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The Trials Of Socrates: Six Classic Texts



Synopsis

Lampooned in 406 B.C.E. in a blistering Aristophanic satire, Socrates was tried in 399 B.C.E. on a charge of corrupting the youth, convicted by a jury of about five hundred of his peers, and condemned to death. Glimpsed today through the extant writings of his contemporaries and near-contemporaries, he remains for us as compelling, enigmatic, and elusive a figure as Jesus or Buddha. Although present-day (like ancient Greek) opinion on the real Socrates diverges widely, six classic texts that any informed judgment of him must take into account appear together, for the first time, in this volume. Those of Plato and Xenophon appear in new, previously unpublished translations that combine accuracy, accessibility, and readability; that of Aristophanes' *Clouds* offers these same qualities in an unbowdlerized translation that captures brilliantly the bite of Aristophanes' wit. An Introduction to each text and judicious footnotes provide crucial background information and important cross-references.

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Customer Reviews

Great read! Here are some thoughts on my purchase! Socrates's most decisive argument in the *Crito* is not an argument, but an action: his choice to submit (to death at least if not to censorship) to the verdict of the jury. Following immediately on the heels of a dialogue thematically and structurally unique from his others, Socrates says, "Then, let it be, Crito, and let's act in that way, since that's the way the god is leading us." Here happens the major pivot in both the *Crito* — a text that releases all its energy in its last lines — and Socrates's ethics. Ghandi (a man Benjamin

Franklin tellingly linked with Socrates in his short list of minor deities) said action expresses priorities, and had Socrates left his life on the ambiguous note of either his exile or silence, we would read his priorities from his deconstruction, but death migrates his message into the moral sphere, giving it an affirmative bent. Elsewhere in the dialogues, Socrates had taken an exclusively negative position: piling pressure onto arguments that could eventually succumb to their own contradictions. Death for a cause is a position for. Under even an only marginally more critical eye, other peculiarities emerge. "Let's act," says Socrates of his death, a statement in which he acknowledges far more of a communal dimension to his life's work than he had before. Death, though, ripples in concentric rings through friends and family, and has a far more moral dimension than neglect-of-wife or other of Socrates' moral stumblings. Had he been oriented only towards deconstruction, Socrates could have furthered his life's work much better by living on to terrorize another ill-conceived argument.

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