

In defense of socrates



My client, the great philosopher Socrates, today stands accused of practicing atheism and of corrupting the minds of our Athenian youth. Meletus and a host of others have brought these charges upon Socrates, who had the chance to stand up and refute them today in this courtroom. Though Socrates has done a superb job of defending himself, answering his charges and displaying his innocence via a meticulous system of logic, I will now attempt to clear your minds of any doubt that Socrates is, in fact, an innocent man.

I submit that not only has he not forced his beliefs on the people of Athens, damaging morale and encouraging atheism, but also that the philosopher is a valuable - and perhaps essential - asset to Athenian society. Further, I will show that Socrates' accusers and others who attempt to suppress such independent thought and questioning are the true threats to the greatness of our land. As Socrates quoted in the affidavit from his accusers, Socrates has been labeled " an evil-doer, and a curious person. " This comment speaks volumes about the corrupt mindset of Meletus and his cohorts.

To equate the trait of being curious to being and doing evil, and to use this mislabeled curiosity as an attack in court documents is highly erroneous. Mathematicians are curious in their quest to solve problems of arithmetic; artists are curious as they strike out into undiscovered territory, and children are most certainly curious in everything they do. Yet we do not label children, artists, or mathematicians as evil off-hand - in fact, we do exactly the opposite by praising and encouraging their achievements.

To condemn Socrates for applying the same curiosity to religion or government is hypocritical. Much of the animosity toward Socrates stems

from a particularly shocking philosophy he holds. He told us with regard to politicians and rhetoricians that " I am better off than he is - for he knows nothing, and thinks that he knows. I neither know nor think that I know. " Clearly the protests to this statement are based upon injured pride and ego - no man, especially powerful men who live in the public eye - wishes to be thought unwise.

However, I suggest that Socrates is fully correct in his remarks. Who would the people rather have lead them into battle - a leader who does not have a clear, strong battle plan, yet leads his men and his country to war; or a leader who does not have a clear, strong battle plan, acknowledges this fact, and turns to his aides and his countrymen for advice? Only a fool would choose to put his life into the hands of a leader who rushes into battle unprepared, for the sake of saving face.

In addition, his charge that some inferior men " were really wiser and better" than their leaders, reminds us that we must not heed the words of one man because he is rich and powerful and dismiss the words of another because he has nothing. Recognizing one's shortcomings in order to better oneself and one's country is the message Socrates preaches. The defendant further claimed that some amongst you might argue that " All this great fame and talk about you would never have arisen if you had been like other men."

Likewise, it is a near certainty that these accusations and this trial - at which Socrates faces a possible death sentence - would not have occurred had Socrates simply behaved like other men. Is it not true that behaving like other men, as so many of us are content to do, is simply a way of maintaining the status quo and not making waves? How many lands have

been conquered, or great nations built, or powerful inventions created, by those content to sit quietly and maintain the status quo? I suggest that number is not many.

On the contrary, we most celebrate those who have risked their lives for the benefit of their country, or do right where they see a wrong. Yet today Socrates stands trial for speaking out where he sees injustice and attempting to make the great Athens greater. Many of you suggest that the work Socrates has done throughout his seventy years was not for the good of Athens, but for personal gain. Socrates has shown here that he does not charge those who come to him, but instead helps the richest and the poorest of men. Unfortunately, the same cannot be said of the Athenian government.

You also suggest that Socrates intentionally harms the youth, though Socrates has again proved his innocence using logic - logic not even Meletus, who was given ample opportunity, could refute. It simply would not make sense for Socrates to poison his own well if he truly thought he was doing evil. What's more, the claims of atheism have been deflated using the same logic. One cannot believe in human things and not humans, as Socrates said. Nor can Socrates believe in spirits and demigods without believing in gods. Meletus himself sat here on the stand moments ago and affirmed as much.

I will now speak to my opening suggestion that individuals like Socrates are not harmful to Athens, but rather are necessary to the success of the state. Whether or not Socrates was acknowledged by Delphi as the wisest man in Athens does not matter; if an insane man could heal the dying, would we not allow him to do so? What truly matters are the things Socrates does, and

whether or not they are good. Since Socrates has logically shown that he is not intentionally inflicting harm on the people of Athens, it remains that he may be causing unintentional harm.

If this is the case, the courtroom is not the venue in which to solve the matter, since the laws do not account for unintentional wrongdoing. I would ask you to go a step further in acknowledging that Socrates is doing neither intentional nor unintentional harm, but is uplifting the spirits of many lost Athenian souls and keeping leaders from operating completely unchecked. Socrates' accusers across the land are " Far more dangerous...who began when you were children, and took possession of your minds with their falsehoods," according to testimony.

Is it not true that those who spew gossip, hatred, and lies, and not those who teach logic and morality, are the greater villains? Children will live their entire lives believing the false ideas of their parents unless they are taught otherwise. What is to be lost, other than perhaps the pride of some misguided parents, if children are taught to decipher logic from illogic, or moral from immoral? Going back to our previous idea that rich and powerful men should not be valued over poor men, it follows that citizens should not follow the immoral or illogical guidelines of their leaders simply because they hold a higher rank.

Instead, leaders should be held to the same moral standards as the common man, and face the same punishments for violating them. Teaching the citizens of Athens, both young and old, to employ keen logic and a sense of morality in making decisions and following orders only serves to create a stronger Athens. This mindset of independent thought and willingness to be

unlike others will sift away bad practices and leave only good and moral ones. Socrates said “ Happy indeed would be the condition of youth if they had one corrupter only, and all the rest of the world were their improvers.”

Though we all know there are many corrupters in the world, imagine if this statement came to pass. If all citizens were willing and able to teach that which is right and logical, and willing to put it before their own personal image, pride, or wealth, then all would be working for the greater good of the state and its citizens. Those who wish to suppress this “ evil” curiosity to maintain power and wealth are driven by the desire for the success of a few rather than the whole.

Stamping out questions, arguments, or calls for revision of old ways, ensures that Athens will remain stagnant and never progress. This is the true crime being committed. Ideas, however bold, can be accepted or rejected at will, but they should never be stifled. Socrates is guilty of nothing but promoting ideas - ideas that will make certain Athens grows and moves forward. If more citizens were willing to dedicate their lives, and be willing to sacrifice them, for such a cause, the future of Athens would be bright indeed. I urge you to find Socrates not guilty.