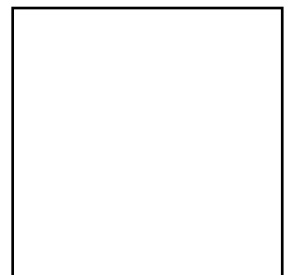
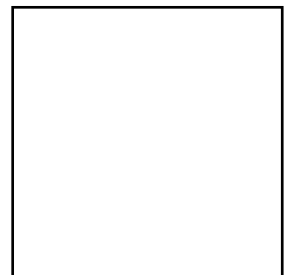
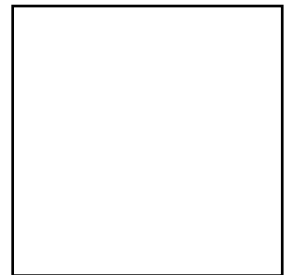


**Nelson Thornes
Distance Learning**

A2 Classical Civilisation

Giles Dawson

David Hodgkinson



Nelson Thornes

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Key to icons used throughout this pack:



Writing



Hand-in activity (either by post or e-mail)

Study Calendar



A2 Classical Civilisation (AQA)

Study Week	Unit	Assignment	Deadline
1	Topic 3 Socrates and Athens: Introduction		
2	Unit 1: Socrates' background, life and philosophy		
3	Unit 2: Socrates' trial – the <i>Apology</i>	Soc 1	
4	Unit 3: Socrates' character in the <i>Apology</i>	Soc 2	
5	Unit 4: Socrates and death		
6	Unit 5: Socrates and the sophists		
7	Unit 6: Aristophanes' <i>Clouds</i>	Soc 3	
8	Unit 7: Themes of the <i>Clouds</i>		
9	Unit 8: The <i>Crito</i>	Soc 4	
10	Unit 9: The idea of dialectic		
11	Unit 10: Dialectic and Socrates' death		
12	Unit 11: What does dialectic achieve?		
13	Unit 12: Different presentations of Socrates – Aristophanes and Plato compared		
14	Topic 4 Unit 1: Introduction to tragedy and <i>Antigone</i>		
15	Unit 2: <i>Antigone</i> 377–1089: features of tragedy	Trag 1	
16	Unit 3: <i>Antigone</i> 1090–end: the Sophoclean hero		

17	Unit 4: Introduction to <i>Oedipus</i> : 1–337		
18	Unit 5: <i>Oedipus</i> 338–1178: features of the play		
19	Unit 6: <i>Oedipus</i> 1179–end: themes of the play	Trag 2	
20	Unit 7: Euripides' <i>Medea</i> 1–762		
21	Unit 8: Euripides <i>Medea</i> 763–end	Trag 3	
22	Unit 9: The challenge to the playwright, <i>Hippolytus</i> 1–524		
23	Unit 10: <i>Hippolytus</i> 525–1101: the main characters		
24	Unit 11: <i>Hippolytus</i> 1102–end	Trag 4	
25	Unit 12: Euripides – a summary		
26	Revision Unit 1 – Socrates 1		
27	Revision Unit 2 – Socrates 2	Soc 5	
28	Revision Unit 3 – Tragedy 1		
29	Revision Unit 4 – Tragedy 2	Trag 5	
30	Spare week if students not already on exam/ study leave		

Introduction



Hello and welcome back to Classical Civilisation with Nelson Thornes Distance Learning. In this A2 year, we shall be studying further aspects of the life and culture of the ancient Greeks, with in-depth consideration of **Socrates and Athens** and **Greek Tragedy**.

Each week, during the 60-minute video-conference tutorial, we shall review the unit you have worked on since the last tutorial. As last year, it is essential that you complete all the activities in preparation for the weekly tutorial. In addition, can we emphasise the importance of bringing in your **own copy** of both the Student File and the current text. You don't have to carry the whole file into school each week; just be efficient and extract the pages you know we will be reviewing that week, then replace them in sequence when you get home.

Assignments must be completed on time, then e-mailed direct to your tutor as **Word attachments** or similar.

Distance learning

As we hope you can now appreciate, studying a subject via distance learning is not a soft option. It is a full-time course, just like those for which you receive around four hours per week tuition in school. We recommend that you continue to allocate at least 4–5 hours of study time per week (in addition to the actual tutorial); and you must work on the Student File during your school study periods and at home, if you are to benefit from the course.

As last year, the Student File effectively *is* the course. It provides your main guide to the background history and culture, and the specific texts that you study. The file also contains plenty of information about other sources of study material: websites, DVDs, specialist books and so on.

The Student File has been written by experts in the field of Classical Civilisation, one of whom is also a tutor on this course.

The weekly, 60-minute tutorial is the focal point of the week. You will have spent much of your private study time preparing for the discussion which takes place in the tutorial. Above all, your tutor wants to hear *what you have thought* and *what you have to say* about the topic under discussion. The tutor is not there to 'teach' as such, but to bring out what you have discovered and, where desirable, to set you thinking about the topic in different ways. The tutor is also there to give hints as to how to tackle the next assignment or major piece of written work.

This Classical Civilisation course is assessed entirely by examination. That means there is no coursework element. But naturally, in order to be able to tackle the exams confidently, you will need regular practice at the skills of analysis, comment and essay-writing which will be tested in the exams. This practice is what the assignments, usually set every two weeks during the course, are intended to provide.

You are encouraged to e-mail your assignments to the tutor (preferably as a Word attachment). But do bear in mind that in the final exam, you will be hand-writing your work. There is a tendency nowadays for many 16–18 year olds to lose touch with the regular practice of writing school work by hand; so that when it comes to the exam, they risk not doing themselves justice. Your tutor will be reminding you of the importance of this during the January term, encouraging you to resume writing by hand for at least some of your assignments.

Continue to discuss Student File work with your fellow students, so that you are not always grappling with the activities in isolation. Just articulating your thoughts and practising argument will mean that you make even better use of the

next video-conference tutorial. This point is especially relevant to **Socrates and Athens**. As you will learn, Socrates spent all his life trying to get at truths about the world; and he used a special method of argument to try to extract them!

Finally – as last year, you will receive your tutor’s e-mail address right away. All NTDL tutors encourage their students to get in touch by this method if there is a problem with the work, or an issue that needs dealing with. Do always feel that you can consult your tutor in this way. During the working/school week you are guaranteed a reply within 24 hours.

The A2 course – modules 3 and 4

During this year we shall begin by studying **Socrates and Athens**. This links in very well with **Aristophanes and Athens** from AS – especially in view of the fact that in his play the *Clouds*, Aristophanes makes the philosopher Socrates an important character, and has a lot of fun with what philosophers were discussing and how they went about their business. We also look at several ‘dialogues’ by Plato which feature Socrates towards the end of his life – including the one which ends with him drinking poison, condemned by an Athenian court on a capital charge.

We then move on to **Greek Tragedy**, focusing on four of the great plays of fifth-century Athens by Sophocles and Euripides. You may remember the latter as a minor character in Aristophanes’ *Acharnians*. Now he will take centre stage as author of some of the most gripping dramas of any age, *Medea* and *Hippolytus*. Of Sophocles’ output, we study *Antigone* and *Oedipus the King*, two great tragedies which still receive new productions in the theatres of our time.

In June, you will sit two examinations leading to the full A-level qualification.

The AQA specification

You can read and print off your own copy of this by going to www.aqa.org.uk. Go to the Qualifications tab, and then the New GCEs tab to find Classical Civilisation.

When you get to

3.3 Unit 3 A study of an aspect of Classical Civilisation 1

Print off the page reading Option C: Greek tragedy.

When you get to

3.4 Unit 4 CIV4 A study of an aspect of Classical Civilisation 2

Print off the page reading Option A: Socrates and Athens.

The AQA Examinations

Just as in the AS last year, your work on two A2 modules will be assessed by written examinations, each 90 minutes in length.

A Level award 2011

Candidates will be expected to

- build on the knowledge and understanding of Classical Civilisation which they have gained at AS
- develop further their ability to analyse and evaluate critically a range of classical sources
- understand the links between the central elements of their chosen course of study

Unit 3 – CIV3

- 25% of full A level
- 90-minute written examination
- 75 marks
- Candidates study *Greek tragedy* (four plays by Sophocles and Euripides)

- Candidates answer one structured, source-based question (from a choice of two) and one extended essay on the topic.

Unit 4 – CIV4

- 25% of full A level
- 90-minute written examination
- 75 marks
- Candidates study *Socrates and Athens* (based on texts by Plato and Aristophanes)
- Candidates answer one structured, source-based question (from a choice of two) and one extended essay on the topic.

Tips for examination success

- Use the AQA website, www.aqa.org.uk, to inspect sample Classical Civilisation A2 exam papers, not least to see how they actually look in practice.
- Tackle your assignments carefully and thoroughly, making use of the specialist vocabulary and critical insights you will be acquiring during the course of this A2 year.
- Take careful note of your tutor's comments on assignments, especially where they have a bearing on examination technique.
- Study and keep the document, which your tutor will be sending out in October, summarising examiners' comments on the final session of the old A2 exams, plus the AS exam papers taken in summer 2009. You should use these comments to inform your approach to the A2 exams you will be taking.

Classics today

There continues to be great popular interest in the world of the Greeks and Romans. The most visible signs of this continue to be feature films and TV series. Look out in your TV guide each week for any showing of old films of *Antigone*, *Medea*, and a famous Italian version of *Oedipus the King* (*Edipo Re*) by Pasolini. You might have managed, in spring 2009, to see a production of *Hippolytus* which visited Oxford and two London venues. It is always interesting to compare different versions/translations of the Greek classics, and it is heartening how really good poets and translators do continue to produce fresh versions for modern audiences. Seamus Heaney's recent version of *Antigone*, called *Burial at Thebes*, might also be revived somewhere near you – look out for such things! Some enterprising company might even put on Aristophanes' *Clouds* – again, be on the look-out.

If you can actually manage to visit Greece during your A-level years, be sure to spend some time in Athens itself, visiting the site of the Theatre of Dionysus, the Parthenon on the Acropolis, and a couple of major museums. The brand new Acropolis Museum is now open – a great piece of modern architecture, apart from the ancient treasures it contains.

On you go...

Best of luck with this year's course. Enjoy!

Topic 3: Socrates and Athens

Introduction

During the course of this topic, you will be studying the original sources which tell us about the philosopher Socrates, whose ideas and method lie at the beginning of western philosophy.

Socrates is shrouded in mystery: he did not write anything himself, and the sources which deal with his life are varied. Apart from the *Clouds* by Aristophanes which was produced in 423 BC, the other authors who describe his life wrote after his execution. They were also devotees of Socrates and, much of the time, were keen to defend him against the charges which led to his execution. Care is therefore needed when considering the 'historical' Socrates. In what follows below, the sources have been taken to be accurate, so that the image of Socrates given by them can be built up. As the course progresses, however, it is important to question these more, so that some of the issues surrounding this interesting man become apparent.

The sources for this course are as follows:

Date	Author	Title	Details
423	Aristophanes	The <i>Clouds</i>	Comedy showing Socrates as a star-gazing teacher of rhetoric, who causes chaos.
390s?	Plato	<i>Euthyphro</i>	Socrates argues with Euthyphro about the nature of piety.
390s?	Plato	<i>Apology</i>	Socrates defends himself against the charges brought against him, and then inflames the jury by suggesting that he should be rewarded for services to the state.
390s?	Plato	<i>Crito</i>	Socrates argues that he must obey the laws and not attempt to escape from prison.
390s?	Plato	<i>Phaedo</i>	Socrates argues that death is not to be feared, and finally drinks the hemlock which kills him.
370s	Plato	<i>Republic</i>	Socrates enquires into the nature of justice, and attempts to build a state built on the idea of justice. This includes numerous philosophical theories including the five systems of government and the theory of forms.

	Xenophon	<i>Memoirs of Socrates</i>	Xenophon describes Socrates' daily habits to show that he was not impious.
	Xenophon	<i>Apology</i>	Socrates' defence speech according to Xenophon

Activity

1

- 1 Research and make brief notes on Aristophanes, Plato and Xenophon. The focus of your notes should be on their life, works, interests and connection with Socrates.



Topic 3: Socrates and Athens

Unit 1: Socrates' background, life and philosophy

In this unit, you will learn about:

- the personal, political and cultural background to Socrates' thought.

Introduction

To understand Socrates' philosophical thought and its development, it is important to have some appreciation of his background, both personal and political. In this unit the aim is to look at some areas of this, and consider what impact they might have had on his later life.

Socrates' background

Socrates was born in 469 BC to Sophroniscus, a stone-mason, and Phaenarete, a midwife. They came from the *deme* or area of Alopece. His parents must have contributed to his view of the world as both his parents were practical people. At one point in his later conversations he uses the analogy of a midwife to describe his own philosophy: he saw himself as helping others to give birth to their ideas. Plato and Xenophon both suggest that he was a poor man, but his service as a hoplite or heavily armed soldier in the Athenian army shows that he must have had sufficient property to qualify to serve in this way. Socrates later married Xanthippe, with whom he appears to have had a stormy relationship. He was also the father of two sons.

As a citizen of Athens, Socrates was part of the radical Athenian democracy, which required every citizen to take part in the government of the state. As a minimum, citizens had the right to attend the Assembly or *Ekklesia*, the body which ultimately determined state policy on almost all matters of any importance. He could also be called upon to serve as a member of the Council or *Boule*, and even act as the chair of this body. Despite his attempts to avoid active participation in politics, he found himself in a very influential position after the battle of Arginusae in 406 BC. The Athenian generals at this sea-battle had left the battle without picking up the bodies of the dead. In Ancient Greece the idea of leaving a

body unburied was a complete taboo, and the generals returned to disgrace and ignominy in Athens. The citizens were so furious, that they decided to put the generals on trial as a group, not individually. This was against the established practice in Athens, and so illegal. At this point, Socrates was the President or chair of the *Prytaneis*, the governing group within the Council. Socrates alone voted against the motion that the generals should be tried as a body. Nevertheless, they were tried in this way and they were executed.

This story shows much about Socrates' philosophical interests. In the first place, they were practical. Both at this point, and later in the *Crito* when he was faced with his own execution, he was determined to follow the laws of the State. He did not wish to go with the convenience of the moment, but preferred to stand by what he regarded as right. Another aspect of this episode was his involvement in Athenian politics. Although he seemed to have preferred not to get too involved in State affairs, such an episode must have made him question the values which he espoused. In the *Republic*, written by Plato, Socrates would give a damning indictment of the Athenian democracy (rather as Thucydides and Aristophanes did before him). Although this work seems to owe more to Plato's ideas than Socrates', some of the ideas must stem from Socrates' own thought and experience. He was called upon to vote for something which he saw as wrong, and he saw all those around him voting to break the law. Such a situation must have led him to ask some fundamental questions: what is right, how do we know what is right, and how do we carry into action these ideas?

Activity

1

- 1 Summarise the details given above of Socrates' personal and political background.



- 2 What effect do you think these would have had on his understanding of human affairs?



Socrates spent much of his adult life pursuing practical questions about human activity. He was to be found walking around the agora or central market place of Athens, asking leading politicians and playwrights such questions. The answers were not always comfortable, and a number of the politicians found themselves embarrassed in public by his probing questioning. Men such as Lamachus and Anytus were infuriated by him. Although he attacked the Athenian system, for enabling unworthy people to become powerful, the system at the time caused him to ask questions, and gave him the opportunity to develop his philosophical method in a city which was nothing short of an intellectual ferment at the time.

It is important to appreciate Socrates' thought in this context. All around him were men like Aristophanes writing comedies, and Sophocles and Euripides presenting tragedies which questioned the very fundamentals of human morality and action. Meanwhile Thucydides the historian was looking carefully at human motivation and action in the context of the upheaval of the Peloponnesian War. While this was happening on an intellectual level, the democracy was encouraging its citizens to take part in the process of governing the city, and increasingly they found themselves in the hands of clever speakers who could persuade them that their views alone were right. This again must have led Socrates to wonder about what was right and how it could best be carried into action – to see all these citizens being led down the paths shown to them by selfish, self-seeking orators, must have made him wonder about the wisdom of democracy. Equally, it must have made him question what a good ruler would be, and how such a person could come into existence.

Socrates' involvement with Athenian public affairs did not end with the trial after Arginusae. Some years later, Athens found herself at the mercy of the Spartans. The Athenians had been at war with the Spartans for about thirty years, when, in 404 BC, the Athenians finally succumbed to Spartan military prowess, and found themselves defeated. A regime known as the 'thirty tyrants' was appointed by the Spartans. Unfortunately, Critias and Charmides, who were among the thirty tyrants, were close associates of Socrates. When their reign of terror came to an end, it was inevitable that those who were associated with them would find themselves in difficulties. It may in part be because of this association that Socrates found himself on trial in 399 BC.

The other aspect of Socrates' character and political involvement was his willingness to act for the State. He was very clear that he was an Athenian, and that he had not left Athens during his lifetime, except on military service. He fought in battles at Amphipolis and Delium, where he appears to have distinguished himself as a courageous hoplite.

Activity

2

- 1 Using the information given above, make brief notes on Socrates' involvement in the political life of Athens.



Unlike other philosophers of the time, he did not spend his time travelling around Greece. The others have become known as **sophists**: 'wise men'. These men travelled around the Greek world, moving from place to place and charging the young and wealthy for their services. They would train young men to argue a case in front of a large audience. In a society such as fifth-century Athens, such a power was invaluable: to be able to argue in front of the assembled body of citizens gave individuals power. The teaching of **rhetoric** became a major industry in the fifth century, and many philosophers became very rich as a consequence. On the other hand, Socrates claimed that he was interested in the truth, not a mere rhetorical technique. Therefore, he did not charge for his services, and remained in Athens so that he could serve his own state as best he could. In addition to this, Socrates seems to have remained poor throughout his life. The simplicity of his life and his lack of travel are two key aspects which Plato emphasises to contrast Socrates with the other teachers of the time.

The Roman politician and philosopher Cicero later said that Socrates brought philosophy down from the heavens to dwell among men. This was because Socrates' main interests were in human conduct, and not cosmological speculations about the origins and development of the world around us. Before Socrates, a number of philosophers in Asia Minor (now modern Turkey) had considered the origins of things, and come to different conclusions: was the whole world made from water or fire? Who or what were the gods? These and other such questions, which found their roots in the ideas of the world structure of the Homeric epics, occupied their minds.

Socrates, on the other hand, was concerned with what people did, and whether their actions were right. If they were right, what was the standard against which they were judged? Was there an absolute standard against which all actions could be judged? What was justice? Does it change from time to time or remain the same? What was courage? Is it the same for everyone or does it vary according to circumstances? Such questions occupied the mind of Socrates, who went around questioning those who thought they were authorities on any subject.

Activity

3

- 1 Make brief notes on the differences between Socrates and other philosophers at his time and before.



Socrates' life came to an end in 399 BC when the Athenians decided that enough was enough. He had been charged by Meletus and Anytus on two counts: corrupting the young and introducing new gods into the state. By all accounts, his defence speech did little to endear him to the jury of 501 Athenian citizens. They decided that he was guilty. In accordance with Athenian practice, the prosecution then proposed the death penalty, and he was given the option of proposing his own punishment. This he did: to be treated as an Olympic victor and be honoured by the State for his services to them. This angered the jury, and they were left with the option of death.

In 399 BC, after a short delay for religious reasons, Socrates was given a fatal draught of hemlock and put to death. He was not silenced though: his students, men such as Plato and later Xenophon, took up his methods and began to write philosophical works based on Socrates' work. Plato then founded the Academy, a philosophical school in Athens, whose students included Aristotle. The method of questioning and philosophical inquiry has been of tremendous importance to the West, and shaped the way we think today.

Activity

4

- 1 Make notes and prepare for a discussion on the factors which influenced Socrates' philosophical thinking.



Time-chart of Socrates' life

Date	Event	Socrates' Life
479	End of wars between Greece and Persia	
469		Socrates born
449	Official peace with Persia, leads to beginning of rebuilding programme in Athens, including the Parthenon	
431	Outbreak of the Peloponnesian War with Sparta	
429		[Birth of Plato]
424		Battles of Delium and Amphipolis
423		The <i>Clouds</i> performed
406	Battle of Arginusae and Trial of the Generals	Socrates opposes trial of the generals
404	Athens defeated by Sparta; beginning of the rule of the 'thirty tyrants'	
399		Trial and death of Socrates

Activity

5

- 1 Use the Internet or the *Oxford Classical Dictionary* to find out more about the events given in the time-chart above. The focus of your investigations should be on their connection with Socrates. Once you have found out the basic facts of these events, you could then think about how they might have affected his philosophical thought.





Summary

In this unit, you have learnt about:

- the personal, political and cultural background to Socrates' thought

Looking ahead

In the next unit we will be looking at the circumstances of Socrates' trial, in particular the system of trial by jury used by the Athenians. Socrates found himself facing 501 fellow Athenian citizens in front of whom he had to defend himself. What were the charges? How did he react to his very public trial? Plato's *Apology* gives us one account of Socrates' actions.

Topic 3: Socrates and Athens

Unit 2: Socrates' trial – the *Apology*

In this unit, you will learn about:

- the judicial process in Athens and its relationship with Socrates' trial
- the charges brought against Socrates and how we know about them.

First, read Plato's *Apology* quickly through. When you have finished reading the *Apology*, work through the notes given below, which will set the text in context.

Introduction

In the years after Socrates' death, it seems that a number of authors wrote 'apologies' or defence speeches for him. Two of these have survived: that by Xenophon and that by Plato. We are now going to study the Plato version in some detail. It is important to have some understanding of how a trial in the Athenian system worked before studying this text, so we will look at this first.

Trial by jury in Athens

The system of trial by jury in Athens in essence was very straightforward. Before the trial, the plaintiff brought the charges to the king archon, a leading official in the Athenian democratic system, and laid them before him. He would then decide whether or not there was a case to be answered. If there was, the process then moved on to a court.

In the court, up to 501 citizens of Athens (men, over the age of 18 and with two Athenian parents) listened to a case brought by the prosecution. The defence then had the opportunity to reply, and once both sides of the case had been heard, the jury would decide on a guilty or innocent verdict. In the event that the defendant was found guilty, if there was no fixed penalty in Athenian law, the prosecution would propose a penalty, followed by a counter-proposal from the defendant. The jury would then vote again on this proposal, and the guilty party would be duly punished.

It is important to note in this situation the significance of a good speech. The jury members were drawn from all sections of the citizen population, and anyone

could find themselves on a jury. There were elaborate systems in place to ensure that the jurors did not know in advance which trial they were attending, and so they could not be bribed or otherwise persuaded to come to a particular verdict. All this meant that the jury was not a group of experts in a particular area of the law or in court procedure: they simply had to respond to the case put in front of them. It is clear that this led defendants to play on the jurors' emotions by bringing in irrelevant material or presenting their weeping children and wives to the jurors to gain their sympathy. Jurors would expect to be appealed to in this way.

Aristophanes' *Wasps* makes this very clear. Procleon, an elderly man who loves serving on juries, describes the power and sense of exhilaration to be gained from serving on a jury:

PROCLEON:

Well, to get off to a flying start, I propose to prove to you that this power of ours amounts to nothing short of absolute sovereignty. Can you think of any living creature that is happier, more fortunate, more pampered, or more feared than a juror? No sooner have I crawled out of bed in the morning than I find great hulking fellows waiting for me at the bar of the court. As I pass, one of them slips his delicate hand into mine – the very hand he has dipped so deeply into the public funds; and they all bow down low, and plead with me in pitiful tones: 'Have pity, venerable sir,' they cry. 'Have you never made a bit on the side yourself? When you held some high office, perhaps, or went shopping for the corporal's mess?' That's how they talk to me – people who've never known of my existence till that moment, unless they've been tried before, and been acquitted.

ANTICLEON:

Point one. Supplicants at bar of court. I'm noting that. [He writes on his tablet.]

PROCLEON:

Then, after they've all crawled to me and tried to soften me up, I go behind the bar and take my seat, and forget all about any promises I may have made. I just listen to what they say – and there's nothing they won't say to flatter the jury in their efforts to get acquitted. Some of them bewail their poverty and pile on the agony: one will start quoting the legends, another comes out with funny stories from Aesop, or starts cracking jokes to make me laugh and put me in good humour. And if he can't win me over that way, he drags his children out in front – all his little girls and boys: and I just sit and listen while they all grovel in a heap, bleating, and their father stands over them and pleads with me to ratify his accounts, for all the world as if I were a god. 'Master,' he cries, 'if thou delightest in the cry of the lamb, hear the cry of my son and have mercy. Or if thy tastes lie in other directions, let my daughter persuade thee.' And after that, perhaps I relax my severity a little. Isn't that power for you? Doesn't it make mere wealth look silly?

Aristophanes, *Wasps*, 547–575, trans. D. Barrett, in *Aristophanes: The Frogs and Other Plays*, pp. 57–58, Penguin, 1964

It is worth bearing this in mind as you read the *Apology*: the Athenians were probably expecting a performance like this, not a philosophical treatise telling them how the defendant had served the city!

Activity

1

- 1 Make brief notes on the trial by jury system in Athens.



- 2 What does the passage from *Wasps* opposite show us about jurors and the process of jury trials in Athens?

Xenophon, on the other hand, writes as follows:

The indictment against him ran something like this: Socrates is a malefactor, firstly, in that he does not recognize the gods recognized by the State, but introduces new deities; secondly, in that he corrupts the young.

Xenophon, *Memoirs of Socrates*, 1.1.1, p. 68, Tredennick and Waterfield, Penguin, 1990

Each of these statements is worth considering carefully in the light of Socrates' life. It is worth noting first, though, that an agreement was made in 403 BC, after the rule of the 'thirty tyrants', when democracy had been restored, that prosecutions would not be brought in relation to political events prior to 403 BC. This meant that the enemies of the thirty tyrants could not attack them directly on political grounds. However, Socrates was associated with these men (especially Critias and Charmides) and may have been prosecuted on these trumped-up charges as a result.

Activity 2



- 1 Make a note of the charges against Socrates as given in the sources above.

Let us look at each charge in turn:

Looking at things above the heavens and below the earth

This accusation was also brought against Anaxagoras, another leading fifth-century philosopher. It would appear that it was an attempt to blacken the philosopher's name, and may have been applied to all philosophers. It is worth considering from your knowledge of the *Odyssey* what an Athenian might have thought about these matters: in the heavens lived the gods, and in the underworld there were other divine powers and the dead. Those Athenians who believed in traditional religion may well not have taken kindly to such new ideas.

Criminal meddling and the weaker argument defeating the stronger

This was not in fact a charge which was directly brought by the prosecution during Socrates' trial, but he suggests that the jury would have been influenced by their previous exposure to these ideas about him. He suggests at this point that it was a playwright who was chiefly responsible for these ideas. This was

Aristophanes, who, in 423 BC, had made fun of the whole sophistic movement with his play the *Clouds*. This depicted Socrates as the arch-sophist, with the characteristics and beliefs of many other teachers of the day. Socrates, if Plato and Xenophon are to be believed, held firmly to his principle that he should not charge for teaching, which marked him out from other philosophers of the time. He also claims early on in the *Apology* that he is not interested in the kind of rhetoric that is used in a courtroom, but only interested in the truth, and discovering the truth through argument or **dialectic**. In the *Clouds* he is presented as a teacher of rhetoric, who shows a young man how to tie his father in knots: due to the son's extravagant habits, the father has got into a lot of debt. He therefore goes to Socrates to get him to teach his son the style of arguing which will enable him to argue his way out of repaying these debts. The result, of course, is chaos. Aristophanes was using Socrates as a figurehead for the whole sophistic movement, and it may have remained in peoples' minds that Socrates was one of these teachers. One has to ask, however, whether the jurors of 399 BC would have remembered a play produced in 423 BC – one which did not even get first prize.

The corruption of the youth

The issue of the corruption of the youth is very significant. Socrates is known to have associated with a number of leading young men in Athens.

1 Alcibiades

These leading young men included Alcibiades, a notorious general and traitor in Athens. In 415 BC he was elected as one of the leaders of an expedition to Sicily, but shortly after it left Athens, he was recalled on charges of sacrilegious behaviour. He failed to return, but went instead to the Spartans, with whom Athens was at war at the time. He then gave them excellent advice on their strategy, and improved Spartan fortunes considerably. Alcibiades had given the expedition considerable support, and encouraged the Athenians to undertake it, probably because it was an opportunity for him to gain considerable glory and wealth. When the expedition became one of the worst disasters in Athenian history, Alcibiades must have been held at least partially responsible in the popular mind. Subsequently, he switched sides again and gained Persian support for the Athenian campaign against Sparta. In his dialogues named after Alcibiades, Plato depicts Socrates questioning an impetuous Alcibiades, and suggests that without Socrates' presence Alcibiades would have been even more wild. How true this is, no one can ever know, but it is easy to see how a close association between Alcibiades and Socrates would have landed Socrates in considerable difficulties after the Athenian defeat in 404 BC.

2 Critias and Charmides

Socrates was also associated with Critias and Charmides – indeed, there are dialogues by Plato which bear their names, and they feature in Xenophon's *Memoirs of Socrates*. They were both members of the thirty tyrants, who took power in Athens after the defeat of the Athenians in 404 BC. In effect, the thirty were a puppet government for the Spartans, and were subsequently associated with a reign of terror, in which they attempted to eliminate any opposition. The association with this reign of terror was one of the main causes of the prosecution against Socrates: in 399 BC people could not directly prosecute others for actions during this period, because of the agreement made in 403 BC.

In Plato's *Apology* Socrates himself speaks about a key incident in his association with the thirty:

When the oligarchy came into power, the Thirty Commissioners in their turn summoned me and four others to the Round Chamber¹ and instructed us to go and fetch Leon of Salamis from his home for execution.

1 The *Tholos* building in the *Agora* or central square in Athens, where the leading committee of the government was housed.

This was of course only one of many instances in which they issued such instructions, their object being to implicate as many people as possible in their crimes. On this occasion, however, I again made it clear not by my words but by my actions that the attention I paid to death was zero (if that is not too unrefined a claim); but that it mattered all the world to me that I should do nothing wrong or wicked. Powerful as it was, that government did not terrify me into doing a wrong action; when we came out of the Round Chamber the other four went off to Salamis and arrested Leon, and I went home. I should probably have been put to death for this, if the government had not fallen soon afterwards. There are plenty of people who will testify to these statements.

Plato, *Apology*, 32

Activity

3

- 1 Use the internet or *Oxford Classical Dictionary* to find out as much as you can about Alcibiades, Critias and Charmides. Make notes on Socrates' association with Alcibiades, Critias and Charmides.



- 2 What effect do you think Socrates' association as a teacher with these men would have had on his public image?

Believing in gods contrary to those of the State

The charges against Socrates, of believing in gods contrary to those of the State and introducing new deities, were standard charges which were brought against philosophers of the day by those who felt that their opinions were a threat to the State. Why, though, might such an accusation have had any validity against Socrates?

Xenophon was at pains to show how Socrates was exemplary in his approach to traditional religion:

‘With regard to the first charge, that he did not recognize the gods recognized by the State, on what evidence can they possibly have relied? Everyone could see that he sacrificed regularly at home and also at the public altars of the State; and he made no secret of using divination; in fact it was common gossip that Socrates claimed that the divine communicated to him. This, I imagine, was the chief reason for accusing him of introducing new deities. Yet he was no more heretical than any other people who believe in divination and rely on portents and omens and chance meetings and sacrifices. They do not suppose that the birds they see or the people they meet know what is the right course for those who are consulting the diviner; they believe that these things are simply means used by the gods to communicate, and Socrates took the same view. But whereas most people say that it is the omen or the encounter that dissuades or encourages them, Socrates asserted what he actually believed: he said that the divine does the communicating. He often warned his associates to do this or not to do that, at the prompting of the divine, and those who took his advice benefited from it, while those who did not were sorry for it afterwards. ... And if he trusted in gods, he surely must have believed in gods.’

Xenophon, *Memoirs of Socrates* 1.1.2–5 passim, pp. 68–9, Tredennick and Waterfield, Penguin, 1990

This passage highlights two important aspects of Socrates’ belief in the gods: he did seem to have a firm belief in the State gods, but he also listened to an inner voice, which seemed in some way to be divine. In this way he felt that he had a connection with the gods. This is described in both Plato and Xenophon.

It is worth noting that we must be very careful with both Plato and Xenophon as sources on Socrates. Both were closely connected with him, and writing in the years after his death, with the intention of defending him against the charges laid against him.

Activity

4

- 1 Make notes on the key points raised about Socrates and religion in the Xenophon passage above.



- 2 How far do you think this is a trustworthy account of Socrates' actions? (You may wish to find out a little more about Xenophon's relationship with Socrates before doing this.)



Socrates also claims in the *Apology* that the visit of his friend Chaerophon to the oracle started him on the quest to discover someone wiser than himself, and so he began on his philosophical quest. He states clearly:

This, I do assure you is what my god commands; and it is my belief that no greater good has ever befallen you in this city than my service to my God; for I spend all my time going about....'

Plato, *Apology*, 30a

Activity 5



- 1 Have a look at your notes on the *Odyssey*, and, if you have time, the text itself. What role do the gods play in the poem? Focus on Athene and Poseidon's role in relation to Odysseus' journey. Remember that this is a much older text, but that the basic ideas embodied in it reflect the more traditional elements in Athenian religion.



- 2 Prepare for a discussion: was the jury right to believe Socrates guilty on the charges in relation to religion and politics?



Opposition to Socrates described in the *Apology*

There are three aspects of the opposition to Socrates described in the *Apology*. The first, and most obvious, are the accusers, Meletus, Anytus and Lycon. They bring the charges outlined above against Socrates. Meletus was named as the accuser, but Anytus appears to have been the real force behind the prosecution. Anytus was a wealthy Athenian and democratic leader. He had been a General in 409, but failed to prevent the loss of Pylos. Plato depicts him in the *Meno* as a passionate

enemy of the sophists: he probably saw the opportunity to prosecute Socrates as a way to attack them and gain political influence in going after someone who was involved with the thirty tyrants. The fact that Socrates appears to show a deep disdain for the democratic process in Athens would also have angered Anytus, and may explain his involvement in the prosecution. In the *Meno* Socrates is discussing whether virtue or human excellence can be taught. Anytus finally becomes so angered by Socrates' conclusions, that he storms out with a clear warning to the philosopher:

Socrates, I think that you are too ready to speak evil of men: and, if you will take my advice, I would recommend you to be careful. Perhaps there is no city in which it is not easier to do men harm than to do them good, and this is certainly the case at Athens, as I believe that you know.

Plato, *Meno*, 95, p. 374, translation, Jowett, Random House, 1937

The second aspect of the opposition is the accusations which Socrates claims have been levelled against him for a long time before the trial. He mentions the playwright Aristophanes and the *Clouds*, the general attacks on his character and the opposition which he engendered through his questioning of leading citizens in Athens. All this, he claims, would have led the jury to be prejudiced against him before the trial even began. He explains that he has no knowledge of things which he is alleged to have spoken of, and that he aroused opposition because he was following the guidance of Apollo in asking people questions and exposing their lack of knowledge.

The final aspect of the opposition is the jury themselves, and their reaction to his speech. As you read the *Apology*, look for the points at which Socrates asks the jury to calm down. His speech clearly inflamed them, and it is worth thinking about the claims that he makes and why these might have met with such opposition. As you consider this, bear in mind the scene from the *Wasps* in which Procleon describes the power of a juror – if the jury were expecting an appeal of this sort, there was very little chance that they would have been impressed by Socrates' philosophical lecture. It is also worth noting that Xenophon's account of Socrates' defence speech also depicts Socrates angering the jury, and asking them to quieten down. Xenophon notes, '... others have written about the trial, and they have all touched upon his arrogant tone; so it is clear that this is how Socrates actually spoke.' (Xenophon, *Socrates' Defence*, 1). Socrates seems to have done little to help himself.

Activity

6



- 1 Look through the *Apology* and note the points at which Socrates inflames the jury.

- 2 Consider how and why he did this.

- 3 Prepare for a discussion on this topic: your notes should include detailed reference to the text of the *Apology* and your own opinions on these references.

The method and details of Socrates' execution

The details of Socrates' execution will be considered later, but it is worth understanding a little of the procedure to put Socrates' words in the *Apology* in context. After the trial, the convicted man was usually taken to prison and held for a short while before being given a fatal draft of hemlock. In Socrates' case, the period of time in the prison was lengthened because a religious observance forbade the Athenians from killing him until after the end of the festival at Delos. He therefore had a period in prison during which further dialogues (the *Crito* and *Phaedo*) are set.

It is worth noting that it was common for people to try to escape at this point. Exile was a common and acceptable alternative to death, and, had Socrates proposed this, rather than the outrageous suggestion that he be entertained at public expense like an Olympic victor, he probably would have lived. However, he was determined not to leave Athens, and to live under the laws of that city, so he had to take the consequences of his speech, and face death. When his companions tried to encourage him to escape from the prison, he would not do so on the same grounds: he was bound by the laws of Athens, and would willingly accept death.

Activity

7

Read the final sections of the *Apology* (35a to the end). Consider the following:

- 1 Why do you think the jury chose the death penalty? Explain your answer with detailed reference to the text.



- 2 Do you think Socrates' claims in this section of the text are in any way justified? Explain your answer with detailed reference to the text.



Summary

In this unit, you have learnt about:

- the judicial process in Athens and its relationship with Socrates' trial
- the charges brought against Socrates and how we know about them.

Looking ahead

In the next unit we will be looking at Socrates' character as it is shown in the *Apology*. How reliable is Plato's account? We will contrast this account with that of Xenophon to see what we can learn of the great philosopher's character.