



## THE *APOLOGIA*<sup>1</sup> OF SOKRATES

(in part)

by:

Plato (*Aristokles* 428-348 BCE)

Translated by: Benjamin Jowett

Additions, corrections, and footnotes by Barry F. Vaughan<sup>2</sup>

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

**Scene:** The Athenian High Court

*We join the dialogue toward the end, in Sokrates' third speech, after he has completed his apologia (i.e., defense) and been found guilty by a slim margin (the first speech).<sup>3</sup> In his second speech he is obliged by Athenian law to offer the jury an alternative to the death penalty requested by his prosecutor, Meletos. His suggestion that he should be given free food in the Prytaneum (the Athenian "hall of fame" for Olympic heroes) does not go down well with the jury, and he is sentenced to death by an even wider margin than found him guilty.*

*After the death sentence is handed down, and before he is taken into custody to await his execution, Sokrates gives a third speech where he first addresses those who have condemned him to death, prophesying that they will regret the decision because his followers will be far more critical of them than he ever was. He then turns to his friends and supporters among the jurors-- who are obviously upset at the outcome of the trial. He tells them that they should not feel bad about the outcome of the trial because he is, surprisingly, convinced that death is not something that should be feared. He gives his friends two arguments, one religious, one purely philosophical, that he believes should convince them not to be worried on his account.*

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<sup>1</sup> Greek, 'defense'.

<sup>2</sup> From the Project Gutenberg's [Apology of Sokrates](http://www.gutenberg.org), by Plato, [www.gutenberg.org](http://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.

<sup>3</sup> If you are interested in reading the whole text you can find it in the textbook for my Introduction to Philosophy class on my website: [www.barryfvaughan.org](http://www.barryfvaughan.org).

*In your paper you will analyze the first of these arguments which is contained in the passages below:*

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.<sup>4</sup> 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]<sup>5</sup> 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.

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<sup>4</sup> Normally, a condemned criminal would be put to death almost immediately. But Sokrates' trial fell on the eve of a religious holiday, the "Lesser Delia". This month-long holiday was supposedly founded by Theseus, the mythical founder of Athens, after he slew the Minotaur in the labyrinth of Crete. Every year the Athenians would decorate a ship and send it to the island of Delos to offer sacrifices at the temple of Apollo. The festival ended when the ship returned to Athens. During the festival, it was forbidden to perform an execution as it would bring religious pollution on the city during a holy time. Thus, Sokrates' execution will have to be postponed until after the festival. The question for the magistrates was, what to do with him until the festival ended.

<sup>5</sup> The "demon" (δαίμωνιον 'daimonion') Sokrates refers to has been a matter of controversy since his own time. In Classical Greek Mythology, a *daimonion* was a minor deity (not an Olympian god) which could act as a guiding "spirit". There were no negative connotations associated with these beings as would be the case in later Christian mythology.

What would have been peculiar to his contemporaries is Sokrates' claim of familiarity with this demon whom he claims has come to him throughout his life and warned him against any action that would later turn out to be wrong. In fact, Euthyphro cites Sokrates' *daimonion* as the likely source of the charge of inventing "new gods" (Euthyphro 3b). Apparently, it does not tell him what he *should* do, but only warns him when he is about to make a mistake. Though most contemporary readers will undoubtedly think of this as his "conscience", we have to remember that the ancient Greeks did not have that psychological concept, and Sokrates himself seems to take it quite literally to be a divine voice that speaks directly to him.