



THE *APOLOGIA*¹ OF SOKRATES

(in part)

by:

Plato (*Aristokles* 428-348 BCE)

Translated by: Benjamin Jowett

Additions, corrections, and footnotes by Barry F. Vaughan²

Persons of the Dialogue: Sokrates, Meletos, and
the Athenian Jury

Scene: The Athenian High Court

We join the dialogue at the end when Sokrates has completed his apologia, been found guilty by a slim margin, and sentenced to death by the citizens of Athens. After the sentence is handed down, Sokrates addresses his friends before he is taken into custody to await his execution. He tells his friends that they should not feel bad about the outcome of the trial because death is not a bad thing. He first gives an argument based on religion that his diamon (i.e., a divine spirit) has not intervened to prevent Sokrates from going to trial or concerning anything he said in his defence. He concludes that the gods, therefore, do not think the outcome of the trial is a bad thing. Therefore, he should think it is a good thing.³

¹ Greek, 'defense'.

² From the Project Gutenberg's [Apology of Sokrates](http://www.gutenberg.org), by Plato, www.gutenberg.org. For the full text visit the Project Gutenberg website. This edited version is intended for academic or personal use and may not be sold or used for profit.

I have changed spellings of proper names to more accurately match the Greek text as opposed to the more traditional Latinized spellings which were dominant in Jowett's time. I have also changed UK spellings to US spellings where appropriate, as well as made clarifications in translation (noted with brackets) and have added explanatory footnotes.

³The text of the religious argument is: "Friends, who would have acquitted me, I would like also to talk with you about this thing which has happened, while the magistrates are busy, and before I go to the place at which I must die. Stay then awhile, for we may as well talk with one another while there is time. You are my friends, and I should like to show you the meaning of this event which has happened to me. Oh my judges—for you I may truly call judges—I should like to tell you of a wonderful circumstance. [Until now] the familiar [demon] within me has constantly been in the habit of opposing me even about [small things], if I was going to make a slip or error about anything; and now as you see there has come upon me that which may be thought, and is generally believed to be, the last and worst evil. But the [demon] made no sign of opposition, either as I was leaving my house and going out in the morning, or when I was going up into this court, or while I was speaking, at anything which I was going to say; and yet I have often been stopped in the middle of a speech; but now in nothing I either said or did touching this matter has the oracle opposed me. What do I take to be the explanation of this? I will tell you. I regard this as a proof that what has happened to me is a good, and that those of us who think that death is an evil are in error. This is a great proof to me of what I am saying, for the customary sign would surely have opposed me had I been going to evil and not to good."

Then, Sokrates goes on to give a **philosophical argument** designed to show that we should not fear death. The speech containing that argument is as follows:

Let us reflect in another way, and we shall see that there is great reason to hope that death is a good, for [it is] one of two things: *either* death is a state of nothingness and utter unconsciousness, *or*, as men say, there is a change and migration of the soul from this world to another. Now if you suppose that there is no consciousness, but a sleep like the sleep of him who is undisturbed even by the sight of dreams, death will be an unspeakable gain. For if a person were to select the night in which his sleep was undisturbed even by dreams, and were to compare with this the other days and nights of his life, and then were to tell us how many days and nights he had passed in the course of his life better and more pleasantly than this one, I think that any man, I will not say a private man, but even the Great King⁴, will not find many such days or nights, when compared with the others. Now if death is like this, I say that to die is gain; for eternity is then only a single night.

But if death is the journey to another place, and there, as men say, all the dead are, what good, oh my friends and judges, can be greater than this? If indeed when the pilgrim arrives in the world below, he is delivered from [who claim to be just] in this world, and finds the true judges who are said to give judgment there, Minos and Rhadamanthus⁵ and Aiakos⁶ and Triptolemos⁷, and other sons of god who were righteous in their own life, that pilgrimage will be worth making. What would not a man give if he might converse with Orpheus and Musaus and Hesiod and Homer?⁸ Nay, if this be true, let me die again and again. I, too, shall have a wonderful interest in a place where I can converse with Palamedes⁹, and Ajax¹⁰ the son of Telamon, and other heroes of old, who have suffered death through an unjust judgment; and there will be no small pleasure, as I think, in comparing my own sufferings with theirs. Above all, I shall be able to continue my search into true and false knowledge; as in this world, so also in that; I shall find out who is wise, and who pretends to be wise, and is not. What would not a man give, oh judges, to be able to examine the leader of the great Trojan expedition; or Odusseos or Sisuphos, or numberless others, men and women too! What infinite delight would there be in conversing with them and asking them questions! For in that world they do not put a man to death for this; certainly not. For besides being happier in that world than in this, they will be immortal, if what is said is true.

Wherefore, oh judges, be of good cheer about death, and know this of a truth—that no evil can

⁴The “Great King” is a phrase used to refer to the Emperor of Persia. It is a colloquial idiom that we could translate as, “the most powerful person in the world”.

⁵ The son of Zeus and Europa and mythical king of Krete who was deposed by Minos. Due to his unwavering virtue he is counted as one of the three judges of mortal lives in Hades; he is the judge of Asian souls.

⁶ The son of Zeus and Aegina and mythical king of Aegina. Known as one of the three judges of mortal lives in Hades; his is the judge of European souls.

⁷ Mythical hero rescued by Demeter and taught the art of agriculture. Associated with the Eleusinian mystery cult of Demeter and Kore and thought to provide hope for the afterlife.

⁸ Musaus, along with the better known Homer, Hesiod and Orpheus was a mythical poet and polymath (i.e., expert in many fields).

⁹ Mythical hero of the Trojan War, leader of Nauplians. He was betrayed by Odusseus and convicted on false charges of treachery against his fellow Achaeans. He was stoned by Odusseus and Diomedes.

¹⁰ Mythical hero of the Trojan War, cousin of Achilles and strongest of the Achaeans. He committed suicide after being denied the magical armor of Achilles in a contest with Odusseus.

happen to a good man, either in life or after death. He and his are not neglected by the gods; nor has my own approaching end happened by mere chance. But I see clearly that to die and be released was better for me; and therefore the oracle gave no sign. For which reason also, I am not angry with my accusers, or my condemners; they have done me no harm, although neither of them meant to do me any good; and for this I may gently blame them.