

Socrates: guilty or not

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Socrates is one of the founders of Western philosophy. The dialogues, written by many of his students, such as Plato, represent a unique way of questioning how we should live our lives, and who do we aspire to become. He was a very intelligent man who was very concerned about ethics, being a good Athenian, and doing what is just. In Plato's Apology the reader experiences all of Socrates characteristics as if they were sitting right there with all the other five hundred men representing the jury. Socrates is trying to persuade the jury by defending himself against accusations made by fellow Athenian, Meletus. He accuses Socrates of corrupting the youth and of not believing in the gods the city of Athens believes in (Apology, 24 b-c).

Socrates, not being familiar with courts, attempts at defending himself stating that is most likely to engage in a defense not using the language of lawyers, but in the way he is used to speak to the public. Even though Socrates was found guilty in the court of law, hence being sentenced to death, he still persuaded one of the jury men that was not present that day in to believing he was not guilty. I believe that Socrates defended himself more than well against his accusations, and the lack of evidence presented by his accusers gives more than enough reason that he was indeed not guilty. But there are two things I do not agree with Socrates: One being that he says he is not a wise man, and the other being that if someone does wrong to another person unwillingly, is a good enough reason for the wrongdoer to not have repercussions for his acts.

It is Important to see that during the entire defense Socrates is attacking his accusers, mainly Meletus and he shows this right away when he goes through the first accusation of supposedly corrupting the youth. He says that

most of the kids that follow him around are kids of very rich parents who just enjoy hearing people being questioned. Socrates states that every time his accusers are asked what he does and what is he teaching that corrupts the young, they have no answer for the question, and that most of the men are just angry because he questioned them on their supposed more than human wisdom (Apology, 23c-d).

The great Socrates was known for going to every man who said was wise and ridiculing them in front of other spectators, in which he made a lot of enemies. It is very important to state that Socrates has been accused before; actually he has been receiving accusations since he was very young. Socrates says that he has two types of accusers: the earlier ones, and the recent ones, which he says listened to what the older accusers said about him making it easier to create a disliking for him. For me this is a very important point, because it is just another reason to believe that the accusations made are just repressed anger and disliking for a man who does not believe in committing any wrongdoing.

Socrates continues his defense attacking Meletus and asking him who is allowed to improve and educate the youth, and he answers that everyone including the jurymen, the audience, the members of the council, the assembly, all Athenians except for Socrates himself (Apology, 24e-25a). This leads him to conclude that Meletus, using an analogy of horses and horse breeders, does not really care about the youth, because he believes that only one man in Athens can corrupt the youth while he goes on thinking that every other Athenian is educating and improving them (Apology, 25b-c). Socrates once again questions Meletus evidence.

In another excerpt of the Apology, Socrates says how can so many people enjoy being around him and listening him questioning others. He then invites all of the supposedly men he has corrupted to stand up as witnesses, but he only finds all of the people that love him and follow him in the audience (Apology, 33c-34b). As you go through the first defense it just keeps on demonstrating the lack of evidence by the part of the accusers, who could not even bring a single person to the stand that has been corrupted. This leads us to Socrates second part of the defense. In the affidavit it says that Socrates is charged for not believing in the cities gods, but when Meletus is questioned he says: " This is what I mean, that you do not believe in gods at all" (Apology, 26c).

This completely changes is early accusation, and it certainly makes it clear that he is contradicting himself. Socrates continues to question Meletus about believing in spirits. Meletus answers a question that made by Socrates, in which he asked, " Do we not believe spirits to be either gods or the children of gods", Meletus answers " Of course"(Apology, 27c-d). This leads me to my second point; does Socrates really believe in any supernatural being? I believe that he actually does.

One small observation I made was that he mentions the god Zeus more than once during the trial (Apology, 17c, 25c, 35d). But more importantly he talks about A* god who has put him in earth to do the work he does, to be a philosopher, to question what others do not dare. He states that they are treating a gift from god unjustly (Apology 30e-31b). He really persuaded me when he talked about a " divine or spiritual sign" that speaks to him when he needs to be turned away from something (Apology, 31d).

Some jurymen would say he is just talking about this to get away with not being sentenced to death, but I say to those people why would a man who clearly says he does not fear death will lie in the court of law, which he has respected his entire life, because that is how he was brought up. But even if I agree with Socrates defense, there are two things I do not agree with. The first is that he says he is not a wise man, which I find to be completely absurd. In a sense I see it as his way for people taking him for a humble man.

Early in the trial he expresses how he visited all the men who said they were wise, but he never says he questioned who said they were not wise. For Socrates being wise is someone who has knowledge and the more arrogant you are about knowing something the less of a wise man you are. To make my point Socrates never thinks of himself as a wise man, so by using his own explanation of a wise person makes him a wise man if not the wisest in Athens. (Santi remember that he believed that you truly do not understand anything until you understand yourself and your own beliefs. Socrates at least knows this truth about himself.)

The second argument I do not agree with Socrates that if someone does something wrong unwillingly is exempt from being accused or even punished from his acts. I do believe in doing what is just, and I do believe Socrates was prosecuted unjustly. But just because you do wrong unwillingly does not give the state to let you go freely. Take this for example you are in a bar and you are carrying a weapon with you, for precaution measures. The gun accidentally goes off and you injure a person. This would go under unwillingly causing harm to another person, but it does not mean that you should not

receive any punishment for acting carelessly while carrying a fire weapon. I arrived at the conclusion that Socrates was never to be punished in any sort of way.

The main reason is because the accusations were vague and were not backed up by any type of evidence. These accusers were blinded by a hatred that was born when they were young and continued to build up when they see the man named Socrates walking through the streets of Athens questioning everything. The city of Athens and the people who lived there were taught everything they know and believe, and those things were never to be questioned because that is what they were taught. Then came Socrates, a wise man, and questioned everything, but I do not believe he ever intended, and surely did not, to corrupt the youth. I strongly believe that he was helping every single human being he spoke to.

Socrates was teaching the people of Athens to question things, to be curious and question everything, and that is the basis of philosophy: to question. One could say that Socrates prophecy was fulfilled his conviction will be shameful for Athens because there will be others to take his place. By reading the Apology I felt a one more jurymen, and I definitely found this man to not be guilty on any of the charges.