

# Socrates

## Greek philosopher

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## Socrates' criticism of democracy

Socrates' analysis of the hatred he has incurred is one part of a larger theme that he dwells on throughout his speech. Athens is a democracy, a city in which the many are the dominant power in politics, and it can therefore be expected to have all the vices of the many. Because most people hate to be tested in argument, they will always take action of some sort against those who provoke them with questions. But that is not the only accusation Socrates brings forward against his city and its politics. He tells his democratic audience that he was right to have withdrawn from political life, because a good person who fights for [justice](#) in a democracy will be killed. In his cross-examination of Meletus, he insists that only a few people can acquire the knowledge necessary for improving the young of any species, and that the many will inevitably do a poor job. He criticizes the Assembly for its illegal actions and the Athenian courts for the ease with which matters of justice are distorted by emotional pleading. Socrates implies that the very nature of democracy makes it a corrupt political system. Bitter experience has taught him that most people rest content with a superficial understanding of the most urgent human questions. When they are given great power, their shallowness inevitably leads to injustice.

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## The charge of impiety



Socrates spends a large part of his speech trying to persuade his fellow citizens that he is indeed a pious man, because his philosophical mission has been carried out in obedience to the god who presides at [Delphi](#). It is remarkable that this is nearly the only positive argument he offers, in Plato's Apology, to support his claim that he is a pious man. The only other evidence he supplies is introduced only because Meletus, upon cross-examination, asserts that Socrates believes that there are no gods or divinities at all, an accusation far more sweeping than—and indeed

contradictory to—the official indictment, which asserted that Socrates did not acknowledge the gods recognized by the city but instead believed in different and new gods. Socrates quickly points out the absurdity of this new accusation. Meletus, he notes, has referred in his speech to a certain strange divinity (daimon) who comes to Socrates to give him advice. Presumably Meletus has offered this as evidence that Socrates believes in new gods that are different