

Anonymous Attendee 01:36 PM

The connection seems convincing. But what exactly did she teach Socrates about love? Do you have any views about what this consisted of?

Diotima's doctrine of love is given in Plato's *Symposium*: love starts with attraction for individual bodies, but as one goes up the 'ladder of love' it becomes a more spiritual pursuit (related to the desire to procreate ideas, rather than just children). I don't think Aspasia went all that way ('ideas' are Platonic). I speculate that Diotima/Aspasia's insistence that 1) one must first define love and 2) love is more than individual physical attraction, influenced Socrates' views about 1) the importance of forming an initial definition of a subject of discussion and 2) the way concepts (e.g. like bravery) need to be generalised, rather than simply be described as individual instances ('x was a brave act').

Amy 01:36 PM

Was there many times where the names of gods were allocated to actual people, like Pericles being known as Zeus?

No. Ancient comedy does this very insistently with Aspasia, however, who was dubbed 'Hera' (goddess wife of Zeus) and described by other mythical parallels.

Lucy 01:36 PM

If Socrates had never lived what do you think western philosophy would have been like - how would it have been different?

Without Socrates Plato would not have developed the ideas he did, which are enormously rich and fruitful (even if wrong) - Whitehead said that Western philosophy can be characterised as 'a series of footnotes to Plato'. And Plato's pupil Aristotle was to become probably the most influential philosopher in history.

Anna 01:37 PM

So I understand that Love can be an abstraction I do not understand how beauty can exist without particularity – beauty is surely a physical attribute

The Greek word *kalos* means both 'beautiful' and 'good', i.e it is both aesthetic and moral. They thought it was just as possible for there to be an abstract idea of beauty as of goodness. While both might be manifested by particular instances, Plato thought that at their purest such qualities ('Forms') were unchanging entities in a transcendent realm, and particulars reflected their attributes in a changeable way. The Platonic notion is clearly strange to us and hard to grasp. Aristotle rejected it, saying that Plato had posited 'Forms' when what was at stake was a matter of logical categories: 'beauty' is (as you say) the abstraction or universal quality, a beautiful person or thing is a particular instantiation of that quality. Nowadays we tend to follow logic (Aristotle's invention) rather than Platonic idealism in these matters.

Karl 01:39 PM

Do you believe Socrates was anti democratic ?

No. He recognised and was critical of the shortcomings of a system which allowed voters to decide on matters about which they had no knowledge. But when a democratic jury of 500 voted by a majority to have him put to death, though he could have escaped the sentence he chose to abide by it. He said he would obey the system that had benefited him. He was

capable of civil disobedience, since we know that when democracy was temporarily replaced in 404 BC he had ignored the orders of the oligarch junta at the risk to his life, because he preferred to suffer evil than to perpetrate it.

Anonymous Attendee 01:39 PM

Do you find that the idolatry of a mentor plays into Plato's depiction of Socrates - particularly in his calm and courage towards the prospect of his death?

No. Plato presents Socrates in a rounded fashion e.g. as an admittedly ugly man, and often as an irritating and even pompous interlocutor. While he was clearly devoted to him, idolatry is too strong a term. In the final hours, Plato even has Socrates show insensitivity towards Xanthippe, sending her away from the gaol so that her wailing should not be heard. It's a realistic touch that makes one feel that a nicer man would have shown more sympathy to his concerned partner and mother of his young child.

Bernays 01:40 PM

is there any evidence that Socrates could read and write?

According to Plato and Xenophon, Socrates was an extremely well read and knowledgeable man. As a young man, he says he bought a book by a philosopher (Anaxagoras) at huge expense and read it avidly but was disappointed by its contents. He also composed some poetry himself, of which we have a few lines.

Natasha 01:40 PM

How do you go about theorising such things? Like how does one make such links, and what sources do you look at and how long does it typically take to complete the research?

This idea for this book formed in my head more than 10 years before I wrote down anything. As I read and re-read the ancient sources, I kept thinking that the standard depiction of Socrates is flawed. But only after I had embarked on a book on Socrates' early life did the stunning proofs for the identity of Diotima in *Symposium* present themselves - I was amazed that such precise clues as Plato leaves us had not been so interpreted before.

Matthew 01:44 PM

Do you think Socrates/Plato's ideas could help us deal with issues in the world today?

Socrates' notions that 1) knowledge is provisional and 2) one needs constantly to examine one's life and direction, are surely helpful and important. One reason Plato's ideas are helpful because they are wide-ranging and brilliantly presented. Among other things, they can be (and are) studied and dissected to show why he got many things badly wrong.

Bernays 01:46 PM

would you consider that Socrates' martyrdom provides a model for the gospel story, with Paul as Jesus' Plato?

The connection between the stories of Socrates and Jesus has long been noted, but one cannot say that Socrates' trial and death provided a model for the gospel accounts, since the latter have a very different feel and context. However, the preaching of Paul was clearly crucial to spreading Christianity, so in that sense Paul and Plato can certainly be compared as playing a central role in the creation and perpetuation of the respective narratives of Jesus and of

Socrates.

Evie 01:47 PM

Did Socrates' wealthy background have any affect on how his teachings were recieved?

Yes. He would not have appealed to so many well-placed Athenians had he not been perceived as socially and intellectually sound - a 'gentleman' as Xenophon suggests - thanks to his education and background.

Anonymous Attendee 01:53 PM

Just out of curiosity, wasn't Pericles considered blasphemous for having himself nicknamed "Zeus"?

He was not responsible for the nickname, so that does not arise. The comic poets were able to say all kinds of things about divinities that we might consider blasphemous - look at the way Dionysus is portrayed in Aristophanes' *Frogs*. In the polytheistic context of classical Greece blasphemy was not simply 'taking a god's name in vain', but denying the existence of gods as divine entities. Clearly the comic poets could get away with that nickname for Pericles, and the audience would laugh at it.

Anonymous Attendee 01:53 PM

do we know anything about life of Socrates children?

Not directly. There is an interesting passage of Plato in which Socrates notes that Pericles had two sons who didn't live up to their father's qualities. I wonder if Plato was thinking that the same might have been said about Socrates' two sons!