

Lecture One: Truth

Reading: Plato, *Apology*

This short dialogue is a record of the defense speech at Socrates' trial. Socrates (470-399 BC) was charged with the crimes of believing in false gods and corrupting the youth. He was tried and convicted by a jury of 501 citizens and executed a month later.

Socrates

Quotes:

[By questioning those who had a reputation for knowledge] "I found that those who had the highest reputation were nearly the most deficient, while those who were thought to be inferior were more knowledgeable."

"I withdrew and said to myself: 'I am wiser than this man; it is likely that neither of us knows anything worthwhile, but he thinks he knows something when he does not, whereas when I do not know, neither do I think I know; so I am likely to be wiser than he to this small extent, that I do not think I know what I do not know.'"

"What is probably, gentlemen, is that in fact the oracle is using my name as an example, as if he said: 'This man among you, mortals, is wisest who, like Socrates, understands that his wisdom is worthless.'"

"It is the greatest good for a person to discuss virtue every day . . . for the unexamined life is not worth living for human beings."

"I go around doing nothing but persuading both young and old among you not to care for your body or your wealth in preference to or as strongly as for the best possible state of your soul."

"I am that gadfly which the god has given the city and all day long and in all places am always fastening upon you, arousing and persuading and reproaching you. You will not easily find another like me."

"You are wrong if you believe that by killing people you will prevent anyone from reproaching you for not living in the right way. To escape such tests is neither possible nor good, but it is best and easiest not to discredit others but to prepare oneself to be as good as possible."

"Keep this one truth in mind, that a good person cannot be harmed either in life or in death."

### Discussion Questions

1. What gives the most meaning to your life?
2. What might you do to live a more examined life?
3. Do you think it is true that a good person cannot be harmed?
4. Think about the people you trust most. Are they always truthful? Are they the most knowledgeable?
5. How would Socrates suggest we deal with misinformation?