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Prejudice and Emotion in the Execution of Socrates
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Abstract

The following research explores a possible reason for the conviction of Socrates, the philosopher most frequently accredited with the founding of western philosophy. On the basis of various primary and secondary sources, it is argued that Socrates was found guilty not because he was truly guilty of the charges placed against him, corrupting the youth and being impious towards Athens, but because the jury had negative prejudices and preconceived feelings towards him that inspired the conviction. Such preexisting notions were present because of incorrect information circulating about Socrates, his ambiguous associates and religious affiliations, and his distinct method of arguing. One of the geneses of incorrect information is Aristophanes' play *The Clouds*, in which a character with the name and profession of Socrates expresses impious views that are, in actuality, not congruent with those of the real Socrates. Socrates also had youth as students who inadvertently spread false information about his teachings when confronted, as they were unsure of his true nature but didn't want to appear ignorant. Socrates' social and political alliances also motivated the jury to convict, as he associated himself with individuals who brought much harm upon Athens (Critias and Alcibiades), and it was unclear at times whether he supported the ideals of a democracy or oligarchy. Addressed with the proximity of the rule of the Thirty in mind, such ambiguities would have made the jury uncomfortable and more willing to convict. Also, in argument, Socrates would adopt the position of the devil's advocate, so to speak, in order to force his opponent into evaluating the strength of their beliefs and claims, even if he believed the same as they. If Socrates frequently argued ideas that he personally did not prescribe to, the ambiguity of his persona would have increased. Since the aforementioned can be cited as the primary reasons he was convicted, it can be seen that he was not guilty of the direct charges placed against him, corrupting the youth and being impious towards Athens. Socrates spent a significant portion of time trying to derive meaning from the Oracle of Delphi, the Oracle through which Apollo was said to speak. If Socrates was impious towards the city, he wouldn't have sought meaning in the Oracle's words. Also, Socrates states that those who are bad do bad things, so why would he intentionally corrupt those close to him, which would only cause him eventual harm. On the basis of such factors, explored at more length in the following paper, it was concluded that Socrates was not guilty of the charges placed against him, and was convicted because of preexisting biases.