

Why did the
athenians convict and
execute socrates?



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

In 399 B. C. E., a tragedy befell the ancient world: the great philosopher Socrates was executed and convicted. Despite his renown in the modern world, ancient Athens viewed him as a threat and convicted him of injustice and corruption of the youth(4). There are many reasons cited for the trial and execution of Socrates, but in the end, it came down to three main reasons.

The evidence suggests that Socrates was sentenced execution for his arrogant behavior, for corrupting the youth of the city with his teachings of new ideas and attempts to implement those new ideas in Athens (6), and relatedly, his involvement in The Thirty Tyrants (6).

While there were some people that disliked Socrates for his outrageous philosophical ideas and beliefs, he did have many loyal followers, primarily his scholars and wealthy Athenian elites. Stated by one of his students, Plato, he was the wisest man alive.

Socrates' Apology, as recorded by Plato, suggested that Socrates was a headstrong, stubborn and pompous man(14). The evidence suggests that one of the reasons that the Athenians executed Socrates was because of his arrogance. The court believed that his interrogation of prominent Athenians and holier, or in this case, wiser-than-thou attitude was disrespectful and insulting. By way of one example, in Socrates trial, he was given the opportunity to propose his own punishment. Socrates himself stated: "Something good, men of Athens, if I am truly to be sentenced according to what I deserve", " If I must suggest a penalty according to what I deserve, I recommend this: to be fed in the Prytaneum" (referring to an elite place to

eat only reserved for nobility)(14). This proposition was foolish and inappropriate. Unsurprisingly, this proposition angered the jury and was promptly rejected.

In addition, Socrates constantly questioned those who seemed wiser than him(14). This derived from his boastful claim that God told him that he was the wisest man. He stated Here is one wiser than me. But you said I was the wisest. He then examined and questioned others. After doing so, he proved the Oracle correct, confirming to himself and to others that he was the wisest. He even told everyone that he was superior to the politicians(14). This made the town mad, they disliked him and thought of him as foolish and inappropriate for challenging them.

The Athenians also convicted Socrates for corrupting the youth. The play *The Clouds* by Aristophanes implied that he was affiliated with the Sophists(12). Being viewed as a Sophist, he was feared by the city because of the controversial teachings he and other Sophists presented to the youth. Athenians believed they practiced wild and disrespectful behaviors(9).

Contrary to this belief, during his trial, Socrates said to not be apart of the Sophists and gave proof of his efforts to promote virtue and glorify the behavior from Athenians. The jury apparently did not accept this testimony.

He also corrupted the youth with his ideas and new beliefs that he presented to them through stories(13). The Allegory of the Cave was one of the stories Plato, one of his scholars wrote. This story relates to Socrates own experience with Athens when he tried to propose his new ideas to them but was quickly rejected. The story showed students that by venturing beyond,
<https://assignbuster.com/why-did-the-athenians-convict-and-execute-socrates/>

and questioning belief systems, new concepts could be learned. In the story, one of the cavemen went out to experience new things and came back to share his experiences with the others in the cave, but was rejected as crazy and executed(13). In real life, Socrates was the man who went out of the cave to open a new world and when we came back to Athens to show his new ideas of believing the gods instead of government, he was shamed for his non-conforming beliefs and not believing in politicians and government(5). In the story, it shows that Athens (or the others) was stubborn and not open to new ideas or views.

Contrary to this submitted reason for why Socrates was convicted and executed, Plato thought that Socrates was extremely wise and that questioning authority and learning new views benefited society.

Being a mentor to the leaders of The Thirty Tyrants, Alcibiades and Critias, Socrates convinced the Athenians that he was associated with their poor behavior. Stated by one of the accusers in his trial, Critias and Alcibiades became close followers of Socrates, and the two of them did grievous wrongs to the city (9). These two powerful men that Socrates taught, became the leaders of The Thirty Tyrants, the most violent and murderous group of Athens and in the end, ended democracy in Athens(9). Accusers blamed Socrates for the wrongdoings caused by The Thirty Tyrants. Many agreed that Socrates educated the two men but the real argument was whether or not Socrates' education contributed to Alcibiades and Critias' treachery. This debate exhibits the importance of Socrates' corruption of the youth as a central premise of why the Athenians executed Socrates.

As I established above, the greater weight of the evidence from the documents show that Socrates was convicted and executed for his arrogant behavior (9), for corrupting the youth of the city with his teachings of new ideas and attempts to implement those new ideas in Athens (6), and relatedly, his involvement in The Thirty Tyrants (2).