

# [Definition of courage according to laches essay sample](https://assignbuster.com/definition-of-courage-according-to-laches-essay-sample/)

[Philosophy](https://assignbuster.com/essay-subjects/philosophy/)

Socrates is considered as the father of the western moral philosophy. Although there were other scholars before Socrates his contribution of modern philosophy has been great.  He did a lot than other thinkers before him and is said to have set the agenda method that has been used by other scholars before him. He has set out agenda for ethical thinking for the next millennia’s to come.  Although there have been many other scholars who have disagreed with Socrates many have admired his work.

One of his precious works has been Laches. This is a dialogue where Socrates ask his interlocutors to give a definition and expound some moral qualities and in this context courage. Socrates makes an assumption that the one who really knows what is courage is the one who gives a definition which identifies some of the most common essence that is shared by some instances of courage. These are the features which make courageous things courage. According to Socrates the one who gives a definition that does not the essences of courage does not really know the real meaning of courage. Then Socrates engages each interlocutor a series of questions to reveal the beliefs of that person in order to know if they are consistent with his definition. According to judgment by Socrates, if the interlocutor continuous inconsistent positions with his definition then he is yet to reach the level of their deep beliefs.

Courage is one of the very import virtues and its presence is observed by all people including children. Its presence is sometimes blamed and often excused with disdain and those who are considered cowards suffer a great deal of reputation.  But is seen in many instances, one person’s courage is person’s cowardice. Courage responds to dangers and sometimes calls for sacrifice and in particular instance in battles.  As it goes in battles, being courage can get you killed and hence one needs to be wise in practicing courage.  But courage and prudence are two different things all together.

In this particular discussion, Socrates engages two interlocutors, Laches and Nicias who were both famous generals at that particular time. Nicias was responsible for defeat of Athenian defeat when they went to conquer Sicily. It is said that Nicias made poor military judgment that led to their defeat. Therefore in this argument Nicias cannot defend the virtue of courage as he defends on this dialogue.

Laches’ definition of courage

Laches gave a variety of definitions on courage as per the dialogue that they had with Socrates. In all these definition Laches tried to exemplify his own beliefs on the concept of courage or on the way that he through courage could be defined.

In his first definition Laches defines courage as standing firm in a battle. Like Aristotle, Laches believe that courage could only be found in the battle field. He defines courageous man as the man who “ remains in the ranks and does not flee.” In this regard, Laches agree that the battle field is the only place which can be used to judge the courage of a man since the more man can endure in the battle field, the more courageous he is.

But according to Socrates, this definition is deficient in the sense that courage is a property which is shared by all the instances of courage. Socrates refers to those who fight while retreating and wins the war like the Scythians. He also gives an example of the Spartans at Plataea who fought in retreat. Hence it means more than just a cavalry In that regard, Socrates expounds that standing firm in a battle is not a property that can be shared by all the instances of courage.  According to Socrates courage is a virtue that can be applied   other places away from the battle field.   He agrees with Laches that courage is usually displayed in the battle field but that is not the only instance that can be used to judge the courage of a person. There are many instances where it can be applied outside the battle field. According to Socrates this was a too narrow definition since it represents only one kind of qualities of a soldier. This is because fighting and not running away in the battle field is just one portion of courage.

At the same time Plato raises the same question which is answered by Aristotle later in the Laches. He enquires other places where this courage can be expressed except in the battlefield.

Therefore Socrates concludes that courage does not equal standing firm in the battle in which case he argues that there are many other places where it can be expressed. Therefore in his understanding standing firm in a battle field may only be equal to a good soldier which portrays only one side of courage.

After Socrates found  out that Laches did not define courage well, he decided to formulate it in another way. This time round he decided for formulate it under a question of examination.  In this regard he wanted to get a definition that is far away from the battle field. He wants to move the definition away from the battle field in order to suit the purpose of discovering a definition that suited the application to where other action takes lace. He put the definition so as to enquire Laches understanding of the power of courage. He helped Laches to formulae the definition.

In his second definition, Laches define courage as endurance. He defines it as a “ sort of endurance of the soul.” By this definition, Laches was trying to link the virtue of enduring or performing consistently under the pressure of a certain force.  But again, Socrates refutes this definition in the sense that he argues courage as being fine and noble.  This means that in endurance, one may be trying to express his courage but end up hurting himself. That is why he refuted it courage as being fine and noble to mean that it does not go to an extent of harming the body in order to be known that one is courageous.

Socrates defends his assertion by stressing that there is nothing that is harmful and injurious that can be considered as noble.  This means that one doesn’t have to harm the body in order to show that they are courageous.  Courage is not harmful neither is it injures.  Socrates explains to Laches that endurance can sometimes become harmful and injurious for example when it is due to a foolish cause. Therefore he concluded that courage does not equal endurance

Socrates helped Laches to formulate another definition of courage which takes a more prudent steadfastness of the sour.  He enquires whether a man willing to fight in a battle after prudently calculating  the reinforces will come to help him will be more courageous than another man who  sits on the opposing side and knows very well that they are going to win and hence stands firm and fight. Laches agreed with Socrates that the second man will be more courageous since he will have made the calculations in his soul and will be led by his determination. Therefore they agree that courage is not foolish steadfastness of eth soul.

Therefore in his third definition, Laches defines courage as wise endurance. This means that though one has to endure, one has to be wise. This was guided by the above agreement that courage is fine and noble and endurance can sometime be due to a foolish cause. Therefore Laches saw the option using once wisdom in expression of courage.

But again Socrates does not agree with Laches on this definition. He refuted the definition on the ground that if courage is equal to wise endurance, then it means that the more wise a man is when enduring danger, the more courageous one is.  In this regard, he refuted that skill is a kind of wisdom and if relay wise endurance was same as courage, them it meant that the more skill that one has in enduring a danger, then one would be considered more courageous. In the vice versa, the less skill that one applies in doing a dangerous thing one is attempting,  the more courageous that person can be considered to be.  According to Socrates, it would be wrong if we called foolish endurance courage.  This is because were are all looking for endurance in knowledge of the good and likewise attaining the knowledge of the good. As he put it is likely that somebody who does not know or someone who is more that ignorant who jumps in a cave without knowledge of that art can endure but he or she might not be that courageous. Therefore Socrates concludes that courage does not equal to wise endurance.

Therefore as we can see here, Laches definition of courage is defined by his involvement in battle. This is because all his definitions are in line with his work in the military. Having been a general in the battle and having waged several wars, Laches therefore sees courage in the virtue of being able to fight strongly in the war.

But according to Socrates, courage involves more than being able to fight courageously in the war. It means more than just being able to stand in the battle. This is because staying in a battle that is being lost may be get one killed. Therefore he refutes that being courageous does not involve only the body strength and the will but it has more to do with analysis of the situation and henceforth application of the right principles of courage. He gives an example of gauging the position of an army in eth war and then making a decision to continue with the war or not. As Socrates leads Laches to understand the real definition of courage, Laches realize that courage involves making of wise decisions in endurances.

Bibliography

Plato. Laches. Nicholas, J. H. (Trans.) In Pangle’s The Roots of Political Philosophy