

Lecture 4. Socrates, Plato and the Sophists

Athens in the 5th century BCE

- 479 BCE. End of Persian Wars
- Peloponnesian War 431-404 (Athens v Sparta)
- Sparta victorious, Athens demoralised



The Trial and Death of Socrates

- 399BCE
- the charge – impiety and corrupting the youth
- Greek religion



Who Were The Sophists?

- Sophia – wisdom
- the original ‘educational revolution’
- taught – the art of politics and;
- scientific speculation about the universe
- convention versus nature (nomos vs. physis)



Why was Socrates put to death?

- questioning traditional values
- impiety
- corrupting the youth
- in the popular mind he was associated with the sophists

Plato's Socrates

- truth seeker, not interested in the clever use of words (i.e. 'making the weaker argument defeat the stronger')
- did not charge a fee – not interested in material advancement
- disagreement with the sophists over the virtue (arete) necessary for politics
- rhetoric versus truth
- the connection between knowledge and virtue
- justice as the chief political virtue

Conclusion - the Sophist
Movement as the
continuation of Homeric
values and Socrates'
challenge