

Plato, *Apologia*. Translated by Harold North Fowler. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1960.

Plato (428-348 B.C.) studied under Socrates, and instructed Aristotle. His philosophical system based on ideal forms supported a potent ethical structure. Plato's system proved seminal to all subsequent Western philosophy. Plato founded the Academy in Athens, where he taught until his death.

I. SOCRATES' SPEECH AFTER THE PROSECUTION RETIRED

Socrates declares to his jury of 501 Athenians men, that the prosecution lied in their statements, but he will speak the truth. Socrates is not a clever orator, as alleged, but a plain speaker of truth. The jury's prejudices against Socrates are of two sorts: 1) long term derogations, deriving from public slanders like Aristophanes' comedy which asserts that Socrates makes weak arguments seem stronger, to the detriment of justice, and 2) recent libels, consisting in the current legal charges of Meletus, Antyus, and Lycon, to the effect that Socrates corrupts Athenian youth by preferring new gods to those sponsored by the city.

Concerning the long term derogation Socrates has suffered, Socrates thinks it unlikely that he can overcome the jury's prejudices against him in a single speech. The jury has years of lies in its collective head, and Socrates does not get to cross-examine absent accusers. Socrates distinguishes himself from the sophists, who are professional teachers of rhetoric. Socrates, unlike them, takes no money and knows nothing to teach. The Delphic Oracle called Socrates the wisest man in the world. Socrates was mystified and befuddled by this saying. Socrates knew nothing; of that he was painfully aware. So, Socrates inquired of men reputed to be wise. He found a pattern of folly in them. These men thought themselves wise in all things because they possessed an excellence in some one matter. They were wrong. When Socrates pointed out their error, they hated Socrates rather than admit they lacked wisdom. Socrates concluded that the Oracle meant, in calling Socrates the wisest of men, that Socrates was wise because he knew he lacked wisdom. Socrates noted that the jury must hate him for criticizing their lack of wisdom, but, regardless, it is the truth.

Concerning recent allegations of the prosecutors, that Socrates corrupts youth by introducing them to novel gods, Socrates examines Meletus. *Socrates' First Question*. Who makes the youth of Athens good? Meletus answers that all Athenians do so, except for Socrates. Socrates compares himself to a skilled horse trainer. He notes that such men are few, not abundant. Would it be otherwise with the trainers of young men? *Socrates' Second Question*. Do people want to live among good citizens, or among bad citizens? Bad citizens will, at least occasionally, injure their comrades. Meletus answers that citizens prefer good neighbors. Socrates asks if Meletus alleges that Socrates corrupts youth voluntarily, to which Meletus assents. Socrates argues that he must then either be abysmally ignorant or acting involuntarily. For by making his young associates bad, Socrates guarantees they will injure him. Legal proceedings exist to punish wrongdoers. Education and exhortation is for the ignorant or those acting involuntarily. Meletus has not, however, sought to instruct Socrates. *Socrates' Third Question*. Does Socrates corrupt youth by introducing them to new gods? Meletus confirms this interpretation. Socrates inquires whether Meletus means that Socrates believes in gods other than those of the city, or Socrates believes in no gods at all. Meletus says Socrates does not believe in gods at all. Socrates argues that Meletus's position self-contradicts. Socrates is accused of corrupting youth by teaching of spiritual matters; such teaching implies the existence of spirits. Yet, Meletus says Socrates rejects all gods, who are all spirits. The indictment is confused. Socrates ends his examination of Meletus.

Socrates states he is not ashamed to have examined himself and others concerning wisdom. For the god has called him as a soldier of philosophy. He has heeded the call, though that may result in his death. Achilles followed his call at Troy, and died. Socrates reminds the jury of Socrates' military service in defense of Athens. To fear death is unreasonable, since men know nothing of death. To know one's ignorance is wisdom.

Socrates exhorts his jury not to acquit him on condition that he stops examining people. Socrates will refuse to comply. Perfecting one's soul in wisdom and truth far outweighs money

and fame and praise. It even outweighs life itself. Socrates will not let any person go without examination, especially Athenians. What Socrates does for Athens is more important than any other job. Socrates invites them to kill him, if they will. He will not stop philosophizing.

The jury grows agitated. Socrates says Athens injures herself by killing him unjustly. Socrates is a gadfly biting Athens. The city needs his examinations to rouse itself. Socrates cannot be easily replaced. His poverty attests that his services to Athens have been free.

Socrates' inner voice keeps him from politics. Had it not done so, Athens would long since have executed Socrates. No person who honestly confronts governmental evils can survive for long. Socrates tells the story of his short tenure as a senator and his opposition to particular governmental injustice at that time.

Socrates distances himself from the ill-considered actions of his associates. Socrates claims (disingenuously?) that he has never been anyone's teacher. But, if he has been corrupting youth, surely some one would be complaining. Socrates lists students and parents present in court. None testified for the prosecution.

Socrates concludes his defense. He will not beg. He will not drag in his little children and sobbing wife to plead for him. Socrates has informed the jury. He has reasoned with the jury. Begging demeans Athens.

II. SOCRATES' SPEECH AFTER CONVICTION

The jury convicts Socrates by a vote of 280-221. Meletus proposes the death penalty. Socrates ridicules the process, arguing that a person who has committed his acts should be "punished" by receiving his meals at state expense for life. Socrates complains that this judicial process did not give him sufficient opportunity to counter the jury's longstanding prejudices. Further, the jury should not elect a penalty on the same day it renders its verdict.

Socrates rejects other possible penalties: incarceration, monetary fines, exile, and house arrest with restraints on speaking. Socrates must philosophize. The unexamined life is not worth living. Socrates proposes one silver coin as his punishment. His students offer to put up another twenty-nine coins.

III. SOCRATES' SPEECH AFTER CONDEMNATION

To those who voted to condemn, Socrates says they should have waited. He is old and soon dead, regardless of condemnations. Now, Athens will be known as the city that killed Socrates. They convicted because Socrates refused to beg and cower. There are fates worse than death, and feigning contrition is one of them. One should fear wickedness, which is more fleet than death. Socrates accepts his fate. His accusers will have theirs as well. Socrates prophesies that Athens will be held to harsh account by men far less kind than Socrates. Athens cannot evade reproach by murdering her critics. Escape is available only by being as good as possible.

To those who voted for acquittal, Socrates calls them friends and asks them to chat while the authorities prepare to transport him to jail. Socrates says that the verdict is a wonderful outcome because his inner voice opposes him whenever he contemplates doing wrong. Today the voice has been silent. The verdict is good or the voice would have complained. Further, death itself is good. It consists in either perpetual unconsciousness or life in another world. If unconsciousness, death is blissful sleep. If another world, death is a chance to philosophically examine all the great persons of history to see which, if any, is wise. Either way, Socrates is satisfied.

Socrates recurs to the jurors who condemned him. He asks them to examine Socrates' sons if they, like Athens, lose their way through love of money or arrogance, just as Socrates has examined Athens. If they do so, he and they have received justice. Socrates goes to die, the jurors to live. No man knows which is better.