

Apology of socrates by plato argumentative essay

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In Plato's dialogues, there is a particular dramatic setting that sets its literary meaning which the analytically-trained philosophers fail to recognize. The explicit arguments in the dialogues are paid attention to, and the philosophical position of Plato is yet to be determined. Plato chose not to relate his philosophy directly with his name. Philosophers from all around the globe failed to understand the innate philosophy by Plato due to over-generalizations and oversimplifications. The work has been misrepresented, and I believe that philosophers who are trained only analytically cannot be successful scholars on Plato as they must be classically-trained literary critics too. Traditionally, it is claimed that Apology is a tribute to his executed teacher while other believe that it is merely a source of knowledge of history of Socrates. There is a huge difference in this speech and Plato's other works: the Apology is a defense speech that Socrates made at his trial and doesn't seem to address any philosophical issue like his other dialogues. There has to be some motivation for Plato write this text. In this paper, I shall argue that this speech is a text linked to metaphilosophy.

THE APOLOGY

The Apology opens with the account of charges against Socrates, and he begins by acknowledging and restating some other criticisms that have been made against him in Athens. The first glimpse of this speech seems to be an account of Socrates' trial in 399 BC. In his speech, Socrates tells how he has been attacked for engaging in the physical speculation about the heavens and the earth. Moreover, the Sophists attacked him for engaging in rhetorical word-play. Discussing both these charges, Socrates denies claiming that his works have been misinterpreted and in this process, he introduces the meta-

philosophical thesis in his speech. He states that his work has been different from his predecessors. He didn't claim to possess any knowledge, neither did he claim to pass on that knowledge. But he was recognized as a wise person; his reputation forced his friend to ask the Oracle at Delphi, who confirmed that nobody was wiser than Socrates.

Socrates faced the paradox of lacking knowledge while proclaiming the repute of the wisest person alive. To resolve this, he chose the politicians, poets and the craftsmen to do an empirical test. After conversing with the politicians, he concluded that while they considered them wiser than others, the truth was they were not. The poets disappointed him equally as they were completely unable to explain their works. In craftsmen, he found that they specialized in a small area of knowledge and made generalization of wider knowledge. His cross-examination set an example where people started cross-examining others' claims themselves and the failures blamed Socrates of deliberately training the youth to question the existing beliefs, as well as the authority of their elders. Meletus formally charges Socrates of corrupting the minds of the youth.

Socrates believed that self-examination is the essence of philosophy that is equally important to cross-examination. He stated, " I spend all my time going about trying to persuade you, young and old, to make your first and chief concern not for your bodies or for your possessions, but for the highest welfare of your souls" (Landesman and Meeks). So, the fundamental doctrine of Socrates was to " care for the soul or oneself." Socrates stated in his speech that he had only focused on caring for oneself and had never imparted any knowledge or teaching so intentional corruption on his behalf does not exist. But he did reply that he wouldn't give up on cross-

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examination and incitement as these were God-given missions. Through Apology, he kept examining his self and exhorted others to do their self-examination.

AIM OF THE APOLOGY

The common interpretation is that this text was written by Plato aiming to defend his teacher from all the horrific claims against him. But I believe that through Apology, Plato made an attempt to describe how Socrates conceived philosophy. The Apology clearly points to two aspects: one is to follow the philosophical life while the second is to take care of the soul. In reality, Socrates' philosophy is based on the notion that life and thought are well integrated such that they cannot be separated. The philosophy of a person is expressed through his actions; while the actions lead to exploring the innate philosophy of any individual.

CENTRAL THEMES IN APOLOGY

I identified three central themes in Apology: first, is that philosophy tends to transform one's way of life; secondly, actions express an individual's philosophy; and thirdly, the behavior of an individual is an expression of their philosophy. Socrates makes clear that it was his duty as a philosopher to examine himself and others as given by God. Further, he restates that it is the lives that he wishes to examine and not the beliefs; and then he adds that without examination, a life is not worth living. So, his main concern was to examine his life, transform it into the philosophical way and to exhort others to go through the same process (Goldman). Aristotle had earlier presented Socrates as a person who was primarily concerned with knowledge but through Apology, the search for knowledge and cross-

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examination of the claimants of knowledge emerged as the primary concerns of Socrates. His philosophy of life has been driven by the quest for how to live.

Aristotle believed that philosophers search for knowledge, but this happens as an impact upon their way of life, but Socrates believed that philosophers searched for knowledge so that they could transform their way of life.

Socrates philosophy is based upon the desire to transform the life; for him, philosophy is expressed in actions and the action is to transform the life. And yet, he also claimed that nobody ever did something wrong willingly. We always tend to act in the best interest, even if something goes wrong, it is not intentional, and rather it could be simple ignorance of what was best for us or some error. Socrates clarified during his speech that all the committed crimes that he was alleged of might had been done involuntarily as nobody would willingly and intentionally do the wrong.

He said, " If I unintentionally have a bad influence, the correct procedure in cases of such involuntary misdemeanors is not to summon the culprit before this court, but to take him aside privately for instruction and reproof; because obviously if my eyes are opened, I shall stop doing what I do not intend to do" (Hamlet). So, Socrates believed that the transformation of his behavior is closely linked to the moment of instruction. When he learns something new and understands it, his philosophical beliefs tend to change resulting in an alteration of the consequent actions. After cross-examining, it is only the transformation of philosophical beliefs that can alter the behavior and not a punishment or threat.

The Apology is equally biographical account as it is philosophical; considering how Socrates linked philosophy and life, I find that biographical <https://assignbuster.com/apology-of-socrates-by-plato-argumentative-essay/>

is as significant as is a philosophical account. Most of the speech that aimed at defending was focused on previous behavior of Socrates where he cross-examined and then explained his actions as the quest for knowledge. This text has explored the philosophy of Socrates as expressed through his actions and then linked it again to the way those actions expressed his philosophy of life.

CONCLUSION

The Apology verbally explains the actions of Socrates in his defense speech. But it also acts a meta-philosophical apology that explained his behavior as well as his philosophy of questioning. His behavior and his speech both contribute to explaining the philosophy of Socrates life. In all the dialogues by Plato, there is a certain philosophical question being discussed, and as I understand, the Apology is based on discussing the actual philosophy of Socrates upon which he has focused through his actions. Plato used the trial and the defense speech to explain the concept of philosophy according to Socrates in a way that the philosophy was being tested while being presented in a biographical account.

References

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