

DID SOCRATES CORRUPT THE YOUTH?

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MELETUS' FORMAL CHARGES

- (1) Corrupting the youth
- (2) Not believing in the gods in whom the polis believes
- (3) Believing in other strange daimonic doings

At 26b2-6, Meletus explains that (2) and (3) constitute the basis for (1): It is by teaching them his heterodox religious views that Socrates corrupts the youth. At 31c8-d2, Meletus explains that the daimonic doings referred to in (3) are the visitations and utterances of Socrates' daimon -- whose voice occasionally prevents him from doing something. At 26c7, Meletus asserts that (3) is a charge of out-and-out atheism.

IS SOCRATES' DEFENSE IRRELEVANT?

Meletus' charges are not charges explicitly defined by the law. If they did the law not Meletus would have sole authority over their interpretation. They have the status we assign to evidence, so that Meletus has sole authority over their meaning. Hence Socrates is obliged to answer the charges as interpreted by Meletus. Since this is what he does, his response is precisely relevant.

DOES SOCRATES REFUTE THE CHARGES?

- (1) Socrates corrupts the youth by teaching them not to believe in the gods of the polis but in other daimonic doings (26b2-7)
- (1) = (2) Socrates does not believe in any gods at all. (26b8-c7)
- (3) Anyone who believes in the doings of Xs must believe that there are Xs (27b3-c2)
- (4) Therefore, anyone who believes in daimonic doings must believe in daimons (27c1-2)
- (5) Socrates believes in daimonic doings. Indeed, Meletus accuses him of believing in them (27c4-8)
- (6) Therefore, Socrates believes that there are daimons (27c8-10)
- (7) Daimons are either gods or the children of gods (27c10-d3)
- (8) Anyone who believes that there are children of Xs must believe that there are Xs
- (9) Therefore, anyone who believes that there are children of gods must believe that there are gods (27e5-28a1)
- (10) Therefore, Socrates believes that there are gods (27e5-28a1)
- (11) (2) and (10) contradict one another
- (12) Therefore, Meletus' writ is a self-contradictory riddle, and Meletus is guilty of dealing frivolously with serious matters (27a1-5).

LEGALLY INNOCENT BUT MORALLY GUILTY?

Xenophon Memorabilia I.ii.41-6

ALCIBIADES: Tell me Pericles, can you teach me what a law is?

PERICLES: Certainly.

A: Then pray tell me. For whenever I hear men praised for keeping the laws, it occurs to me that no one really deserves that praise who does not know what a law is.

P: Well, Alcibiades, there is no great difficulty about what you desire. You wish to know what a law is. Laws are all the rules approved and enacted by the majority in the Assembly, whereby they declare what ought and what ought not be done.

A: Do they make laws requiring people to good things, or evil ones?

P: Good things, of course, not evil ones.

A: But if, as happens under an oligarchy, not the majority, but a minority meet and enact rules of conduct, what are those?

P: Whatever the sovereign power in the polis, after deliberation, enacts and directs to be done is known as a law.

A: If, then, a tyrant, being the sovereign power, enacts what the citizens are to do, are his orders also laws?

P: Yes, whatever a tyrant as ruler enacts is also known as a law.

A: But violence and lawlessness, Pericles, what are they? Is it not the action of the stronger when he forces the weaker to do whatever he wants him to do, not by persuasion, but by force?

P: That is my opinion.

A: Then whenever a tyrant by enactment forces the citizens, without persuading them, to do something that is lawlessness?

P: I think so, and I withdraw my answer that whatever a tyrant enacts without persuasion is a law.

A: And when the minority passes enactments, not by persuading the majority, but through using its strength, are we to call that force, or not?

P: Everything, I think, that men constrain others to do without persuading them is not law but force.

A: It follows, then, that whatever the assembled majority, through using its power over the owners of property, enacts without persuasion is not law but force.

P: When I was your age, Alcibiades, I may tell you, that I too was very clever at this sort of thing. For the puzzles we thought about and exercised our wits on were just such as the one you've just produced now.

A: Ah, Pericles, if only I'd known you when you were at your cleverest.