

The Concept of Liberty according to Socrates and Allen Ginsburg

The court case regarding Allen Ginsburg's "Howl" originated with Socrates beliefs and is a continuing issue today in various peoples individual lives, and in states all over the world. In the movie *Howl*, Ginsburg describes freedom as "The ability to communicate exactly who you are." He believes that, in his life, he must continually learn to express himself fully, and that is the most beneficial aspect of life. Without this desire, people will be nothing but soldiers, or drones for a failing empire. Socrates believed in similar ideals.

In the Defense, Socrates describes, "For if I tell you that this would be a disobedience to a divine command, and therefore that I cannot hold my tongue, you will not believe me serious; and if I say again that the greatest good of man is daily to converse about virtue, and all that concerning which you hear me examining myself and others, and the life which is unexamined is not worth living(19)." Meaning that, Ginsburg and Socrates both perceived the state of their fellow men, conformed to a per conceived notion which kept them from progressing as a species and a nation, or republic.

They both felt that without exposing the underlying truths after times of war, the people were blinding themselves to the follies that were plaguing the people as a whole. Socrates and Ginsburg believed that through self examination, people are capable of reaching a more plentiful and even, divine or holy way of existence. Ginsburg writes in "Howl":

"What sphinx of cement and aluminium bashed open their skulls and ate up their brains and imagination? Moloch! Solitude! Filth! Ugliness! ... Moloch the loveless! Mental Moloch! Moloch the heavy judger of men! ... Moloch the incomprehensible prison! Moloch the crossbone soulless jailhouse and Congress of sorrows! Moloch whose buildings are judgment! Moloch the vast stone of war! Moloch the stunned governments!" (II)

Allen Ginsburg's description of the industrial world which is fixed in stone, where the majority feel that they cannot fully express themselves is similar to Socrates' Defense. In the "Defense", Socrates expresses his duty to self examination, and to discuss the unmentioned aspects of society (through a rather peculiar way, as far as the citizens perceive it). Society is almost frozen in time in both instances, and these two writers are proposing a desperate need for individual thought and communication in order to progress as a people.

Socrates and Ginsburg find themselves after, and even during times plagued in war; a world where the people of their society are disillusioned by dead knowledge, and fixated on false agenda. They both desire the betterment of public welfare. According to a quote on Thinkexist.com, Ginsburg expressed, "Poetry is not an expression of the party line. It's that time of night, lying in bed, thinking what you really think, making the private world public, that's what the poet does." This is in accordance with Socrates' belief that through his ability to act as a gadfly on the people of Athens, in order to examine the world around him, and further understand the problems of society. Socrates writes, "But I shall be asked, Why do people delight in continually conversing with you? I have told you already, Athenians, the whole truth

about this: they like to hear the cross-examination of the pretenders to wisdom; there is some amusement in this(16)." In other words, both Ginsburg and Socrates believe that if they analyze, dissect, and discuss areas which are usually forbidden, they will essentially break the mold and discover new ways to perceive and interpret the world around them.

By doing so, people will prosper. Ginsburg and Socrates believe that these are universal truths, and without them, there really is no purpose to life. This is their concept of freedom from control. Their sense of liberty is founded in self expression, examination, and the ability to exercise it throughout every waking day is the very essence of liberty itself. Hindering this sense of liberty, to Socrates and Ginsburg is allowing stagnation of the human. It, and of itself, is slavery of the mind.