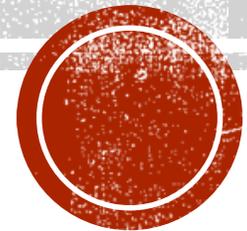


# LITERARY CRITICISM: IDEOLOGICAL CURRENTS



# IDEOLOGICAL CURRENTS

- Many currents of poetic tradition:
- Sophistic & Rhetoric
- The young men of nobility had their education in sophistry and rhetoric.
- Rhetoric was, strictly speaking, restricted to the techniques of argument and persuasion; the more ambitious Sophists promised a more general education extending over the areas considered by philosophy: morality, politics, as well as the nature of reality and truth.

# PLATO VS. RHETORICIANS & SOPHISTS

- Plato was opposed to both sophistic and rhetoric.
- He objected to **sophistic** accounts of the world, which were essentially secular, humanistic, and relativistic. These accounts rejected the authority of religion and viewed **truth as a human and pragmatic construct**.
- What Plato rejects in **rhetoric** is also based on its alleged exclusion of truth: rhetoric is concerned **not with truth but merely with persuasion**, often preying on the ignorance of an audience and merely pandering to its prejudices rather than seeking a moral and objective foundation.

# PLATO VS. RHETORICIANS & SOPHISTS

- Much of Plato's philosophy is generated by a **desire to impose order on chaos**, to enclose change and **temporality within a scheme of permanence**, and **to ground our thinking about morality, politics, and religion on timeless and universal truths** that are independent of human cognition.
- Plato's objection was so profound that his very method of argument was internally shaped as **dialectical** – systematic question and answer.
- He finds the same vision of the world (of the sophists and rhetoricians) in literature. Saw **tragedy as a form of rhetoric**.

# PLATO VS. POETS AND DRAMATISTS

- Like rhetoric, **tragedy** “makes particular moral views appear attractive to the ignorant and irrational audience”
- Drama – an important public event for citizens – many political issues were debated on stage.
- **It expressed a vision** which was later taken up by sophists and rhetoricians.
- **Arising from Homer’s world** of quarrelling gods – who could manipulate human destiny (Odyssey)
- - a vision of the **world as ruled by chance**. Where one has to propitiate gods through sacrifices.
- Plato offered **an alternative vision** - which appeals rather to **natural processes** in the service of a **rational explanation** (originating from the pre-Socratic naturalists).

# PLATO

- In Plato's view, the gods are "entirely just and good, with no anger, jealousy, spite or lust."
- Like the naturalists, Socrates and Plato distinguished between mere **evidence of the senses**, which was "**appearance**," and an underlying reality accessible only through reason.
- **In other words, Greek philosophy begins as a challenge to the monopoly of poetry** and the extension of **its vision in sophistic and rhetoric**. Plato's opposition of philosophy to poetry effectively sets the stage **for more than two thousand years of literary theory and criticism.**