

Plato's *Apology*



An *apologia* is not an apology, but a speech in defense of something.

The setting:

Socrates is on trial. He is 70 years old. The year is 399 B.C.

There are 501 juror/judges.

Socrates addresses two sets of accusers (18a).

The first accusers (18a ff.): The Athenian rumor-mill

- Fed by people like Aristophanes, author of a satirical 423 B.C. play called *The Clouds*, depicting Socrates as head of a school (the “Thinkery” where students are taught that “Vortex”, not Zeus, is king and how to “make the worse argument the stronger” (18c).
- Socrates explains his oddness and unpopularity via the account of Chaerephon and the Delphic Oracle (21a-23c).

The later accusers (23e ff.): Meletus, Anytus, and Lycon

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According to the Oracle, no man was wiser than Socrates (21a).

What did Socrates make of this pronouncement?

In response, Socrates went to those reputed for wisdom, questioned them, and found that they weren't nearly as wise as they thought they were.

- The politicians
- The poets
- The craftsmen

Notice what groups Socrates' later accusers represent (23e-24a):

- Meletus (poets)
- Anytus (craftsmen and politicians)
- Lycon (orators)

What would it be like to have all of these groups arrayed against you?

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The formal charge (24b):

“Socrates is guilty of [1] corrupting the young and of [2.a] not believing in the gods in whom the city believes, but [2.b] in other new spiritual things.”

How does Socrates respond to the first charge? (24c ff.)

How does he respond to the second charge? (26c ff.):

- Socrates' *daimonion* (31d) – a divine sign that guides him from error
- Socrates is on a mission from the god of the Oracle (30a). He's a gadfly sent to stir people to care about what's most important: wisdom, truth, virtue, the health of one's soul.

By a vote of 281-220, Socrates is found guilty.

Meletus proposes a penalty of death. Socrates proposes free meals for life in the Prytaneum. After prodding from friends, he ups it to a modest fine.

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By a vote of 360-141, the jury imposes the sentence of death.

Now, Socrates knew about the possibility of a death sentence before he was found guilty (28b). Why was he so accepting of that?

1. It is irrational to fear death (29a and 40c ff.)
2. The soul is vastly more important than the body; hence, it is always worse to do wrong than to suffer physical harm.