

17.03. Introduction to Political Thought
Lecture Outline: Plato's *Apology of Socrates*

Dates

Socrates b. 470 BC d. 399 (Socrates convicted 280-220 by Athenian jury)
Plato b. 428/427 d. 348/347

I. Background

- A. Plato's use of the dialogue form
 - 1. Philosophical arguments tailored to the audience
 - 2. The audience in the *Apology*: hostile and unphilosophical
- B. Political context

II. *Apology* as a document of Socrates' life and philosophical activity

- A. Commitment to testing claims of wisdom or knowledge
 - 1. Socratic method: *elenchus* (interrogation, examination)
 - 2. Embarrassing people as a means of educating them
- B. Pursuit of life's most important question: What is the best way to live?
- C. Portrait of Socratic citizenship: not conventionally political but loyal to Athens
- D. Socratic irony: claims to know less than he does

III. The charges and accusers

- A. Past charges (accusers: anonymous and/or dead)
 - 1. Socrates is a busybody who investigates things he shouldn't
 - 2. Makes the weaker argument appear the stronger
 - a. Comparison with the Sophists
 - b. Socrates is politically dangerous, not a patriot
- B. Present charges (accusers: Meletus, Anytus, Lycon)
 - 1. Impiety
 - 2. Corrupting the youth

IV. Socrates' defense

- A. Response to past charges: Doesn't make any claims of practical wisdom or knowledge
Why then do the Athenians think he makes such claims? (Story of the oracle)
- B. Response to present charges
 - 1. Corrupting the youth: He could not intentionally corrupt/harm the youth because he knows that harming someone will lead to retaliation
 - 2. Impiety: Silent on question of whether he believes in any gods at all
- C. Digression on his way of life
 - 1. Socratic citizenship as superior to the old Homeric model
 - 2. Unconventional patriotism through interrogating the laws and fellow citizens

V. Conclusion:

- A. Critique of political life from the point of view of philosophy
- B. Limits of reason