

The understandings
of socrates emerge
from aristophanes
and plato essay
sample



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In Apology, at passage 19 b and c, Socrates briefly explain the reasons of accusations against him. Those are, inquiring the things below the earth and in the sky, making the weaker argument defeat the stronger and teaching others to follow his examples which corrupts the young, and he mention s Aristophanes play as a kind of root for these accusations. At 19 c, he says, he does not try to educate people and charge a fee. Unlike, in Aristophanes' Clouds, Socrates charges Strepsiades to educate his son. In Plato's Socrates, Socrates claims, he does not teach and charge a fee whereas in Aristophanes' Socrates, in Clouds, he teaches by charging a fee. In addition, In Apology, at passage 20 c Socrates emphasize on being master in the subject you teach to charge your students for a fee and he claims, he can not teach since he did not master in any subject. He sees himself as who is in interaction with the people and youth of Athens in informal discussions, not lectures or lessons.

Socrates inquires possessing wisdom and he concludes that he does not have such a wisdom and the God Delphi is the one who posses that wisdom. However, he claims he is the wisest man since he knows that he know nothing. So, when, you compare human wisdom with divine wisdom, human wisdom is nothing. He uses this methodology to lead the people to examine their life and know their self-knowledge and potential. He admits education as passing a scholar or an educational discipline to a person with its whole structure. That's why; he does not see himself as a teacher even though he admits teaching something to people. Here, Socrates inquires the specialty of a person in his subject area. He also does not mean no one can reach the most favored level of specialty.

Aristophanes' *Clouds* emphasize on Socrates' methodology from different perspective. In the play, he mentions "thinking house" wherein scholars, philosophers, natural and rhetorical wisdom reside and these philosophers study two stereotypical arguments "right and wrong". The "wrong" argument is morally inferior but rhetorically superior and convincing. In *Clouds*, Socrates teaches how to conquer the "right" argument by defending cleverly "wrong" argument. Strepsiades wants to go this school in order to get rid of his debts and creditors by defending himself with that way. However, he cannot adapt himself to Socrates teaching and Socrates does not want to teach him no more. So, Strepsiades decides to send his son to this school. But, his son is against this offer since he has adherence to his God "Zeus" traditional education system under which boys are obedient, respectful and strong. At first, Strepsiades' son does not want to get such an education since this education introduces new philosophy and divinity. So, the chorus of clouds calls "right" and "wrong" to a debate, here right represents old school and wrong represent new school over education and morality in order to decide how to best to teach and convince Pheidippides. He gets the teachings of Socrates well, and defeats the creditors of his father. However, his ability to argue for wrong statement influences his ethical values and beliefs badly, like his father influenced badly.

In the *Clouds*, Aristophanes chooses to corrupt Socrates' philosophy to show the absurdity as a matter of dramatic necessity of comic play. Aristophanes other main aim is to inquire Socrates' skepticism or new ideas as his new perspective on skepticism in traditional and new schooling. This can be seen,

where he criticizes the audience for not giving the deserved value to his play in the competition.

As both texts inquire the purposes and responsible of education and educator with regard to the questions at the beginning of the essay. In the texts, there are two types of understanding of education; one is traditional education, which aims to keep the pupils in the values of polis in order to make them good citizens. The other one is new approach to traditional education, which emphasizes more on preparing pupils for a career or helps them discover any hidden potential. Aristophanes' play, *The Clouds*, criticizes Socrates new educational approach and traditional education system, The debate between "right" and "wrong" and wrong's triumph without bringing totally different educational system show us his skeptic approach to Socrates' philosophy. In addition, emphasizing on contrary items in the play gives us a clue about Aristophanes' aims. Undoubtedly, Socrates' inquiring method of logical analysis in his defense shows the clues of Socratic Method in dialectic. The dialectic begins with a problem, which must be analyzed. So, you can see problem-centered method, which is applicable in teaching methods.

When a student gives an answer and he responds depending on own knowledge and experience. The student is held responsible for his statements. The teacher analyzes student's remarks and keeps asking questions and the teacher does not tell the suitable answer. Here the emphasis is upon the thinking processes of the student. So, the student judges his responses by means of logical analysis, which leads him to critical thinking. This method seems very useful. However, to apply this method <https://assignbuster.com/the-understandings-of-socrates-emerge-from-aristophanes-and-plato-essay-sample/>

requires very advanced ability skill and capacity to lead your student's to logical conclusion. At this point, a teacher should not underestimate his influence on his students. Continuously, A teacher should analyze the performances of his students in order to be fair since the teachers are important role model for the society. In addition, to help to nurture a healthy society, a teacher should struggle with himself to find the ways of better society. The words " right" and " wrong" should be his outlet point to establish a better balance between " better" and " worse".

Sophists were traveling teachers who went around the cities of the Mediterranean teaching skills such as the art of rhetoric, and claimed to be able to teach wisdom which they interpreted as statecraft. Most were non-Athenians who attracted enthusiastic followings among the Athenian youth and received large fees for their services. Sophists sometimes studied the nature of the universe and their most prominent element of philosophy was skepticism, They stressed the idea that there are two sides to everything, often undermining faith in religion and real values by preaching a kind of relativism. Many sophists saw the gods as creations of men, and were often agnostic or atheistic and they aimed at producing cleverness and efficiency rather than wisdom and goodness.

According to Plato and , Socrates never accepted any fees in return for a discussion or in exchange for any knowledge, in fact compared to the majority of sophists, such as Gorgias, Prodicus and Hippias (the three most famous amongst the profession) Socrates lived in poverty. He publicly disdained material possessions and was renowned for walking around Athens without any shoes. Socrates believed that the pursuit of the truth was far

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more important than material wealth and opted instead for a free exchange of ideas and felt it an obligation to share important things with other citizens so that all could benefit. However, it seemed that no matter how hard he tried to distinguish himself from the sophists, Socrates was still regarded as one by his fellow Athenians, and it was this view of him that led him to arrested and executed.

As already stated, in 399 B. C, Socrates was brought to trial on three charges, the first being his ' refusal to recognize the gods acknowledged by the state', the second being ' the introduction of new gods' and his third charge was ' corrupting the young', all of these charges brought together certainly implies that the public's perception of him was definitely one of a sophist. It is important to remember the political background at the time, concerning the reign of the thirty Tyrants until 401 B. C and that at the time of Socrates' trial politics, religion and education were all intertwined. People were frightened of any new idea's that might corrupt the young into changing the system yet again, and it was very easy to get the three subjects confused. It is not obvious that Socrates refused to recognize the gods, although he may have led many people to believe different things. For example, Socrates constantly searched for the definition of piety, holiness and goodness (Plato's Euthyphro), which leads us to believe that Socrates must have thought that there was a higher truth other than traditional religions, piety or observance. Within the dialogue of the Euthyphro, Euthyphro prosecuted his own father on a charge of murder and claiming that he had the right to do so because it would be viewed as pious and holy

by the gods. As Socrates got mixed up in the discussion he destroyed Euthyphro's convinced and insisted an explanation of goodness.

' I adjure you to tell me the nature of piety...' (Plato, Euthyphro, 3)

When it is clear that Euthyphro had no way of answering this, Socrates questioned how a man could be truly pious without fully knowing what it means. He never once said he disbelieved in the gods, he just questioned their morals and their supposed view of holiness and goodness. He rejected Euthyphro's definition of piety as giving a service to the gods, querying instead whether piety must be a prior reality that the gods in fact recognize. However, despite even Socrates not knowing what makes a pious person, and how a god is truly satisfied, he still carried out all of his religious duties.

'...But through my services to God I am in a state of extreme poverty' (Plato, Apology 23b)

Socrates may have exhibited sophistic qualities, one of which was his slightly irritating and twisted arguments, that almost always ended up with the other person remaining speechless, such as in the dialogues of Euthyphro and the ' cross examination' of Meletus in the Apology. On the subject of religion, Socrates gets the prosecutor at the trial, Meletus, to contradict himself by provoking him into declaring Socrates a complete atheist (although this contradicts the evidence), and by doing so Socrates points out that that would mean that it was impossible for him to have invented new gods.

Although Socrates could have been thought as similar to the Sophists, he still differed from them greatly. He recognized that there was a lot that he did

not understand and this troubled him, he was known for saying, ' One thing only I know is that I know nothing'. (Socrates)

He did not believe himself to be wise as sophists often did and was in strong opposition to their skepticism; this is another reason why he could not be classed as one of them. His method in which he searched for the truth is now commonly called ' Socratic Method', Socrates never desired to educate people, like sophists did; on the other hand, he gave the notion of desiring to know from those with whom he talked. Instead of lecturing he discussed, and simply asked questions, especially to begin a conversation, as if he knew nothing. However it is probably the skill by which he could reduce people's arguments, by Socratic method, which led people to confuse his method with that of sophistry. Socrates used the art of rhetoric to make men look at themselves and examine their own arguments and very often made people look publicly stupid when their views were crushed, and this obviously irritated the Athenian people and did not help him when it came to his trial. By feigning ignorance, Socrates forced the people he met to use their common sense.

In 493, Aristophanes' comic play the ' Clouds' had implied that Socrates was a sophist. Attacked all kinds of new ideas; mocking all religions and caricatured many contemporary customs. At the time a favorite subject for ridicule was any new intellectual ways of thinking, particularly sophistic philosophy and Aristophanes associated Socrates with them. The sophists in this play are shown as cranks and cheats who, as well as wasting their intellectual powers on scientific nonsense destroy both religion and established morals by introducing new gods.

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Socrates knew this and refers to it in the Apology:

' There are a great many accusers...they approached you at the most impressionable age...they literally won their case by default, because there was no one to defend me...it is impossible for me to even know and tell you their names, unless one of them happens to be a playwright.' (Plato, Apology, 17a-42a)

Plato tells us of the 'real' Socrates, while from other sources we can derive popular perception. According to Plato, Socrates was not guilty of the charges he faced. But the public did not know this, and Socrates was quite aware of that fact. He faced a great deal of suspicion leading up to the trial, and during his trial he did not defend himself against the charges he faced, he behaved in a most arrogant manner and on the whole served to confirm any suspicions the jury may have held. Thus acting in the way he did invited the verdict. It may not have been accurate, but given the circumstances it was most certainly fair. But perhaps the more poignant question is whether he was fairly punished, and to this the answer is a resolute no. Certainly he had provoked the jury, but the altered margin favoring the death penalty indicates that such provocation influenced the decision. Idealistically emotions should have been left out the decision. Realistically it is an inescapable feature of democracy. Socrates was well aware of the shortcomings of democracy, so the real puzzle is why he let it destroy him.

" The unexamined life is not worth living"(Plato, Crito, 38a) Questioning everything from wisdom to virtue in Plato's dialogs, the Apology and the Crito, establishes Socrates' philosophical views. In the Apology Socrates

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attempts to give an unapologetic defense against false acquisitions and attempts to go against the people who are condemning him. However, in the Crito Socrates is in his cell waiting for exile and does not want to go against the laws and would rather be put to death than to be unjust. (Plato, 123)

When the dialogs are compared to one another it is easy to see the contradictions between his views of human virtue and wisdom, the impact of this makes Socrates' views less persuasive. He does, however, set unprecedented opinions that have helped form philosophy and change society.

The contradictory views Socrates holds about human virtue and wisdom makes Plato's dialogs, the Apology and the Crito less persuasive. The largest contradiction is that the laws are right and should be obeyed but the people are not right and shouldn't be obeyed. He does, however, help to illustrate the importance of virtue and the unimportance of wisdom. The two dialogs are inspiring accounts of the daily life of Socrates from his trial to his execution and his constant mission to seek courage, virtue and wisdom. The dialogs inspire me to question things about life that seem unquestionable, such as wisdom and to question those who are in higher positions and who appear to be wiser. These dialogs help me to seek further courage, virtue and wisdom.

However, Aristophanes may not have been maliciously attacking Socrates, what Aristophanes presented to the audience were the stereotypes of sophists, and simply used Socrates as a convenient caricature as he was a conspicuous native Athenian who was a prominent philosopher. Socrates always seemed to think of himself as a man to take care of the minds and <https://assignbuster.com/the-understandings-of-socrates-emerge-from-aristophanes-and-plato-essay-sample/>

souls of the Athenians. He believed that man must always examine himself and his thoughts and be helped to do so; and although his accusers advised him to mind his own business he maintained that that was impossible.

Rather than teach people that their views were incorrect and tell them the 'right' points of view were that of his own, as many sophists did at the time, he wanted to inspire the Athenians to think for themselves and simply to question what they knew. Socrates never claimed to know the truth as sophists did, and insisted that no fees were paid in exchange for a conversation or knowledge. Socrates was not a sophist, although he and his methods had similar elements to that of sophistry and that it could have been an easy mistake to confuse the two at the time.

The playwright here is undoubtedly Aristophanes; he is mentioned explicitly shortly after this. While it may seem Aristophanes was maliciously attacking Socrates, credible evidence points to the contrary. *The Clouds* was an attack on the Sophists, and its plot required somebody to represent the typical Sophist. While Socrates differed in many regards to the Sophists, the public did not make the distinction, and it was they who Aristophanes was writing for.

To anybody who knew Socrates personally the portrayal was, as was it was intended to be, absurd. However, those who knew him by name and rumor only most likely took it at face value. Socrates, overhearing some foreigners asks each other in a whisper who is Socrates? stood up for the audience to see, and remained standing until the conclusion of the play. Indeed, there is much reason to believe that Aristophanes and Socrates had an amiable relationship. If they did not Plato would have been the first to damn him, and <https://assignbuster.com/the-understandings-of-socrates-emerge-from-aristophanes-and-plato-essay-sample/>

yet in the only Platonic presentation of him, the two appear very close.

Aristophanes and Socrates meet in Plato's *The Symposium*, written in 360 BC. There is no animosity; they are engaged in a friendly conversation about the reconciliation of comedy and tragedy. Given such a relationship one can conclude that Socrates' portrayal in *The Clouds* was merely gentle mockery, it was not the serious attack such as Cleon is subjected to. While Aristophanes presents us with a stereotype that almost certainly does not represent the real Socrates, a stereotype is still valuable in so far as it indicates what the general public thought of him.

It is a characteristic feature of his elenctic method, and it was not a wise move to employ it when being tried by a jury already deeply suspicious that he was a Sophist. Socrates traps Meletus into self-contradiction by getting him to express that Socrates is an atheist; this contradicts the second charge, that he imported divinities of his own. Such a state of contradiction was obviously achieved by verbal manipulation, again not helping the perception of him as a Sophist. Socrates essentially makes no real defense of this charge, instead merely leading Meletus in circles.

Both sources have Socrates relating the story of the Delphic Oracle, whereby his friend Chaerophon approached the Oracle and asked if any man was wiser than Socrates. The reply was negative, which set Socrates off on his mission to both prove to himself the truth of the Oracle and to expose the ignorance of his fellow man. This was a bad move on several levels. Firstly, the Athenians at the time suspected the Delphic Oracle of being pro-Spartan. The reign of the Thirty Tyrants was still fresh in the Athenians' minds, and so was Socrates' silence throughout it. His 'sting' was not there when the city
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needed it most, and as such it was another ill-considered choice of argument.

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