

Socrates Had It Coming

In the course of Western Civilization, there have been two trials ending in a sentence of death imposed upon two individuals later deemed grossly unfair and unjust by the verdict of history. One trial was that of Jesus Christ, the other that of Socrates.

Of course, it can be said with justification that each man steered a course that ended with a fatal termination from the power structure of the time.

It was Jesus' destiny.

It was Socrates' choice.

Both philosophers and theologians, by defining proper moral conduct, carry a political message, a message apt to rub the ruling power structure's nose in its own mess. Honesty is a dangerous double-edged sword wielded by a messenger of truth speaking to power. Christ defined and built a new moral order. All Socrates ever accomplished was questioning and probing the democratic beliefs of his day. He refused to define proper behavior and what should be done by government. Socrates built nothing, wrote nothing; instead he strove to destroy the legitimacy of free men ruling themselves, brown-nosed to concepts of authoritarian rule, and thus was never more than a moral vandal and graffititagger to the social-order Parthenon of fifth century Athens, perhaps the most brilliant civilization ever seen on this planet.

Both Christ and Socrates were killed at the orders of lesser men for what they said. The story of Jesus Christ and the world in which he lived are well known. Now let us look at Socrates, the world's first "intellectual" and the stage he acted upon.

Fifth Century B.C. Athens was the world's first and most brilliant democracy. From being governed by kings, one of them the legendary hero Theseus, it had gradually opened the franchise from an oligarchy of nobles and rich landowners to where even poor men could serve on the Council of 500 or on the jury. Every citizen was expected to govern and perform military service for his city. Athens also had a middle class, the backbone of all democracies, who were expected to arm themselves and serve as hoplites, heavy infantrymen in a phalanx. This middle class carried arms and underwent military training, both to protect their government and their rights.

Late in the sixth century, the Persians in trying to expand their empire came in contact with the Greeks. The Greeks, loving their freedom, helped their cousins living in Asia Minor resist the Persians. The Persians tried to conquer and punish the Athenians and Spartans who had interfered in their goals of empire.

Both the Athenians and the Spartans successfully resisted the Persians and in a number of battles on land and at sea eventually drove the Persians out of Europe and back to Asia Minor. Athens was not able to grow enough grain to feed her people. So the population grew olives and grapes and exported their wares and silver all over the known world. Thus Athens became a trading maritime, then a sea power.

Sparta, on the other hand, was a militaristic state, ruled by principles opposite to those of Athens. The land was fertile. The Spartans enslaved the non-Dorian population and made them grow food for the Spartans. In order to guard against slave revolts, Sparta became a

police state, and the free citizens were trained in the arts of war from the age of seven. At 30, a Spartan citizen was allowed to live in his own house, but his male children belonged to the state, to train a new generation as soldiers.

Thus Sparta was not a trading state. Its coins were made of iron. Its soldiers were the best in Greece. Sparta did not produce a single poet, writer, or artist. In order to keep some of its slaves docile, no man could live free.

When the Athenians and Spartans faced a common enemy, they were allies. Once the Persians were driven from the scene, both city-states, unable to understand the other, became first rivals and then enemies. Out of alliances between the various city-states forged during the Persian wars, came the bloody fraternal conflict known as the Peloponnesian War (431-404 B.C.)

The Athenians were in charge of the naval organization known as the Delian League. The Spartans led the armies of Peloponnesian League. Picture the Peloponnesian War as equivalent to a naval America in conflict with a land-based Russia, or a Great Britain at war with Germany. It would be an apt comparison, because that is the way the war was fought; politically, economically, and morally for 27 years.

And Socrates lived in Athens, was a citizen there, and in every utterance he is recorded to have said, openly preferred the tyranny of the Spartans over the democracy of the Athenians, much in the same way socialist "intellectuals" without intellect live among us today, sucking up to the notions of a dictatorship of the proletariat, a dictatorship that will make common cause with the intellectuals to rule the common herd of common man.

Socrates was a moral and intellectual traitor. He lived and died to destroy the country which gave him birth.

It took a while for easygoing Athens to get Socrates' number. Socrates was the town character, as mentioned in Aristophanes's *"The Clouds."* While a member of the middle class, he was on good terms with Pericles, the ruling aristocrat voted the first strategos (general) for over 30 years. Socrates, the perfect snob, surrounded himself with the gilded aristocratic youth of Athens.

But there is a limit to even the most patient of governments. When a legitimate government is strong, it can afford to ignore pinpricks of ridicule. But after Athens lost her empire by losing the Peloponnesian War and had undergone two oligarchic reigns of terror at the hands of the gilded, Socratified rich kids, her patience with Socrates ended.

Socrates was charged in 399 B.C. with "impiety against the gods of the city" and with "corrupting the young." He was guilty on all counts.

On the count of impiety against the gods of the city, the charges pertained not to bad-mouthing Zeus, but to Socrates' love for dictatorship and disdain for democracy. After having fought wars against tyrants -- foreign and domestic -- Athens felt that she had to protect herself from the contaminating sources of bloodshed, death, and poverty. And lest we condemn Athens, was it not Abraham Lincoln who protested against "shooting the 16 year old deserter" and then "not harming a hair on the head of the wily old agitator" who egged him on?

Socrates' basic premise of government -- according to Xenophon's *"Memorabilia"* -- was "that it is the business of the ruler to give orders and of the ruled to obey." So the ruler

should have total, unaccounted power.

And who should the rulers be? "Kings and rulers are not those who hold the scepter." Scratch conventional monarchy. Certainly not "those who are chosen by the multitude." Ick, not nowhere near a democracy. Shudder, elitist shudder, to think of the "herd" trying to rule themselves. "Nor on those whom the lot falls." Athens chose by lot from out among the democratic herd those who served on the expediting committees of a given day. Socrates did not like Athenian democracy at all, not even when tempered by chance. "Nor those who owe their power to force or deception." So much for traditional musclebound tyrants. The best form of government is by "kings and rulers," "those who know how to rule."

After hearing this, it's not too difficult to figure out where Plato got his notions of rule by "philosopher-kings." Absolute rule by so-called intellectuals who know what is best for the rest of us, over we who are nothing but sheep to be used for the good of the elites who would rule us.

Socrates was the world's first killer intellectual, the world's first proponent of "dictatorship of the proletariat," the first apologist for Leninism, and the first colonist of the nasty lot of moral squatters on free soil who infiltrate and destroy the social order of free men.

Athens would have spared herself a lot of trouble if she had bestirred herself to write Socrates' name on broken potsherds -- the ostracism -- branded the Spartan equivalent of the hammer-and-sickle and a swastika on his butt, and given him a no-expenses paid, free, ten-year trip to Sparta where he could have enjoyed the life of a menial helot under a system he supposedly admired.

But no, the Athenians, a relatively decent lot, got tricked into indulging Socrates' death wish, and Socratic intellectuals have been whining up the sad fate of this moral criminal ever since.

The second charge against Socrates, that he had corrupted the youth of Athens, was even more damning. The foremost examples of the gilded youth he led astray was Alcibiades and Critias, although Socrates' effect on the rich young aristocratic fops was already mentioned in Aristophanes' *"The Birds,"* written in 414 B.C., fifteen years before he was called to account:

Why, till ye built this city in the air; _____ line 1280
All men had gone Laconian-mad; they went __ [Spartan-mad]
Long-haired, half-starved, unwashed, Socratified,
With scytales in their hands; but Oh the change!
They are all bird-mad now, and imitate _____ line 1284

Aristophanes made fun of the dandies with their Spartan habits, dress, and even carrying their little Spartan secret police short clubs about town, but this was before the rich kids turned mean. When he mentions the intellectual beliefs of the Athenian "Spur Posse" as being "Socratified" he refers to their instilled beliefs that they were better than everyone else and that the poor and middle class were disposable human beings they could use with impunity.

One rich kid named Alcibiades was a relative of Pericles and raised in Pericles' own

household. Brilliant, handsome, rich, and of noble birth, Alcibiades had it all, except for a good character. As a general, he betrayed Athens, fled to Sparta, knocked up a Spartan king's wife and was kicked out of Sparta as a troublemaker, ran back to Athens, got elected general again, betrayed Athens again and was kicked out, then fled to Persia where he was killed upon the orders of another Athenian rich kid named Critias who set up a dictatorship backed by the Spartans. The Athenians loved Alcibiades, but nobody could trust him.

Alcibiades was Socrates' favorite pupil. Socrates saved his life on a battlefield. But the lesson Alcibiades learned from Socrates was that the rulers have no duty to their country; that their ambitions and desires come ahead of the common herd's well-being and lives. Alcibiades was a Socratified "superman."

The other pupil of Socrates mentioned in this indictment was Critias. Critias was Plato's uncle and Plato wrote a dialogue about him. In 411, an aristocratic over-throw of the Athenian democracy occurred and Athens lived in a state of terror for four months until they were able to restore a democracy. In 404, Athens lost the Peloponnesian war and the Spartans installed a puppet government of the aristocratic "Socratified" element.

The leader of The Thirty, Critias, was the Athenian Robespierre. He killed and murdered as many Athenians from the middle and poor classes as the Spartans had killed in battle over the last ten years of the war. The democratic element fled Athens and waged a civil war and retook the city the next year. To have it said that you had stayed in the city was thereafter a mark of reproach.

But a mark of reproach was all it was, because Athens did one thing not done before or since -- it forgave. An amnesty was offered. Even the aristocrats were offered amnesty without an acre of their lands being confiscated or a copper obol of their money seized. They were not loved, they were not respected, but they were allowed to live in peace.

Critias and another leader of The Thirty, Plato's uncle Charmides, a man Socrates urged to go into government, didn't live to see the armistice. Before they were overthrown, like Nazis seeking refuge in South America, the Thirty carved out a temporary refuge in the small village Eleusis, where they murdered 300 of the male citizens under color of law, having forced an Athenian assembly to vote in a death sentence without trial. Soon afterwards, Critias and Charmides were killed in battle and the amnesty declared.

The aristocrats left for Eleusis and used their money to buy mercenaries to attack Athens. The alarmed Athenians executed the ringleaders, but still extended the amnesty to the rest. Finally, in 401 B.C., two years before Socrates' trial and death, a weary, tired peace came to Athens, who had lost a war, her empire, and many of her citizens.

Socrates remained in Athens and kept his mouth shut when mildly threatened by his Socratified pupils of The Thirty.

Plato does not allude to these matters for some reason. He was 25 years old, military age, and was urged to share in his uncle's and first cousin's government, but like so many "intellectuals," he wussed out. He preferred government by "philosopher-kings" in a book, but never did anything to actually attain it.

So now Athens is as whopped as a cut dog. Her walls have been torn down by order of the victorious Spartans and she has no navy. A civil war between rich and poor has

weakened her social cohesion and confidence among her populace. And here comes Socrates, an intellectual Bourbon having remembered everything and learning nothing, preaching the gospel and glories of Spartan style despotism and wanting to teach a new generation of rich kids to despise their elders and their social order.

Athens had had enough.

Athens put Socrates on trial in 399 B.C. when he was 70, a ripe old age considering the times. If Socrates had put on a defense of demanding that Athens live up to its high ideals, perhaps he might have only been ostracized for ten years, a fate that had happened to both good and bad men before him. But instead, in accordance with his wanting to destroy the moral legitimacy of a free government by using its judicial system to fulfill his death wish, he baited both the jury to find him guilty and to punish him with death.

Socrates, who always said that he knew nothing while he asked his destructively critical questions boasted about how the Oracle at Delphi declared that Socrates was the wisest, most free, just, and prudent man in the world. In other words, "I am a fool, but I know I'm a fool and that makes me smarter than you." The jury convicted him on both counts. Then Socrates asked that his penalty be that he be declared a civic hero and fed at the public table for life! That did not go over too well. The jury, incensed, gave out the death penalty.

One of Socrates' disciples suggested a jailbreak and escape, with the tacit connivance of the authorities who just wanted him gone, but Socrates refused. So he drank the hemlock while he put on the airs of a martyr. After all that he had done for democratic Athens, this is the thanks he got! Christ wept over Jerusalem, but Socrates shed not a tear for Athens.

Socrates' most famous pupil, Plato, figured out the heat was on, so he traveled abroad for 12 years, living on his inherited money. Then when the stink cleared, he gave up his notions of becoming a playwright and instead wrote up numerous books about his leading man, Socrates. He formed an academy, wherein his most gifted student, Aristotle, studied. Of course, Aristotle formed his own conclusions, most of which differed from Plato's. No philosopher kings for Aristotle! Aristotle's royal pupil was Alexander the Great.

Read Plato, Aristotle, Xenophon, Aristophanes yourself to judge how a man like Socrates acted upon the Athenian stage. Fifth century Athens was possibly the brightest and most beautiful civilization that ever graced this planet. Fourth century Athens did not shine as brightly, and afterwards Athens did not produce any more great men or institutions. Athenians became like the Mayans, living in stone huts outside the splendid ruins of their ancestors. Socrates should bear some of the blame for this.

But let this article close with the judgement of another man of Socrates' generation, the Greek playwright Euripides, "the philosopher of the stage," as he was known by his contemporaries. Euripides wrote with feeling and humanity about the tragic follies of powerful people who forgot to act with decency and the punishment the gods brought down on them for their misconduct. Character determined destiny. With Euripides began Western Civilization's worthy portrayal of women and the poor. Euripides, while of noble family, was a democrat in the best, most responsible sense of the word.

In one of his lost plays, *The Auge*, Euripides has one character say in the few lines which survive:

"Cursed be all those who rejoice to see the city in the hands of a single man or under the yoke of a few men! The name of a freeman is the most precious of titles: to possess it is to have much, even when one has little."

Yes, cursed be Socrates, Plato, and all the "intellectual" petty Hitlers, Stalins, FDRs and other big-government butt kissers since.