

Socrates on Trial

A live theater presentation of the life and trial and death of Socrates is a powerful medium to bring to life what we studied in class. The theater adds an important aesthetic dimension to learning - we can vicariously feel and experience what Socrates felt. To enhance this aesthetic experience it is necessary to give full attention to what is taking place on the stage. Talking to your friends, making side remarks, or creating any other type of disturbance, simply ruins the dramatic effect of reenacting the Socratic message. Please show respect to others and most of all respect for your own integrity.

The play is derived from the accounts of five dialogues of Plato in which Socrates is the main character: The Gorgias, The Euthyphro, The Apology of Socrates, The Crito, and The Phaedo.

GORGAS - Gorgias was a famous orator known for his rhetorical flair, speaking with great pomp and Eloquence. Socrates tries to see the relation between the rhetorical power of persuasion, ethical behavior, and human happiness. In the end, Socrates offers arguments to challenge the view that rhetoric is an ultimate value. The way we live our lives is the real issue; not how convincing we are in our speech.

EUTHYPHRO - Socrates meets young Euthyphro at the courthouse where Socrates must face an indictment and stand trial for being disloyal to religion (impiety); Euthyphro is bringing the very same charge against his elderly father. Socrates wonders if true piety is based on self-sustaining reasons. Independent of the whims of the "gods." "Are actions pious because they are pleasing to the gods, or are they pleasing to the gods because they are pious?"

The Apology - Plato's account of the actual trial of Socrates who defends himself in court (his own apologist). He offers ironic evidence of why he may be viewed suspiciously, viz., the oracle at Delphi proclaiming that none in Athens is wiser than Socrates (He is the only one who does not claim to be knowledgeable). He offers political reason for his arrest (Battle of Arginusae). He infuriates the assembly by suggesting that he is worth at least as much as the Athenian Athletes who won at Olympus. He leaves the assembly with the lesson that death is not the greatest evil for a human being. Being a wicked person is much worse than death. He urges the people to correct his sons - as he (Socrates) corrected them when they (the people) claimed to know what they really did not know.

Crito - The scene is the jail cell where Socrates is awaiting execution. No condemned person may be executed while a religious event is happening and a vessel was sailing to Delphi with a priest aboard. Crito, Socrates' dear friend has a plan to sneak Socrates out of the cell and find safe haven outside of Athens. Socrates chides his friend and gives a lesson on being loyal to the principles of a country, even if mistakes are made.

Phaedo - The boat has returned, Socrates is to be given the fatal dose of poison. He discusses with his friends the nature of the human soul and its relation to the body. Can the human souls survive the death of the body? It is not an esoteric question for Socrates (nor for us). He suggests that *perhaps* death is the final "recovery" from depending on the body. He drinks the poison, rebukes Crito for crying (he didn't learn a thing from Socrates!), and utters his last words: "Crito, we owe a cock to Aesculapius, see that the debt is paid!" The narrator ends the dialogue: "Such was the end of our friend, a man, rather, the *best* of all the men of the times; the most righteous, and the most wise."

Prepared by Professor Joseph Cabrini