

Faculty panel on Plato's *The Apology of Socrates*

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Humanities Professor Herman Sinaiko

Moderator: Kendall Sharp

Question 2: Do human beings need education in order to become human? Is it possible for a civilized society to form in the absence of laws? Herman Sinaiko returns to the issue of education raised in his opening remarks.

Sinaiko: To live in a community means to have to obey the law, and is it possible that Socrates is saying, "We really do need two kinds of excellence." We do need to live in communities. We cannot achieve our full humanity so to speak, in a state of nature. We need the kind of established set of rules, customs, ways of living if you will, even a kind of economic system which provides for needs and goods to let us live a reasonable life. After all, Socrates had a house, he had a wife, he had kids. He lived in this law-abiding town for the most part. And is that not necessary for us to achieve our full humanity? Quite rightly, it isn't a matter of choosing one or another, it may well be figuring out how to live with both. Is that not clear that in some sense, none of us would want to live in a world without any constraints on our behavior? The law says you cannot drive 70 mph down the Outer Drive without getting a ticket. But surely you don't want to live in a city where people have cars and there no speed limits, no traffic laws, where you can do anything you want?

All I'm saying is that it may well be that education is necessary, in some form or another, and it may well be that we need education both to be a citizen and to be a human being, and there may be a tension in that, that we all feel. The person who spoke before you raised the question of an unjust law. We all acknowledge that there may be such things. There could be a law in a community which violates our sense of justice. Not every law simply by virtue of being a law is a good law. If the law says in Soviet Russia, turn your

parents into the authorities if they talk in favor of private property, or in Nazi Germany says turn a Jew in if you know that there's a Jew living down the block, then we all agree that there are problems. There can be problems. There was a law in the southern United States that made a distinction between blacks and whites and said blacks do not have the same rights to vote, to own property, etc., as whites do. We all agreed we had to have an enormous civil rights struggle for many years, to establish full legal, equal rights for black citizens. So the problem is not simply a question of being human in opposition to being in a community, it's somehow or other to get the two together. If Socrates is defending himself against the charges that are made against him by Anytus, Meletus and Lycon, and he's defending his way of life, which is perfectly right, it's also true that in some sense he's trying to defend the city against the possibility that the city is going to do something unjust in condemning him. The city needs to understand that it is capable of an injustice. And that's a problem with democracy, that it can do that kind of thing.