

Notes and Study Questions for Plato's *Apology* (in *The Trial and Death of Socrates*, 3e)

Introduction to the Apology (p. 20)

(1a) Why is this dialogue titled 'Apology'?

(1b) What event occurs in this dialogue? Is this a fictional or real (i.e., historical) event? To what extent is the character Socrates in this dialogue (probably) an accurate reflection of the historical Socrates (the person)?

(1c) How large were the juries in ancient Athens? What was the procedure for determining, after conviction, the penalty for the defendant?

17a to 24c

(2a) What kind of speaker does Socrates claim to be? What does Socrates claim, in the first two paragraphs of the dialogue, that he is going to say in his speech? In the second paragraph, what does Socrates ask of the jury?

(2b) In the third and fourth paragraphs of the dialogue, Socrates describes two groups of accusers. One group is Anytus, Meletus, and one other person (Lycon). Who is the other group?

(2c) At 19b, Socrates says, "What is the accusation from which arose the slander in which Meletus trusted when he wrote out the charge against me?" Part of what Socrates is saying here is that Meletus (one of the individuals who has brought Socrates into court) had in mind this "slander" about Socrates that was widely known. And this slander stems from an accusation made by the first group of accusers (i.e., not from Anytus, Meletus, and Lycon). How does Socrates phrase the accusation made by the first group?

(2d) What is Socrates reply (at 19d) to this accusation?

(2e) What does Socrates say that he asked Callias? How does Callias respond? How does Socrates say that he is different than Evenus?

(2f) In the first full paragraph on p. 24 (starting right below 20c), Socrates addresses the question *What has caused him to acquire this reputation?* How does he answer?

(2g) What, according to Socrates, did Chaerephon do?

(2i) When Socrates hears about what the oracle said, what is his reaction?

(2j) At 21c, Socrates describes going to visit a man who had a reputation for being wise. What was Socrates's purpose in visiting this man? What did Socrates find when he visited him?

(2k) What further investigations does Socrates describe in 21e to 22e? After these investigations, how does Socrates assess himself?

(2l) In the middle of p. 26 (at 23a and b), how does Socrates interpret what the god who spoke through the oracle at Delphi meant? What does Socrates call his “occupation”?

(2m) Who are the young men who follow Socrates around? Besides listening to Socrates, what do they do?

(2n) Who, according to Socrates, says, “That man Socrates is a pestilential fellow who corrupts the young” (23d)? Why do they really claim that Socrates corrupts the young? What answer do they give when asked how Socrates corrupts the young?

24c to 28b

(3a) What is Meletus’ accusation?

(3b) What does Socrates accuse Meletus of?

(3c) At 24d, who says, “Indeed I do”?

(3d) Who, according to Meletus, improves the young?

(3e) How does Socrates’s question about horses (and then his answer) create a problem for Meletus’ explanation about who improves the young? What does Socrates conclude about Meletus’ charge that he (Socrates) corrupts the young?

(3f) ◦ Between 25c and d, Socrates says, “tell us also whether it is better for a man to live among good or wicked fellow citizens.”

◦ And, then, at 26a, he says, “Either I do not corrupt the young, or, if I do, it is unwillingly.”

What is the line of reasoning that gets Socrates from the first quote to the second one?

(3g) What is the charge that Meletus makes against Socrates regarding the gods?

(3h) How does Socrates argue against the charge that he does not believe in gods? Does his argument seem to be successful?

(3i) Does Socrates accept or reject the charges that Meletus has made against him?

28a to 34e

(4a) Right below 28b, Socrates considers the question, “Are you not ashamed, Socrates, to have followed the kind of occupation that has led to your being now in danger of death?” How does he answer this question?

The son of Thetis is Achilles; Thetis is his mother (28c).

In the sentence beginning at 28e, Socrates mentions the battles at Potidaea (432 BC), Amphipolis (422 BC), and Delium (424 BC). As a younger man, Socrates fought in these battles, and so in this sentence he is comparing his actions in those battles to 'living the life of a philosopher'.

Slightly amended, it looks like this:

"It would have been a dreadful way to behave, if, at Potidaea, Amphipolis, and Delium, I had at the risk of death remained at my post, and then, when the god ordered me to live the life of a philosopher, I had abandoned that post for fear of death."

(There should be ellipses where text has been removed, but look at it this way right now.) Recall that at 23b – 23c, Socrates explains that he interprets what the oracle at Delphi said as a directive to go out and question those people who have a reputation for wisdom—that is, live the life of a philosopher.

(4b) Why does Socrates think that "to fear death is ... to think one knows what one does not know"? (between 29a & b)

(4c) If Socrates was found not guilty (i.e., acquitted) on the condition that he stop practicing philosophy. What does he say that he would do?

(4d) At 29e to 30b, Socrates describes (what he is calling) the life of a philosopher (or doing philosophy). How does he describe it?

(4e) How does Socrates describe himself and his relationship to the city on p. 33? What does he mean by "a kind of gadfly," and who is he calling a gadfly? In the bottom of this page, what does Socrates describe as 'not seeming like human nature'?

(4f) What does Socrates say has kept him from becoming involved in public affairs? What is he referring to as *private affairs* and *public affairs*? Why must a person "who really fights for justice ... lead a private, not a public life" according to Socrates?

(4g) In 32a – 32e, what two event does Socrates describe? What point is he making by describing these events to the jury?

(4h) In 33d – 34c, Socrates argues that, if the charges against him are true, then certain other people should be willing to help and support Meletus and Anytus. Who are these people and why, according to Socrates, have they not sided with Meletus and Anytus?

(4i) At 34c, Socrates suggests that some people on the jury might be angry towards him because of the way that he has (and has not) presented his defense. Why exactly would these people be angry?

(4j) What two reasons does Socrates give in 34e – 35d for not doing these things that might get him acquitted?

35e to 38c

- (5a) What's happened, and what is Socrates discussing at the top of p. 38?
- (5b) At 36b, Socrates says, "I think myself that I have been cleared of Meletus' charges." Has Socrates been cleared of the charges? Why does he say this?
- (5c) What is Socrates talking about here: "He assesses the penalty at death. So be it. What counter-assessment should I propose to you, men of Athens?" (p. 38)? (Recall what Grube says in his introduction at the bottom of p. 20.)
- (5d) What does Socrates propose should be his penalty for being found guilty? What reasons does he give for this as an appropriate penalty? How do you think the people on the jury would have reacted to such an offer?
- (5e) What other penalties does Socrates acknowledge that he could have proposed? Why does he refuse to offer these other penalties to the jury?
- (5f) Meletus has asked that the penalty be death. A reasonable counter-offer (and one that the jury might have been willing to accept) would have been exile. Why does Socrates not want to propose exile as his penalty?
- (5g) Recall that Socrates said at the very beginning of his speech (at 17c) that he is just going to speak as the thoughts come to him. He has proposed the penalty that he believes he deserves on p. 38. Now he suggests another penalty; one that is somewhat more in line with what would be expected. What penalty does Socrates propose at 38b?
- (5h) Socrates suggests a fine, and then Plato, Crito, Critobulus, and Apollodorus speak up. What do they say to Socrates, and what does he do?

38c to 42a

- (6a) The jury has to decide between the penalty suggested by Meletus and the penalty suggested by Socrates. What does the jury decide?
- (6b) On p. 40, Socrates says that he was convicted because he lacked "boldness and shamelessness." What does he mean? In what sense did he lack boldness and shamelessness?
- (6c) Does Socrates think that it is easy or hard to avoid death?
- (6d) Socrates, as he says, has been caught by death. What has caught his pursuers?
- (6e) Socrates says to those who have voted for him to die that "vengeance will come upon you immediately after my death" (39c). What kind of vengeance does he have in mind?
- (6f) Who is Socrates addressing at 40a, and what does he want to discuss?

At 40a Socrates refers to “my familiar prophetic power, my spiritual manifestation” and then at 40b “my divine sign” (these are all referring to the same thing). Socrates also referred to his divine sign at 31d, and Euthyphro refers to it between 3b and 3c in the *Euthyphro* (and see footnote 4 on that page).

(6g) On this day, what does Socrates say that his divine sign did or did not do?

(6h) Socrates says that death is either of two things. What are the two things?

(6i) Does Socrates think that either of these two would be a negative event? Which, if either, does he seem to think is better?

(6j) Between 41d and e, Socrates says, “I am certainly not angry with those who convicted me, or with my accusers.” Why isn’t he angry?

At 41e, Socrates talks about his sons. A slightly different translation might be clearer:

Still, this much I ask of them. When my sons come of age, gentlemen, punish them: give them the same sort of trouble that I used to give you, if you think they care for money or anything else more than for goodness, and if they think highly of themselves when they are of no value. Reprove them, as I reproved you, for failing to care for the things they should, and for thinking highly of themselves when they are worthless. If you will do that, then I shall have received my own just deserts from you, as will my sons.

(6k) Is Socrates making a request here of those who voted for him to be killed or those who voted for his acquittal? What does Socrates want these men to do to his sons?