

# Socrates good or bad citizen



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

Before we ask whether Socrates was a good citizen, we must first ask what prerequisites grant a person this title. Those who say Socrates was not, in fact, a good citizen may say, “ This man had no respect for the laws of the state, and therefore had no business in questioning its practices. He lived a life of solidarity, only entering the public sphere to prod and probe, to confuse the public mind that they may turn against the state.

Oh Socrates, he had no belief in our gods, for he was an atheist, and therefore had no right to question our morals. We know of his deeds for we had heard utterances of his misconduct. For if his mission was not to overthrow us, why then do his students refute us? We lived peacefully until this man came among us, questioning our virtues, challenging our gods, and disturbing the haze of ignorance bestowed upon our citizens.” It is to these men I ask, what makes a good citizen?

We could say that a good citizen is one whom respects the laws of the state and follows them accordingly. If this is true, then Socrates is truly a just citizen. For it is he who offers himself up on trial, and it is he whom sacrifices his life even under an unjust ruling. The accusers of Socrates are adolescent in their manner, accusing him of such falsehoods only evident in the mouths of men. These men may say, “ But it is he whom questions the state! Socrates, the unwashed hermit, he claims we have no knowledge and he wishes to destroy us” I ask to them then, “ What law is broken when one questions the actions of another?” If we are not allowed to examine the flaws of our government, how may we then improve upon it? Socrates recognizes his position under the state and humbles himself accordingly. “ Well, then, since you were brought into the world and raised and educated by us, how,

in the first place, can you deny that you are our child and our slave, as your fathers were before you?" Socrates, acting as the state, poses this question in Crito to prove that he may not escape his judgment, for it is justly given by the laws of Athens and there is no justice in requiting evil with evil. We know this to be truly right and just, coinciding with the Fourth Commandment; Honor your father and your mother.

How then could one say Socrates has no respect for the law? They may say, " He lived privately, away from the public. Who is he to judge, who hath no experience in civic life?" I would ask them to consider the willingness of Socrates to serve and die for the state, in accordance with their laws.

Socrates' military service shows not only his willingness to put his life on the line for the country he so loved, but also his respect for the laws which required him to engage in battle. After their victory at Potidaea in 432, the army was ambushed during their return to Athens. Socrates defended his own life, and that of his brother in arms, Alcibiades, who, later in his life, became one of Athens' leading strategists and politicians. Plato himself wrote, " When you behave in war as he did, then (the enemy) do not even touch you; instead they pursue those who turn in headlong flight. Laches, an Athenian general said, " If all the Athenians had fought as bravely as Socrates, the Boeotians would have erected no statues." Socrates was strong in mind and in body, proving himself to be a worthy citizen of Athens militarily and philosophically.

Socrates also made an appearance on the senate during the trial of six military generals after the Battle of Arginusae. Two generals had fled from the battlefield and returned to Athens prior to those whom were tried.

Instead of feeling relief for the great victory they had won, the public was plagued with anger by the slander of said generals. They were tried for not recovering the bodies of their fallen comrades after the battle. Though the generals were able to persuade the public that it was in fact a storm that prevented them from their duty, washing away the bodies of their men, the emotions of the Athenians were riled up once again during a festival which took place the next day. The Athenians pleaded for the execution of these generals, despite the illegality of their methods. Socrates refused them under threats of death. He feared not death, but that he may do something unrighteous or unholy. Once more, he proves his adherence and respect of the law by resisting a tyrannical government when given unlawful orders to participate in the arrest and execution of Leon of Salamis.

Socrates' accusers claimed him an atheist, while also accusing him of corrupting the youth with teachings of other spiritual agencies other than the state recognizes. Is not this alone proof alone of the accuser's ignorance? Socrates himself took to heart the words of the Delphic oracle, "There is no man wiser than Socrates." Socrates' wisdom, he claimed, came from God alone, for only He is wise. "and by his answer he intends to show that the wisdom of men is worth little or nothing; he is not speaking of Socrates, He is only using my name by the way of illustration, as if he said, 'He, O men, is the wisest, who, like Socrates, knows that his wisdom is in truth worth nothing.'" Socrates accepted that true wisdom does not come from man, and this directly challenges the Sophists idea of truth, "Man is the measure of all things". We see then that these accusers were more concerned with the power they held, and not of the Truth that all men are held accountable. "

Socrates' unyielding determination to achieve absolute truth is in one sense a reaction to the Sophists' "moral relativism."

Because the Sophists influence bled into the minds of most Athenians, Socrates was at a disadvantage during his trial. A lifetime of slander had plagued the philosopher and surely these lies factored into his judgement. Even still, he was condemned by only a slim margin. We cannot then, say that he was entirely wrong in his criticisms if he convinced nearly half of the assembly. Socrates holds firmly to his truths even after condemnation, remaining a truly righteous, just, and exemplary citizen of Athens.