

The apology of socrates essay

[Experience](#), [Belief](#)



Commentators on Plato's *The Apology of Socrates* note that the author is using the literary artifice of the dialogue to teach lessons to his audience. Identify at least three lessons that you believe Plato teaches in this work and argue what you believe the author intends by using them.

The *Apology of Socrates* is Plato's dramatization of the speech given by Socrates at his trial for the corruption of young minds and for not believing in the Gods. This trial resulted in the execution of Socrates: upon being given the death sentence, he was encouraged to run away but instead, Socrates chose to die in the name of his beliefs, despite their lack of popularity. (de Botton 12) His speech was significant for being the first martyr's speech and for this; Socrates is still heralded today as being one of the founding fathers of civilization. The purpose of this essay is to discuss Plato's presentation of this speech and analyse the various messages and lessons perpetrated throughout.

During his defence, Socrates maintained that he had done nothing wrong in voicing his opinions and encouraging the concept of free thought among the younger Athenians. During his trial, in which he counselled for himself, he stated: "What! Do I not seem to you to have spent my whole life in mediating my defence?" (Plato) His words and actions reflect his desire to inspire others to think for themselves, no matter how difficult their lives may be as a result. He defines wisdom as being able to question knowledge: "Whom would one reasonably deem wise, rather than such a one as myself, who, from the moment I began to understand things spoken, have never omitted to inquire into and learn every good thing in my power?" (Plato) This is Socrates imploring his listeners to take heed and question their own

knowledge. Without such forward thinking as this, our civilization would never have taken its giant leaps forward: we would never have walked on the moon, or questioned the constraints of religion, or even have diversified into the multicultural race that we are today.

Socrates discusses the idea of wisdom further but implying that the man who thinks he knows best, undoubtedly knows the least: “ I am better off than he is – for he knows nothing, and thinks that he knows. I neither know, nor think that I know.” (Plato) This implies that Socrates taught that the best state of knowledge is an open-minded one because without that, you are closed to other ideas, opinions and interpretations. Socrates was teaching us to never think that our work is done: there is always more to learn; more knowledge to absorb. The wisest man is the man who recognizes that he will never know everything, and therefore remains open to every new lesson.

Socrates alludes to the idea that the development of man’s thinking will continue to evolve regardless of his death: “ if you were to strike me dead... then you would sleep on for the remainder of your lives, unless God in his care of you gives you another gadfly.” (Plato) He continues to state that God will undoubtedly send another “ gadfly” – someone who is going to question conventions and encourage forward thinking. Socrates belief in the momentum of human development was unwavering, even in the face of a death sentence, and his defiant statement of ‘ if it’s not me then it will be someone else’ is a significant lesson to his followers and non-followers alike: the human mind is naturally inquisitive and it is a skill that should be nurtured, at all costs.

Socrates was a man held in low esteem by the people of his time. However, he was ahead of his time and so his peers are more accurately described as people of today. Without his forward thinking and strength in his beliefs, our ability to question and absorb knowledge would be limited today. His main lesson was this: follow your beliefs and never let someone tell you you're wrong for questioning ideas.

References

1. Plato. *The Apology of Socrates*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1901. Print.
2. De Botton, Alain. *The Consolations of Philosophy*. London: Vintage Books, 2001. Print.
3. Lawall, Sarah. *The Norton Anthology of World Literature: Vol. A, second edition*. New York: Norton, 2009. Print.