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The mythical presence of Socrates and his legendary acceptance of the poisoned drink have always fascinated the philosophers and historians alike. What makes the historical and philosophical character of Socrates even more elusive is the fact that Socrates himself did not write any big volumes of philosophy and the sole vessel to his philosophical contributions are the reminiscences of his equally gifted student Plato. Due to this indirect nature of the knowledge being passed down, one can never be sure of what Socrates really believed in as there are many conflicting views presented by other philosophers who were directly influenced by Socrates like Plato's student Aristotle. Socrates along with his student Plato and Aristotle are the three dominant figures in ancient Greek philosophy which was quite thought provoking despite the turbulent times Greece had to go through in their lives.

There are four works more or less in chronological order that were written by Plato regarding Socrates and his life: The Euthyphro, Apology, Crito and Phaedo. While each of them describes important parts of Socrates' life, his trial and subsequent handling of the poisoned bowl, they are definitely influenced by the role of a great thinker over the author. So much that they are considered ancient fiction. (Plato, 2010, p. 11) Now let us consider each of these works and analyze the legend of Socrates in the eyes of Plato.

Euthyphro is based on the dialogue between Socrates and Euthyphro, who was a religious prophet of that time deliberating on definitions of piety. They had long debates on the concept of piety and the reason why it was loved by the higher power. Naturally, it led to some theological standoffs between the two. There were two turning points in their main dialogue. The first one involved the questioning of piety and what caused it to be so. The second

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involved the deliberation whether the piety was nothing, but servitude. In the first turning point involved answering the following question.

" Do the gods love what is holy or pious because of its holiness or piety, or is what is called 'holiness' or 'piety' only so called because the gods (all the gods) love it?"

Despite several reservations against the concept of piety, the two of them mutually agreed that it is the former which is true. (Plato, 2010, p. 35) The question is answerable because what is loved by God is so because it is pious, not the other way around. It is easy to understand why. In the first glance, the question appears to be a paradox as both parts of the question are answerable because of each other. But, if you accept the concept of God, it is clear that the concept of God envisions a benefactor. Since the piety demands only good deeds, it is because of these good deeds that they are considered pious. The piety is not constituted. That is what they collectively decided. This information contradicts the allegations of the private citizens who alleged in the apology that Socrates was a non-believer and wanted to influence the public against the writ of the state. This dialogue shows that he was a firm believer in a higher power and wanted to study morality and piety in philosophical terms that resonate in his mind. He thus wanted to go a step further. In other words, he said that whatever is liked by God is due to the good nature, not because it is only declared by him to be so. This gives realization and a boost towards our humble existence. It also negates the concept of a religious personality which is normally depicted as a ruthless conservative. Here, Euthyphro takes part in a logical debate in the area of his expertise thus dispelling the notion that religion and philosophy are separate entities.

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The second part of the dialogue was named apology. During that time, Socrates was at loggerheads with the authorities for affecting the youth of Athens and not believing in Gods that the city believed in, instead, believing in other divinities. The trial was quite absurd, as nobody before him had been tried on these charges, and they were specifically designed for his questioning (Plato, 2010, p. 58). The trial was conducted by private citizens who, along with the government thought that Socrates' views were negative and destroyed the order of things. The apology consists of long dialogues from the master philosopher in which he tried to answer the accusations. What troubled the accusers was the fact that Socrates encouraged each and every one of the people to be a philosopher over the obsolete concepts that are taught from generations to generations with no concrete thinking and blind eyed approval. It could result in the abolition of the established order. Socrates starts by apologizing for his poor skills of speech, which was not true as Plato's version of him is a very skilled orator who is adept at transferring his thoughts into effective words (Plato, 2010, p. 58-59). There are two sets of accusers in his trial. One is a younger group while the other is an elder group consisting of a comic poet Aristophanes. He implores the audience to listen to him carefully because he has been imparted wisdom and he doesn't claim to have inhuman wisdom and those accusing him are lying to suit their own needs. He believed in the oracle and all the other current trends of the society and since it had appointed him as the wisest man in Athens, the other supposedly wise people were deeply disappointed and affected. Socrates continued to say that these people had started to hate him because of this and when he went to them to say that they might be wiser than him, he found them having something they didn't have (Plato, <https://assignbuster.com/free-the-last-days-of-socrates-essay-sample/>

2010, p. 58-59).

Another accusation on him was that he disbelieved in the gods of Athens and believed in “strange gods” thus defying the city’s religion. Socrates answers this accusation and says that he believes in the oracle, which was considered a religious object at that time. The oracle had come up with his name, and he took it as a sign of divine intervention for his journey towards attaining wisdom (Plato, 2010, p. 58-59). Another accusation from the prosecutors was that he gave his views privately, thus agitating the public against the state. If he was so truthful and all that, why couldn’t he announce his views in the public? Socrates replied to this accusation by saying that his poverty was a proof that he wasn’t taking any money to work against the state. He also elaborates that if one wants to work for the betterment of the society; he must need to live privately among the citizens and try to enforce his ideas from that humble beginning. He believes that if he had taken to public speaking, he would have been dragged in the dirt, and the purposes of enlightenment of the society would have been in shambles (Plato Apology, 2010, 31c-32a). He chose to speak here because it was a last resort to prove his sanity and make his voice heard in the assembly. Overall, the arguments that Socrates provided in his defense are a little odd for someone to understand in a court room, but if one reflects on them deeply, he is amazed by the level of thought put in his presumptions.

The third part of the dialogue is Crito that was named after his loyal friend who had a relatively short argument with him to persuade him to run into exile in the face of the gallows. In the apology, the great thinker was convicted by jury which indicted him of the charges being presented before them. Then he thinks that the jury might be able to be persuaded to forgive <https://assignbuster.com/free-the-last-days-of-socrates-essay-sample/>

most of his crimes if he agrees to stop spreading his beliefs among the youth and the general public alike. But the jury convicts him nonetheless. It seems that the sanity of Socrates had lost its value in the eyes of the decisive people. Socrates was aware of the reality all along and he knew that they had no choice but to execute him. He therefore resigns to his fate in the *Crito* (Plato, 2010, p. 97-98).

He is desperately tried to be persuaded by his friends and families, some of whom are important people in Athens. But Socrates discontinuing from his earlier anti state approach tells them that it is very important to follow the laws that have been promulgated in order to save Athens from crime and defiance. He believed that the laws were to be respected even though they were abused because their intent was right and justified. This leads to several important parts of Plato's Socrates philosophy. These parts tend to explain tough choices and the matters to believe in.

Crito continues with the same rhetorical approach that the rest of Socrates' dialogues are. It is one of the shortest dialogues that were presented by Socrates in Plato's "The last Days of Socrates". *Crito* approaches Socrates and offers help to escape to him but he is rebuffed. *Crito* is very desperate for Socrates to escape and tries to convince him using his own brand of reasoning. He says that it is injustice and this should not be allowed in a society as great as Athens (Plato, 2010, p. 97-98). Socrates coolly replies that his sentence was not so. He proved his point by saying that all necessary process was done in accordance with the laws and he was sentenced by a free jury who had found him guilty of committing crimes. The very basis of his argument was that he had fought all his life to help people and he had proved his worth by doing so. He would never abandon his views

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on anything even if he faces death.

This was a very brave, but stubborn thing from the great philosopher. His views also appear to contradicting his statements from the apology. He for the first time says that since he was born in Athens, he was subjected to the rights and duties of the city. During the trial, he had exercised his right in the process and had found the system fully functional but not able to make space for his contradicting views. His apparent shift from his approach towards the laws and his conflict with statements from the apology has been a subject of many debates.

What he did at that time was very unreasonable as he had the opportunity to free himself from the system that wrongly accused him of something he didn't commit. But, if you have studied the character of Socrates from the start, you would come to know that Socrates was a very contented man and thoroughly believed in what he had observed and learned. It might seem irrational to us but the strength of the character of the great man dictates that he must take his beliefs to the gallows. If he had fled, his ideas would have been discredited, and his opposition would have won. So in the face of the magnitude and strength of his views, it is not a question of right or wrong. It is what he believed in even if his views altered and faltered in the end. He accepted that goblet of poison without any remorse.

The fourth and final part of the set of dialogues is the Phaedo that is named after one of the younger companions of Socrates who witnessed his last moments in Philius, Athens (Plato's Phaedo, 2010, 57a-59c). The most important part of the Phaedo is when typical Platonic ideas regarding the human soul are presented by Socrates on his deathbed. This confirms that this version of Socrates has been crafted to include the ideas put forward by <https://assignbuster.com/free-the-last-days-of-socrates-essay-sample/>

the Plato thus giving everything less credibility as far as the true incident of Socrates is concerned, but nonetheless, they are an important source of Greek philosophy themselves and we continue to study them in that light. This particular part of the dialogues is the most important of the lot because as death approaches, Socrates has to answer a lot questions from his companions because they are young and cannot understand the reason behind Socrates' apparent refusal to save his own life. Socrates calls a philosophy a practice by which, the soul is separated from the body and allowed to drift into areas that cannot be achieved with traditional thinking (Plato's *Phaedo*, 2010, 64a-69e). After death, the soul is gone and becomes a part of these heavens. But, one of the objectors says that how can it be rational that the survival of the human soul is a rational thing when no proof can be there possibly. Why should Socrates welcome death without any proof of after life? The thinker then presents a theory of recollection as a proof of the human soul's immortality. The theory says that the human soul was in existence long before and when it is born it forgets everything. So what we learn in life is not really new but rather recollection of the sea of knowledge that we already had. It is a very thought provoking theory as human beings tend to think as recollection subconsciously. This is followed by various other objections from his friends and students regarding the act of injustice that he was subjected to, and further denunciations of Socrates' concept of the human soul. Socrates answers rhetorically as usual with his firm basis on the theory of recollection. In his eyes, the goblet of poison is an elixir of eternal life.

In conclusion, it is clear from the thorough study of these dialogues of Socrates that his fictional character is heavily influenced by the ideas of <https://assignbuster.com/free-the-last-days-of-socrates-essay-sample/>

Plato himself. He made contradictions where he saw fit and tried to enforce his ideas through the character of Socrates. This is obvious, but the depth of Socrates being portrayed at least shows the level of the Socrates' being was high enough to be a truly moving philosopher. The ideas and oratory language being used is of top notch and the level of persuasion doesn't feel to be out of place even in these modern times. The spiritual awakening and questioning embarks us on a journey that is both satisfying and enlightening. It influences and affects the way of contemporary thinking and forces us to think out of the box like Socrates himself. It is human after all to wish for life beyond the death but these dialogues, and the elegant theories instill a logical and rational existence of these kinds of experiences. Although we aren't fully convinced, it is a great step towards a greater realization and spiritual development.

Works Cited

Plato. *The last days of Socrates*. London: Penguin Classics. 2010. Print.