

## Introduction to the Great Book of the Western World

As I begin my reading of these Great Books of the Western world, I am following the 10 volume guide. This guide does not take one volume by volume, but rather attempts to focus on principles and discussions much as Socrates did in Ancient Athens (about 339 B.C.).

As I have been evolving as I age and have become more outspoken, I am becoming, even at this late stage more politically active and outspoken. As my business interests wane, partially due to my inability to convince companies to retain my services (do I truly threaten them with my expertise?) I have more time to devote to study and family.

Maybe it is just timing or fate, but as I have become more politically outspoken it is probably right that the guides begin with Socrates and the Plato dialogues. Part of the introduction discusses the activities necessary for a successful democracy. As in ancient Athens and the Greek state, citizens were constantly encouraged to openly discuss topics; thus the fame of the Greek Senate.

In our United States of America, we are not required to be experts in everything. One of the major premises, without which the whole democratic republic structure must collapse, is that the People will be informed enough, intelligent enough, and interested enough to judge the policies proposed to them by those whom they have chosen (elected to office), with information, intelligence and interest, to represent them.

I am not sure that many of our population actually can meet these criteria as they often rely on perverse and biased journalists, once thought to be impartial in the presentation and factual reporting, that bombard us in print, TV and the Net.

### My First Reading

My first reading started with Plato. It begins with the trial of Socrates and of his last days in prison. Some thoughts and quotes from Plato's *Apology* and *Crito*.

The Apology is the discourse of Socrates to his accusers in the Athenian Senate. He stands accused of corrupting the youth of Athens by challenging the wisdom of the powers that be. Given that the God of Delphi speaking through the Pythian prophetess said that there was no man wiser than Socrates (as witnessed by Chaerephon [being deceased] who's brother was attending the trial of Socrates), the powerful elite of Athens was out to discredit Socrates.

Socrates states: *"I tell you that virtue is not given by money, but that from virtue comes money and every other good of man, public as well as private"* Further along in the dialogue Socrates again discusses virtue: *"...I say again that daily to discourse about virtue, and of those other things about which you hear me examining myself and others, is the greatest good of man and that **the unexamined life is not worth living...**"*.

I believe that Socrates was trying to convey that a life of virtue and truth was the ultimate pursuit. Left unexamined, individuals wander around either led by the more powerful by intimidation or in ignorant bliss. Neither situation is one that should be acceptable, but as individual laziness and lethargy

overtakes the individual who has been granted the privilege to be a Citizen of these United States of America, it seems to have become a common state of individual affairs.

When facing his ultimate sentencing of death, Socrates continues: “*Wherefore, O judges, be of good cheer about death, and know of a certainty, that no evil can happen to a good man, either in life or after death*”. He believes that a 'good man' can suffer no evil unless he allows himself to surrender to those who wish to do him harm. Taking solace in the aspect of a future beyond death, I believe Socrates was accepting the certainty of his ultimate sentencing by those too jealous of his following or ignorant of his intent. Spreading truth by challenging the status quo, asking questions to make one think and examine his/her life and questioning unfair or improperly legislated laws or the application thereof, was his only crime.

In the final words of the Apology, Socrates states: “*The hour of departure has arrived, and we go our ways – I to die, and you to live. Which is better God only knows.*” As this concludes the Apology, we are led to the dialogue Plato wrote of the discussion between Socrates and his friend and benefactor, Crito.

In this short dialogue, Crito has come to offer Socrates a 'way out' of his predicament. As Socrates has accepted the sentence of death and refused to suggest banishment during his trial (see the Apology), his friend is basically offering to break him out of jail and take him to another country to live out his life. Socrates presents a detailed dialogue and ultimately refuses to flee; preferring to accept his verdict, even though it is most apparently unjust, and die. Socrates ends the discussion thus: “*Leave me then, Crito, to fulfill the will of God, and to follow whither he leads.*”.

Even though this took place over 300 years before Christ, there are parallels in today's society. The Founding Fathers of the USA certainly knew of Plato, most of them were learned scholars and well educated. The unjust charges brought by the rich and powerful were basically 'trumped up' and based on nonsensical. Still Socrates died. Would he have lived and contributed much more, given his advanced age (especially for the period). Who is to judge? It brings to mind the often spurious charges brought out in today's biased media. False accusations can ruin a life or disparage a company or product; often with absolutely NO substantiation. The once 'Free Press' is now no more than a propaganda arm of the liberal left (socialist and communist influenced) politically powerful elite.

Freedoms have eroded. We have no Socrates or other leader on today's scene. No leadership for Truth, Justice and the American Way. Where are the leaders, the independent thinkers, the individuals who will speak out against the wrongs done by the rich and powerful. Maybe they are US?