

Influential philosopher socrates



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Socrates was a very influential philosopher who would often be found surrounded by his students debating various topics. His primary concerns were with ethics, justice, and politics. These, as well as others, would often be discussed with those who were around him.

Although most other instructors would charge fees for these interactions, Socrates refused to accept payment for his teachings. One of his most notable students was Plato, who wrote down many of Socrates' ideas. A great many of these teachings focused on the political structure that would yield an ideal society (Socratic Faction). In the ideal Socratic society, the government would be run by philosophers, each member of society would have a specialization that they focus their time on, and there would be no Assembly.

While some may think that Socrates wanted philosophers to rule because he himself was a philosopher, he presents several points as to why this makes logical sense. One of the arguments that he presents is that knowledge is a key factor in someone's ability to rule. In particular, knowledge of government and justice are essential for rulers to be effective (Brown).

Philosophers spend their lives seeking wisdom and truth, and therefore they are uniquely qualified to run a government. Not only that, but others are distinctly unqualified to run a government, because knowledge is not what they have devoted their lives to (Brown). In this way, ruling is a specialization in and of itself, where as a doctor would practice medicine, a philosopher would see to his society (Ambury).

This transitions into the next point, that each person has their own specialization, and that one specialization is what they should stick to (Ober

and Carnes, 107). There is no shame in becoming an expert in a single area and working in that area for the rest of one's life. In fact, if each person did this, every single task that was carried out in a society would be done by only the best!. It is preposterous to think that everyone is at the same intellectual level, therefore it makes minimal sense to let those who lack knowledge to have a say in areas where critical thought is necessary. In contrast to a non-philosopher doing a philosopher's work, an example given by Ober and Carnes is that it would be ridiculous to think that a philosopher would be as adept at making shoes as a shoemaker, so why bother making something mediocre (107). As Ober and Carnes state in reference to Socratic beliefs, shoemaking and politics were distinct and mutually exclusive activities, to be undertaken by different persons (107).

A third aspect of an ideal government according to Socrates was to get rid of the Assembly (Socratic Faction). One of his arguments for this proposal is that many of the Athenian citizens could be convinced of nearly anything when it was proposed by a strong speaker (Ober and Carnes, 7). This is not their fault, as mentioned previously, the common folk lack the knowledge that is needed to rule effectively. In addition, the Assembly allows unjustified merit to be given to ideas brought forth by uninformed people. By having an Assembly, Athens is letting an uneducated group of people make important decisions (Ober and Carnes, 8). Another issue with the assembly is that those who are wealthy and those who are poor are divided on many topics, and consequently there are unnecessary rifts between the classes over issues (Ober and Carnes, 107).

While Socrates presents a good case for why philosophers should be the ones in charge, some opponents of this viewpoint would argue that this concept is selfish coming from a philosopher. However, there are several reasons why this is an incorrect statement. Socrates mentions (through Plato's written work) that philosophers would much prefer to think about various philosophical arguments instead of ruling, but it is in the best interest of everyone that they take on the leading role in government (Brown). He makes the point that philosophers possess virtues that many others lack. This is tangibly evident by the proposal that a ruling party of philosophers would not be able to have private property (Brown). The ideal government would be ruled by a small group of philosophers who lead simple, chaste lives, dedicated solely to the welfare of everyone else (Ober and Carnes, 8). This would eliminate the potential for government leaders to become corrupted with the obsession of materialism.

Materialism and corruption, while not issues in a Socratic-ruled society, are very likely in an oligarch society. Although an oligarchy may start out with good intentions, it is very likely that those in charge will forgo the good of the people in favor of personal gain (Socratic Faction). This is why it is better to put people in charge who will have no opportunities for personal gain; it prevents the possibility of corruption. While Socrates was opposed to an oligarch society, he also had suggestions as to why a democracy form of government was not the best choice. As mentioned previously, not everyone has the same ability to rule and make decisions. Another key point in opposition to democracy is that there are no standards that the society lives by on a long-term basis (Brown). Each time the Assembly meets, the

outcome depends on majority vote, not one unifying goal. Finally, both of these types of government are unsuitable due to the high tension that they cause between the different classes (Brown).

In a Socratic society people would be distinguished based on their duties/ specialization, not by how much money or property they had (Ober and Carnes, 107). This type of society would have a caste system where Athens is ruled by a small number of philosophers. Another important classification is the Guardians, who would serve as Athens' protectors. The rest of society would be made up of people who specialize in one field, whether that be shoemaker, farmer, or any other specialty (Ober and Carnes, 107). Another aspect of Socrates' teachings that was rather controversial was the role that women can play in government. While women who are not inclined to participate in the deep thinking that philosophy requires should not be in the ruling class, Socrates argues that gender is not relevant to whether a not someone is qualified to rule (Brown). This is also a testament to his forward thinking.

While many of Socrates' ideals were met with scorn by his opponents, he presents several good arguments for why a democratic or oligarchic society would not necessarily be the best option. In his ideal society there would be rule by a select few people who are uniquely qualified to run a government with their philosophical backgrounds. Philosophers who participated as government leaders would lack corruption due to their simple living conditions. They would also be best qualified to ensure a safe home for the Athenian people with their critical thinking skills. Every other member of the Athens society would have one area of specialization and that would be what

they dedicated their lives to doing to avoid anyone overstepping their areas of competence, in addition to a select group of Guardians who would serve as protectors for the Athenian people. This would be a much better use of the regular person's time than participating in the Assembly where they would be unqualified to make important decisions concerning society.

Although Socrates provides many good points as to why his ideal society would be the best option, there are many factors that go in to creating the ideal civilization.