

Unfortunately, this is not convincing to enough of the jurors, and they vote for his guilt. Socrates is told that he may be allowed to live, provided that he stops practicing philosophy. Why does he reject this offer?

Towards the end, Socrates provides his eloquent and justly famous summary of the value of philosophy:

I say that it is the greatest good for a man to discuss virtue every day and those other things about which you hear me conversing and testing myself and others, for the unexamined life is not worth living for man.

- Plato, *Apology*, 38a.

In the end, the jury votes overwhelming for the death penalty. Socrates concludes that philosophy will go on, with or without him—and true enough, here we are today.

Introduction to Philosophy

What is Philosophy?

The *Apology*, written by Plato, recounts Socrates’ speech at his trial in 399 BCE to a jury of 501 Athenian male citizens. (Plato is recorded as being present at the trial, so this account is thought to be a fairly faithful rendition of what Socrates actually said.) As the opening of this speech reveals, this is not an apology in the modern sense of the term:

To what degree, Gentlemen of Athens, you have been affected by my accusers, I do not know. I, at any rate, was almost led to forget who I am—so convincingly did they speak. Yet hardly anything they have said is true.

- Plato, *Apology*, 17a.

Socrates is clearly not saying he’s sorry. The title comes from the Greek word *apologia*, meaning “a speech in one’s own defense”. Indeed, Socrates intends to defend himself against two “formal”, legal charges made against him by three of his fellow citizens, Meletus, Anytus, and Lycon. What are the two legal charges against Socrates?

In answering these charges, Socrates is literally defending his life, for being guilty of these two charges warrants the death penalty. In particular, he seeks to justify his choice to practice philosophy. So, in a certain sense, philosophy itself is on trial here. The word philosophy comes from the Greek words *philos*, meaning “love”, and *sophia*, meaning “wisdom”. A philosopher is therefore a lover of wisdom, and Socrates’ speech aims to reveal the exact meaning of this. However, his accusers do not see philosophy in such a pleasant light. In the end, the question is whether philosophy is something important or something strange and possibly even dangerous.

What do you think a philosopher does? How have you heard others describe philosophy?

Socrates claims that the formal charges against him are based on three misconceptions about what a philosopher believes and does. These three misconceptions are:

1. Philosophy is . . .

2. Philosophy is . . .

3. The philosopher is . . .

The above are the “old” accusations made against philosophy, and Socrates believes that they underlie the two formal, legal charges against him. The accusers characterize philosophers as quarrelsome folk who are a menace to society! Socrates’ intends to refute this mischaracterization. As he says in the introduction, he will recall who he really is, and what it is that a philosopher really does.

In order to address the first misconception, Socrates (implicitly) brings up the following distinction:

Sphere of _____ (The Realm of Science)	vs.	Sphere of _____ The Realm of Philosophy
Descriptive (Factual) Claims:		Normative Claims (Value Judgments):

In order to address the second of these misconceptions, Socrates tell a story about how his friend Chaerephon visits the Oracle at Delphi. What does Chaerephon ask the Oracle and how does it respond?

Q:

A:

How does Socrates respond to hearing about this? Why does doing this make the Athenians angry?

While his activity of philosophy may have upset his fellow Athenians, Socrates becomes aware of a certain form of ignorance and a certain form of wisdom. Socrates believes that philosophy teaches these and thus the third misconception is not true. What are these?

Socratic Ignorance:

Socratic Wisdom:

What do these reveal about the nature and purpose of philosophy? Why is this unsettling to many people?