



McKenzie Study Center, an Institute of Gutenberg College

**Handout 3**  
**The Bible and the History of Ideas**  
**Teacher: John A. “Jack” Crabtree**

**Socrates**

**A. Socrates’ “Project”**

- 1. To call people to that which is substantial and eternal, and away from that which is superficial and temporal.**
  - a. To declare the ultimate, eternal destiny of the one who loves goodness and beauty and truth *vis à vis* the one who loves the stuff of this material world.
- 2. To define human excellence (virtue) as the love of and pursuit of the good (that is, as moral goodness); rather than as social-political success.**
  - a. Virtue (define)
  - b. Virtue = to live (to act) well
  - c. Therefore, to expose the sophists (who assumed the latter) as fools and self-deluded (they think they are wise; but they are not).
- 3. To expose the “wisdom” of mankind, generally, as ignorance and confusion.**
  - a. We do not know, do we?
  - b. Socrates was the “wisest man in Athens,” he decided, because he knew that he did not know.
- 4. To expose the pride and hubris of the typical man: he is not good and successful (as he thinks he is), he is bad and unsuccessful.**
  - a. But Socrates does not seem to have the same understanding of sin as the deep problem that the Bible presents it as
    - i. *Socrates: “To know the good is to do the good.”*
- 5. To encourage men to pursue knowledge and understanding on their own, rather than put their trust in “Sophists”.**
  - a. To make clear that one can know something without being able to articulate, analyze, prove, or define it.
    - i. *Hence, the average person does not lack knowledge; he has it already.*

6. **To make clear that true “virtue” (i.e., human excellence) is ultimately a GIFT from God.**
  - a. Can virtue be “taught”? Yes and no.
7. **Not to TEACH people the true picture of reality, the cosmos, and everything in it; rather, to TEACH people what to love and pursue.**
  - a. Not a *speculative*, metaphysical philosopher
  - b. Rather, an *existential* philosopher
    - i. *End of life: to live (to act) well. His aim: to discover the truth leading to acting well.*

## **B. Socratic method (Socratic “dialectic”?) = his teaching method**

### **1. Midwifery**

- a. His task is to “give birth” to wisdom and knowledge in the soul of another person.
- b. Socrates does not have much use for speech-making or writing books (that is for my benefit, not for the benefit of another).
- c. Socratic questioning
  - i. *Makes the search for knowledge a pursuit of the other person*  
(A) Compare with Jesus’ use of parables.
- d. *Aporia* as a part of the process of learning.
  - i. *One can only come to true understanding and wisdom after he recognizes that he does not have understanding and wisdom.*  
(A) It takes humility to gain wisdom.

## **C. Socratic Dialectic = his method of analysis of concepts**

### **1. The making of distinctions that brings clarity to a concept**

- a. Purpose: analysis of our concepts (that we grasp only tacitly and intuitively) in order to get to clarity with respect to them.

## **D. Socrates’ Criticism of Sophists**

1. **Rejected their narrow understanding of utility and practicality in favor of objective, universal goodness.**
2. **Rejected their preoccupation with the trivial matters of this world and stressed instead the ultimate, eternally-important issues of one’s soul.**
3. **Rejected their relativism in favor of objective moral truth.**
4. **Critical of their pretense to knowledge.**
  - a. Exposed their lack of clarity.