

Reasoning in the Apology (Draft)

There are two kinds of reasoning in the Apology: Explanation and argumentation.

An **explanation** tells us why something that we already know is so, and an **argument** asserts something (a conclusion) that we do not yet have grounds for believing but supplies reasons (premises) in support of believing the conclusion.

The Apology is a story of the trial of Socrates. As such, we read it as a narrative in which Socrates is depicted as giving an oration in his defense. In the early part he gives an explanation of how he came to be on trial that differs quite markedly from the accusations made against him. Then he follows with many arguments showing that he is not guilty as charged and that in fact the accusations as stated are groundless and the accusers actually have no case against him. The main issue, however, is Socrates constant theme of virtue. I will not cover the literary and rhetorical issues that deserve much attention and make the dialogue not only persuasive but also demonstrate Plato's literary gifts in reflecting the irony and style of Socrates (as well as Plato's own irony). I will cover some of the reasoning in the Apology so that a student can see them imbedded in this powerful story and that it is not merely the style and irony of Socrates/Plato that makes this defense so powerful. Here are some central issues that are explained or argued.

GOAL: TRUTH AND JUSTICE

(17): Socrates draws attention to the goal of this trial and the laws in general which is truth and justice. This is neither an argument nor an explanation, but states the obvious: that a trial has as its goal truth and justice, though this is frequently overlooked. It is a premise that sets up the rest of the dialogue as it moves toward truth and justice and all the arguments/conclusions in the dialogue depend upon this premise directly or indirectly.

EXPLANATION OF WHY SOCRATES IS ON TRIAL

(18b-19): **Explanation** of why he is on trial: Due to the accusers and jury being exposed from childhood to slanderous lies about Socrates in previous long standing accusations without any rebuttal, they believe many things that are not so. It is on the basis of this and his unpopularity with many people that his accusers in the trial have brought their current charges of impiety and corruption of the young.

(19b) When specifically asked what Socrates does to corrupt the young, his old accusers of the past typically repeat this same empty refrain: "he busies himself studying things in the sky and below the earth; he makes the worse into the stronger argument, and teaches these same things to others." (This was the general attack on philosophers and Sophists by Aristophanes in his play "The Clouds" in which Socrates was made to be the leading character.) Socrates counters that these descriptions fit others, not himself. He points out that he is not a Sophist who gets paid for teaching how to win debates and is not a nature philosopher concerned with issues of "things in the sky and below the earth."

This can be construed as an **argument**:

Premise: I am said to have done wrong because I pursue and teach these things.

Premise: There is no evidence that I do this. Therefore, I do not pursue and teach these things.

Conclusion: Therefore, I have not done wrong as charged in these old accusations.

(20d-23c) Socrates goes on to further **explain** what has caused his unpopular reputation: A certain kind of wisdom pronounced by the Delphic Oracle: Socrates is the wisest among Athenians, because unlike others who claim to possess wisdom but do not, Socrates also does not possess wisdom, but knows that he does not. So in this minimal respect, he is wiser than others. He takes this wisdom proclaimed by the Oracle very seriously as his mission: to disabuse himself and others of the illusions and pretense to knowledge and wisdom. This illusion of thinking they know, blinds them to their own ignorance. In his pursuit of wisdom, Socrates has tried to learn from many people. But he is invariably disappointed. In his examination of those who think themselves wise, their lack of wisdom is exposed, by showing the impossibility of their views because they are self-contradictory. Instead of this leading to appreciation, it has upset many people. In addition, onlookers mistakenly take this as Socrates having this supposed wisdom himself, when all Socrates has done is shown that others do not have it. Sons of the wealthy enjoy this and have imitated Socrates in exposing pretensions to wisdom which further angers people.

CORRUPTING THE YOUNG:

(24b) Next Socrates aims at his current accusers: Meletus, Antyus, and Lycon charge that Socrates corrupts the young.

Argument: "Meletus is guilty of A) dealing frivolously with serious matters, B) of irresponsibly bringing people into court, and C) of professing to be seriously concerned with things about none of which he has ever cared." A and C will turn out to be premises for B.

(24 d-26) A series of questions leads to several arguments based on premises including analogies that set up his support for the conclusions A,B, C above, as well as the sub conclusion at 25b and main conclusion C above stated again at 25c.

Premise: It is of great importance that our young be as good as possible (that they be improved/well-brought up, virtuous (Starts with a premise that is easily accepted by all)

Question: Who improves them? (Meletus answers in a way that at first looks like a good rhetorical move by saying the jury does, thus gaining favor with them). But Socrates continues this line of thought that exposes the absurdity of Meletus's view. When asked about others, instead of taking the subject seriously, Meletus is obviously trying to persuade and gain favor to support his case, rather than deal with the truth).

Answers/premises: the jury, the audience, the council, the assembly, all Athenians.

Conclusion: Everyone but Socrates improves the young. Socrates alone corrupts the young.

This conclusion is already so patently absurd, that Socrates could have stopped here. But he drives the point home with an analogy between horses and young people and another premise that everyone agrees with:

Premise: Only a few people improve horses, not everyone.

Analogy/premise: What is true of horses is true of young people: not everyone improves horses except one person as Meletus has said about young people.

SubConclusion/premise: The claim that only one person corrupts young people while everyone else improves them is false. This now is a premise for:

SubConclusion: Meletus obviously has given no thought to the subjects over which he has brought Socrates to trial.

Premise: Since he has given no careful thought to this issue over which he has brought Socrates to trial, the conclusion at 24c is now restated here which Socrates said he would show:

Conclusion: Meletus has no real concern for these issues, is dealing with them frivolously, and

final conclusion: is therefore irresponsible for bringing Socrates to trial.

This whole section of argument would look like this:

Premise: Meletus says everyone improves the young.

Premise: The young require attention just as horses do.

Premise: most people cannot improve or train horses properly.

Premise: Just as with horses not everyone but one person improves the young.

Conclusion: Therefore, the claim that everyone but one person improves the young is obviously questionable if not outright ridiculous.

Premise: The issue of improving the young is a very serious issue ("greatest importance" 24c).

Premise: Meletus has claimed ridiculous things about a serious subject.

Conclusion/Premises: Meletus is guilty of dealing frivolously with serious matters and of professing to be seriously concerned with things about none of which he has ever cared."

These now serve as premises for the **conclusion:** Meletus is guilty of irresponsibly bringing people into court.

Final Conclusion of this section: This casts serious doubt on the credibility of the charges

(25c-d)

Premise: the wicked do harm to those around them, the good benefit others (25c)

Premise: no one wants to be harmed, but rather benefitted (**25d**)

Concl/premise : It is therefore better to live among good people than wicked ones (25c).

Implied Conclusion: Socrates does not want to be harmed.

Implied Conclusion: Socrates wants to live among good people, not wicked people.

Conclusion: No one who wants to live among good people would intentionally make those around them wicked

Premise: No one would intentionally make those around them wicked.

Claim by Meletus: Socrates harms the youth intentionally (makes them wicked) (25d)

Premise: If Socrates makes people wicked, then he runs the risk of being harmed.

Premise: Socrates does not want to be harmed

Therefore Meletus can't be correct about Socrates intentionally corrupting and making the young wicked

Therefore, either Socrates does not corrupt the young OR he does not do it intentionally.

1. **Conclusion/premise) :** If he does not corrupt the young, then he is not guilty of the charge of the trial.

2. **Conclusion/Premise:** If he does corrupt the young, he does so unintentionally.

3. **Premise:** If he corrupts the young unintentionally, then he needs instruction not punishment for something he did not do intentionally.

Conclusion: In neither case (1 or 2) is this a legitimate issue to bring to court (repeat of conclusion B).

Final Conclusions that repeat p 29 (24b): Meletus is guilty "of irresponsibly bringing people into court. And "Meletus has never been at all concerned with these matters." (26b).

IMPIETY/NOT BELIEVING IN THE GODS

In Meletus's deposition: Socrates corrupts the young by teaching them to not believe in Athenian gods but rather other new spiritual beings.

At the trial Meletus says: Socrates corrupts the youth by teaching them not to believe in gods at all.

(27b) **Conclusion:** Socrates both believes in gods and does not believe in gods.

Meletus clarifies: Socrates does not believe in any gods at all.

27b Analogy: Humans/horses/flute players/Gods
If there are human actions, then there are humans
There are human actions
Therefore there are humans

If there are spiritual activities, there are spirits
There are spiritual activities
There are spirits

Spirits are gods or sons of gods.
If spirits are gods, then there must be gods,
If there are sons of gods, there must be gods.
Therefore there are gods

Socrates believes in spiritual activities.
Therefore, Socrates believes in spirits (together with the argument above).
Therefore, Socrates believe in gods.

(28): CONCLUSION: I am not guilty of atheism or teaching it to others.

Restates **explanation** at beginning of dialogue: It is envy and slander that led to my unpopularity and my being on trial and will be the reason for my undoing. Claim: Athens has and will continue to destroy good men this way.

DEATH:

(28b) **Prem**: Socrates occupation/actions have led him to the brink of death.

Assumed Prem: Death is something to be feared and avoided.

Implied Conclusion: Socrates, you should not do what you do

Premise: One's Virtue should be one's only consideration in one's actions.

Conclusion: A good man does not take death into account when considering what it is right to do.

Assumed Premise: To be virtuous I must do what is right.

Premise: I was given this mission by my commanders (the gods).

Premise: To follow the commands of the city state and/or the gods is right.

Conclusion: I must remain and face danger/death, (rather than disgrace myself with cowardice in the face of doing what is right).

Premise: If you (the jury) are right that one should flee death, then all the heroes who died at Troy were inferior/unvirtuous people (because they did not flee death).

Assumed Premise: You do not believe they were inferior/unvirtuous.

Conclusion: You are not right [MODUS TOLLENS]

(28-29d) **Premise by Analogy**: In the great battles (Potidaea, Amphipolis, and Delium) that I fought in, I followed the command of the city and stayed and faced death, rather than disgrace. Likewise, when I was commanded by the gods to live a life of philosophy examining myself and others, I have the same obligation to remain at my post regardless of death or anything else.

SubConclusion: To do otherwise than I have done in doing philosophy would be a disgrace.

Conclusion/Premise (29d): I shall not cease doing philosophy and testing the virtue of Athenians

Premise: (29a) If I had stopped following the commands of the gods and stopped doing philosophy, then I would (ironically) justly have been brought to trial for not believing in gods, disobeying the oracle, fearing death, and thinking that I was wise when I was not.

Premise: I did not and will not disobey the gods and disgrace myself out of fear of death.

Conclusion: (29b) I am unjustly brought to trial for doing what is right.

(29 b)

Prem: To fear death assumes we know something about it (are wise about it)

Prem: But we do not know anything about it.

Conclusion: To fear death is to think oneself wise when one is not.

Conclusion: it is irrational to fear death. (Note: it is not irrational to fear what might happen to others if you die, but still no reason to forfeit your virtue)

Sub Conclusions (from 28b to 29b): Therefore,

To take any action on the basis of fear of death instead of what is virtuous, is irrational

To take any action on the basis of fear of death instead of what is virtuous, a loss of virtue/wrong.

Conclusion: One must not be motivated by fear of death

Prem (from above): I do not know anything about death.

Prem: (29b) I do know that it is wicked and shameful to do wrong.

Prem: (29c) Never fear and do not avoid what you do not know to be bad (for example, death)

Prem: Always fear and avoid what you do know is bad.

Conclusion: Do not fear death, fear and avoid doing what you know is bad.

Prem (from above): I was commanded to do philosophy by the gods

Prem (from above): To obey the gods is virtuous (to disobey is unvirtuous)

Prem: (30b) My service to the god to test the virtue of Athenians is a blessing and gift to the city

SubConclusion/Premise: Doing philosophy is right

Conclusion: (29d & 30c): I shall not cease doing philosophy and testing the virtue of Athenians (my course of action regardless of death)

Prem: A better man cannot be harmed by a lesser one. (it is only one's own choices/actions that can harm one's virtue)

Concl: If you kill me, you will not harm me.

Prem: It will be wrong to kill me unjustly.

Prem: You will harm yourselves by doing wrong.

Conclusion: You will harm yourselves by doing wrong

Prem: If you kill me, my service to the city will cease

Conclusion: You will harm yourself by depriving yourselves of my service.

Prem: My poverty is evidence that

SubConcl: I have never received a fee for this service

Conclusion: Therefore it is a gift

Prem: (31a-c) My devotion to philosophy and to your virtue and neglect of myself, are not human, but have another origin.

Concl/Prem: (31c) My service is a gift from god

Prem: If you mistreat a gift from god, it will harm you

Assumed Prem: Killing me is mistreating a gift from the god

Conclusion: It will harm you

Summary of Premises: Do not harm yourselves by

A) depriving yourself of my service

B) doing something unjust

C) going against the gods

Conclusion: (for your own sake) Do not kill me

(32d-e) I have always done my service privately, not in the assembly. **Why?**

Explanation: A) A spirit has always turned me away from something wrong/bad.

B) To have done my service via politics would have ended in my death long before now and not have benefitted anyone.

Prem: As member of the Council under the democracy, I was ordered to do something unjust and illegal.

Prem: I opposed this injustice and was nearly prosecuted for it.

Prem: Under the oligarchy, I was ordered to bring Leon to be executed.

Prem: I refused and might have been put to death if the government had not fallen.

SubConclusion: These just actions in the public arena nearly got me killed

Conclusion/Prem: If a person who fights for justice is to survive, he must lead a private life.

Prem: I fought for Justice

Conclusion: It was necessary for me to live a private life

I have never agreed with anyone to act unjustly

I have not begrudged others to listen to me while I deal with my concerns (about virtue and justice)

I have never received a fee for teaching

I have never promised to teach anyone anything

I have never been anyone's teacher

No one has heard me say anything privately that others did not hear

SubConcl: I did not instruct others to do wrong or to be wicked, as I am accused

Conclusion: I cannot be held responsible for the good or bad conduct of others

(33b) Why do some people enjoy spending considerable time in my company?

Explanation: They enjoy hearing those being questioned who think they are wise, but are not.

Why do I do this?

Explanation: A) It is pleasant B) It is enjoined upon me by the god and by means of oracles and dreams

(33d): **Premise:** If I have corrupted anyone, then someone would have accused me

Premise: No one has accused me

Concl: I have not corrupted anyone. [MODUS PONENS]

Prem: Instead, these men come to my defense.

Sub Conclusion: Meletus is lying and I am telling the truth. **Concl:** Therefore, I am not guilty.

(34c-35d):

For a virtuous superior person to grovel and beg is a disgrace

if Socrates begs, it will be a disgrace.

One should not disgrace oneself.

Sub Concl: Socrates should not beg [MODUS TOLLENS]

If one is virtuous, then one does not disgrace oneself

Assumed (You members of the jury are presumably superior/virtuous people)

Sub Conclusion: You should not expect me to disgrace myself. [MODUS PONENS]

Conclusion to both arguments: Do not be persuaded against me because I do not beg. Rather I should persuade you of what is right and just. (This is a reiteration of original statement/premise at the beginning of the dialogue, stating what is obvious about a trial: its goal is truth and justice).

Prem: Judging in my favor is should not be a favor granted for doing what you want (beg, appeal to pity).

Prem: It is a matter of law and justice.

Prem: You have an oath to uphold justice

Concl: It would be unjust and would be violence to your oath of office to grant a favor instead of uphold justice

Prem: To disrespect the laws/justice, would be to disrespect the gods.

SubConclusion: This would imply A) there are no gods or B) it would be disrespect for the gods.

Conclusion: Therefore: any attempt on my part to persuade you by appeal to emotion, instead of truth and justice would convict me as charged of impiety, that I do not respect or do not believe in the gods.

(This, of course, is an example of the irony Socrates so often uses to make his case. He is NOT guilty as charge, but if he does what they want him to do, he WILL be guilty of what he is on trial for!!)