

# PREPARATION TASK

Platon's apology of Socrates & Platon's Protagoras

Johannes Hjalmarsson, PhD student

Ethics of technology and science pt II

Department of electrical engineering

2020-11-17

## Platon's apology of Socrates

In the text "Platon's apology of Socrates" (or "death of Socrates") the reader gets to follow Socrates during his trial in Athens, he is prosecuted for teaching atheism as a non-approved teacher. Indirectly, he is prosecuted for questioning the current ideal of religion, knowledge, and ethics.

Without going into the details about what Socrates preaches, it is possible from the text to understand that Socrates has a different point of view regarding wisdom, knowledge and moral than the common attitude. This is certainly not a new phenomenon, and commonly appears during the history and in the everyday life: when new and "strange" ideas are raised that strongly affect the section of people with a lot of power it creates a strong battle to maintain the current order.

However, I think that this story has several possible interpretations that relate to the present way of conducting research within technology and science. Firstly, I recognize the method that Socrates uses during his mission of finding a wiser man than himself. It can be directly compared to how a standard hypothesis should be approached: "the hypothesis can be said to be true only if it cannot be proven the opposite". Further, the questioning of the poets, artisans etc of their own work is also something that can be related to the research topic: the critical review of research results. It is of great importance that researchers and research results are being reviewed to ensure the high quality of study and education.

Considering the more abstract ethics in this story, I think that this quote is interesting to raise:

*"... Some one will say: And are you not ashamed, Socrates, of a course of life which is likely to bring you to an untimely end? To him I may fairly answer: There you are mistaken: a man who is good for anything ought not to calculate the change of living or dying; he ought only to consider whether in doing anything he is doing right or wrong – acting the part of a good man or of a bad..."*

This quote from Socrates reveals some of the information regarding his moral compass, and I think that his non-consequential moral was vastly different from the people of his time that he encountered. His ethical fight eventually ended up in a voting session in court where the majority of the judges disagreed with Socrates, but not doing so would be in conflict with his moral since the only right thing for him would be to stand up for his opinion and point of view of wisdom.

## Platon's Protagoras

This text starts with the meeting of Socrates and his companion, where Socrates accounts for his earlier meeting with Hippocrates and how they eventually decided to go for a meeting with Protagoras and his company. The main dialogue of the text consists of the argumentation between Socrates and Protagoras regarding the philosophical standpoint whether virtue is the same as knowledge or not, but also regarding whether the five mentioned virtues are similar or not.

After reading this text, I cannot stop thinking about the two different ways of arguing Socrates and Protagoras are using: Socrates trying to find a reliable basis to ground his arguments with (e.g. when he asks his friend about the meaning of the word "hard"), but also his way of questioning the mindset of Protagoras. Protagoras on the other hand, trying to increase the reliability of his arguments using the fact that he is a recognized person within the area and has gotten a lot of experience during the years. These two approaches are different, but at the same time examples of both be found in our everyday life where people base arguments on either facts or experience. I think that the dialogue reaches its climax when Protagoras and Socrates almost break up the discussion during to the different ways of arguing – because this is such an important aspect when trying to moderate a scientific discussion: that all involved parts follow the same rules and talks the same language.

The scientific discussion is remarkably different from a political discussion where various aspects, senses and feelings can be included. Protagoras has obviously made his career by convincing people rather than presenting reliable facts or evidence. At the present time, the political and scientific situation were of a completely different character compared to today's – but Socrates reminds us very much of the scientist that enters a discussion with a critical mindset.

Considering some more abstract ethical aspects from this text, I think that one of the main topics to raise is critical thinking. But two other topics that are important to highlight as well are the awareness and responsibility aspects of this matter. Socrates has a strong moral compass (which appears to be non-consequential) and as the dialogue with Protagoras begins, he quickly gets aware of the situation and starts to question his opinions. The responsibility aspect gets visible when one of the persons from the audience decides to act when the discussion is about to end mid-through, with the aim to fulfil the discussion and argumentation. Apparently, this person found an ethical responsibility to make sure that the discussion did not end due to the unwillingness of Socrates and Protagoras to finish the debate from their own will.