Seminar on Topics of World History for Junior Secondary History (1): Legacy of Greco-Roman Civilizations and its Influence on Today's World

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CDI020160247

15.10.2015

- # **Ancient Greek Philosophy:**

- **Main References:**
- **Plato. *The Trial and Death of Socrates*. Tr. by G.M.A. Grube. Indianapolis: Hackett, 1975.**
- **-------. *Symposium*. Tr. by Alexander Nehamas and Paul Woodruff. Indianapolis: Hackett, 1989.**
- **-------. *The Republic*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1974.**

- ***Popper, Karl. *The Open Society and Its Enemies*. Vol. I: The Spell of Plato. Princeton: Princeton U. Press, 1966.**

- **In ancient Greece, at the earliest stage, *physics, mathematics, and astronomy were included as parts of "philosophy", which means "the *love of wisdom".**

- **It seeks to trace everything back to its "ultimate grounds" (typical characteristic of a philosopher).**
- **What is the origin of the universe? (Cf. Stephen Hawking of our time)**
- **Philosophy seeks to know why there is a universe at all.**
- **The law of causation -- everything, which has a beginning, has a cause.**
- **(Plato, "the unmoved mover, the uncaused cause = the prime mover").**

- **Socrates**
- **Born in Athens (469 - 399 B.C.)**
- **Socrates was first interested in natural science, including "whether the earth is flat or not', but he was not satisfied with the result of his research; so he abandoned the study of natural science and turned to the study of human life.**
- **In teaching method, Socrates did not use "spoon-feeding" method, but "dialogue -- questions and answers" (cf. Confucius, *The Analects* or *Lun Yu*).**
- **Socrates liked using examples of daily affairs to enlighten his students.**

- ***"educare"* (Latin) = to lead (like a "mid-wife" helping the mother to give birth to her baby).**

- **Socrates' divine mission "was to expose the ignorance of those who thought themselves wise" (*Apology* [*Apology* is Plato's version of Socrates' speech to the jury for his own defense in his trial])**

"What did Socrates really know?"
- **Socrates did not claim to know anything**
- **Socrates did not think he knew a lot.**
- **But, the Delphi's Oracle, "no one is wiser than Socrates"!**
- **Probably, Socrates knew that he was ignorant, but the others did not know that they were ignorant.**
- **(Cf. Confucius, *The Analect*, "say you know when you know, say you don't know when you don't know, that is know-how or knowledge or wisdom")**

- Socrates liked to use dialogues with careful definition and logical thinking + systematic questioning, such as what, where, when, why, how, etc.

- Socrates, "the greatest power on earth is the power of reflection."

- In 399 B.C., 3 Athenian citizens accused Socrates of (1) "heresy" (or "impiety"); (2) did not believe or observe the gods of the *polis;* and (3) "corrupted the minds of the youth"!

- ***Plato (427-347 B.C.)**
- **born in Athens**
- **his youth witnessed the decline and fall of Athens (in 404 B.C., Sparta defeated Athens in the Peloponnesian War; + in 399 B.C., the trial and execution of Socrates, his beloved mentor/master, via "democratic" ways, [thus, Plato preferred Spartan timarchy to Athenian democracy (which was with 'selfish individualism, civic irresponsibility, diversity, disintegration, dislike of authority, no respect for the authority, class war + lack of cohesion, … that is, all negative)]).**

- After the execution of Socrates in 399 B.C., with final disillusionment, Plato left Athens and traveled, including to Syracuse in southern Italy.

- In 386 B.C., Plato returned to Athens and founded the **Academy** where he taught for the rest of his life (d. 347 B.C.).

- Plato used the **dialogue** form of writing as the most effective means of presenting his philosophical ideas.

- It was not Plato's intention to answer specific question or to propose final and dogmatic solutions to any of the problem that were being discussed.

- Plato preferred instead to do something that would stimulate original thinking on the part of the reader. This manner of presentation enabled Plato to present contrasting points of views as they would likely to occur in a series of conversations taking place among individuals having different points of views.

- **Finally, by using conversational method (dialogue), it would be possible to illustrate way in which current issues of the day were related to one another.**

- **This is one of the reasons why not one of Plato's dialogues is devoted exclusively to the discussion of a single topic. Plato wanted to make it clear that in order to understand any particular subject, you must see how it is related to other subjects and to the field of knowledge as a whole.**

- **<u>Plato's *Republic*</u>:**
- **With theories of government;**
- **It represents what Plato regarded as the ideal toward which actual states should strive [it is a little bit too idealistic; in a later and considerably longer dialogue titled, *The Laws*, Plato proposed a less idealistic but more practical alternative for the organization of state government].**

- **Timarchy (Sparta)**
- **Oligarchy**
- **Democracy (Athens)**
- **Tyranny**

- **To Plato, "democracy was controlled by the ignorant majority; and there was no order/discipline. Yet, there were political/class/power struggles, disorder, and wars."**

- **The philosopher-king (of Gold quality with wisdom, benevolence, yet "*little desire*") = the ideal ruler [Plato believed that only those persons who possessed intellectual as well as moral qualities should be entrusted with the power to rule over others]**

- **Auxiliaries (of silver quality with bravery, + obedient to the philosopher-king) = warriors [protecting/defending]**

- **Citizens (of iron quality with a lot of desires) = ordinary people, such as farmers and workers [to produce accordingly]**

- **Each should behave "accordingly", [then, everything would be in order, (but, in reality, that's not the case. A lot of people, such as Hitler, would believe that they are the "philosopher-king"!)]**

- **(*Adolf Hitler considered himself as the philosopher-king, etc., …)**

- **Plato believed that there was an ideal state (or the perfect *polis*/republic [cf. Thomas More's *Utopia*]) up above in heaven; and "this world of phenomenon is not the real world but pale, imperfect reflections of ideal models."**

- **Chapter 7 in *The Republic:* "The Allegory of the Cave"**

- **In the cave, people faced the deep end (like a screen) with lights coming from the entrance [objects were pale shadows/reflections in the screen, yet people got used to it and believed those were the real objects].**

- **Yet, some philosophers (like him) went outside of the cave and found the truth/reality, and because of the sense of duty as a philosopher, these philosophers tried to tell the truth [but in vain].**

- **Nevertheless, Plato's conclusion: "objects that we perceive through our senses are merely pale, imperfect reflections of ideal models that exist in a world invisible to us."**

- **To Plato, knowing reality is not by doing/observing experiments [like Aristotle's science], but by thinking/contemplating [like pure mathematics].**

- **Later books influenced by *The Republic:***
- **St. Augustine, *The City of God***
- **Thomas More, *Utopia***
- **Francis Bacon, *The New Atlantis***
- **James Hilton, *The Lost Horizon****

- **Just the opposite, there were books/literature criticizing these kinds of "ideal" world:**
- **Aristophanes,** *Birds*
- **Jonathan Swift,** *Gulliver's Travels**
- **Aldous Huxley,** *Brave New World*
- **George Orwell,** *1984*

- **Plato, *Symposium***

- **According to Alexander Nehamas and Paul Woodruff, "The *Symposium* is one of Plato's best known and most influential works. ... The dialogue presents at least four different aspects to its readers, ... First of all, the *Symposium* contains a series of speeches on the subject of love [*eros*], and this is the main reason most readers are attracted to it. Second, it contains one of the most explicit and vivid descriptions of a Platonic 'form,' the Form of Beauty, which according to Socrates' speech, is the final object of all love. ...**

- **The *Symposium* [usually is translated as dinner party or feast, but literally means "drinking together" is an account of a banquet given by the young poet Agathon to celebrate his first victory at the dramatic contest ...**

- **The general Greek word for "love" is *philia,* which applies indifferent to the feelings of friends, family members, and lovers. *Eros* refers to particularly intense attachment and desire in general. Most commonly, however, it is applied to passionate love and desire, usually sexual, and to the god who personified that state. ...**

- **Homosexual**
- **Heterosexual**

- **"Platonic love"**

- **Plato: "if you don't know that you are ignorant, you are really ignorant." (cf. Zhuang Zi).**

- **Plato loved and respected Socrates, his teacher and friend.**

- **In his later years, Plato is reported to have said, "I thank God that I was born Greek and not barbarian, free and not slave, male and not female, but above all that I was born in the age of Socrates."**

- **Plato's questions and answers are still valid today = "The Prince of Philosophy", because (1) Plato asked many of the fundamental philosophical questions that philosophers still ask today; (2) many of Plato's answers have been continuously meaningful and are still meaningful for us today.**

According to Whitehead (a renowned 20th century philosopher, who concluded at his article for Plato in the *Encyclopedia Britannica*), "modern Western philosophy is only footnotes to Plato."

- **Greek *polis***
- ***Athens***
- **A.H.M. Jones, *Athenian Democracy***
- **Frank Frost, *Democracy and the Athenians***
- **余英時 〔民主制度之發展〕**
- **黃俊傑〔古代希臘城邦與民主政治〕**
- **Donald Kagan, *Pericles of Athens and the Birth of Democracy***

- *polis* (s.)
- *poleis* (pl.)
- "city-states" (Kitto ✕)
- = a self-governing state
- = an independent & autonomous political unit
- = a political structure
- an advanced or a degenerate form of tribalism
- = small
- = exclusiveness (oneness) (wholeness)
- There were more than 200 *poleis* in ancient Greece
- The biggest = Sparta = 3,300 sq. m.
- Athens = 1,000 sq. m.
- Most *poleis* = less than 400 sq. m.
- e.g. Corinth = 340 sq. m.
- Geographically, a *polis* covered a very small area, usually much less than a modern county
- e.g. Plato's *Republic*:
- Ideal *polis* = 5,000 citizens
- Aristotle's *Politics*:
- Each citizen should be able to know all the others by sight

- The citizens of a *polis* felt themselves tightly bound together & separated from the citizens of any other state.
- Each *polis* had its own distinctive customs & its own gods, & was an object of intense religious-patriotic devotion
- As a result, a Greek *polis* could not easily expand its territory or admit foreigners to citizenship. Its jealous local pride made it ready to fight with its neighbors for the slightest causes.
- But, *polis* was more than a mere region, it was a community of citizens — enjoyed political rights & played a role in government

- "Man is a creature (an animal) who lives in (belongs to) a *polis*" Aristotle's *Politics*
- The chief political virtue = "participation"
- It's everyone's duty to participate in the *polis*
- ∴ Greek culture = creative
- + all-roundedness

- *polis* of Athens: Attica (peninsula)
- 7th century B.C. aristocrats
- …………Solon (594 B.C.)
- "If there was injustice anywhere in the state, it directly or indirectly affected everyone, even though he went inside his house & locked the door."
- Solon rewrote law code + judges were chosen by "lot" from among the entire citizenry without regard to wealth

- (Until the time of **Clisthenes'** reforms, loyalty to clans & tribes had remained strong)
- Clisthenes appealed to the common citizens
- ∴Athens = democracy (*demo kratia)* or "the rule of the people"
- & Clisthenes called it "*isonomia*" the system of equal rights
- + abolished the ancient clans & replacing them with 10 new "tribes" by regions (territorial districts)
- ∴members of every class (commercial, industrial, rural)
- = evenly divided (distributed) among 10 tribes

- The evolution of democracy at home was intimately connected with the increasing imperialism of Athens abroad.

                    democracy

Athens

                    Imperialism

- (Age of Pericles: 461-429 B.C.)
- :dignified, well-educated
- :an "hypnotized" orator, a practical statesman (yet idealistic)

- : "Pericles saw what a *polis* might do for her citizens; and what the citizens might do for their *polis*."
- President John F. Kennedy (January, 1961):
- "Ask not what your country can do for you; ask what you can do for your country!"

- Pericles introduced "state pay" for service on the Council of 500 (practical)
- ∴even poor citizens could take part in public life.

- to develop an equal balance between the individual & the *polis*
- to make <u>duty a delight</u>, & <u>service an honor</u>.
- to recognize benefits to the community as the only ground of civic distinction.

- Pericles: far-sighted
- d. 429 B.C.
- "was afraid of Athens' mistakes than of Sparta's designs"
- — proven to be well-founded 404 B.C. Sparta＞Athens

- According to Finley, "Pericles … had 4 characteristics: he could see & expound what was necessary, he was patriotic & above money."
- Athens' misfortune the essential cause of her ruin was that none of his successors combined all his 4 characteristics.
- Nicias, who was <u>honest</u> but <u>inactive</u>, had the <u>last 2</u>.
- Alcibiades, who was <u>able</u> but <u>utterly self-interested</u>, only had the <u>first 2</u>.

- **<u>Athens</u>**
- **594 B.C.   Solon**
- **546 B.C. Cyrus the Great (Persia) conquered Lydia (Asia Minor)→499 B.C.**
- **Ionian Rebellion**
- **Athens 20 ships to aid**
- **Ionian → Persian**
- **508 B.C. Clisthenes**
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- **490, 480, 479 B.C. Persian Wars**
- **∴Delian League**
- **461-429 B.C.: Age of Pericles**
- **447-438 B.C.: Parthenon巴特龍神殿**
- **431-404B.C.: Peloponnesian War % Athens & Sparta**
- **429 B.C. d. of Pericles**

- # **Sparta**
- **Frank Frost, *Greek Society.* 5th ed., 1997:**
- **"Sparta: an Experiment in Elitist Communism," pp. 44-49.**

- **Military obedience = paramount virtue + tough life**
- **Thus, producing strong, courageous, highly disciplined soldiers**
- **(infants were abandoned to die of exposure, if they were not qualified) – "elitist"**

- **At the age of 7, a Spartan boy would be owned by the *polis,* + 13 years of military training: physical, endurance of hardship, and unquestioned of devotion to the *polis.***
- **At the age of 20, a soldier/warrior in a barrack (for 10 more years)**
- **At 30, = full-fledged citizen (may go home)**

- "terrible food/meal"
- "Now I understand why the Spartan do not fear death."
- No individual existence (body & soul) – the ultimate in self-denial
- : dedicated to the *polis (*complete loyalty to the *polis* was demanded of every Spartan)
- Virtue = obedience, courage, and participation
- The Greeks admired "ordered' life, and nowhere was life more ordered than in Sparta!
- Spartan slaves (helots)' life was hard, because they had to;
- Spartan citizens' life was hard, too, because they chose to.
- Plutarch's story of an old man in the Olympic Games:
- "All Greeks know what is right, but only the Spartans do it." – that is "*courage*"!
- To the Spartans, Honor = to win in battles
- The story of a mother to her son who was a soldier going to battle:
- Giving him a shield – "with it or on it"!
- "They asked not how many enemies there were*, only* where they were."

- Spartan art = silent?
- "Spartan art … is creation, and Sparta created not things in words (no drama [tragedy, comedy, fables] nor philosophy) or stone (no sculpture) BUT _men_"
- Sparta is a small community of warriors who have little interest in material comfort
- Sparta has an enormous slave (helots) population (1 : 10)
- All Spartans are full-time professional soldiers

- 480 B.C. Xerxes, King of Persia, led an army of 250,000 men seeking revenge for his father's defeat 10 yeas ago (at the battle of Marathon).
- Xerxes, "Which of the Greeks will dare resist me?" (It seems that even if all the Greeks joined together, they would stand no chance against my army).
- Demaratus answered, " -- the Spartans!"

- "In single combat, the Spartans are as good as any soldiers on earth. Fighting together, they are the _best_ in the world."
- "They will fight, ….. And do not ask me whether they have enough men to fight you. If only a thousand of them march into the battle field, then that thousand will fight you."
- Xerxes laughed, "Are the Spartans free?" (Do you really imagine that so few would freely choose to fight?)
- "Yes, … free … but … they do have a master – the law (_eunomia_), whatever the law demands, they do. And the law always demands the same thing: never retreat in battle, whatever the odds. Always stand your ground. Win or die." (Herodotus, _The Histories of the Persian Wars._ 7.101).

- Common life, food, wealth, & even family = "shared"
- Thus, Frank Frost, _Greek Society:_
- Sparta = "elitist communism"

- **Plato admired Sparta:**
- **1. the idea of an equal community in which all citizens share things among themselves, and cooperate rather than compete with each other;**
- **2. the discipline and order of the Spartan system;**
- **3. strong sense of loyalty and duty to each other, and the life of the community**

- **===========================**
- **The Ancient Greek Ampitheater**
- **The Parthenon (Temple worshipping Athena)**
- **Nike, Goddess of Victory (= Roman Victoria)**

- **The legend of the founding of Rome – Twins Remus and Romulus (children of Mars, god of war, drinking milk from a she-wolf. Romulus killed Remus, thus, Roma (now Rome).**
- **"Rome was not founded in one day"**
- **"All roads lead to Rome"**
- **March (Mars): *first month in the ancient Roman calendar (thus, oct = 8, dec = 10)**

- **Roman Law**
- ***The Twelve Tables*, 451-450 B.C.**
- ***The Justinian Law Codes* (great collection of constitutions or ordinances in the Byzantine [Eastern Roman] Empire.**
- **(more advanced than the Babylonian Law Codes by Hammurabi in 1700 B.C.).**

- *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*
- Edward Gibbon

- Arnold Toynbee

- Barbarian Invasion (death by murder)
- Too big, too old, … (natural cause)
- Christianity
- *Lead poisoning (water pipes)
- Homosexuality (Norman Cantor)
- Death by "accident"*