

LECTURE 2.2: Background on the APOLOGY

NOTE: You will meet Socrates through the dialogue of Plato titled APOLOGY. Before you read (and you will be cheating yourself if you do not actually read this entire dialogue) the Apology or Defence of Socrates dialogue (Cahn/Markie, pp. 16-33). If you do not yet have the Cahn/Markie text, I have posted on CANVAS an electronic copy of this dialogue), please read this backgrounder on the dialogue, Apology.

1. The dialogue of Plato titled **Apology** was written by Plato immediately after the execution of Socrates. 'Apology' here does not mean what we normally understand it to be (as being sorry or apologetic about something). Instead, Apology was a transliteration of the Greek word '**apologia**' which means **defense**. So, what you will read from the Apology is the recollection of Plato (who was present during the trial of Socrates) of the defense of Socrates during his trial (in 399 BCE) and of what happened during that trial.
2. Immediately after the execution of Socrates (who was convicted and sentenced to death) in 399 BCE, Plato wrote this dialogue, not for us or for future students of philosophy, but for the very people of Athens at that time to make them reflect on what they have done to Socrates. After writing this dialogue, Plato left Athens, traveled outside Athens, from one country after another reaching as far as even some Asian countries. He traveled for 12 years, and when he returned (Plato was then 40 years old) to Athens, he had made up his mind to become a philosopher (like Socrates) and he founded a school which he named the **Academy**. It is while managing and teaching in the Academy that Plato wrote all the dialogues (except for the Apology). By making Socrates the main speaker or character of his dialogues, Plato is giving credit to the influence Socrates had on his (Plato's) becoming himself a philosopher.
3. Socrates was on trial because a young man by the name of **Meletus** went to the court of **King Archon** to file an affidavit, charging Socrates of 2 crimes: corruption of the youth and atheism or impiety (not believing in the god recognized by Athens, which at that time was considered to be a capital crime, and thus punishable by death). This affidavit was filed in the court of King Archon because King Archon is the judge assigned to preside over capital cases. The next day, after it became publicly known that Meletus had filed these 2 charges against Socrates, 2 other Athenian men (**Anytus** and **Lycon**) came to the court of King Archon and they added their signature to the original affidavit filed by Meletus. These 3 men (Meletus, Anytus, and Lycon – in the Apology, they were referred to as the **later** or **more recent accusers**) are the accusers of Socrates during the trial, with Meletus acting as the prosecutor. Socrates will defend himself and be his own lawyer during the trial.
4. During the trial, Socrates will be tried by a jury consisting of 501 jurors, chosen from among the citizens of Athens. Because of the large number of jurors, to acquit or to convict all that is required is a simple majority (**50% +1** which in this case is equivalent to **251** out of 501 jurors).

Socrates **failed** to get 251 jurors to acquit him (he was short of **30 votes**) and so was convicted and then sentenced to death.

5. With this background information, you should now **CAREFULLY READ** the Apology from the beginning to the end, and while reading this dialogue, imagine yourself present during the trial as one of the jurors. You have heard many stories and rumors about Socrates and about his questioning of other people, and even watched the comic play (**The Clouds**) as it was performed on stage. But you have not met Socrates, you have not seen how he looks like (his physical appearance) and you have not seen Socrates as he (S) questioned people who claim to know something. You are seeing and hearing this man Socrates for the very first time.
6. **If you were one of the jurors, would you have convicted Socrates if you were to base your judgment solely (only) on the evidence presented by the two sides (the prosecutor side and the defense side)?**

NOTE: To guide you in the reading of this dialogue I am posting series of questions that you should be able to answer if indeed you have carefully read this dialogue. My advice to you is to have these questions (maybe, make a hard copy of these questions) before you as you are reading the dialogue, and try to answer each question as you read along the dialogue. These questions follow the chronological development of the dialogue [for example, for the 1st set of questions – Ia, Ib and Ic – the answers to these questions would be found on the 1st chunk (17a-18a of the dialogue [if you look at the margin of pp. 27-39 of your Cahn text, you will find numbers and letters – this is what is cited when you quote passages from the Apology. **So, here now are these questions:**

The Apology or Defence of Socrates

- I. In the introductory section of the Apology Socrates draws a contrast between himself and his accusers, describes the kind of person he is, and reminds the jury of its primary duty.
 - a. How does Socrates draw the contrast between truth and persuasion?
 - b. What kind of person does Socrates say he is?
 - c. What is the challenge of Socrates for the jury to do?
- II. Main Defense and Counter-Examination of Meletus
 - a. Socrates must make two defenses: Who are his **earlier accusers**? Who are his **later or more recent accusers**? How do these two sets of accusers differ? Socrates thinks it is going to be more difficult for him to defend himself against the earlier accusers. Why does Socrates think this is so? What are the three main points made against him by his earlier accusers? Explain the meaning of each of these points. What does Socrates say about each of these points? How does Socrates differentiate himself from the **sophists**? Who are the sophists? What do they do? What are the charges made against Socrates by the later accusers?
 - b. Re the **Oracle of Delphi**: What story does Socrates tell about his life? What three classes of people did Socrates question? Why did Socrates think he should go about questioning these people? In each case, what was the result? What conclusion does

Socrates draw from his investigation? From this experience, what does Socrates say is his mission in life?

- c. Cross-examination of Meletus begins.
 - 1. What are the specific charges made by Meletus against Socrates? What do you think is the aim of Socrates in cross-examining Meletus?
 - 2. First cross-examination: Socrates asks Meletus who does he (Meletus) say are the educators of the young. Why do you think Socrates asks Meletus this question? What is the answer of Meletus? What is Socrates' counter-example? What do you think is the point of Socrates' counter-example
 - 3. Second cross-examination: Meletus says that Socrates corrupts the young willingly and deliberately. How does Socrates answer this charge? If Socrates' analysis in this regard is true, then what follows? In either case, should Socrates be in court? Why or why not?
 - 4. The impiety (or atheism) charge: Socrates asks Meletus to clarify his charge. What two versions does Meletus give of this impiety charge? Socrates asks Meletus, "Do you think you are prosecuting Anaxagoras?" Who is Anaxagoras? In asking this question of Meletus, what do you think is the point Socrates is making against Meletus?
 - d. By this time Meletus has contradicted his sworn deposition. Socrates addresses the actual charges of the deposition. What does Socrates say in his defense? What point do you think Socrates is making here?
 - e. Socrates brings up the issue of **shame**. What does Socrates say about the connection between public shame and morally right action? What point do you think Socrates is making here?
 - f. Does Socrates claim to know anything about life after death? Why or why not? Does he fear death? What would fear of death mean for Socrates?
 - g. Is acquittal on the condition of silence a possibility for Socrates? Why or why not?
 - h. What is Socrates' attitude about the possibility of a morally good person staying in politics? Why do you think this is so?
 - i. The corruption charge reappears. At this point how does Socrates answer the corruption charge?
 - j. What does Socrates say he will not do in his defense? What point do you think Socrates is making in his refusal to do such actions
- III. Proposal of penalties after the guilty verdict: What does Socrates suggest as suitable penalty for his crimes? Why do you think Socrates suggested such penalty for himself? What point do you think Socrates is making here?
- IV. Final speech after the sentence of death:

- a. What does Socrates say is more difficult to avoid rather than death? And who, according to Socrates, have not avoided it? Why is this so?
- b. What does Socrates prophesy about the fate of his accusers? In making this prophesy, what do you think Socrates is trying to say to his accusers?
- c. What surprising thing does Socrates point to his friends? What does he take this thing to mean
- d. Renewed discussion of death: At this point of the dialogue, what is Socrates' attitude towards death? From what experience does Socrates base this attitude?
- e. According to Socrates, death can be conceived in either of two ways. What are these two ways? Furthermore, Socrates claims that in either of these two ways, death is a blessing. Explain why in each way, death is a blessing for Socrates.
- f. At this final point of the dialogue, having been found guilty and sentenced to death, what is Socrates' hope? What does he say about the divine-human relationship? Upon what does Socrates base his hope?