

**Pancho Savery's "Some kind of Gad fly" Lecture.  
Summary by Patricia Roach**

November 17, 2004.

**Terms:**

*Elenchus* = Examination. A thesis in contradiction to what the student believes to be true. It acts as tool to cause the student to question what he or she thinks he or she knows.

*Aporia* = Being at a loss, (refer to Walter Englert's Thucydides, the Sophists and the Nature of Justice.) Sophist strategy of confusing the student in order for him or her to question what he or she believes.

**Common Ground:**

Little is truly known about Socrates; most of the inferences made about him are constructed by applying one of the three schools of thought, either from Plato (Early, Middle or Late), Aristophanes (The Clouds), or Xenophon (Oeconomicus). Of utmost significance is the disparity between the image of Socrates portrayed in Plato's works as the most noble of men versus the denigrating view of him as an 'evil' sophist paid to teach his 'atheistic' logic in Aristophanes' The Clouds. The Aristophanic view questions the motives of Socrates and allows for the open criticism of sophists and philosophers, thus acts as a way of perpetuating the Athenian status quo.

**But:**

It is thought however, that the most realistic depiction of Socrates is in the Apology, allegedly transcribed by Plato from Socrates' own speech to the jury of his trial. Socrates is not a greedy Sophist, as is the convenient view of the majority of the Athenian citizenry. Instead he acts as a model of democratic citizenship as he recognizes the responsibility of each individual within a democracy to fulfill the requirements of good citizenship: a) to perform a **critical examination** of one's surroundings, situation, self etc; and b) to acknowledge the **fundamental importance of reason** for the aforementioned critical examination. Socrates' criticism of Athenian life is not unpatriotic but is a re-enforcement of just how much he believes in democracy. Aristophanes misplaces his concern about the corruption of Athens by blaming sophists, when Socrates is merely suggesting that "we all live worthless lives, but we can get better."

**So What?**

Pancho Savery claims that Socrates is the most important figure in this term. Why? "Socrates is not just another dead white male"—The moral conscience and intellectual reasoning that he professes are still underemphasized in democracy today. The trial and death of Socrates can be compared to the institution of the Patriot Act by the US Government upon its people, which restricts the same type of dissent that Socrates displayed and was punished for in Athens. The fortitude of Socrates' refusal to "kiss ass" instead of being himself that is necessary at present as it is part of the important role of the citizen to prevent the complacency of the demos and thereby protecting the democracy from actions which might bring its fall. It is in this sense that the nature of democracy will never change, it is a dynamic system requiring constant input.

**Thesis:**

The life and death of Socrates is still relevant to the 21<sup>st</sup> Century as the role of the citizen as defined by Socrates has not changed, Socrates serves as the archetype of a good citizen: one who believes in democracy but also remains vigilant in questioning the world around him without falter: "The unexamined life is not worth living." Although we may not know much about the man himself, we model ourselves around his principles and we must continue introspection about why we study at a liberal arts college, why we still value the principles of democracy, and what we think of ourselves as. It is our duty to be subjects rather than objects.