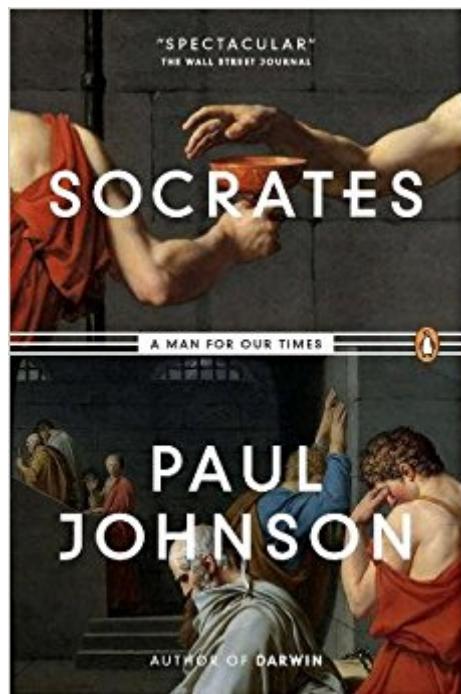


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# Socrates: A Man For Our Times



## Synopsis

“Spectacular . . . A delight to read.” The Wall Street Journal From bestselling biographer and historian Paul Johnson, a brilliant portrait of Socrates, the founding father of philosophyIn his highly acclaimed style, historian Paul Johnson masterfully disentangles centuries of scarce sources to offer a riveting account of Socrates, who is often hailed as the most important thinker of all time. Johnson provides a compelling picture of Athens in the fifth century BCE, and of the people Socrates reciprocally delighted in, as well as many enlightening and intimate analyses of specific aspects of his personality. Enchantingly portraying “the sheer power of Socrates’s mind, and its unique combination of steel, subtlety, and frivolity,” Paul Johnson captures the vast and intriguing life of a man who did nothing less than supply the basic apparatus of the human mind.

## Book Information

Paperback: 224 pages

Publisher: Penguin Books; Reprint edition (November 27, 2012)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0143122215

ISBN-13: 978-0143122210

Product Dimensions: 5 x 0.7 x 7.9 inches

Shipping Weight: 5.6 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.2 out of 5 stars 72 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #115,258 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #19 in Books > Biographies & Memoirs > Historical > Europe > Greece #58 in Books > Biographies & Memoirs > Professionals & Academics > Philosophers #111 in Books > History > Ancient Civilizations > Greece

## Customer Reviews

Praise for Socrates by Paul Johnson: “An admirably concise view of a remarkable life whose influence remains central to the foundations of Western thought.” Publishers Weekly “[Johnson’s] genuine love of the demos makes him an all-too-rare figure in today’s chattering classes.” First Things “Johnson writes more concisely than most scholars and brings to his prose a wealth of anecdote and asides unknown to most academics. His Socrates comes alive not through arguments over Platonic dating or Pythagorean influence, but by wit and allusion to Jane Austen novels, Samuel Johnson, John

Maynard Keynes, firsthand remembrances of Winston Churchill's speeches and Richard Dawkins. A valuable overview. • *Washington Times* "Robust." • *The New Republic* "With effortless erudition, Paul Johnson brings to life the world of the great philosopher." • *Women's Wear Daily* "A succinct, useful exploration of life in ancient Athens and of the great philosopher's essential beliefs." • *Kirkus Reviews* "A wonderfully readable account of life in Athens, its political quarrels, and its failures. As good as a murder mystery, Johnson's narrative is exciting." • *Library Journal* "Enlightening.... Johnson disentangles centuries of scarce and questionable sources to offer a riveting account of a homely but charismatic middle-class man whose ideas still shape the way we decide how to act, and how we fathom the notion of body and soul." • *History Book Club* "Johnson is an accomplished historian and writer with a fluid, unpretentious style and an honest voice. These gifts, which have made his 12 previous books enjoyable and popular, are no less evident in Socrates." • *The Washington Independent Review of Books* "This snappy biography goes down easy while offering a full portrait of Socrates—the man, the thinker, the celebrity—and the world he lived in." • *Zocalo Public Square* "Spectacular...a delight to read." • *The Wall Street Journal*

Paul Johnson's many books, including *A History of Christianity*, *A History of the Jews*, *Modern Times*, *Churchill*, and *Napoleon: A Penguin Life*, have been hailed as masterpieces of historical analysis. He is a regular columnist for *Forbes* and *The Spectator*, and his work has also appeared in *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, and many others publications. He lives in London.

Paul Johnson has a unique ability to summarize a topic in a brief but very informative manner. Having enjoyed his bios of Napoleon and Churchill, I jumped on this when I saw it, and I was not disappointed. As usual, Johnson's text reads easily. The editing of my Kindle edition was a little sloppy in places, but not so bad as to hamper my enjoyment of the book. Johnson covers Socrates' life well, and the reader comes away with a good feel for who he was--a physically unattractive man who believed in Athens and its people and who sought to bring out the best in them. Thanks to his student, Plato, we know what Socrates believed and how he taught. According to Johnson, Socrates was a highly principled man who loved Athens, fought for Athens, taught Athenians of all levels of society and paved the way for monotheism. In the end, he was unjustly sentenced to death, but died a noble death continuing to exemplify the principles he treasured. In the process, Socrates became

the most influential philosopher of all time. The primary question that Johnson left unanswered for me was how Socrates supported himself. It is clear that Socrates lived a simple life, but it is unclear exactly how Socrates actually supported even his minimal needs. This is an excellent introduction to Socrates. Highly recommended.

I actually found this book to be good. You have to keep in mind that this book is largely an interpretation of who Socrates might have been based upon what little evidence we have. I'm not saying I agree with the author's interpretation entirely, but I enjoyed the theory. One reviewer commented that the author claimed Socrates would've voted Republican. I didn't find that anywhere. I did notice that the author felt Socrates was a conservative person, and from that maybe some readers thought the writer was suggesting something else. I bought this book because so little is out there about a father of Western philosophy, a person who deeply influenced Plato and some of the other most important figures of ancient times. I really wish I could've met Socrates, and the author gave me a taste of what that might've been like. The older I get, the more I agree with some of the principles Socrates supposedly upheld.

I studied Socrates as a Philosophy major in college, so I have some familiarity with Plato's texts. I think Johnson does an excellent job of deciphering and articulating the differences between those texts that are true to the actual dialogues of Socrates and those in which Plato takes creative license to inject words and ideas of his own. Essentially, Plato's early texts reflect the true Socratic dialogues, while later texts use Socrates as a puppet for Plato. Johnson does a good job of separating the wheat from the chaff, providing the reader with a clear idea about Socrates the man, his methods and his ethics. Definitely worth reading if you would like to learn about or revisit the life, ethics and methods of Socrates. It is a quick and engaging read.

When you first think of Socrates it is not always in modern terms. Not only is Socrates a "modern man" in every sense of the word, he is a man across time. When the mind opens darkness flees. The Socratic method of questioning is really simplification codified. A child asks why because they don't know and are not afraid to say so. The same with Socrates - his ego does not get in the way - only his mind and it is wonderfully open. I recommend this if nothing else as a method to open the mind and expand our individual universe.

Good title.

A new (for me) view of Socrates as a worthy philosopher and morally good man. He was genuinely curious about ordinary people and human life in general, which makes him in Johnson's (and my own) opinion a wise man rather than an "intellectual" like Plato. Socrates had a balance between head and heart, unlike Plato who tended to think only from his eyebrows up.

Brilliant and easy to read

From the author of the well-received *The Birth of the Modern*. Paul Johnson has written a brief overview of Socrates the man and his philosophy. His explanation of Socrates life and philosophy is understandable not only to students of philosophy, but to the general reader as well. I highly recommend this book for anyone who wants to know how Socrates arrived at his famous dictum that the unexamined life is not worth leading. Highly recommended for anyone who questions the concept of cultural relativism. It's been added to my syllabus for the coming semester.

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