Socrates Works And Believes Essay, Research Paper

Socrates focuses a large amount of time during his defense examining the motives for which he has been charged. Although all of the accusations and the terms that relate to them are clear to Socrates, he is unclear as to how they relate to his actions. In this process, he examines both the early accusations as well as the later ones. This is an important position in his defense, it explains how his reputation has been formed and that general prejudices have been created against him. These prejudices make it difficult for Socrates to influence men as to what wisdom really is. It is the earlier accusations that concern him the most as they surrounded his name for many years. “These earlier ones, however, are more so, gentlemen; they got hold of most of you from childhood, persuaded you and accused me quite falsely, saying that there is a man called Socrates, a wise man, a student of all things in the sky and below the earth, who makes the worse argument the stronger.” (Apology, 18b). More simply, Socrates has been accused of being both a physicalist and a sophist. Many of the members of the jury as with others, have been persuaded throughout their lives that Socrates does not speak of the truth. Socrates finds this very difficult to defend as he would be required to “uproot” from their minds, years of slander that has been continuously placed their. (Apology, 19a). This leaves him with little or no defense and as he says, “one must simply fight with shadows…” (Apology, 18d).

The false images of Socrates arose because people misunderstood his true activity. In his best attempt to defend himself against these first charges and the slander that followed his name, he explains his story of the Delphic Oracle. From his activities, he learns that it is wisdom that has been the cause of his reputation. In attempting to investigate the oracle’s meaning, Socrates angers many men. The oracle simply explained that Socrates is the wisest among all men, and in testing this statement; it is then that he realizes that wisdom consists of knowing that you know nothing. When Socrates explained to these men, many of the highest reputation, that they are not wise, they became very angry. “I think they find an abundance of men who believe they have some knowledge but know little or nothing. The result is that those whom they question are angry, not with themselves but with me. They say: ‘That Socrates is a pestilential fellow who corrupts the young.’” (Apology, 23d). It is easy to establish then, that it was for this reason that many are skeptical about his theory of wisdom. It is difficult for one to understand that they are not wise when they believe that they are, or that they possess some kind of knowledge. When you have been raised and lived your whole life believing that you possess a certain characteristic, it is not easily accepted to think that one man can deny you of that. This is essentially what Socrates did. By claiming that these men were not wise at all, he was forcing these men to accept something that is contrary to what they have been told their entire lives. His motive for telling this story is to gain the trust of the jury and illustrate to them that he speaks nothing but the truth. “I have hidden or disguised nothing. I know well enough that this very conduct makes me unpopular, and this is proof that what I say is true, that such is the slander against me, and that such are its causes.” (Apology, 24a). In gaining the trust and understanding from the jury, he attempts to relieve them of their skepticism of wisdom as he sees it.

Socrates finds it easier to defend himself against the later accusations that have been brought upon him. It is much easier to persuade the men of the jury from believing these accusations to be true. This is because they are far more recent accusations and it is possible to attract the members of the jury into why they are false. It is important for Socrates to persuade these men into to supporting him not only to be acquitted of the charges. By believing that Socrates speaks nothing but the truth, they will understand and support his idea of wisdom. In his later accusations, Socrates is charged with corrupting the youth and of impiety. The method he uses to defend himself in this case is to thoroughly examine all of the motives of Meletus. At the same time, he, in fact, slanders Meletus and his beliefs. In his defense concerning the corruption of the youth, Socrates explains how it is impossible for one man to corrupt the youth while all others improve them. In this, he also establishes that Meletus does not have a solid argument for these charges and they are simply a desperate attempt to bring him to trial. “You have made it sufficiently obvious, Meletus, that you have never had any concern for our youth; you show your indifference clearly; that you have given no thought to the subjects about which you bring me to trial.” (Apology, 25c). By examining the intentions and validity of the accusations brought against him, Socrates is simply trying to gain the trust and support from the jury. By convincing the bias minds of the jury that he is not guilty of these charges, also convinces them of the logic of his wisdom.

In his defense to the charge of not believing in the gods of the city but rather in other spiritual things, Socrates illustrates how Meletus contradicts himself. Socrates takes the approach of being confused as to what the charges actually consist of. He examines whether the purpose of this accusation is to prove that he does not believe in gods’ altogether, or that it is the idea that the gods in which he does believe are different from those of most Athenians. Socrates proclaims that these charges are not authentic because within them, it does in fact show that he believes in some gods. As he did with the charge of corrupting the young, Socrates shows that they are a result of the slander and prejudice that have been bestowed on him and not of authentic reasons.

You cannot be believed, Meletus, even, I think, by yourself. The man appears to me, gentlemen of the jury, highly insolent and uncontrolled. He seems to have made this deposition out of insolence, violence and youthful zeal. He is like one who composed a riddle and is trying it out: “Will the wise Socrates realize that I am jesting and contradicting myself, or shall I deceive him and others?” I think he contradicts himself in the affidavit, as if he said: “Socrates is guilty of not believing in gods but believing in gods,” and surely that is the part of a jester!

(Apology, 27a)

This statement is an attempt by Socrates to make a mockery of the charges against him and make Meletus look foolish. Also, Socrates is down playing the severity of these accusations and is attempting to introduce humour into his argument. This can be contributed to his attempt to gain confidence from the jury to have their support and understanding of his way of thinking. In this argument, he shows that he is confident and truthful in everything that he says. Also, he shows that the charges brought against him come from insolence and not of accountable reasons. Socrates continues to challenge Meletus’ motives by saying to him: “You must have made this deposition, Meletus, either to test us or because you were at a loss to find any true wrongdoing of which to accuse me.” (Apology, 27e). This statement is used by Socrates to further his argument that what he believes is true and the charges against him are a result of denial or misunderstanding. This technique of defense is focused on gaining the trust of the jury and removing the skepticism about why he is wise. He also shows them that Meletus is