

PHI 201: HISTORY OF ANCIENT PHILOSOPHY
HISTORY NOTES

LECTURE 5: GREECE ON THE EVE OF THE PELOPONNESIAN WAR (POMEROY, ET AL., CH. 7)

I. GREECE ON THE EVE OF THE PELOPONNESIAN WAR (POMEROY, CH. 7):

- A. INTRODUCTION:** We're going to move quickly through this chapter, hitting the highlights.
- B. THE BREAKDOWN OF THE PEACE:** The Thirty Years' Peace broke down due to a lack of meaningful arbitration, which in turn was due to major states lined up on one side or the other.
- C. Trouble at Epidamnus:** In Epidamnus, a civil war broke out between the democrats and the oligarchs; the democrats sought assistance from Corcyra. Corcyra turned them down (for some reason), and Delphi encouraged them to be protected by Corinth. The Corinthians agreed to assist the democrats because they had a long-standing feud with Corcyra. However, on their way to assist, the Corcyreans attacked their ships. So the Corinthians began to build more ships to pursue their goal.
- D. The Alliance of Corcyra and Athens:** Corcyra belonged to neither the Peloponnesian League nor the Athenian alliance, so they feared the Corinthians, and sought to ally themselves with Athens in the summer of 433 (they couldn't ally themselves with Sparta because Sparta was friends with Corinth). The Athenians were nervous about allying with Corcyra, because it pitted them against Sparta, indirectly; but they were even more nervous about Corinth defeating Corcyra and having the latter's ships. After a two-day debate, Athens allied with Corcyra and effectively declared war with Corinth.
- E. The Problem at Potidaea:** Potidaea was a member of both the Corinthian colony and the Athenian alliance. This was not illegal, but a political strain. Potidaea was very loyal to Corinth, but in 433-432, Athens ordered them to dismiss the Corinthian magistrates (as they had been happily receiving), reject any future Corinthian officials, tear down their seaward defenses, and give hostages. Potidaea tried to negotiate with Athens and then sent envoys to Peloponnesus, obtaining assurance that at least some Spartans would invade Attica if Potidaea were attacked. Macedonia (whose king was Perdiccas) urged Sparta to attack Athens, and Corinth to revolt in Potidaea; Corinth entered a secret alliance with the Bottiaean and Chalcidian states.
- F. Athenian Decrees Against Megara:** Athens accused Megara of harboring escaped slaves and of cultivating sacred, undefined land between Eleusis and Megara (also angry over Megara's assistance of Corinth in the Battle of Sybota). One decree excluded Megarian merchants from all ports of the Athenian empire (this didn't technically violate the Thirty-Years' Peace agreement). The Megarian economy would be devastated by this move, since there were very few non-Athenian ports, and Athens could expect the Spartans to involve themselves to aid Megara. The Peloponnesian League, at Sparta's urging, voted to go to war with Athens.
- G. Last-Ditch Efforts to Avert War:** For several months after the declaration of war, Spartans sent embassies to Athens to try to gain concessions to avert war. Concessions included "freeing the Greeks" – ending the empire, expelling any Alcmaeonids (Pericles' mother was an Alcmaeonid), and rescinding the Megarian decree. The Athenians counter-demanded that the Spartans purify the "curse of the goddess of the Brazen House" (referring to the impieties of the starvation of Pausinias in the Athenian temple decades earlier). These exchanges showed that (1) Pericles was really in charge of Athens, policy-wise; (2) the Megarian decree was very important to the Spartans; and (3) both Athens and Sparta were divided on the desirability of war. The first move was the Thebans' (Spartan ally) attack of Athens' ally Plataea (which was "heinous" because this was the site of a great Greek victory against Persia in 479). They were at war. Obviously Athens wanted to battle at sea; Sparta wanted to battle on land.
- H. HISTORICAL AND DRAMATIC LITERATURE OF THE FIFTH CENTURY:**
 - 1. Sophocles:** *Oedipus Tyrannus* (*Oedipus the King*) is the most famous tragedy of antiquity, written by Sophocles (c. 494-406 BCE). Sophocles authored over 100 plays. In *Oedipus*

Tyrannus, Oedipus was the eventual Theban ruler who was fated to kill his father and marry his mother. In *Oedipus at Colonus*, the blind hero is portrayed as having learned much through his suffering, and finding peace at Colonus. In *Antigone*, painful tensions arise in Oedipus' family after his death.

2. **Euripides:** Euripides (c. 485- c. 406 BCE) composed/produced *Medea* in 431 in the theater of Dionysius. *Medea* was shocking (compared to Sophocles' questions about society) and had a surprise ending: it used the tale of Jason, celebrated leader of the Argonauts in their quest for the Golden Fleece, to undermine conventional views of what makes a hero.

I. CURRENTS IN GREEK THOUGHT AND EDUCATION:

1. **Formal and Informal Education:** Poorer children didn't learn how to read; they imitated their elders and learned their skills, basically (e.g., farming and crafts for both girls and boys). Children of wealthy parents had private paid lessons in *mousikn*, a subject that included poetry, which was sung along with a lyra. We get our word "music" from this term and lyrics were sung along with the lyre; hence our word "lyrics." In the beginning of the 6th century, more and more children (usually boys but some girls as well) did learn to read and write, however. Math was also taught privately. Boys effectively attended "college" by their adolescence. Greek boys had older mentors for teachers, and their relationship was often erotic. However, the written sources on this subject are not thorough because of a reticence to discuss it, and the Greeks felt that education should stress the intellectual and spiritual bond at the expense of the sexual one. The bond between the older lover (the *erastns*) and the younger beloved (the *eromenos*) shored up the stability of society by encouraging each generation (or half-generation) to imitate the one that had gone before. There were also erotic bonds between men of the same age. Greek culture in general offered life-long learning of the man, from the *polis* (as Simonides puts it). Philosophy and rhetoric became more and more popular among Greek intellectuals, but the Sophists' bursting on the scene caused tension. The Sophists taught how to dissect and demolish arguments of political opponents, which was valuable in democracy, where many could speak at the assembly and in courts. They also investigated tricky questions about the workings of the world. They were not united in their thinking – most questioned authority and even the gods, but not all did so.
2. **Sophists:** These were paid teachers who provided formal education to the children of wealthy Greeks. They questioned deferential emulation of one's elders as being the noblest of achievements. They questioned *nomos* (customs/laws). The written laws sometimes conflicted with the practiced customs (each society considers his customs to be best), and the Sophists examined these. They also investigated the relationship between *physis* (nature) and *nomos* (convention). If laws didn't reflect nature, then they may have been developed arbitrarily, and this would imply that men should not necessarily follow them. Some of them were highly esteemed in Athens, but others did not like them. For instance, wealthy Athenians didn't like that Sophists charged money for their service; the poorer citizens didn't like that they couldn't afford to pay to win arguments in court, say. Notable Sophists:
 - a. **Protagoras:** Protagoras (c. 490-420) of Abdera in northern Greece, who moved to Athens around 450 and mostly lived there. Two famous sayings: (1) "Each individual person is the measure of all things – of things that are, that they are, and of things that are not, that they are not." No one can tell you what is real or true, right or wrong, no state official, parent, or even god. (2) It is impossible to know whether the gods exist, or how they might look if they do. Numerous obstacles stand in the way, such as the shortness of life and the difficulty of the subject matter." He also is reputed to have been the first to claim to be able to make the weaker argument the stronger. Works ascribed to him: *Contradictions*, *The Knockdown Arguments*.
 - b. **Thrasymachus:** Argued (in Plato's *Republic* I) that justice is nothing but the interest of the stronger.
 - c. **Hippias:** natural laws were common to all societies, so there was no conflict between *nomos* and *physis*.

- d. **Gorgias**: Gorgias (c. 485 – c. 380), Alcidas' teacher and rhetorician, was born in Leontini in Sicily. He first visited Athens in 427 seeking to persuade Athens to become involved in Sicilian affairs. He famously defended Helen against the charge of having caused the Trojan War by eloping with Paris (either because of fortune and the plan of the gods and decree of necessity, or by being seized by force, or being persuaded by words – all of these are defensible reasons he says).

Sophists were accused of moral relativism; there was a writing titled "Double Arguments" (*dissoi logoi*), e.g., that tried to demonstrate that any position could be defended with argument/rhetoric. Aristophanes' "The Clouds" (written in 423) ridiculed the intellectuals of Athens by claiming that they worried about calculating how many flea-foot-lengths it was from a spot in the room to the door; argued that a son should strike his father; and had Socrates in a basket, floating above the stage farting. The character "Socrates" runs a "think shop" and makes some of these arguments, demanding fees for his service. So Aristophanes confused Athenians as to what Socrates really did in his life, at least from the perspective of Plato if not the Athenians themselves, given their reaction to Socrates' execution.

J. THE PHYSICAL SPACE OF THE POLIS: ATHENS ON THE EVE OF WAR: [... to be covered in class.]