

# Socrates in platos apology philosophy essay



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In this essay I will discuss the character of Socrates as he is presented in the Apology, I will look at Socrates as a religious fanatic and an apostle of reason. I will provide an argument from my own personal stance that the character of Socrates in the Apology is a variation of both religious fanatic and apostle of reason. I will also make reference to Crito in order to strengthen my position that Socrates is indeed a religious man of reason. First I shall discuss the Apology and provide examples to strengthen my argument that Socrates is a man of religion and reason. Secondly I shall provide examples from Crito showing that Socrates is a moral and just philosopher.

In Plato's "Apology", Socrates says to the jury that if they said to him, "... Socrates, we do not believe Anytus now; we acquit you, but only on condition that you spend no more time on this investigation and do not practice philosophy..." (Socrates 29c-d, 2012), he would rather obey god than the men of Athens and practice philosophy as long as he is breathing. Socrates would continue to question the Athenian citizens about wisdom, truth, and the best state for one's soul, proving that wealth, reputation, and honor are not the most important things in life. According to Socrates, fulfilling his obligation to god is more important than what the law may tell him to do because in practicing philosophy, he is serving god. "Be sure that this is what the god orders me to do, and I think there is no greater blessing for the city than my service to the god," (Socrates 30a, 2012). By sentencing Socrates, the men of Athens are mistreating god's gift to them because god himself attached Socrates to the city in order for him to question those he encounters. By teaching them about virtue and how important the soul is,

Socrates shows them how to live the good life and live it well. As a result of Socrates being given to Athens as a gift from god to question the Athenians to enlighten them and bring about positive outcomes, he is entitled to disobey the court's verdict.

If he was breaking the law and harming Athens it would be wrong and immoral, but because god sent him to do this duty, he must overcome every obstacle in his way to do so. There is no inconsistency between what he says in Crito about upholding the laws and never breaking them. What Socrates says in Plato's Apology proves that he has found a common ground between reason and religion. Therefore, Socrates is both a religious fanatic and apostle of reason. Thus Socrates' argument to continue practicing philosophy even if the men of Athens rule that he should not, is completely justifiable and moral. The Gods placed Socrates in Athens to act as a gadfly stinging Athens in order to wake up the lazy Athenian citizens. Socrates is acting as an apostle of reason and religious fanatic when he challenged the wise men of Athens. After receiving a prophecy from: "...the god at Delphi" (Socrates 20e, 2012), that he is the wisest of all men, Socrates concludes that he knows nothing so he must be the wisest in the sense that he knows nothing for sure. By challenging the wisest of Athens he follows the Gods wishes in a reasonable way. Through argument, question, and discussion, Socrates exposes false wisdom as ignorance which I argue is fulfilling his obligation to the Gods and reason.

Socrates believed that he was following the gods plan for him; it was his moral obligation to question those who claim to be wise. As a philosopher one ought to act as an apostle of reason, whether it is to argue against the

government to determine whether a law or idea is justified or completely wrong and determine through reason how to replace it with a new law or idea that has been proved to be correct. A Philosopher is a lover of wisdom which follows the obligation to cross-examine people in order to find out where or not that are wise or just ignorant. As a religious fanatic and apostle of reason Socrates attempted to teach people he argued with that instead of claiming to be wise and arguing for their ideas without reason along with claiming that any previous idea contradictory to theirs was wrong, one should be open to all objections because we are all truly ignorant. In the Apology, Socrates attempted to persuade people through argument and reason to question everything because not everything can be answered by saying, God did it.

In order to strengthen my argument I shall refer to examples from Crito proving that Socrates is a variation of apostle of reason and religious fanatic. Socrates states that doing wrong to someone is wrong therefore it is immoral. Similar to the Apology, Socrates uses reason to prove his point. Escaping Athens and going against its verdict is disregarding the law, which is immoral and unjust. Socrates makes a connection between the laws of Athens and morals. By escaping, Socrates would be acting against the laws of Athens and disregarding everything he stood for up to this point. By fleeing, Socrates would destroy the city's laws and through the city, all of its citizens. This relationship between a citizen and the city is similar to the relationship between a parent and child. From the city, Socrates was brought to birth, "...was it not through us that your father married your mother and begat you?" (Socrates 50d, 2012). Athens instructed Socrates' father to get

him an education and made sure he was nurtured. Socrates cannot deny that he was brought up being properly educated and nurtured by Athens, therefore he cannot deny being an offspring and servant to it. Just like Socrates is on equal footing with his father, he must respect his superiors' wishes. If his father scolded him or beat him, he would not do the same in return to his father because he is superior. From birth Socrates was taught to obey the laws of Athens like his parents did.

The laws of Athens should be respected just as much as one does their parent. Your parents teach you what is right and what is wrong, thus it is immoral to disrespect or treat your parents poorly as it is them that have invested in you and raised you into the person that you are. Due to the fact that Socrates is an apostle of reason he cannot go against his parent's actions/wishes, he cannot do the same even to Athens because Athens is more sacred than your mother and father and it is to be revered. Even if one feels the sentence was unjust, they should not do anything in return, according to Socrates' No Harm Principle. This principle is one of the two fundamental principles needed for a city to function properly. It states, " One should never do wrong in return, nor do any man harm, no matter what he may have done to you," (Socrates 49c, 2012). The other fundamental principle is the Just-Agreement Principle which maintains that when one has come to an agreement that is just with someone, they should fulfill it and not cheat on it. By leaving Athens, Socrates will break the Just Agreement Principle and be doing harm which goes against both his principles. If no one obeyed these principles, the citizens would no longer obey the laws and the city would not exist. By remaining in Athens and accepting death Socrates

shows he truly loves and respects Athens. In death one will receive peace but if one were to flee and attempt to destroy the laws which hold Athens together, they will be judged harshly and have a rough welcoming in Hades, according to Socrates.

Thus, Socrates believed it was always wrong to disobey the laws. According to Socrates the only rational and reasonable way is to accept the punishment given by the law, regardless of what it is. The objective of having laws in place is to teach virtue to those who inhabit the city. The rules which are implemented in the laws act as an outline for how to behave. The laws direct behaviour, censure, and praise in such a way that ensures that the citizens within the city will go after positive goals and partake in positive activities in order to keep the city secure. The fact that Socrates would rather stay in Athens and die rather than flee and live proves that he is an apostle of reason. I believe that by Socrates following through with his death sentence ordered by the Athenians, he proved that he is wise and he stood up for what he believes in. Socrates made a wise decision by refusing to escape and accept his death sentence. If Socrates would have decided to flee Athens to avoid his sentence he would not be an apostle of reason; Socrates would not have been able to get his point across. I will also argue that by remaining in Athens rather than escaping it solidifies my argument that Socrates is also a religious fanatic. The gods placed him in Athens for a reason and Socrates fulfilled his service for the gods until his last breath.

## **Work Cited**

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