

Antecedents of the fall of the Athenian democracy – The trial of Socrates^[1]

Who was Socrates? Well, it is not a complicated question. Regular people not at all interested in philosophy can also answer the question without thinking: the most famous philosopher. Indeed, with we can undoubtedly establish that his popularity and recognition will never fade away, his personality and his philosophical thinking still has an effect on our lives. It is widely known that he never changed his principles on virtue, wisdom and the insecurities of the physical word, not even at the cost of his own life. According to our modern standpoint, Socrates was a real star in the 5th century Athens, and as it usually happens to celebrities, some people were head over heels for him, while others, maybe even more in number, had hostile attitudes towards him.^[2] This short study tries to clarify the circumstances of Socrates' death; unfortunately, due to length limits I have to omit the description of Socrates' philosophy, I primarily aim at the analysis of the trial. I would like to get answer to the following question: what political circumstances led to sentencing a seventy-year old, well-respected philosopher to death in the city-state of the glorious democracy.^[3]

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[2] Aristophanes' comedy entitled *Clouds* presents the peculiar figure of Athenian philosophers in a great parody, the author did not only hold a mirror to Socrates, however, we have to admit that the comedy did not serve Socrates' popularity. The play's premiere was in 423 BC and Socrates himself was there as well. In the comedy the philosopher gives advices to Strepsiades, the impoverished Athenian man on how to undermine his creditors. Presenting the truth as a lie with rhetorical tools was the method of the Sophists, who did not belong to Socrates' circle, moreover, Socrates distanced himself from them in every possible way, still, Aristophanes confused Socrates' real personality with his Sophist personality in the *Clouds*. In his work entitled *Apology*, Plato mentions the error of the dramatic poet: „For you yourselves saw these things in Aristophanes' comedy, a Socrates being carried about there, proclaiming that he was treading on air and uttering a vast deal of other nonsense, about which I know nothing, either much or little. And I say this, not to cast dishonour upon such knowledge, if anyone is wise about such matters (may I never have to defend myself against Meletus on so great a charge as that!),—but I, men of Athens, have nothing to do with these things.” Plato, *Apology*, 19c.

[3] „In 399 BC. Socrates was brought to trial by Anytos, the democratic laeder, Meletos, a „youthful and unknown” tragic poet, „with lanky hair, a scanty beard, and a hooked nose” (Euthyphro, 2 b.) and Lykon, an even more obscure rhetorician. The indictment stated that he was guilty of not worshipping (nomidzon) the gods the State woeshipped but introducing other nwe divinities, and further that he was guikty of corrupting the young by

I would like to clarify the real reasons of suing the wise man via recalling the era's historical events, because the made-up accusations according to which he seduces youngsters and loves new gods, were only excuses for the people of Athens in order to conduct a big conceptual proceeding. Plato and Xenophon tell the story authentically, still, they do not clearly name the real reason of Socrates' death, they only refer to that the philosopher was the victim of a political show-down. The events of the last phase of the Peloponnesian war and the complicated problems of the restored Athenian democracy help us understand the background of this mysterious case. While we are dealing with the real accusation, we have the possibility to give a historical introduction on the Athenian court proceedings at that time.

Although Socrates did not leave lengthy works behind, we still have several useful information in connection with his life and philosophical thinking. Its obvious explanation is his unbelievable popularity. His contemporaries and his late followers all made sure that the master's memory would never fade away. Socrates' way of life, especially his death made his whole oeuvre authentic; he forever became the example of standing up for one's own principles. Socrates' personality was not exclusively considered as positive among his own contemporaries either; its obvious reason is his philosophical style, more precisely, his irony. It becomes clear from Plato's dialogues that Socrates was a philosopher who carefully selected his conversational partners based on their knowledge, however, meanwhile he gave voice to his and his debate partners' ignorance; with today's words we could call him 'uptight'. He did not really care about his appearance, he was small, bug-eyed, his clothing was neglected, on the other hand, it was impossible to disturb his peace, he was not short-tempered, he was the calmest person we know Greek history. It seems a little inexplicable how such an always calm person, though relentlessly dealing with mistakes and errors, could tempt his own fate at the age of seventy in a way that he was sentenced to death. The reasons of his tragic death can be found in the troubled era of the fifth century Athens BC.

I. ANTECEDENTS

The trial was held in 399 BC, a few years after the Peloponnesian war, during the time of the restored democracy. Before presenting the accusation I find it important to give a hint on the era's mood, as it is a significant element in order to fully understand the real reasons of the death sentence. After the death of Pericles (429 BC) Athens did not find a solution to the city-state's problems and its harmonic governance. The Peloponnesian war ended with the fall of Athens (404 BC),

- teaching them accordingly. In the Apology, Plato gives us what profess to be the speeches delivered by Sokrates at his trial. It is not to be supposed that even here he is a mere reporter." Burnet, *Greek Philosophy, Thales to Plato*, 1928, 180.

however, the reason of the defeat was not only the ingenuity of the Spartan soldiers. Unfortunately, Athenians also caused their defeat themselves. In the last years of the 24-year long war they simply turned against themselves, civil war circumstances prevailed due to the acquisition of the city-state's governance. In 411 BC democracy was abolished by a putsch and an oligarchic circle of friends, the Hetaireias took over the governance. As a result, more groups were formed who simultaneously competed for the power, meanwhile others wanted to restore democracy.^[4] The Hetaireias were quickly torn into the Council of 400 citizens with the leadership of Anthiphon, and the Council of 500 citizens with the leadership of Theramenes; meanwhile the old devotees of democracy also acted on the island of Samos, with the leadership of Alcibiades, the genius politician of the war. Alcibiades^[5] wanted to be the laughing third party; he was such a commander of the state of war who did not fight for Athens but for wealth and the success of his own soldiers. Though Alcibiades belonged to the circle of Socrates when he was young, he was not a persistent student, he left the philosopher early. In 411 BC, all of these political powers concurrently felt the right to make decisions over the city's matters. The three parties even used violence, they killed the other's devotees after one another. In the end, Theramenes, leading the Five Thousand defeated the council of four hundred, then allied with Alcibiades who therefore could return to Athens. Of course, they did not restore democracy, the city stood under the governance of the oligarchs until the end of the war.

Exactly ten years before the trial of Socrates Athens was in war and was also in conflict with itself. What was happening meanwhile with the philosopher? Socrates was not involved in the war proceedings, he was not active in politics, we only know about one occasion when he called the Athenians for caution due to an illegal execution. In 406 BC, in the sea battle near the Arginusae islands the Athenians defeated the Spartan, however, the assembly sentenced the returning generals to death with made up accusations, instead of celebrating them. Their sin was that in the heat of the fight they did not save Athenian sailors who fell into the water. It was only Socrates who protected them.^[6] It is an alarming case that

[4] Aristotle, *Athéni állam (The Athenian Constitution)*, 29-33; Thukydidés, *The Peloponnesian war*, VIII. 48-98.

[5] Alcibiades is one of the most important people of the Peloponnesian war. As a young man, he belonged to the circle of Socrates. He was a great speaker and an excellent generalist, Pericles raised him as his own heir. His wartime role revealed his true nature. Alcibiades's political career can be regarded as unpatriotic on many occasions, as an Athenian generalist he joined the Spartans in a bad moment, gave them advices against the Athenians then left them as well, joined the Persians, then again dreamed about governing Athens. Athenians even almost forgave him. See further: Plutarch, *the portrait of Alcibiades*. Plutarch: *Párhuzamos életrajzok (Parallel Lives)*.

[6] Xenophon, *Hellenica*, I, 7. „Pharnabazus, however, was ready to meet with encouragement the despondency which afflicted the whole Peloponnesian army and their allies. „As long as their own bodies were safe and sound, why need they take to heart the loss of a few wooden hulls? Was there not timber enough and to spare in the king's territory?“ And so he presented each man with a cloak and maintenance for a couple of months, after which he armed the sailors and formed them into a coast-

the most talented generals of the fleet did not die in a battle but were executed by their own compatriots. From that time on, Athens was really left without military leaders. It is no doubt that citizens themselves helped the Peloponnese to win the war.

Finally, in 404 BC the Athenians gave up the fight, Theramenes made peace with the Spartan. Athens fell and had to put down the weapon with the following conditions: it had to destroy all its protective walls, eliminate the fleet, give up its properties and call back all those outcast aristocrats – the members of the Hetaireias – who overthrew the democracy with a putsch in 411. A ruling body of thirty members was set up to govern Athens^[7], which task would have been to govern Athens in a simpler way than in a democracy. With their power, the thirties were even started to be called tyrants. Theramenes leading the disarmament was their first person, who was supported by Lysander, the Spartan generalist reaching the victory. However, this situation still not brought peace in Athens. Theramenes had many enemies in the Thirty among the oligarchs called home, first of all, the radical Critias. As a youngster, Critias was also a member of Socrates' circle but similarly to Alcibiades he did not prove to be a good student, either. From our viewpoint it is significant to note that the decisions of the Thirty Tyrants were indeed extreme, such as, they prohibited the education of philosophy, with which they primarily aimed at hindering the popularization of democratic ideas.^[8] In fact, the Thirty Tyrants continued the civil war debate where it had been before the peace with the Spartans. Critias and Plato's uncle, Charicles urged the body to act radically, they were the bloodiest tyrants out of the thirty, they made several civilians, especially they own political enemies executed, in many cases even without court proceedings. As a sign against the prevailing events, Socrates confronted the Thirty Tyrants on his own when they dragged home Leon, one of their political enemies from the island of Samos in order to execute him later. In connection with Socrates' trial it is a significant piece of information that one of his accusers, Meletus was a member of that body which participated in Leon's capture. Socrates

- guard for the security of his own seaboard. He next called a meeting of the generals and trierarchs of the different States, and instructed them to build just as many new ships in the dockyards of Antandrus as they had respectively lost. He himself was to furnish the funds, and he gave them to understand that they might bring down timber from Mount Ida. While the ships were building, the Syracusans helped the men of Antandrus to finish a section of their walls, and were particularly pleasant on garrison duty; and that is why the Syracusans to this day enjoy the privilege of citizenship, with the title of „benefactors,” at Antandrus. Having so arranged these matters, Pharnabazus proceeded at once to the rescue of Chalcedon.”

[7] See the full list: Xenophon, op. cit. II. 3, 1-2. „And this oligarchy came into being in the way hereafter described it was voted by the people to choose thirty men to frame the ancient laws into a constitution under which to conduct the government. And the following men were chosen: Polychares, Critias, Melobius, Hippolochus, Euclidean, Hieron, Mnesilochus, Chremon, Theramenes, Aresias, Diocles, Phaedrias, Chaereleus, Anaetius, Peison, Sophocles, Eratosthenes, Charicles, Onomacles, Theognis, Aeschines, Theogenes, Cleomedes, Erasistratus, Pheidon, Dracontides, Eumathes, Aristoteles, Hippomachus, Mnesitheides.”

[8] Németh, György, *A harminc zsarnok [The Thirty Tyrants]*, 219.

did everything in order to prevent the Thirty Tyrants from committing an illegal act but Leon was executed. The leader of the tyrants, Theramenes also protested against the trespasses, however, he was also sued and executed. The unlimited terror was stopped by the Spartan king Pausanias in 403 BC, when he started to support Thrasybulus who wanted to restore the Athenian democracy. In the battle of Mynykhia they defeated the Thirty Tyrants for good.^[9] Following this, a seemingly calm period could be experienced in Athens as with the help of the soldiers of Sparta they restored democracy. In 403 BC King Pausanias made the Athenian people accept the history's first act of amnesty, according to which – except the main sinners of the Thirty Tyrants – no one could be sued and impeached for their previous acts. With this tool they tried to prevent further infightings.^[10] The act of amnesty was presented to the assembly by Anytus himself, who, a few years later was one of Socrates' accusers.^[11] The restored democracy was very strict about adhering to the act of amnesty, meanwhile, the Athenians were disappointed as the bloody events of the previous years were left without punishment.

The public mood was not so satisfactory, people needed someone to blame, whose execution could calm the Athenian people's revenge due to the illegal acts of the Thirty Tyrants. The victim suiting the requirements had to be chosen wisely because of the act of amnesty. They choose Socrates, even though except his plea to save Leon and the generals he had nothing to do with the civil law affair and the battle for power, still, all these events contributed to his late execution. Before I give details on the trial itself, the practice of the Athenian trials of the fifth century BC are worth mentioning.

II. HISTORY OF THE CIVIL TRIALS

The institution of public law allegation had already been noted in the previous centuries in Athens. The Greeks had a norm system of justice, morality and natural law, which had to be followed by all citizens. They differentiated between proceedings in connection with personal offence (Dike idia) and proceedings against public offence (Dike demosia).^[12] In the case of personal trials the plaintiff acted as a prosecutor, as for public trials, all Athenian citizens could initiate proceedings. At Athenian trials of that time do not resemble to today's practice at all, we could hardly regard them legal these days. The trials were based on accusations, they were public

[9] Xenophon, op. cit. II, 4.; 19.

[10] "There should be a general amnesty concerning past events towards all persons except the Thirty, the Ten, the Eleven, and the magistrates in Piraeus; and these too should be included if they should submit their accounts in the usual way." Aristotle, *The Athenian Constitution*, 39, 6.

[11] Taylor, *Plato*, 226.

[12] See more details about Athenian democracy: Harris, *The rule of law in action in democratic Athens*, 2013.

and oral. The accusers could usually present their charges in the days before the trial in writing (graphe) or orally, then the charges were investigated for a few days then on the given day the parties and the judges were called in.^[13] The indictment was always kept, it was placed in the Metroon, the Athenian archive.^[14] Depending on the committed act, the accuser could make a suggestion on the punishment in his indictment, however, the defendant could also hand in a request against that and the judges decided between the two. The trial was held publicly on the central market place in Athens, within the course of a single day. The lengths of the speeches were measured by water clocks. They differentiated between oral and written claims; the consequence of oral claims was compensational sentence, the consequence of written claims was retaliatory sentence. The parties represented themselves, however, from the 5 century BC they even had professional judicial speakers. The sentence was given by the Heliaia, the supreme court of ancient Athens; since Solon, male citizens over the age of 30 could be its members, later they were selected by drawing lots. During the time of Pericles they introduced that citizens received a 2,3 Obol payment for one seating as due to the office work they had to neglect their own businesses. Votes were taken by counting of stones after listening to the speeches, according to the majority principle, in the event of a tie the defendant was absolved and the accuser had to pay a fee. If the accuser did not reach 1/5 of the votes or he cancelled his complaint he also had to pay a fee. Regarding the importance of the various cases, the number of the court members was different, we have knowledge of courts with 301, 501 or even 1001 members. Decisions were made immediately, even in the case of executions. Sending people to prison was not very common, they rather applied more practical punishments like fees or exile; death was only a punishment in the case of capital crimes. On the morning of the trial, the accusers, the defendant and the members of the court took an oath in order to adhere to justice and law; it became a tradition during the democracy of Pericles. Accusations were taken very seriously, as the frequency of court proceedings would have taken the time of citizens from governing their own business. Trespasses might have been avoided in a way that false accusers had exactly the same punishment what they accused the defendant of. Therefore, they really had to think about accusing someone. The convict had the chance to exchange the punishment for fine, and could even beg in front of the court to lower the punishment or even absolve him; especially family status or previous military actions made a lot of difference. The implementation of executions can be said was humane as they did it with a poison retrieved from hemlocks. It is slightly strange but prison servants were slaves, they produced the neurotoxin which the convict had to drink himself. The poison caused a slow and painful death.

[13] Socrates was only informed about the accusation days before, Plato captures this in his dialogue entitled *Euthyphro*.

[14] Horváth, *A géniusz pere (The Genius' Trial)*, 14-21.

The trial of Socrates was carried out in 399 BC.^[15] According to the recordings of Diogenes Laertius, the philosopher did not accept the help from the era's most famous court speaker Lysias,^[16] which is not at all surprising from a philosopher, and of course we would expect Socrates to represent himself in his own case. The speech of his former master is presented by Plato in a dialogue entitled *Apology*,^[17] the authenticity of the narrative is not questioned by the posterity.^[18] We have to mention that besides Plato, Xenophon also described the events, his work entitled *Memorabilia* also deals with this topic. The apology of Socrates can only partially be regarded as regular, as after reflecting to the accusations he does not beg for exemption,^[19] what is more, he asks for a reward for his true actions during his whole life. Ironically answering to the whole proceeding, after hearing the judgement, he asked the court of people to have a meal with the heroes in the Prytaneum.^[20] It is not surprising if we are talking about a personality like Socrates. Judges ruled after listening to the speech in this case as well and if we can believe Plato, those who found Socrates guilty were only a few more in number than those who found him innocent.^[21]

[15] Similar trials were very common at that time. Protagoras, Euripides and Damon were also convicted with the charge of impiety.

[16] Diogenes Laertius II, 40. The philosopher then, after Lysias had written a defence for him, read it through and said: „A fine speech, Lysias; it is not, however, suitable to me.”

[17] We basically refer to this text in this study.

[18] We can see it from Plato's text that he was present at the trial of Socrates. Socrates names his talented, young follower among the people who were present. Plato, op. cit. 33e.

[19] Plato, op. cit. 34b-c. “What I would have to say in my defense is pretty much that and more of the same. Now maybe one of you is going to feel irritated because he remembers his own case when he was on trial on some less serious charge than this one—how he implored you, supplicated the judges, shed floods of tears, put his children up on the stand to produce maximum pity, produced other family and friends in crowds—and I'm not doing any of these things, although my danger, people might think, is of the worst. Maybe some one of you, thinking of all that would get arrogant and rageful about it and would vote out of rage. Now, if any of this applies—I don't think it should, but if—the decent thing to say to him, it seems to me is this: „Well, friend, I also have some relatives, and as the line says in Homer, I was not born ‚from an oak or a rock,’ but from human beings, so that I have family—sons actually, gentlemen, three of them; one is already a young man, the other two are boys—but just the same I'm not going to bring any of them up here and plead with you to acquit me.” Why not, you may ask? Well, it isn't from arrogance, gentlemen, nor from any disrespect for you—but as to how I feel about death, well, that's another story—but as far as my reputation goes, and yours, and that of the whole city, I don't think it looks good to do any of these things, especially at my age, with the name I have; whether it is true or false, people do at least think that Socrates is a little different from most people. And if those of you who are supposed to be special in wisdom or courage or in any other kind of excellence are going to be like that, it looks bad.”

[20] „What would be a reward suitable to a poor man who is your benefactor, who desires leisure that he may instruct you? There can be no more fitting reward than maintenance in the Prytaneum.” Plato, 36d.

[21] Plato, op. cit. 36 a-b. „I'm not going to make myself particularly miserable, gentlemen, about what has happened here—that you convicted me—for a number of reasons, mainly that there was nothing unexpected about what happened. I'm actually more surprised about the vote count, how close it was; I would have thought it wouldn't be that close, but more one-sided. As it is, it seems that if only thirty votes had changed sides I would have been acquitted. † So I think I was acquitted in relation to Meletus—not only acquitted, but it's really pretty clear that if Anytus and Lycon hadn't come down here to accuse me he would have had to pay the thousand drachmæ for not getting twenty per cent of the votes.”

After the sentence was announced, Socrates spent one month in the prison of Agora;^[22] the reason was the celebration of Apollo when it was prohibited to kill another person that is, to execute someone. During the excavation carried out at the Agora they discovered the stones of the prison where Socrates very likely spent that time, we shall imagine an average-sized house as his prison. In this exact area several sculpture portraits of Socrates were discovered, they must have been presents in the honour of the philosopher or in the honour of those who were innocently executed. During the excavation of the Agora those medicine bottles were also discovered which are thought to be the holders of poison used at the executions. If we can believe them, the giant cups in the hands of Socrates in the romantic representations are slightly exaggerated and shall make us smile, since the discovered bottles are the size of a shot glass. Now, we are going to investigate the accusers' personality, the charges and the main elements of Socrates' defence, finally, we are going to unveil the real reasons of the turbid charges.

III. THE ACCUSERS OF SOCRATES

Three accusers stood in front of the court of people in the trial of Socrates: Meletus, Anytus and Lycon. Meletus and Lycon are insignificant people, the instigator, the mastermind must have been Anytus, who also belonged to Socrates' circle before but was not a successful student, either, just like the previously mentioned Alcibiades and Critias.^[23] As far as I am concerned, we also need to talk about the fourth accuser, the most threatening one that is, the people of Athens themselves, the mob, who was the main accusers of the philosopher. Diogenes Laertios and Plato alike mention that the charges were handed in by Meletus, who, we can say that regularly accused other people, not only Socrates was his only victim. He similarly accused Andocides of being impious.^[24] It is surprising but Socrates' other accuser, Anytus stood on the side of the defence in the trial of Andocides and in that case he was not found to be guilty.^[25] Now let's talk about Socrates'

[22] Plato commemorates this in his dialogue entitled *Crito*.

[23] „The actual conduct of the prosecution was entrusted to Meletus, who bungled it, according to Plato. By a skilful cross-examination Sokrates got him to admit that he believed him to be an out-and-out atheist, which was of course inconsistent with the indictment. In any case Sokrates did not stoop to defend himself against either the one charge or the other, though he showed himself more sensitive to the accusation of corrupting the youth, and offered to allow the fathers and elder brothers of his associates to give evidence on that point. He was found guilty, however, in spite of the failure of Meletus to make anything of the principal count in the indictment, which he does not seem to have understood himself. The majority was a considerable one, though Sokrates says he had expected it to be larger. He knew therefore that there was something else against him besides the trumpety charge of introducing new divinities, which he did not for moment treat seriously.” Burnet, 181.

[24] Lysias (445-380 BC), an Athenian speaker presents Meletus' indictment word by word in his work entitled *Against Andocides*.

[25] *Andocides* protected himself in his trial in 399 BC. The marvellously talented speaker protected

accusers one by one, about their relationship with the philosopher and their possible reasons to accuse the old man. First of all, we are going to talk about Anytus, the mastermind, then the two least significant figures, Meletus and Lycon.

The personality of Anytus is especially interesting as he was the citizen who proposed the act of amnesty in 403 BC, after the rule of the Thirty Tyrants; the act already prohibited the evocation of the tyrants' previous sins.^[26] In connection with it we have to be careful not to get to the incorrect conclusion that the trial of Socrates has nothing to do with the rule of the Thirty Tyrants. It is exactly the action of Anytus what evokes suspicion that in reality Socrates was impeached due to the dishonest actions of the Thirty, of course, without a direct accusation due to the act of amnesty. The accusers of Socrates could not even mention their real charges in the trial, if they had done it, they would have destroyed themselves with it. Since it was Anytus who proposed the act of amnesty, it is understandable that he could not sue anybody in connection with the Thirty, so he had to find someone who proposed such an accusation instead of him which was well edited and did not mention the sin of the Thirty Tyrants at all. We have no information whether Meletus undertook the task on his own or upon the request of the politician, probably, he caught the attention of Anytus with his aptitude in the trial against Andocides. The possible relationship between Socrates and Anytus is unclear, so supposing that during his short time in the circle of Socrates Anytus was hurt by the master and hence he initiated a proceeding against him, would be incorrect. If he had been hurt by Socrates, he would have accused him of that exact thing and would have not accused him of such made up charges.

As for the relationship of Meletus and Socrates we know some concrete facts; they turned against each other in connection with an important case. As I have already mentioned, Socrates was the only person during the rule of the Thirty Tyrants who did not support the dragging and execution of the Thirty's political opponent, Leon from Samos to Athens. However, Meletus was a member of the body which participated in the illegal arrest.^[27] Socrates did not mention Meletus' former great mistake at all, still, he remembers the case well and highlights his own role, as well as that with that decision he also risked his own life during the time of the terror.^[28] Meletus acted as Anytus' puppet in the trial of Socrates, even

- himself with his defence speech on the ministries.

[26] Taylor, op. cit. 226. p.

[27] Taylor, op. cit. 227. p. See further: Burnet, John, *Greek Philosophy, Part I. Thales to Plato*, Macmillan and Co. Limited, London, 1928.

[28] „This happened in the days of the democracy. But when the oligarchy of the Thirty was in power, they sent for me and four others into the rotunda, and bade us bring Leon the Salaminian from Salamis, as they wanted to execute him. This was a specimen of the sort of commands which they were always giving with the view of implicating as many as possible in their crimes; and then I showed, not in words only, but in deed, that, if I may be allowed to use such an expression, I cared not a straw for death, and that my only fear was the fear of doing an unrighteous or unholy thing. For the strong arm of that oppressive power did not frighten me into doing wrong; and when we came out of the rotunda the other four went to Salamis and fetched Leon, but I went quietly home. For which I might have

Socrates refers to it when he proves the easy refutability of the accusations, he even says that he suspects that there is a secret charge in the background. The fact that he does not mention Meletus' previous role tells us a lot about Socrates' personality. Socrates, the master always beats Meletus if we compare them together.

The third, specified accuser is Lycon, however, we do not know much about him outside the trial of Socrates; he was an Athenian speaker in the fifth century BC.^[29]

The most threatening accusers of Socrates were the people themselves, the Athenian masses, the mob. It was impossible to defend himself against the charges, the antipathy was old and the prejudice was irreparable, which the philosopher highlights himself: „*For I have had many accusers, who accused me of old, and their false charges have continued during many years; and I am more afraid of them than of Anytus and his associates, who are dangerous, too, in their own way.*”^[30] After having presented the main characters, now let me introduce the charges.

IV. THE CHARGE

We shall state that there is no contradiction among our sources, Xenophon,^[31] Plato and Diogenes Laertius have the same memories. Diogenes Laertius even tells us that Favorinus, a Roman sophist living in the second century AC, read the charges that were kept in the Metroon, the Athenian archive.^[32] In my study I am going to analyse Plato's words from his work entitled *Apology*. In the dialogue two charges are mentioned, an old and a newer one, and it is only the latter one which can be found in Meletus' indictment. With evoking the old charge Socrates justifies it himself that the masses of the Athenian people and not certain politicians shall be his real accusers. Let us closely examine the old and the new charges.

(1) The old charge is the following: „*They shall be my prosecutors, and I will*

* lost my life, had not the power of the Thirty shortly afterwards come to an end.” Plato, op. cit. 32 d-e.
 [29] „And this is the reason why my three accusers, Meletus and Anytus and Lycon, have set upon me; Meletus, who has a quarrel with me on behalf of the poets; Anytus, on behalf of the craftsmen; Lycon, on behalf of the rhetoricians: and as I said at the beginning, I cannot expect to get rid of this mass of calumny all in a moment.” Plato, op. cit. 24a.

[30] Plato, op. cit. 18b1-4.

[31] Xenophon, *Memorabilia*, 2.

[32] Diogenes Laertius, II, 40-41. “The affidavit in the case, which is still preserved, says Favorinus, in the *Metroon*, ran as follows: „This indictment and affidavit is sworn by Meletus, the son of Meletus of Pitthos, against Socrates, the son of Sophroniscus of Alopece: Socrates is guilty of refusing to recognize the gods recognized by the state, and of introducing other new divinities. He is also guilty of corrupting the youth. The penalty demanded is death.” The philosopher then, after Lysias had written a defence for him, read it through and said: „A fine speech, Lysias; it is not, however, suitable to me.” For it was plainly more forensic than philosophical. Lysias said, „If it is a fine speech, how can it fail to suit you?” „Well,” he replied, „would not fine raiment and fine shoes be just as unsuitable to me?”

sum up their words in an affidavit. Socrates is an evil-doer, and a curious person, who searches into things under the earth and in heaven, and he makes the worse appear the better cause; and he teaches the aforesaid doctrines to others."^[33]

(2) The new charges are cited by Socrates himself from the accusation of Meletus: „*What do they say? Something of this sort: - That Socrates is a doer of evil, and corrupter of the youth, and he does not believe in the gods of the state, and has other new divinities of his own.*"^[34]

At first, the philosopher reacts to the old charges, then the newer ones are refuted, of course, easily. We have to mention that neither the accusation, nor the apology refers to the previous years' messy political events. Socrates acts like this out of respecting the acts, while his accusers are simply cowards. The charges are transparent and instantly make one smile, we have to realize that other things must be in the background, such events of which we shall not speak about, especially, in front of the judges. We have already referred to that it is very likely that Socrates had to be punished in connection with something connected to the rule of the Thirty, however, we are going to clarify it later, now let us interpret the charges and their background. Let us begin with the old charges.

(1) Socrates is guilty as he studies subterraneous things and supernal phenomenon; he marks wretched cases as good and teaches others to do so as well. In short, this charge is nothing else than qualifying Socrates' philosophical work: Socrates is guilty as he is a natural philosopher and a sophist. It is a commonplace that the judgement of philosophers is always free of negative aspects. They are usually lonely, misunderstood, strange, secluded and sometimes superior, these are exactly such characteristics which most of the people do not find likeable. And Socrates was a born philosopher. He did not care about conventions, he talked in an ironic, cynic manner, moreover, his look was ignorant and his peculiarity was so high that the Athenians could not stand him anymore. Referring to Socrates

[33] Plato, op. cit. 19b. „So let us take up from the beginning the prosecution that produced the prejudice against me, that gave Meletus the confidence to enter his indictment. OK. What do the prejudiced say to produce prejudice against me? We have to read it aloud, as if it were the formal charge of prosecutors: „Socrates is a criminal and a busybody. He seeks things beneath the earth and in the heavens, and he makes the weaker case the stronger, and he teaches other people to do these things.” It's something like that. You yourself have seen these things in the comedy of Aristophanes—some kind of Socrates dangling there and saying he treads the air† and talking a lot of other nonsense that is not even slightly within my competence. Not that I mean to despise this kind of knowledge, if someone has this kind of wisdom—I hope I would never be prosecuted by Meletus on a charge as serious as that!—but, gentlemen, I am not mixed up in anything like that. As my witnesses I offer most of you, and I ask as many of you as have ever heard me conversing to teach one another and say—since many of you have heard me—tell each other if you ever heard me conversing about such matters even slightly—and from this you can figure that all the other things most people say about me are just the same kind of stuff.”

[34] Plato, op. cit. 24c. „ He says that I am a criminal corrupting the young. But I, gentlemen, say that Meletus is a criminal because he's playing at serious things and brings people to trial in a lighthearted way, pretending to be serious and full of tender concern about things that matter† to him not at all. The truth of this I will now try to demonstrate. Come here, Meletus, and tell me: is it true that you have made the absolute goodness of the young people your highest priority? „It is.””

in this trial as a Sophist is not surprising, as since the comedy of Aristophanes it got stuck on the philosopher.^[35] Socrates was not Sophist, the fact that he was charged with this can be explained with the general public mood which prevailed in connection with Sophists and philosophers in Athens. During the time of the Thirty, even philosophy itself was prohibited. As far as I am concerned, the old charges are really about the unpopularity of Socrates, and this is his real tragedy, since he was not a popular person, he could be easily sacrificed; he was an appropriate scapegoat to compensate the unpunished sins of the Thirty. Socrates protects himself brilliantly and in a stylish way against the old charges, though we should introduce it later, now let us study the new charges of the trial.

(2) The new charges contain two elements, which is not by accident, they are very well created charges, understanding them is crucial when dealing with the real reasons of the death sentence. (2.1) According to the first element of the new charges, Socrates is guilty because he corrupts the youth. It seems messy, but what does it really mean? At first, we believe that it is what it literally means that is, sexual harassment. These days we do not even like to hear apologies against such charges but in the ancient Athens, if the charge had really be based on that, it would not have been a sin either, as Athenians, just like citizens of the Greek city-states openly had homosexual interactions, even with youngsters. They did not accuse one another for such a corruption. Therefore, the corruption of the youth must have meant something else in the 5th century BC. The accuser basically meant the misleading of the youth. Socrates was accused with exactly that. Still, in this case we do not understand Socrates' trial, what is more, death, as several talents emerged in the city-state from his circle. What was Socrates' sin, then? Who exactly did he corrupt and how did he do that? The charges are not clear about that, they only speak in general terms. Whichever way you look at it, sentencing a seventy-year old master to death due to bad work seems incomprehensible, even more as he obviously and demonstrably raised students to be wise, mentioning one name, Plato to exempt him is enough. This charge is full of contradictions, still, we understand it as soon as the real charge prevails, which the Athenians understood without saying it out loud. Before unveiling the real reason, we have to analyse the second element of the charge and Socrates' apology.

(2.2) The second element of the new charge states Socrates' impiety, according to which Socrates does not believe in those gods in which the city-state believes and only talks about the operation of other, new daemons. With today's thinking

[35] „It must also be remembered that the charge of introducing new divinities was no novelty; for it had been definitely formulated by Aristophanes a generation earlier. In the *Clouds* Socrates announces that Zeus has been dethroned and Vortex reigned in his stead. He offers prayer to the Clouds and swears by Respiration, Chaos, and Air. It will be remembered that Diogenes of Apollonia held Air to be a „god”. That being so, it is shrewdly very significant that Aristophanes does not make the most distant allusion to the „voice”, though he must have all about it, and it would lend itself admirably to comic treatment. The omission is the more striking, as there is an allusion to the trances of Socrates (150). Xenophon is even more instructive.” Burnet, 185.

we would not take this charge too seriously as nowadays we have freedom regarding our spiritual lives, why did not the Athenians establishing the shining democracy do the same. However, ancient acts of the Greek city-states established that not worshipping the Greek gods and avoiding the institutions built around them was a major sin. People found guilty of impiety were either expelled or sentenced to death. With naming the sin of impiety or asebeia, we can instantly guess that the accuser obviously asked for Socrates' death sentence. Therefore, the accusers of Socrates must have exactly known that if they could prove his disrespect towards Athenian gods, then the sentence would be death. This second element of the new charge had this exact role in the accusation. For the sin of corruption the judges would only have given a fine, while impiety needed to be punished with death. Socrates would get death punishment for the corruption of the youth and for nothing else.^[36]

Socrates saw it clearly that not impiety was his major sin but rather his own personality.^[37] Defending himself against impiety is hard in itself as he first wanted to make it clear what impiety meant but as no one knew it, it was easy to accuse him of that. Socrates did not really try hard to defend himself against this charge of Meletus, he could guess the result of the trial easily.

The reason why the Athenians wanted Socrates' death and not punishment was going to be revealed by the end of the study, now let me present a short summary of the philosopher's speech.

[36] „The penalty proposed by the accusers was dearh, but there is no reason to suppose Anytos really wished it to be carried out. By a very ingenious provision of the Athenian law, it was ordained that in cases of the class the condemned man should be allowed to propose an alternative sentence. The idea was that an adequate punishment would probably be arrived at in this way; for the judges were bound to choose between the two penalties proposed, and could not suggest another themselves. It was, therefore, the interest of the condemned man to propose something the judges would be likely to accept. There can be no doubt that if Sokrates had proposed exile or imprisonment till he had paid a ransom, everyone would have been satisfied, but he refused to do anything of the sort. That, he said, would amount to an acknowledgment of his guilt. If he had really to propose what he thought he deserved, he would accept the penalty at free quarters in the Prytaneion, at the public expense, an honour sometimes voted to Olympic victors and public benefactors.” Burnet, 181–182.

[37] Burnet gives a short explanation to prove that Socrates wasn't irreligious. „Plato represents him as full of Orphic ideas, though, as I have said, there is always a certain reservation which does not allow us to suppose he accepted them implicitly. I do not think it likely that his Pythagorean friends had much to do with this; for, to all appearance, they had ceased to „practise”, and they had dropped the Orphic theory of the soul, which was just the thing that appealed most to Sokrates. In fact it is Socrates who is represented as trying to bring them back to an earlier form of Pythagorean belief. All this can be hardly be fictions. What motive could Plato have had for inventing it? By this time Orphicism had hopelessly degenerated, so far as we can see, and it is not probable that it ever attracted him. In the youth of Socrates things may well have been different.” Burnet, 191.

V. THE MAIN POINTS OF SOCRATES' APOLOGY

Already the first few lines of the apology show us that it was Socrates himself who decided to participate in this „act”.^[38] The charges and their destruction surely did not cause any difficulties for the master of speeches. Guided by his conscience, Socrates took his task seriously, even though he knew that in reality he had to defend himself against the hidden charges. Socrates was an appropriate scapegoat as though he clearly saw the trial's conceptual nature and knew that he would get a death sentence, he still did not run away or hid. The Athenians must have known that, this is why they must have chosen him. From his apology we can see that he undertakes the role of the scapegoat himself. We could say he does that from stubbornness but he was seventy years old with much experience, he must have had more serious reasons.

The soberness of Socrates gives a hint that he saw through the situation and was fully aware that no matter how well he would defend himself, he would lost. His foreknowledge regarding the result is easy to work out. One solution can be that based on his wisdom he saw his own situation clearly, the Athenians did not have good decisions for a long time by then, why would they do that in Socrates' case? Another obvious explanation of Socrates' foreknowledge could be the gossip. Plato makes Socrates to clearly say that he had not been popular with the Athenians for a long time and since he was unpopular, they obviously came to an easy decision regarding his death. These gossips were known by Socrates as well.^[39] The third answer for Socrates' foreknowledge is the political affair why he was effectively impeached and what he only mentioned in his speech in riddles. It is very likely that the wise Socrates understood that he was implicitly impeached due to the dreadful acts of the Thirty Tyrants. Meletus' turbid and easily refuta-

[38] „It was usual for speeches to be carefully revised and adapted for publication, and no doubt Plato meant to do for Socrates what other accused persons either did for themselves or more often had done for them by a professional speech-writer. On the other hand it seems incredible that he should have misrepresented the attitude of Socrates before the court or the general line of his defence. It is perfectly true, no doubt, that the Apology is not a defence at all, but that makes it all the more characteristic for the man. Socrates treats the accusation with contempt, and even goes out of his way to import things into the case that were hardly of a nature to conciliate the judges. That does not prove the Apology to be pure fiction, as it has been supposed to do. Far from it.” Burnet, 181.

[39] Plato, op. cit. 23d-24a. The truth is what I don't suppose they'd ever be willing to admit, that they have been exposed as pretending to know and knowing nothing. Given that they are reputable people, I suppose, and fervent, and numerous, and that they never quit and are quite convincing about me, they have filled your ears these many years, and made the prejudice very strong. Meletus is one of this bunch, and Anytus, and Lycon—Meletus representing the poets in their irritation, Anytus representing the craftsmen and the political people, and Lycon representing the orators. So—as I said at the beginning—I would be surprised if I were able to root out so much prejudice in such a little bit of time, now that it has become so great. Nevertheless, gentlemen, this is the plain truth, and I am not holding back the slightest bit when I tell you this, nor have I trimmed my sails. I am nearly sure that I am right now irritating these very same people, which is proof that I speak the truth, and that this is the prejudice against me, and its cause. Whether you look into it now or later, you will find it so.

ble charges also support this idea.^[40] Still, Socrates gives an apology, provides answers to the made up charges, he unquestionably prepares for his last great performance, his martyrdom. He exactly knows that he is held responsible for Athens' political failures, its messy events in the last years of war, but most importantly, for the actions of the Thirty Tyrants. His realization is supported by the fact that he remembers his friendship with Chaerephon, who was already dead by that time. Chaerephon was Socrates' contemporary, an Athenian democrat, a role model of the restored democracy, a politician respected by all Athenians. I believe that with mentioning their friendship, Socrates gives a nice and obvious gesture towards the Athenians regarding that he already stood on the right side and supported democracy in his young ages. „*You must have known Chaerephon; he was early a friend of mine, and also a friend of yours, for he shared in the exile of the people, and returned with you.*”^[41] The „great run” is also worth mentioning. Socrates referred to the reign of the Thirty Tyrants with it, and it shows his great personality that he only mentioned that tragic period once, even though he had to face the trial because of the Thirty. Socrates' law-abiding nature gives an explanation to that he was forced to defend himself against made-up charges; he could not defend himself against the real charges due to the act of amnesty. Socrates was a democrat, a fine personality, he was wise. Now, I am going to investigate how he reacted to the made-up charges.

[40] Referring to Meletus' turbid indictment, Socrates openly says his instincts, Meletus' real indictment. „*Such nonsense, Meletus, could only have been intended by you as a trial of me. You have put this into the indictment because you had nothing real of which to accuse me.*” Plato, 27e.

[41] Plato, op. cit. 21 a 2- b. Now, you probably all knew Chærephon. He was my companion from childhood, and he was your companion, one of the popular party; he went into exile with you, and he came back with you. You know the kind of person Chærephon was, how impetuous he was, whatever he set out to do. Well once he actually went to Delphi, and had the nerve to ask the oracle—please remember, don't interrupt me, gentlemen—he asked if there was anyone wiser than me. The answer came from the Pythia that no one was wiser. And about all this his brother here will be your witness, since the man himself is dead. Now you'll see why I am telling you all this. I'm going to explain how the prejudice against me got started. Once I had heard this, I thought it over like this: „What on earth does the god mean, and whatever is his riddle? Because I know in my heart that I am not even slightly wise, so what on earth does he mean calling me wisest? He wouldn't be lying; they don't let him do that!” „For a long time I was baffled: what on earth did he mean? Then at long last I began to inquire into him, more or less like this. I went to a person thought to be wise, with the idea that here, if anywhere, I would refute the prophesy, and that I was going to show the oracle: „this man here is wiser than me, but you said I was.” So I looked into this person—I don't have to tell you his name, he was one of the political people—and when I looked into him I had the following experience, gentlemen, when I was talking to him; it seemed to me that this man seemed wise to many other people, and most of all to himself, but that he was not. So then I tried to show him that he thought he was wise but was not. At that point he became irritated with me, and so did many of those present. So I went away thinking to myself: „I really am wiser than this person. Probably neither of us knows anything really worth knowing, but this one thinks that he knows, although he doesn't, whereas I, just as I don't know, don't think that I do.” So it seemed that by just this small amount I was wiser than him, in that what I did not know, I did not think that I knew. From there I went to another of those who are thought to be wise, and I came to the same conclusion; and on that occasion also he and many others became irritated with me.”

(1) The old charges were the followings: Socrates is guilty because he is a philosopher, that is, he is wise. His main point of defence against it was the stupidity certificate of the Athenians. During his whole life, though not in a direct way but Socrates could justify that all Athenian citizens who thought themselves wise were not that wise at all, some simple questions easily revealed their stupidity. This activity had been done by the master since he was young, so he himself was not surprised by his unpopularity. The question arises, why did Socrates undertake the continuous unveiling of the arrogant, ordinary Athenian citizens thinking too much of themselves. In order to answer the question, we need the assistance of Chaerephon, the above mentioned young democrat. Socrates tells us that as a young man his contemporary friend went to Delphi for a prophecy; his question was whether Socrates was the wisest man on Earth. The fortune-teller replied with yes. In order to prove that he did not just make it up, Socrates named Chaerephon's brother as an authentication, who was also present on the trial.^[42] Neither we, nor the judges have the reason to doubt these events. Following this, Socrates performed the first item of his apology. He said that he put his whole life to contradict this prophecy, in order to do so, he searched for the most talented men in their profession, including politicians. With his questions he always won over his debate partners, he always found out that though they believed that they were wise, in reality they were not.^[43] While Socrates tried to contradict Pythia's prophecy, he gained the hate of the Athenians. In his whole life he tried to prove that the prophecy was wrong and he was not wise. He could only do it that he competed against people who were thought to be wise according to others. Even though these people always lost against Socrates, he did not regard himself as

[42] „Well, Chaerephon, as you know, was very impetuous in all his doings, and he went to Delphi and boldly asked the oracle to tell him whether - as I was saying, I must beg you not to interrupt - he asked the oracle to tell him whether there was anyone wiser than I was, and the Pythian prophethess answered that there was no man wiser. Chaerephon is dead himself, but his brother, who is in court, will confirm the truth of this story.” Plato, op. cit. 21a5-11.

[43] Plato, op. cit. 21b-d5. Now you'll see why I am telling you all this. I'm going to explain how the prejudice against me got started. Once I had heard this, I thought it over like this: „What on earth does the god mean, and whatever is his riddle? Because I know in my heart that I am not even slightly wise, so what on earth does he mean calling me wisest? He wouldn't be lying; they don't let him do that!* „For a long time I was baffled: what on earth did he mean? Then at long last I began to inquire into him, more or less like this. I went to a person thought to be wise, with the idea that here, if anywhere, I would refute the prophesy, and that I was going to show the oracle: „this man here is wiser than me, but you said I was.” So I looked into this person—I don't have to tell you his name, he was one of the political people—and when I looked into him I had the following experience, gentlemen, when I was talking to him; it seemed to me that this man seemed wise to many other people, and most of all to himself, but that he was not. So then I tried to show him that he thought he was wise but was not. At that point he became irritated with me, and so did many of those present. So I went away thinking to myself: „I really am wiser than this person. Probably neither of us knows anything really worth knowing, but this one thinks that he knows, although he doesn't, whereas I, just as I don't know, don't think that I do.” So it seemed that by just this small amount I was wiser than him, in that what I did not know, I did not think that I knew. From there I went to another of those who are thought to be wise, and I came to the same conclusion; and on that occasion also he and many others became irritated with me.

wise, he was only better than other people in that he was able to recognize that a mortal man cannot have the most complete knowledge. He realized that he did not know anything. In order to understand this reasoning we have to know what Socrates meant under the definition of wisdom. Wisdom according to Socrates is the absolute knowledge. Who is capable of gaining absolute knowledge? An intelligent man cannot presume that, only stupid people that is, the only common Athenians could believe that they could be the possessors of absolute knowledge. Socrates was wise because he admitted that only God can know everything: *„but the truth is, O men of Athens, that God only is wise; and in this oracle he means to say that the wisdom of men is little or nothing; he is not speaking of Socrates, he is only using my name as an illustration, as if he said, He, O men, is the wisest, who, like Socrates, knows that his wisdom is in truth worth nothing.*”^[44]

As far as I am concerned, Socrates did not even try to effectively defend himself against the old charges, though he could have done to list his great students, summon them to the trial in order to justify the charges’ opposite. Still, he shortly dealt with the question which makes us conclude that he wanted to highlight the negative description of the Athenian people; he simply wanted the posterity to remember the incorrect „mentality” of the people of the city-state. The lecturing, ironic style of the logical reasoning against the new charges supports this theory. Socrates knew that all of his reasons were futile; his case had already been decided.

The new charges consist of two parts (2.1) the corruption of the youth and (2.2) the belief in the gods that is, not respecting the ancient Athenian gods. Socrates takes the charges word by word, he does not refer to their true meaning. (2.1) The charge of corrupting the youth is destroyed by the Socratic method, also known as the method of elenchus. Let me quickly mention the reasoning. If Meletus knows who corrupts the youth, he also has to know who makes them better. Meletus’ answer is that everybody makes them better, the council, the assembly, the Athenians, only one man raises them in a bad manner and that is Socrates. The master replies him with a metaphor. Whether the situation is the same with raising horses, whether people make horses better and only one man raises them bad. It is obviously impossible, and this is true the other way around, too. The trainer makes them excellent, the masses do not know anything about dealing with horses. Therefore, the first element of Meletus’ accusation has obviously no sense. Meletus himself cannot be that stupid not to accept Socrates’ reasoning connected to horses. At this point, Socrates simply says that this charge is only an excuse to sue him because of a completely different sin. *„Happy indeed would be the condition of youth if they had one corrupter only, and all the rest of the world were their improvers. And you, Meletus, have sufficiently shown that you never had a thought about the young: your careless-*

[44] Plato, op. cit. 23a-b.

ness is seen in your not caring about matters spoken of in this very indictment.”^[45]

In the second, more extensive part of the speech where Socrates' philosophy is described – which we do not present due to length limits – the philosopher once again mentions the charge of the corruption of the youth; his main defence is the logical reasoning according to which the master cannot be held responsible for the later activity of his students, however, he very surprisingly does not present the name of the despicable students, even though it would have been helpful for us to understand the real charge. „*Whether he be rich or poor, may ask and answer me and listen to my words; and whether he turns out to be a bad man or a good one, that cannot be justly laid to my charge, as I never taught him anything.*”^[46] He is now held responsible for such people who once proved to be bad followers and whose acts were not forget by the people of Athens, however, they cannot be impeached the due to the act of amnesty. Socrates had many bad students, like the accuser Anytus, the political adventurer Alcibiades, or the most bloody handed general of the Thirty, Critias.^[47]

(2.2) Now let us move on to the defence told against the new charges' second element, the impiety, which was punished with death sentence in Athens. Socrates was guilty because he did not believe in those gods in which the city did, as he was talking about new gods, the demigods. First, we have to understand this latter element. They use the expression ‚demigod' when they talk about the gods of Socrates. However, it is a question to what extent can demigods be regarded as gods, or maybe gods not known by the Athenians. Socrates used the expression of demigod in order to express his own conscience, he stated that during his life he came to every decision with listening to the demigod operating within him, and this thought is also supported by the texts of Xenophon^[48] and Plato.^[49] It is no doubt that the accusers and the judges present knew very well in what meaning Socrates used the word demigod. According to the Greek mythology, demigods are the illegitimate children of gods.^[50] Therefore, demigods are by all means gods

[45] Plato, op. cit. 25c1-4.

[46] Plato, op. cit. 33b.

[47] Xenophon, *Memorabilia*, I, 2.

[48] Xenophon, op. cit. I, 1.

[49] Plato, op. cit. 40a-b. I am by now used to this prophetic spiritual sign which has come so often in my life, and absolutely opposed me about trivialities if I was on the point of doing something not right. Here things have turned out for me as you yourselves see, this thing here that somebody might think and believe to be the worst of evils—but when I left the house in the morning the divine sign never opposed me, nor when I came up here to the law court, nor anywhere in my speech with anything I was going to say. And yet, other times when I was talking it has often opposed what I was saying, often in the middle of it; in this case neither in fact nor in word did it ever oppose me. What do I take to be the explanation? I will tell you. Probably what has happened here is something good, and there is no way that we can rightly understand it, as many of us as think that it is a bad thing to die. I have strong evidence for this. It absolutely would have opposed me, my usual sign, if I weren't going to experience something good.”

[50] Plato, op. cit. 27d. „Surely if I suppose there are spirits, as you say, and if spirits are some kind of gods, that would be what I say is the riddle you're having fun with, when you say that I don't suppose

of Greek origin. Still, Meletus refers to them when he marks Socrates as an atheist, his problem is that the philosopher ignores the cults of the Athenian religion and he only worships the demigods. Socrates defends himself with logical reasons against it but he does not explicitly deal with this question which again supports the assumption that he has foreknowledge on the upcoming decision. His aim is not to defend himself but to stay true to himself and his own philosophy. The logical reasoning is the following. Socrates believes in the operation of demigods who are of divine origin but if demigods are of divine origin it means that Socrates believes in the gods. „*But this is just the ingenious riddle of which I was speaking: the demigods or spirits are gods, and you say first that I don't believe in gods, and then again that I do believe in gods; that is, if I believe in demigods.*”^[51] It is impossible that someone does not believe in gods but believes in their operation. Not believing this counterargument on the part of Meletus is not unbelievable, either. Socrates again expresses that the accusation of Meletus does not contain the real charges. „*Such nonsense, Meletus, could only have been intended by you as a trial of me. You have put this into the indictment because you had nothing real of which to accuse me.*”^[52]

Finally, Socrates ends his defence against the accusations and says that he is not guilty, and it is completely unnecessary to reason against such made up charges. His ancient enemies are the Athenian citizens themselves, he has long gained their antipathy, it does not make sense to defend himself. „*I have said enough in answer to the charge of Meletus: any elaborate defence is unnecessary; but as I was saying before, I certainly have many enemies, and this is what will be my destruction if I am destroyed; of that I am certain; – not Meletus, nor yet Anytus, but the envy and detraction of the world, which has been the death of many good men, and will probably be the death of many more; there is no danger of my being the last of them.*”^[53] The apology is a masterpiece, still, we have a feeling of loss as we do not understand the background of the death sentence. After the elegant, overwhelming defence of Socrates we would expect that the Athenians look at themselves and exempt the old man, the Athenian man who always adhered to laws and regulations. Still, Socrates cannot escape, his death is the essential condition of Athens' public peace, which was clearly in the interest of the state.

- there are gods, and then again suppose there are, since I suppose there are spirits. But if in turn spirits are children of gods, some kind of bastards, or by nymphs, or some other kinds of ways they tell us—what person could suppose the children of gods exist and not gods? That would be just as peculiar as if someone supposed that children of horses and donkeys exist, mules— but not horses and donkeys! Meletus, the only explanation is that you're teasing us in the way you composed this indictment, or else you had no idea how to complain of any true crime. Because how in the world could you convince anybody who had even the smallest grain of sense that the same person could suppose that spiritual and even divine things exist, and also suppose that spirits or gods or heroes do not? There's just no way you could do it.”

[51] Plato, op. cit. 27d5-9.

[52] Plato, op. cit. 27e4-7.

[53] Plato, op. cit. 28a3-b2.

VI. THE REAL REASONS OF THE DEATH SENTENCE

The real reasons not written in the accusations can be easily discovered if we take some previous events of the trial into consideration: the years of the political detabilization, the victory of the Spartan, the rule of the Thirty Tyrants, the act of amnesty^[54] and the measures of the restored democracy.^[55] After the rule of the Thirty Tyrants the Athenians were disappointed, they relentlessly needed to impeach and convict the sinners, who, however, were protected by law. The Athenians found Socrates appropriate to satisfy their revenge with his death. Of course, they could not impeach any of the sinners due to the strict act of amnesty, so they had to find a scapegoat who was not in a direct relationship with the Thirty Tyrants, he was only indirectly connected to them, of which everybody was aware. Socrates came in handy, as there was not a single politician in Athens, either positive or negative who did not know him. Among those who were protected by the act of amnesty many people knew Socrates as well. What did the accusation say? Socrates was guilty because he corrupted the youth. In the direct meaning of the words we can find the exact reason why the mob wanted his death. When they were youngsters, such politicians also belonged to the circle of Socrates who later seriously harmed the Athenians. The two protagonists causing the greatest disappointment of the Peloponnesian war, Alcibiades and Critias were also

[54] Kritias and Alcibiades as younger take part of Socrates' followers, after some years later they became Athenian politicians. Socrates never mentioned that they as his disciples. „That is, to all intents and purposes, a plea of guilty, to what the hints of Kallikles and Anytos suggest was the real ground of the accusation, namely, that Socrates had fostered in young men that antidemocratic spirit which had led to the oligarchical revolutions. After half a century later Aischines put the matter quite bluntly. He says (I. 173) that the Athenians „put the Sophist Socrates to death because he was believed to have educated Kritias”, and less than ten years after his trial the Sophist Polykrates charged him, as we saw, with having educated Alcibiades. In fact, it looks as if Polykrates simply wrote the speech Anytos would have delivered at the trial, if the amnesty had not stood in the way. That point was actually made by Meletos, a less responsible person, is strongly suggested by the allusion Socrates makes in the Apology (33 a) „to those they say are my disciples. Xenophon also in the Memorabilia (i. 2, 12) makes a point of saying that Kritias and Alcibiades were not really disciples of Socrates.” Burnet, 187.

[55] Burnet on his analysis gives another answer, according to him the real offence of Socrates was his criticising the democratic leaders of the fifth century, including Pericles. Plato in the Gorgias and Meno draws Socrates very critical when Socrates speaks about democratic heroes. „there are two passages in which he is represented as criticising the democratic leaders of the fifth century, including Pericles, in a very severe manner. One of these is in the Gorgias, and there Kallikles, who is a democratic statesman, bluntly tells him (521 c) that, if he refuses to flatter the democracy instead of trying to make them see the error of their ways, he is in danger of being dragged into court by some sorry wretch, and then anything may happen to him. The other passage is in the Meno, where Anytos himself is brought on the stage to give a similar warning. That is surely meant significant. Anytos is not the chief interlocutor, and is apparently introduced solely for this purpose. After listening impatiently to the criticism of Socrates on the hero to the democracy he says (94 e), „I think, Socrates, you are rather ready to of your taking my advice, to be careful. Even in other good turn, and most decidedly it is so in this one.” These are very broad hints, and Plato set them down deliberately some time after the event. That can only mean that the real offence of Socrates was his criticism of the democracy and its leaders. No one in Plato ever gives him a hint that he had better be careful not to talk about unauthorised divinites, as he frequently does, and still less does anyone suggest that the „voice” is a thing he would be wise in keeping to himself.” Burnet, 186-187.

among them.^[56] Alcibiades became famous as a political adventurer, Critias was a member of the Thirty Tyrants, what is more, he was the bloodiest handed tyrant of all. Therefore, Socrates was held responsible for the sins of the despicable students. The sin of the corruption of the youth therefore refers to the corruption of these two people, such two sinners whose activity and behaviour caused serious damages to the Athenians. They could not accuse Socrates directly with the corruption of Alcibiades and Critias, however, they wanted and received a satisfaction for the last years of war and the pain from all their domestic feuds. The accusation and the conviction of Socrates and was a well-structured political act, so it is not hard to work out that the people of Athens stood in the background. During the wartime period the citizens of Athens slowly transformed into a stupid mod from previous democrats. Only such a court could convict Socrates which members were democrats, still, they were not able to make a rational decision. With the conviction of Socrates the final days of Athens definitively started but the broken democracy's victim became really immortal with his martyr death. Maybe Socrates did not even have the aim to defend himself with him well-structured speech full of small references as he already knew what would happen at the end of the trial. His real aim could not have been else than to be remembered by the posterity.^[57] The philosopher wisely saw that due to the acts of the Thirty Tyrants his death could provide calmness to the city and finally their can get revenge. A sculptor commemorates himself, a philosopher who surprisingly only presents his thinking in speech and cannot choose any other tool to leave his work to the posterity than his own life. Socrates made his art authentic with his whole life, especially with his death. I am not saying anything else than that the famous victim of the destroyed democracy was so wise that they used the Athenians to put a crown to his oeuvre. Socrates really became immortal. In the years, centuries after the trial several philosophical movements protected his memory. Plato established his school, the Academy based on his respect of Socrates,^[58] and in the era of Hellenism the popular philosophical tendencies all based their system on the teachings of Socrates.^[59]

[56] „So long as Critias and Alcibiades were together with Socrates, they were able, with his help to master these desires.” Xenophon, *Memorabilia*, I, 2.

[57] Plato, op. cit. 41.d-e. And so I am not really so angry with the people who convicted me, and with the prosecution—although this is not what they had in mind when they accused and convicted me; they thought they were going to harm me; I do have the right to hold that against them. [41e] I have this one request of them: when my sons come of age, be hard on them, giving them just the same kind of trouble that I gave you—if they seem to you to worry more about money or anything rather than excellence, and if they think they amount to something when they don't, keep after them, just as I did with you, that they don't worry about the right things, and that they think they amount to something when they are really worthless. And if you do this, you will be treating us justly, myself and my sons. But now it is already time to go away, I to die, you to live; but which of us goes to the better fate, that is dark to us all—except god.”

[58] Plato's Academy was founded in 387 BC. and emperor Iustitian closed it in 529.

[59] The most well-known Socratic tendencies are the cynic, the Cyrenaics and the Megaras. Their

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