

Philosophy/Political Theory
The VanRoss Foundation Staff Writers

Aristophanes' *Clouds* takes a parodied approach to criticizing Socrates while seeking to expose his moral inconsistencies as well as his philosophical ones. At the same time, the *Apology* builds off of the criticisms laid out in Aristophanes' *Clouds* in an extensive dialogue of charges against Socrates. Although the *Apology* is a formal depiction of Socrates' own defense, the *Republic* actually appears to be a fundamental shift in the Socratic ideologies described in *Clouds*. Unlike in the *Apology*, the *Republic* is the real apology in terms of Socrates reconstructing his philosophical beliefs to better fit the city.

In Aristophanes' *Clouds*, Socrates is portrayed as somewhat of an immoral individual who has a negative influence on the ones around him. From the beginning of the play, the reader is met with the unfortunate predicament Strepsiades has found himself in. As a result of his son, Pheidippides', frivolous spending habits, Strepsiades is in somewhat of a financial predicament. Therefore, Strepsiades seeks help from Socrates to discover how to make weaker speech overcome stronger speech in order to evade his financial debt. It is here where the reader realizes the basis for Socrates' negative portrayal throughout the story. The fact that Socrates is sought after by Strepsiades in search of learning illegitimacies makes it clear that the author intends to emphasize Socrates' guilt. The list of things Socrates is made out to be guilty of is extensive and precise. As a whole, the charges against Socrates are characterized by his perceived unwillingness to recognize the gods and their power. In Scene Two of the *Clouds*, Strepsiades becomes acquainted with Socrates' thinkery where he meets students who are studying trivial concepts such as the measurement of a flea's foot. The first of Socrates' faults is his explanation of physics replacing religion, therefore delegitimizing the existence of the gods such as Zeus. At

his thinkery, Socrates examines the secular belief of science replacing religion, but these ideas are parodied by Aristophanes as seen in the other ideas Socrates' pupils are studying.

Socrates is also accused of teaching how to make weak arguments overcome stronger ones. Strepsiades' attempt to progress through Socrates' complex teachings is one of the main examples brought up against Socrates of spreading unjust argument methods. Socrates attempts to educate Strepsiades in improving the effectiveness of his speech. Although Socrates is initially diligent in his teaching attempts, Strepsiades proves to be highly incompetent leading to Socrates' teachings to shift towards the root of Strepsiades problems, which is his son, Pheidippides. This is where Socrates' portrayed guilt of corrupting the youth of Athens is introduced and examined. Unlike Strepsiades, Pheidippides was successful in absorbing Socrates' teaching. Socrates calls upon what is known as the Just and Unjust Arguments as two separate and complex entities that help educate Pheidippides on subjects such as morality and philosophy. The traditional Just argument is influenced by the gods and teaches men and boys obedience, reverence, and values. However, it is the Unjust argument that ultimately prevails in influencing Pheidippides. The Unjust argument teaches excess and self-indulgence with a lack of moderation. Furthermore, the Unjust argument exploits the inconsistencies of some of the gods, which the Just speech uses as sources. The fact that Pheidippides is successful in learning from Socrates is evidence of the young being more vulnerable to being influenced by the old, further enhancing the likelihood of Socrates' ability to corrupt the youth as he is charged of doing. As a result of Socrates teachings, Pheidippides behaves in a corrupt manner as expected. Because Pheidippides becomes more educated and wiser than his father, Pheidippides beats his father in an alignment with Socrates' teachings of supreme natural order as opposed to the man-made laws. This implication begs the question of Socrates' morality as well as his respect for legal

legitimacy. The influence of Socrates ultimately proves to be catastrophic for both Strepsiades and his son as well as Socrates. By the end of the play, Strepsiades reacts to his sons conduct by burning down Socrates' thinkery in spontaneous retaliation.

Socrates and his unjust argument represent all that that the city considers to be wrong with Sophistry. The new education teaches illegitimate rhetoric and persuasion. In the *Clouds*, Aristophanes points out some critical flaws in Socrates' morality. In the *Apology*, it is made clear that Socrates pays little to no attention to the certain aspects of politics that take place in the city. Because Socrates is ill-informed on such activities, he is portrayed as a potential danger to the city, and this is further laid out in the *Apology*. Aristophanes depicts Socrates as giving no regard for the family as seen in the behavior approved in Pheidippides. The fact that Socrates is willing to attempt to educate Strepsiades is also a crucial flaw, considering Strepsiades proved to be unsuccessful. This severe misjudgment is an indication of Socrates' portrayed inability to comprehend man's need for a higher deity. Although Socrates, makes claims in favor of physics instead of religion, he offers no adequate replacement.

Plato's *The Apology* serves as a depiction of Socrates' attempt to defend himself many years after the *Clouds* in a formal court. The charges brought against him are mainly based on Socrates' overall character as well as the events that took place in the *Clouds*. Socrates begins his defensive dialogue by first establishing to his accusers the fact the he is not a skillful speaker, but instead just one who speaks the truth. However, it is clear that Socrates is indeed a skillful speaker with his initial claim being an example of his skilled rhetoric. It is obvious that Socrates' accusers were trained by sophists on account of their ability to establish persuasive untruths against him. However, Socrates claims that he himself is not a sophist that teaches how to make weaker arguments overcome stronger arguments as he is accused to be simply because he does

not charge for his services and he lacks skill in teaching virtue. He makes it clear that sophists usually charge a fee for their services in order to exploit young men with the incentive of teaching virtue. Socrates then seeks to make it clear that he is being prejudiced as a result of his poor reputation for being wise, especially by his old accusers who claim Socrates attempts to replace the legitimacy of the gods with physical justifications. Socrates defends himself by refuting their claim and asking the jury if they have ever witnessed him discussing such ideas. Socrates would rather be ignorant like he claims to be than to claim false wisdom like the politicians, poets, and craftsmen that he proceeded to interrogate during his dialogue. For example, the politicians perceived themselves to possess great wisdom, but in reality they knew nothing at all. The poets could not accurately interpret their own works or speak logically, and the craftsmen proved to be limited to their own area of expertise in terms of knowledge. Therefore, Socrates was able to make the claim that he is wise in the fact that he is aware of his own ignorance. He even goes on to explain that it is his divine obligation to continue exposing the ignorance of men so that they will be more like him. Socrates points out that although he has never directly sought the admiration of young, it is simply inevitable that he would gain a following as a result of his reputation. At the same time, it would also be inevitable for the men whose ignorance he pointed out would develop a sense of bitterness. With such a weak argument against Socrates, it is apparent that those who oppose him would then create false accusations against him. Here it is made obvious that Socrates is at least somewhat skilled in the art of cross-examination as seen in his explanation for his false accusers as well as his interrogation of the city's skilled men.

After a thorough defensive dialogue towards his old accusers, Socrates then aims his defense at those who stood before him at trial, primarily Meletus. One of the main charges

brought up against Socrates is the claim that he is corrupting the youth. Socrates proceeds to ask Meletus who or what would be a positive influence on the youth of Athens in which Meletus responds with the laws. Because the laws are created by a jury, and a jury is open to all adult males, it is made apparent the Meletus is claiming that each citizen possesses the influence to create good, except Socrates, which is highly irrational. Next Socrates points out the fact that if he intentionally harmed members of a community that he is also a part of, then he would ultimately be hurting himself. This is an ingenious defense against the charges of corrupting the youth. It would be irrational for Socrates to corrupt any portion of the community by wasting teachings on an effort that would negatively impact himself and the ones around him.

Considering Socrates' age, it would be highly unwise to corrupt the young citizens who are in the most favorable position to have the most influence on society, especially in the future. It is the youth who are coming into position to make impactful political and economic decisions for the whole of the society. In a decisive portion of the cross-examination, Socrates addresses Meletus' claim of Socrates not believing in supernatural beings or the gods recognized by the state. Socrates uses the examples of believing in human matters, matters of animals, and matters of music. In order to believe in those matters, one must believe in those beings. To further discredit Meletus, Socrates reintroduces the fact that Meletus himself wrote an affidavit claiming that Socrates believed in and taught of supernatural beings, directly contradicting Meletus' initial accusations. Here, we see evidence of Socrates' malicious intent towards uncovering the ignorance of Meletus. In addition to revealing the inconsistencies in Meletus' accusations, Socrates further seeks to disrepute Meletus' character in the process. Unlike his cross examination of his old accusers and the skilled men of the city, here Socrates clearly uses a tone of disdain and contempt in his barrage of interrogations. Finally, Socrates seeks to make it clear

that he never had any intention of corrupting the youth in any way. Instead, he taught virtue and justice to the youth who would have denounced him if he taught ill-will.

It is evident that although Socrates initially claimed to be an unskilled speaker, he actually proved to be prepared with an onslaught of persuasively convincing rhetoric and rationality. Without spiraling into other self-produced facts, Socrates instead proceeded to successfully manipulate the original charges brought against him in a manner that effectively unraveled the reasoning behind them and diminished the logic of the accusers that created them. The tone Socrates uses throughout the dialogue lacks any form of pretentiousness, further adding to the irony of his defense. Although he speaks in a common, conversational manner, the effectiveness of his speech is just short of overwhelming for his opposition. Socrates' claims to be ignorant, unlike the people he interrogated, is ironic in the fact that he proves to be more skilled at speaking than they during his cross- examination. Furthermore, if we examine the context of Socrates' dialogue, we find that his defense is not actually an apology as much as it is a justification for his actions. Not once in the whole defense does Socrates actually apologize for any of the charges brought against him. This could be because a formal apology would officially indicate guilt. Instead, Socrates seeks to justify his actions with the intent of acquiring more supporters who see things through his own understanding. The dialogue of Socrates' cross examination of Meletus lacks an apologetic discourse as well, with Socrates' attitude resembling an attack much more than an apology.

It becomes clear that *The Republic* is the true Apology of Socrates. Towards the end of Book II of *The Republic*, Socrates explains that the stories told to the youth of the republic determine the development of the child's soul and that the youth are guardians in training who must be spirited. The stories told to the youth are crucial in their development and must be

carefully overseen. Socrates then mandates two rules that must be closely followed in relation to telling stories to the youth. First, the gods must always be portrayed good and virtuous, for if they are portrayed in any other light, the youth will gain a corrupt insight into what is right. Also, the gods must never be characterized as untruthful, as that would result in having a negative impact on the young's perception of what is just. Socrates' explanation of how the youth should be raised and influenced denounces two of the most prominent claims against him. Those being the accusation of his desire to corrupt the youth as well as his disbelief in the gods. Here in Book II, it is clear that Socrates' beliefs are consistent with the beliefs of the city that the youth should not be corrupted or exposed to influences that undermine the gods. Instead, Socrates believes that the ideal city should promote virtuous behavior in the youth that is directly influenced by the existence of the gods. The fact that Socrates considers the youth to be guardians further supports his claim to have no desire to corrupt them. Corrupting the guardians of a community would only leave society, including Socrates, vulnerable to threatening outside forces. Also, the youth cannot be corrupted by gods who are only portrayed as good and honest. Socrates does not condone exposing the youth to negative influences that could damage the virtuous soul. In Book III of *The Republic*, we find Socrates' description of the importance of the relationship between a boy and a man. Being sure to eliminate sexual contact as appropriate without corrupting the relationship, Socrates explains that a positive relationship will result in the boy gaining a proper education. Education regulates the soul and it must be monitored for the good.

The Republic is the true Apology of Socrates, but it is not in the format of a formal apology. Instead, Socrates carefully lays out direct examples of his intentions using stories and examples to supplement his claims. Socrates uses *The Republic* to give an in depth analysis of an ideal city to answer questions regarding man's intentions of being just, as well as the result of

being just. Therefore, Socrates provides a response to the charges against him in *The Apology* by examining the characteristics of a just society by his own definition. However, the characters that contribute to the dialogue in *The Republic* allow Socrates to construct his analysis based on several other viewpoints and experiences. In light of his analysis of justice throughout the dialogue, Socrates successfully addresses his accusers in a rational context, continuing the dissection of their untruthful accusations. Socrates provides an examination of the just individual before he expands into composition of the just society. While *The Apology* acts strictly as a defense on Socrates' part, *The Republic* acts as a reflection of Socrates' understanding of the charges brought against him as well as the ideally just function of the city. The beliefs Socrates attributes to how the youth should be influenced by both the adults of the city and the gods are consistent with his old accusers' beliefs pertaining to the youth and the gods. However, *The Republic* does not display an agreement with the false accusations on Socrates' behalf. Instead, Socrates provides his own account on his own terms without crediting or legitimizing the arguments of his opposition.

In conclusion, *The Republic* is the true Apology of Socrates. While Aristophanes' *Clouds* lays out a parodied account of the events leading up to the trial in Plato's *The Apology*, *The Republic* solidifies Socrates' beliefs as well as the legitimacy of his character. In *The Apology*, Socrates meticulously, yet collectively, defends his actions, his character, and his reputation. This account, although explanatory, does not resemble a traditional apology. Instead, from a comparative analysis, *The Republic* creates a dialogue that lays the framework and ultimately develops into a true apology.

References

Aristophanes' *Clouds*

Plato *The Apology*

Plato *The Republic*