

# The trial and death of socrates by plato essay example

[Health & Medicine](#), [Body](#)



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Socrates appears as an individual with rather radical viewpoints for his time, considering that in the Golden Age of Greece, where Pericles believed the masses deserved liberty, he saw and insisted on the need to guide the masses, like a wise shepherd does to a herd. To him, people should not be self-governed and that those that claim to be philosophers or people with deep knowledge of the things around them, should first realize their ignorance, which is their true wisdom. His most characteristic trait is his ability to turn any conversation around and lead his interlocutor exactly to his point, by using irony and dialectic that he had mastered over time.

## **The scene with Euthyphro**

While discussing with Euthyphro, Socrates uses irony from the beginning of their dialogue. He almost immediately offers to become Euthyphro's pupil, when the latter claims he knows all about what is holy and divine, as well as unholy (V 1-10, p. 8). What Socrates, in fact does, is challenge Euthyphro's certainty that what he truly knows about the divine matters, and with a

series of arguments and counter arguments between the two men, they end up making circles. Socrates seeks for a universally accepted definition for piety and what is pious that his interlocutor fails to provide adequately. Throughout the duration of the conversation with Euthyphro, Socrates leads, and Euthyphro seems to not be aware of it, as he was, cleverly, placed by Socrates in the “teacher’s” position, making Socrates Euthyphro’s student, when in reality, it was the other way around. The overall sense this conversation between the two men leaves is that Socrates acts like a father taking his son by the hand and leading him through the forest to the openness. Also, by reminding Euthyphro of his promise to become Socrates’ teacher, Socrates tries to make Euthyphro more aware of his ignorance and his responsibility to pass on genuine knowledge to others. Indicatively, when the opinion discussed was whether what the gods like, is considered holy and what they hate is unholy, Socrates told Euthyphro “It is for you to consider whether that definition will help you instruct me as you promised” (XI p. 17). Although Euthyphro never made that promise, he still liked the fact that he was admired by another individual for his stated knowledge upon the divine matters and carried on an entire conversation being in the instructor’s position.

## **The death scene from the Phaedo**

The death scene from the Phaedo is representative of Socrates’ deep wisdom. He admits that pain and pleasure come following one another in turns. For example, the pain in his legs caused by the chains he was wearing gave place to pleasure when they were taken off, and Socrates rubbed his

legs (III, 60 p. 109). The same applies to life itself. Socrates also reveals a radical notion for his time. He considers people as prisoners and that the gods were people's guardians, owning everyone alive. Therefore, he thought it was redemptive and a sign of wisdom to wish to die and be free from the imprisonment of this sort. For this reason, he asks Cebes to find Evenus and tell him to follow Socrates to death, as quickly as possible, if Evenus considered himself a wise man (V p. 111). However, what Socrates did, in fact, was challenge his audience and lead them to reaching the conclusions he wanted for them, through paradox and dialectic, yet one more time. Philosophy, to Socrates, was not all about studying death and dying (IX p. 116). A wise man and so-called philosopher would never want to seek for his death, and only the fools would rejoice with this prospect because the wise men are obliged to pass on their light and wisdom to the younger ones and become their beacon. Socrates' opinion on death and dying again reveals that his thinking process was ahead of his time as he believed that the death gives the body a chance to live on its own, separated from the soul (IX p. 117). He carefully led his good friend to the point he wanted to make: that the true philosopher is temperate and will never care much for the pleasures of the body; in fact, he will retract from them (XXXII p. 151). A genuine lover of knowledge will want to release the soul from its captivity, so to gain peace. This is why Socrates did not think of his fate as a misfortune (XXXV, 85 p. 155) and given that the soul was much superior to the body; it will live forever (XXXVII, 87 p. 159). By the end of the death scene, Socrates appears a thinker that has philosophized life to its essence rather than the superficial. To him, the soul was fearless and that there was no adverse fate is one's life

came to an end, after living a life in virtue. For that reason, he never allowed himself to consider escaping from his death sentence. It would simply make him an inferior man, if he apostatized his beliefs and sought for the pleasure of the body, which he taught little about.

### **Socrates' accusations and how he defended himself**

Socrates' deep need to tell the world that the masses should be guided by wise men brought him to court. He was accused of corrupting the young and for being a sophist, meaning getting involved in the study of the universe, metaphysics and supernatural, among others, which was considered an act of violation of the established laws. With clever dialectic "maneuvers," he proved his ignorance on matters he was accused of, proving his knowledge upon them and making his accusers feel inferior to his mind's superiority. He started by establishing that not all men's opinions should be esteemed, except for the good ones (VI, 47 p. 87). He continued by mentioning that just like in the medical field people embrace the opinions of those that do not leave the body crippled or sick, they should also see that life is worth living when there are no maimed by wrong parts (VIII, 48 p. 89). A man with just agreements should not only perform them but also shuttle them out (X, p. 93), which is why Socrates acted the way he acted. He said that the only thing he truly knows is that he knows nothing, yet, his viewpoints are well justified each and every time. However, this makes him an enemy of the state and "a subverter of law" (XV p. 99) as he tries to make people stand against the governing laws and regulations and perceive life, religion, and the world around them differently than passed on to them.

## **People who dissent in society: A blessing or a menace?**

Dissenting in society is a two-bladed sword. Significant accomplishments have been made throughout history, only because there have been individuals that raised their voice and spoke of what they felt was right and just. However, it all depends on the moralities of the ones asking for change. Moreover, morality, as well as ethics, are usually defined by the societal norms as they prevail from time to time. For example, Martin Luther King was a radical, when he was asking for fair treatment and equality between the black and white people the world over. His concepts opposed the one's people that benefited from the existing inequality, which made him undesirable and a threat to the society of the white's. Although a menace followed until the new order was established (an order we, modern people, judge as just and fair), what King started made a huge impact to the world and changed things completely. As King mentioned in his sermon in 1967 " I call on the young men of America [ ] to take a stand on this issue. Tomorrow may be too late. The book may close. God has a way of standing before the nations with judgment. [ ]" (Information Clearing House). Revolutionaries will always exist and, sometimes, they may even put their country at risk, especially during war time. Since our ancestors have fought fierce battles, both in the battlefield and behind closed doors, no one should be deprived of his or her fundamental rights, such as the right to be free to speak. This means that everybody should be allowed to speak their mind freely and not punished for it, as long as their freedom to speak does not oppress the rights of others to choose what they want to listen or not. And, like Socrates said, "

An unexamined life is not worth living” (Plato 38 A), whatever this may include.

## **Works Cited**

Church, F. J (trans) (1887). “ The Trial and Death of Socrates”. Harvard College Library. McMillan and Co. New York.

Information Clearing House (n. d). “ Martin Luther King: It's A Dark Day In Our Nation”. Web. July 3, 2014 < <http://www.informationclearinghouse.info/article16183.htm>>