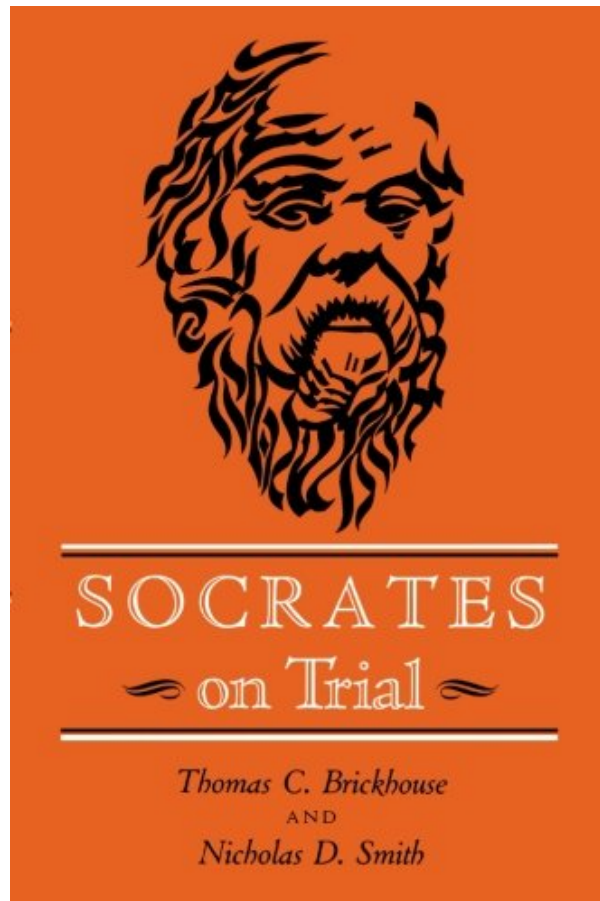


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Thomas Brickhouse and Nicholas Smith offer a comprehensive historical and philosophical interpretation of, and commentary on, one of Plato's most widely read works, the Apology of Socrates. Virtually every modern interpretation characterizes some part of what Socrates says in the Apology as purposefully irrelevant or even antithetical to convincing the jury to acquit him at his trial. This book, by contrast, argues persuasively that Socrates offers a sincere and well-reasoned defense against the charges he faces. First, the authors establish a consensus of ancient reports about Socrates' moral and religious principles and show that these prohibit him from needlessly risking the condemnation of the jury. Second, they consider each specific claim made by Socrates in the Apology and show how each can be construed as an honest effort to inform the jurors of the truth and to convince them of his blamelessness. The arguments of this book are informed by a critical review of the scholarly literature and careful attention to the philosophy expressed in Plato's other early dialogues.

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Exhaustive detail fills this Brickhouse & Smith book, neglecting Socrates the person. This is yet another philosophy book that reduces Socrates to a mere series of arguments. Concerned with synthesizing and/or refuting interpretations of other scholars, this book joins the several that fail to present the trial of Socrates in

cultural context. The authors also fail to show the dissident character of Socrates, choosing instead to bury him under a mound of philosophical abstractions. Undervalued in this book is Socrates the civil disobedient. The reader is led to think that this great ironic philosopher, as represented in Plato's CRITO, was opposed to civil disobedience. Misreading the CRITO, this book portrays Socrates as a mere apologist for the status quo rather than the political dissident that he actually was. If the Socrates of history depicted in this book is the true one, he probably would not have been tried and executed.

Like many philosophy books, this work is not reader-friendly, making one wade through myriad sections and subsections.

A far better book is the recent one by James Colaiaco, entitled SOCRATES AGAINST ATHENS. Praised for its clarity and elegant prose style, Colaiaco's book captures the drama of Socrates' trial better than any other one, and makes the dissenting philosopher relevant for today. As Colaiaco persuasively argues, Socrates represents a radically new conception of a hero-- the hero as philosopher. Colaiaco's account of the Socrates in Plato's CRITO is illuminating and accurate, with due appreciation for Socrates' brilliant use of irony. Looking for the best book on the trial of Socrates? Read Colaiaco's.

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