

Plato's Apology Summary and Philosophical Analysis

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I began my reading this week with Plato's Apology. Plato's Apology is a narration of Socrates' speech that he makes as he is charged in a trial for not recognizing gods sanctioned by the Greek State, instead of being accused of inventing new deities and thus corrupting Athens youth. The apology divides Socrates' speeches by the actions and responses in his trial, which include defence, accusation, verdict, cross-examination, and sentence. Socrates counters the accusations made against him and defends his actions, beliefs, and way of life. The dialogue of Socrates, as recorded by Plato, is fascinating and is famously known as the Socratic Method. (Plato, c. 399 BCE)

What impresses me about Socrates, as I go through the Apology, is that despite how others think of his words and actions as corruption or wickedness, he remains devoted to his cause and describes his purpose in his defence. As the verdict is announced, he accepts it.

In the Apology, Socrates, in fact, does not apologize for something but rather presents a reasoned account of his defence, answering charges the city of Athens made against him. He is blamed in two regards. He is accused of atheism and corrupting the youth of Athens. But as I read the accusations, I found the atheism accusation to be rather muddled. As I go through the Apology, I feel more inclined to side with Socrates' arguments. His defence is presented in a way that captured my heart, as the Apology seems to let the reader witness the scene of a good man who is facing unjust accusations and defending his case. I found him to be a character representing the hero, the hero of free thought, of an extraordinary Individual standing up for the right to think freely against a tyrannical establishment. The way Plato writes it, capturing his dialogues, makes it seem like the spirit of Socrates is speaking to the reader.

Reading the whole account, I notice Socrates' blunt refusal to give in to his litigants. Those whom Socrates publicly ridiculed their case seem to be taken up by the accusers. Additionally, the youth whom the accusers thought to have been corrupted by Socrates' spells and who ended up imitating his methods also pretended to be defending them in the case. What is interesting and inspiring is that despite having plenty of opportunities to apologize or stop and give up his speeches and activities, Socrates refused as he considered his work to be God's mission. He maintained that he would go back again to perform the activities that resulted in him being accused, even if they let him go free. In the end, Socrates doesn't despair upon hearing the verdict and accepts his fate.

Plato's Apology is one of the finest documents I've read. It is a reconstruction of Socrates' philosophical ideas rather than just a chronicle or historical record. Philosophy is presented with the utmost seriousness. One of the lessons I learned while studying "The Apology" was never to claim to know more than you do. The Socratic Method teaches you to think through life's problems with

wisdom and humility, keeping an inquisitive mind.

Week 2: Feb 8 to Feb 15, 2018

This week I studied, Plato's Republic. The Republic was a highly enjoyable read; its treatise deals with three interconnected levels: the mythos (image), the logos (rational discussion] and the ergon (action). Using the three levels, Plato's Republic describes the ideal republic, even though that doesn't form the majority of the work. The question is first considered by Socrates, for which he makes a proposal that is initially refuted by the converters; Plato captures Socrates' second attempt at defining the ideal republic. I found the first attempt mentioned in Book II to be interesting as well, though it was only mentioned briefly.

The principle of specialization is introduced by Plato, as imagined by Socrates, in which the basic principle behind political justice is classified as everyone to be doing what best suits their nature while not meddling in any other business. The tyrannical man's psychology is described by Socrates as a man governed by disordered desires, which, in ordinary people, only appear seldom in dreams. Further, as I progressed to Book VI, Socrates went on to describe what a form of Good is by making an analogy with the sun. According to him, man can achieve the highest levels of wisdom and understanding if he reaches that ideal Form of the Good.

From the readings, Plato's' general principles that I derive from the Republic can be summarized by saying that the other person's "good" should be regarded as good for ourselves as well, just as it is seen in a healthy family. Rulers should be just and wise, and only such should be allowed to rule for everyone's benefit. Corruption is caused by temptations and conflicts of interest, and rulers should not be allowed any monetary corruption. Everyone in society should acquire what is necessary to play their roles for the people's collective benefit.

As I continue the work, Plato moves from societal and political justice to individual justice. For him, three main classes of people exist in an ideal society, which functions correctly if there are harmonious relations between them. They are the producers, including the craftsmen, artisans, farmers, etc. The auxiliaries or the warriors, and the guardians that are the rulers. Each class in his ideal society must execute its proper function. However, what is interesting is that Plato recognizes that in a pure democracy, people do not sacrifice their interests for the public's interest and describes oligarchy to be better in this regard.

For me, many principles described in the Republic make sense and can help eliminate injustice if these principles are followed, but of course, there is no guarantee that today's individualistic society will be willing to conform to these principles, as today, people freely act on unnecessary desires. Plato's Republic presents a solution. But the question in my mind is how to guarantee that everyone will be willing to regard others' good as their good and work as a family. Or eliminating the temptation of amassing wealth among the rulers? That will require many things to declare illegal and educate

them on what is beneficial or harmful for them as rulers.

The strong point in *The Republic* for me is that Plato tries to define justice in a way that appeals to actual human psychology instead of perceived behaviour.

Week 3: Feb 15 to Feb 22, 2018

This week was spent studying Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*. The theme of the work is what the best way of life is for men; there is a discussion about happiness and virtue and the meanings of it. Actions are defined according to their utility to us, for example, eating to live and shopping to buy essentials. Some activities are done because we like them in themselves, and there are some activities we do not like but like the results of what they bring. Reading *Nicomachean Ethics*, one sees that Aristotle is not trying to say that we should live happily but to tell us what a happy life can consist of. Those who have an imperfect view of the good life think of happiness as honour or physical pleasure. (Encyclopaedia Britannica, n.d.)

It is clear when reading through Aristotle's *Ethics* that he does not think virtue can be taught through argumentation, nor does he try to suggest means to achieve happiness. Instead, he focuses on explaining what good is, why it is considered to be good, and how societies can be built incorporating these forms of goodness. Classifying virtue as being between two extremes of deficiency and excess is one of the most interesting notions he makes. Furthermore, he attached great importance to friendship and dedicated two books discussing it in its forms since, for him, happiness is not just a private affair but a public one, so friendship carries great significance. Moving to Book X, Aristotle concludes that the highest human activity is contemplation because the activity involved in it is Wisdom. Therefore, it is the highest activity.

The *Nicomachean Ethics* tries to answer many questions related to happiness, such as what kind of life projects would be needed to achieve happiness? How far should a happy person let a single end or goal prevail in his life? In one's life projects, what kind of balance is necessary? Should the pursuit of a few goods be sacrificed to pursue greater ends? He also dwells in metaphysics, wondering how much a man's happiness could be affected by the afterlife. Does living itself mean happiness? When Aristotle moves into metaphysical notions of the soul and the afterlife, I feel that the translations that are influenced by the Western World's understanding of Christianity mix up Aristotle's thoughts about the soul or the divisions he speaks of therein.

Aristotle doesn't contemplate much about the ideal form of things like Socrates and Plato did in their work. Instead, he does not seem to believe in one universal characterization of happiness or good. He was only interested in some common elements that, according to him, make people happy, as people often refer commonly to happiness or good but differ significantly in their notions and perceptions of good. In that sense, his philosophy, in my opinion, differs from those of his predecessors, such as Socrates and Plato.

Week 4: Feb 22 to Feb29, 2018

This week I had decided to review material relating to Socrates' metaphysics. Socrates used a questioning and a conversational dialogue from philosophy rather than discussing a formal doctrine of metaphysics. (Nails, D., 2022)

Studying the Socratic Method, I find that he works through possible elimination, in which that hypothesis that leads to contradictions is identified and eliminated. This method allows an individual to evaluate his/her own beliefs and their validity. Socrates' approach is quite helpful in studying Metaphysics itself since it concerns itself with the study of very basic questions about what life is, what space is or what it means to live. So, Socrates' method is a good method of raising questions in this regard, from anything to everything, from your own beliefs to others' beliefs.

One of the interesting conclusions that I drew from studying Socrates' approach to metaphysics is from his words that the most valuable possession for humans is philosophy, and to be truly philosophical, goodness must come from one's inside.

Socrates' metaphysical questions discussed the concepts of justice and good. To reach the answers, they must be broken down a subset of following questions and to find the answer that we require in response to those questions. Western philosophy crowns Socrates as the father of moral and political leadership, owing to his method, which was designed to help examine and evaluate the worth of deeply held beliefs. Socrates' criticism of Athenians is commonly seen in his works; he is always intellectually, morally and politically refuting them.

He criticized them for not being concerned about the welfare of their soul and always worried about their families and careers. Socrates saw virtue as something that can be taught by giving the analogy that successful fathers do not always yield successful sons. Socrates' metaphysics saw moral distinction as a matter more related to divine inheritance rather than parental rearing. Many were outraged by his thoughts back in those days, even though he made a lot of sense.

Socrates had faith in a God who was guiding his spirit to do the right thing. Furthermore, for him, living with wrongs is actually what makes life more terrible, rather than death, which he did not see as inherently as bad as an amoral life, for he saw death as something man is training himself for. A man who has not learned to love his body or soul is not a true lover of philosophy. Because the man who longs only for materialistic honours is not ready for death, something that remains attached to his body all along. It is possible that our mind thinks one thing and the body thinks another so that the body can hurt us. The material body is low because it is an embodiment of various desires that can distract the pursuit of truth in one, and for Socrates, using the body as the sole tool for discerning truth is deceptive and imprecise. The body is unintelligible, whereas the soul is divine and intelligible.

References

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