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The Trial and Execution of Socrates

Lead: In 399 BC the Greek philosopher and social critic, Socrates, was tried for religious heresies and corrupting the morals of the young. His conviction led to his suicide.

Intro.: *A Moment in Time* with Dan Roberts.

Content: Socrates, left no writings of his own. His life and philosophy are known to us through the writings of Plato, his most famous pupil and follower, and through the Greek historian Xenophon. His ideas became the foundation for an secular ethical

philosophy based on knowledge and self-examination. Through knowledge, Socrates maintained, one could learn justice, truth and love, and in their application lead a moral life. Socrates' method of teaching his philosophy is now known as the "Socratic method"- a dialogue between teacher and student that promotes self-examination. The teacher begins with a question such as "What is courage?" The student responds and thus begins a series of interrogatives, question answer, further question, answer, and so on.

Socrates was born around 470 BC in and lived his whole life in Athens. His mother was a midwife and it is believed his father was a sculptor.

The young man received a rather conventional education common to those of his social status in Athens - music, literature and gymnastics. He fought in the Peloponnesian War, married and had three sons. Life was not easy for the family. Never paid as a tutor, he spent much of his time teaching informally, in the marketplace, engaged in informal dialogue on many topics, often critical of Athenian democracy and its leaders.

In 399, the war sputtered out with Athens the acknowledge loser. It was a time of political pay-back and blame assessment. It was said that two of Socrates' former pupils had betrayed Athens during the war.

Some of Socrates' less admiring fellow citizens seized upon his reputation as an iconoclast and brought him to trial for corrupting the morals of the youth and neglecting the gods of Greece. Next Time: Trial and suicide.

At the University of Richmond, this is Dan Roberts.

Resources

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