

# The death of socrates



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The Death of Socrates by Jacques-Louis David, defines his views on politics via painting and changes perspective in art history with his interpretation on death and philosophy. David gained major notice to his art-work and garnered popularity prior to the French Revolution. David's painting depicts the last moments of the life of Socrates.

The death of Socrates, as portrayed by Jacques-Louis David, provides a viewpoint on the regret and sorrow resulting from Socrates's trial. David's painting expresses Socrates' commitment and sacrifice to his work as a philosopher using his own demise as the main catalyst. Socrates, primarily regarded as the father of philosophy, has been credited with providing humanity with one of its greatest gifts, Scientific Method. During that time, it was known as the Socratic method. Scientific method demands that we question and argue everything that we are told, to question until a contradiction has happened. Socrates perceived contradiction as the main criteria when assessing truths because it upheld the notion that no one man has the answer. According to Socrates, "true knowledge exists in knowing that you know nothing." This belief that knowledge meant that you are aware that you know nothing at all emphasized the key values of Socratic method; to question your ideas and others in the pursuit of knowledge, making an individual more conscious and aware of their reality. Socrates imposed this idea upon his disciples and to the people around him in hopes of them seeking and finding their own truths. Socrates' theory was to educate society to question rather than trusting in the belief of others to be true.

In 399 B. C., having been accused by the Athenian government of transgressions and of corrupting children with his teachings and practices, Socrates was tried, found guilty, and given the option of renouncing his beliefs or drinking the cup of poison known as the hemlock. During his trial, Socrates chose death rather than exile to prove that he will not recant his ideas or cease to philosophy. A primary reason for his conviction, according to the Apology, is the threat he posed to powerful figures within the Athenian community. They feared his teaching would over-educate people to go against the current policies established. While imprisoned, he denies Crito's offer to help him escape because he wants to honor the laws of Athens and all the while prove his philosophy. Phaedo tells us that before his execution, guests come to grieve and say their final goodbyes. Socrates also sends his three sons, his wife, and all the women of his household away for showing too much grief. Socrates regards his family's grief as weakness and admonishes them for crying. He expresses that they have understanding and strength during his death. The guard gives Socrates the hemlock and as he begins to drink the guard departs grieving. Socrates is accompanied by five friends: Phaedo, Simmias, Cebes, Echebrates, and Crito. His friends begin to cry and grieve as he continues to philosophize, but he reprimands them for spoiling the moment of his heroic death with their emotional weakness. Socrates dies on his bed philosophizing, bravely drinking the hemlock.

David's image captures a scene in which Socrates sacrifices his life for the sake of his ideas; An admirable message conveyed through Neo-Classical art. A genuine consciousness of injustice is projected and understood in David's painting. He properly depicts the wrongs in society prior to the start

of the French Revolution. As Socrates wasn't presented a just ruling in either living a muzzled life or dying through illogical and unjust means. It shows the parallels with the middle class forced to live unfairly under the rule of the aristocrats. David's painting conveys the early sentiments and desires for justice that manifested during the early phases of the French Revolution and this idea is shown throughout his artwork. His artwork was initially regarded as brash and gaudy. Art historians and idealists have theorized that David chose to subdue his reds in this picture. Most notably, the colors grow more vibrant toward the center of the painting actively drawing our eyes to Socrates and the young guard holding the cup of poison. The Death of Socrates received critical reception, pioneering and cemented this style of art and garnered the attention of the world. Neoclassicism found inspiration in ancient Greek and Roman art focusing on anatomy and musculature. The glaring simplicity of their statues and the two-dimensional murals capturing historical events from an artistic viewpoint. Essentially, David took these inspirations and gave them new life and relevance with oil paints on canvasses.

There are similarities and differences in beliefs between philosophers. Kant who came after Socrates both establish an ability to address the concepts of acceptable political discussion and disobedience. The philosophers each show their observations upon experience and agreed that wisdom is best uncovered past the ideas of government and law. Socrates proclaims a life of justice is a life of solitude. Socrates couldn't process the idea of conforming to a government position to drive his ideals. He deems he cannot justly express his true political views and must conform to the masses.

Comparably, Kant believes that a greater freedom comes from being in a government position. Socrates and Kant both recognize that expectations for those in civic positions differ from citizens, especially concerning matters of disagreement and disobedience of authority. However, despite this parallel, Kant and Socrates' standards for proper political discussion vary and both has a divergent criterion for when personal opinions are legitimate.

Ultimately these philosophers have slightly contrasting views on the process of reasoning and enlightenment.

In retrospect, Socrates would concur with Kant that enlightenment is discovered in its best form without being in a public position, but he would not oppose the idea that authority must be thoughtlessly obeyed while under its command. Socrates encourages questioning the majority's decisions, while Kant positions that in politics one must argue and not obey to appease. Both believe that reason and enlightenment must begin with isolated deliberations but differ regarding behavior at an official municipal position. While Socrates' criterion for wisdom is pursuing truth regardless of position, he believes that it is easiest to seek out privately. Kant considers the government a principal organization. Attempting to influence the public to think more for themselves rather than succumbing to oppression. Overall, although the specifics of each philosopher's theory contrast, each considers the idea that an unexamined life is not worth living for men and individuals should seek to understand more.