



Ancient Fanfiction: Socrates

By Zac Copeland-Greene

Socrates stared at the wall of the prison cell. He had grown accustomed to the sight of this wall during the few days he had dwelled there. The philosopher's execution had been delayed by a religious observance that required the city of Athens to remain pure, which left Socrates to await his death in a cell. He had not run, or accepted the help of his friends in bribing the guards, but instead he just sat in his cell, patiently awaiting the day he would die. He had filled his final days just like he filled those of the rest of his life: discussing truth and justice with his friends.

But then the holy ship of Apollo returned from Delos, bringing with it the end of the festival and the execution of Socrates. He turned his gaze away from the wall to look at his friends one last time. They were weeping and crying out that it was just not fair, yet Socrates himself was not crying. There was a serenity to his expression. Only moments before they had questioned this odd expression for a man facing death, but Socrates had merely smiled and said "The philosopher does not fear death. I have practiced for this day all my life. Where I am going, truth awaits me."

"Don't talk too much," the executioner interrupted. "It makes the poison less effective," he said as he handed Socrates the cup of hemlock. But as Socrates raised the poison to his lips, he did not turn away. He did not look back to his trial in front of the Athenian jury that had accused him of corrupting the city's youth. He did not think back to how he had told them of the service he had done in teaching the young men of the city to question and think for themselves. He did not go back to how they had demanded the death penalty for such an arrogant reply. Instead, Socrates looked forward to what was yet to come for his soul.



It was Socrates' feet that went numb first from the hemlock, so he lay down as the lack of sensation slowly trickled up his legs. But before it had climbed all the way to his mind, Socrates turned to face his friends. After a moment of silence, the final words of the great philosopher Socrates were spoken: "Crito, my boy, we should sacrifice a rooster. Make sure you don't forget."

Context:

Socrates was a philosopher who lived in Athens during the 5th Century BCE. Although Socrates never wrote any philosophical works himself, he has been immortalised as the principal character in the dialogues of Plato. Socrates spent his life challenging the young men of Athens about their knowledge of concepts like beauty or justice, claiming that neither he nor anyone else could truly know or define them. In 399 Socrates was put on trial for corrupting the youth and not believing in the gods of the city. After being found guilty, he was shortly executed.

Resources:

About Socrates: <https://www.ancient.eu/socrates/>

<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2010/oct/17/socrates-philosopher-man-for-our-times>

Read Plato's account of Socrates' death: <http://classics.mit.edu/Plato/phaedo.html>