

Plato, *Apology*

The Charges Against Socrates

2 sets of accusers:

1. The “old accusers”

2. More recent accusers (formal charges)

The Charges from the “Old Accusers”

1. Socrates busies himself studying things in the sky and below the earth

-Here, Socrates is charged with concerning himself with inappropriate topics of study

He replies by challenging anyone to testify to having seen him professing knowledge about these things.

The Charges from the “Old Accusers”

2. Socrates makes the worse argument into the stronger.

Socrates replies with a question: What would make people say this about him?

His answer: He possesses a “Special Kind of Wisdom”

Socrates' Special Wisdom

What is the nature of this wisdom?

Socrates knows the limits of his
own knowledge.

Something to consider: How might this
wisdom be an advantage to a person?

Socrates' Special Wisdom

IMPORTANT: Socrates does *not* think that he is the *only* person who can have this wisdom.

A Question to Ask Ourselves

Socrates says that he is merely undertaking this mission to “serve the god”. Do we believe this?
Is this really the only thing he's doing?

The Socratic Challenge

Socrates challenges his peers to think for themselves, and to be critical of beliefs, values, and ideas.

Return to the Charges Against Socrates

Now that we know about Socrates' Special Wisdom, why would people accuse him of “making the worse argument the stronger”?

The Formal Charges Against Socrates

1. Socrates corrupts the young

- This is an old charge against Socrates, revived by Meletus

Socrates has two replies to this charge

“Socrates Corrupts the Young”

First response: It is highly unlikely that Socrates is *only* person in Athens who corrupts the young. More than likely, Meletus and others wish to use Socrates as a kind of scapegoat.

Second response: By surrounding himself with people he has corrupted, Socrates would be putting himself in danger of harm. But no one wants to be harmed (including Socrates), so it's ridiculous to think that he would intentionally do this.

The Formal Charges Against Socrates

2. Socrates does not believe in gods

What exactly does Meletus mean by this?

According to Meletus, Socrates is a strict atheist, believing in no divine reality whatsoever

“Socrates is an Atheist!!!”

Socrates has 2 replies to this:

1. There's nothing Socrates has said that is any different from other well known views of the time.
2. Socrates' second response is more complicated, but ultimately more interesting.

Argument Form: Reductio Ad Absurdum

Socrates' Reductio Ad Absurdum

INITIAL ASSUMPTION: Socrates does not believe in any gods at all.

P1 If a person believes in spiritual activities, then he believes in spirits.

P2 Socrates believes in spiritual things.

C1 Socrates believes in spirits. (from P1 and P2)

P3 Spirits are either gods or the children of gods.

C2 Socrates believes in the children of gods. (from C1 and P3)

P4 If a person believes in the children of gods, he believes in gods.

C3 Socrates believes in gods. (from C2 and P4)

C4 Socrates believes in gods and Socrates does not believe in any gods at all. (from Initial Assumption and C3)

CONTRADICTION

Final Conclusion: It is false that Socrates does not believe in any gods at all.

For Next Week:

Read the entire *Apology*

Ask Yourself: What are the benefits and costs of the Socratic Challenge for us? For Socrates? What is he willing to risk to present us with this challenge?

Review of Last Week

- Why is Socrates on Trial?

Official Charges:

Corruption of the youth, disbelief in gods

Informal Charges (“Old accusers”):

Turning the worse argument into the better,
engaging in high metaphysics

Socrates' “Special Wisdom”

Why is philosophy so important to Socrates?

One reason: Divine mandate

Second reason: the Socratic conception of the good life

“Wealth does not bring about excellence, but excellence makes wealth and everything else good for men, both individually and collectively.”

“If I say that it is impossible for me to keep quiet because that means disobeying the god, you will not believe me and will think that I am being ironical. On the other hand, if 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 men, you will believe me even less.”

For Socrates, the pursuit and contemplation of the good life is itself a constituent feature of the good life

“I am far from making a defense now on my own behalf, as might be thought, but on yours, to prevent you from wrongdoing by mistreating the god's gift to you by condemning me; for if you kill me you will not easily find another like me. I was attached to this city by the god... as upon a great and noble horse which was somewhat sluggish because of its size and needed to be stirred up by a kind of gadfly.”

What kinds of activities might people undertake today that mirror this sentiment?

“No man will survive who genuinely opposes you or any other crowd and prevents the occurrence of many unjust and illegal happenings in the city. A man who really fights for justice must lead a private, not a public, life if he is to survive for even a short time.”

What are the implications of this statement for us? Is it a true statement?