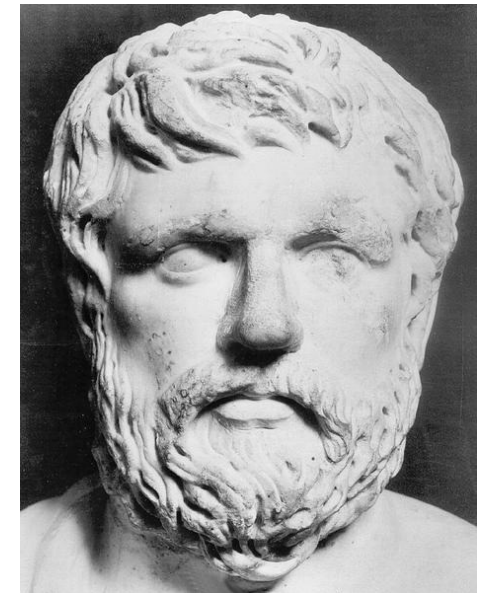
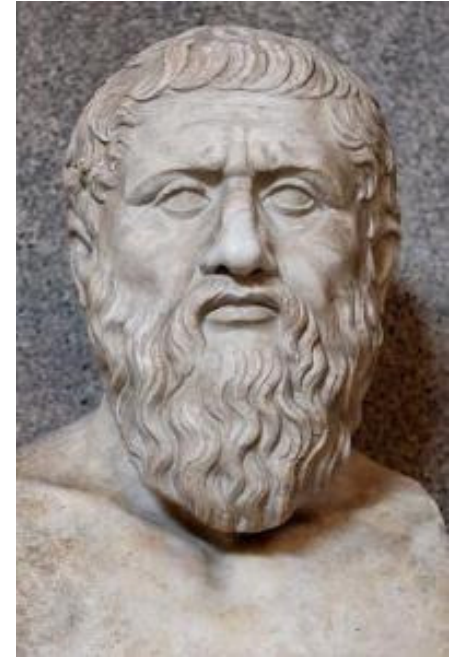
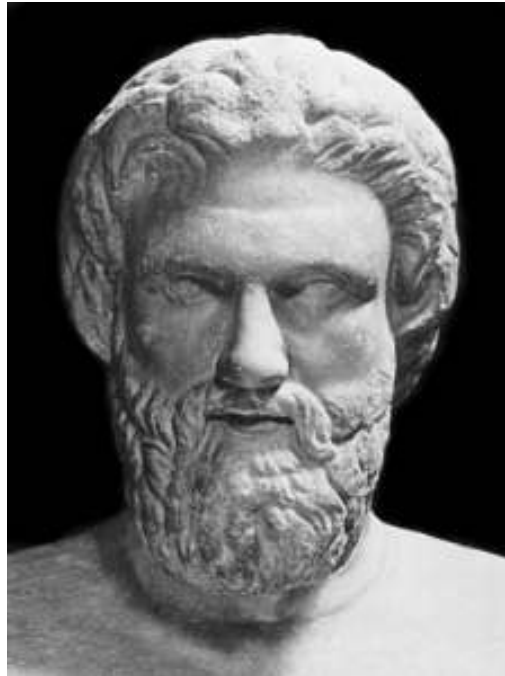
Euthyphro (11b)

- This is the Socrates we know from Plato.

- But we have three sources of information on Socrates.

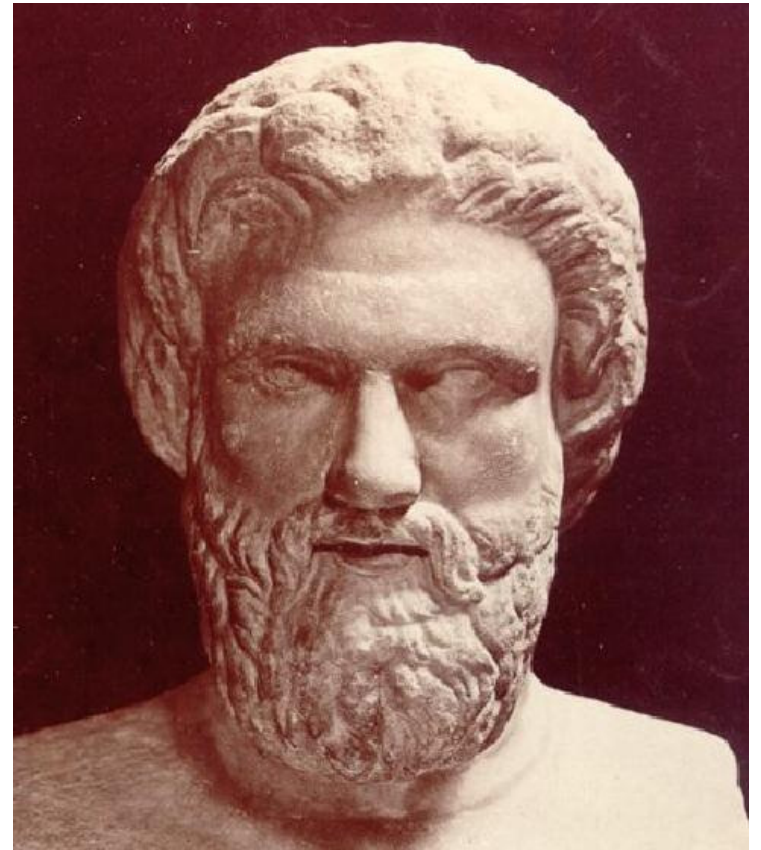
Plato
Aristophanes, and
Xenophon.

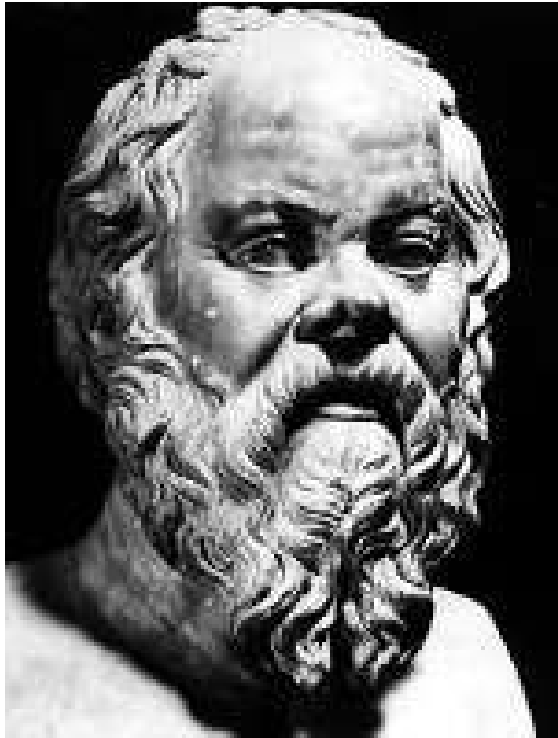
- They don't agree.



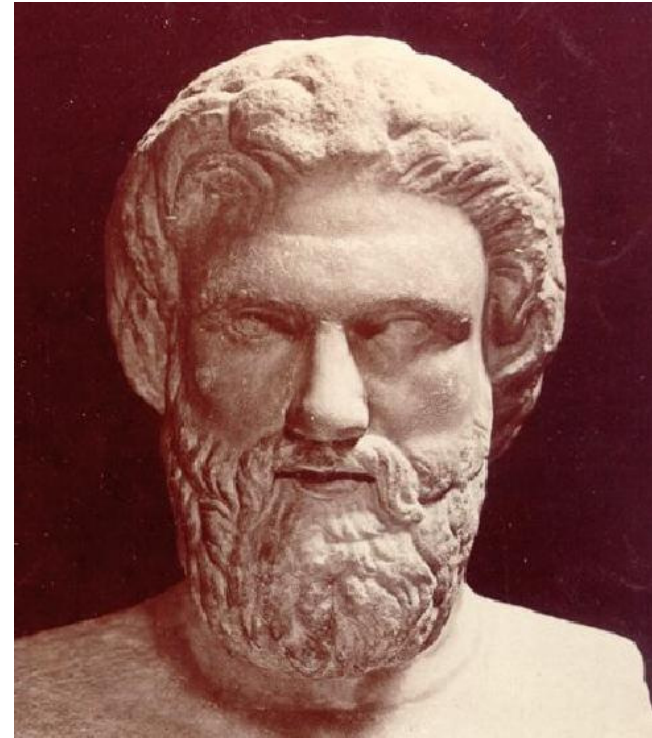
Aristophanes (466 – 386)

- Gives us the earliest “portrait” we have of Socrates.
- He was a friend of Socrates, and Plato, and appears in Plato’s *Symposium* with Socrates.





Socrates (469 – 399)



Aristophanes (466 – 386)

They had to have known each other.

- The Peloponnesian War was on-going.
- Athens had pro-war and anti-war factions.
- Sound familiar?
- Aristophanes was anti-war and a member of the “conservative block”.

- His plays “attacked” the war party’s claims and what he considered the hypocrisy of its leaders, as Cleon. He was sued by Cleon for slander but was acquitted.
- He was also concerned with the “loss” of “traditional” values in public life and in education.
- Clouds was “produced” in 423 BCE. After 7 years of war and a bit before the Peace of Nicias.

- A time of anxiety and change.
- The war was disrupting society, the countryside was emptying of people due to the war.
- All this philosophizing was questioning traditional values and explanations.
- The Sophists were teaching that “values” didn’t matter, just how well you argued.

- Aristophanes apparently is a tad uneasy with all this “new” thinking.
- Sound familiar?

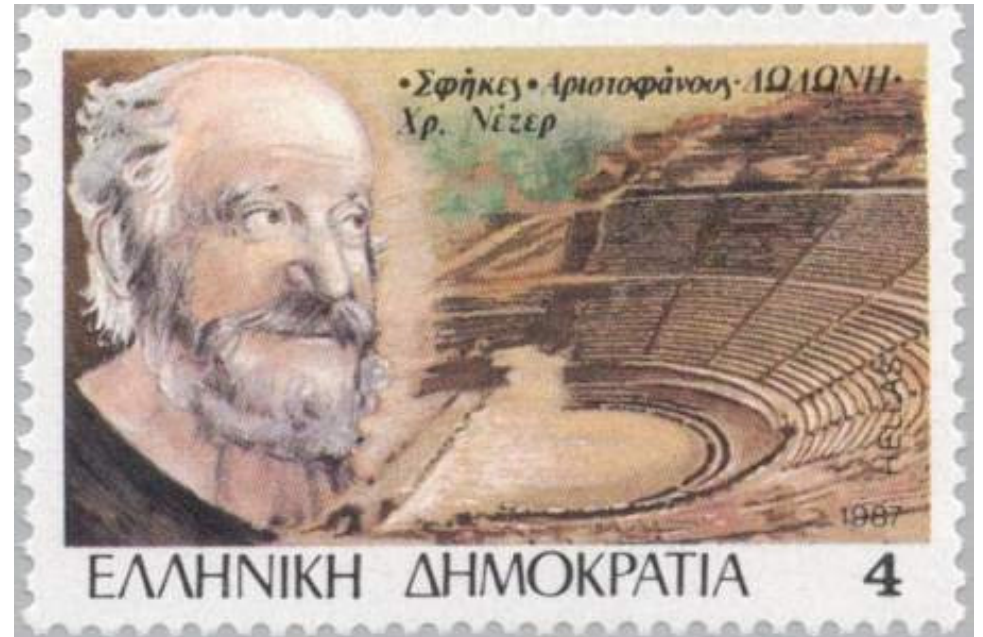
■ Aristophanes' Socrates:

Teaches in a school and
accepts money;

Is concerned with
Natural Philosophy;

Teaches Rhetoric, a
Sophist(?);

Denies the existence of
the Gods;



Claims to “know” is
maybe even
boastful;

And is dirty!

- Aristophanes genteelly(?) pokes fun at Socrates, and all this philosophy, and his knowledge claims.
- He shows him:

Determining how far a flea can jump, in flea feet;

Studying a gnats' “trumpet”; and

- Much more seriously - studying the heavens, in a basket so he can get a closer view.
- And looking “down” at ephemeral things.
- Replacing God based explanations with “natural” causes is not necessarily popular, just ask Darwin.

- He, less genteelly, shows us a Socrates denying the existence of the Gods and teaching students how to argue your way out of anything.
- Is he perhaps giving Socrates a warning of what may happen if he continues to:

Deny the existence of the Gods; and

“Corrupt” the youth of Athens.

- But who else maybe corrupting the youth of Athens.
- Who may be using the Gods as a way to justify their policies and so are reaping a Whirlwind for Athens.

- The Sophists certainly. And “corrupt” politicians?
- But what about the people of Athens as Strepsiades and Pheidippides?

- All in all a very different picture we have of Socrates than we get from Plato.

Enough talk.

Time to look at the play!

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- Last Session Material Follows

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- In the play we get a very different picture of Socrates than we get from Plato.
- How much of this about Socrates is true?

- To be effective a parody or satire must have some element of truth.
- But Plato takes Aristophanes to task in the *Apology* (19).

Now let us take up from the beginning the question, what the accusation is from which the false prejudice against me has arisen, in which [19b] Meletus trusted when he brought this suit against me. ... “Socrates is a criminal and a busybody, investigating the things beneath the earth and in the heavens and making the weaker argument stronger and [19c] teaching others these same things.” Something of that sort it is. For you yourselves saw these things in Aristophanes' comedy, a Socrates being carried about there, proclaiming that he was treading on air and uttering a vast deal of other nonsense, about which I know nothing, either much or little. ...

...But in fact none of these things are true, and if you have heard from anyone that I undertake to teach [19e] people and that I make money by it, that is not true either. Although this also seems to me to be a fine thing, if one might be able to teach people, as Gorgias of Leontini and Prodicus of Ceos and Hippias of Elis are.

- But then there seems to be some “confirmation” of this Socrates in Plato’s *Pheado* (18-19)

When I was a young man I was wonderfully keen on that wisdom which they call natural philosophy, for I thought it splendid to know the causes (arche) of everything, why it comes to be, why it perishes, and why it exists...finally I became convinced that I have no natural aptitude at all for that kind of investigation...[now] I am far, by Zeus, from believing that I know the cause of any of those things.

■ And the *Euthyphro* (6)

Is not this, Euthyphro, the reason why I am being prosecuted, because when people tell such stories about the gods I find it hard to accept them? And therefore, probably, people will say I am wrong. Now if you, who know so much about such things, [6b] accept these tales, I suppose I too must give way. For what am I to say, who confess frankly that I know nothing about them? But tell me, in the name of Zeus, the god of friendship, do you really believe these things happened?

- There must then be something of the “truth” in the Socrates Aristophanes portrays.
- But it is also likely that, at least to some degree, Socrates is a convenient “stand-in” for the entire philosophic and Sophistic influences in Athenian life.
- Which Aristophanes seems to feel are undermining traditional values.

Times change. The vices of your age are stylish today.

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- Any of this sound familiar?

- He appears to be giving a warning to Socrates of what may happen if he continues on in this way.
- But is he also warning Athens what lies in store for it if it continues claiming they are involved in a just war supported by the will of the Gods?

- And use “corrupt” argument to justify those claims?
- And how about abandoning the “old ways” for sophism and fashionable intellectual trends?
- As we clearly see Strepsiades doing.
- (The old corrupting the young?)

- Strepsiades, destroys the Thinkery at the end of the play.
- Athens will lose the war in 404 BCE.
- The Tyranny of the 30 will be installed and removed.
- And Socrates?

- In 399 BCE he is accused and tried for:

Denying the existence of the Gods; and

Corrupting the youth of Athens.

- And...



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Thank you very much!

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