

## Socrates II

PHIL301

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### The *Apology*

- Note that 'apology' has more than one meaning. As used here, it does not mean an expression of regret at some harm caused. It means here a reasoned defense, particularly of some important and/or wrongly challenged principle or thing.
- Two sets of Accusations
  - o Historical Accusations – i.e., that he is the worst kind of Sophist:
    - ♣ That he philosophizes about “things beneath the earth and in the heavens;”
    - ♣ That he “makes the weaker argument the stronger;”
    - ♣ That he teaches the above to others.
  - o Meletus' Accusations:
    - ♣ That he corrupts Athenian youth;
    - ♣ That he is an atheist;
    - ♣ That he acknowledges false deities.
- Response to the Historical Accusations
  - o Socrates recognizes that he is unlikely to be able to change juror opinion of him, since his reputation is widespread and the result of learning from childhood.
  - o Against the teaching claim, Socrates denies that he has ever charged a fee for his “services”. (This would set him apart from the traditional Sophists, who claimed to educate, but only for a fee.)
  - o Further, Socrates cannot properly be said a teacher, since he disavows knowledge of anything. Rather, in light of this ignorance, Socrates has sought (first) to determine his wisdom relative to others and (then) to attempt to show others their ignorance.
  - o Anger resulting from his practices explains why he is associated with the Sophists, as one who attempts to subvert truth and the morality of youth (who imitate him).
- Response to Meletus: Socrates easily shows that Meletus' allegations are trivial, groundless.
  - o Corruption of Youth charge: No one wishes to harm himself. (Cf. note above on weakness of will.) One is harmed by corrupt company. Hence, either Socrates is not corrupting the youth of Athens (because to do so would be intentionally to harm himself), or if he does so it is unintentionally. So Meletus' charge is either false or spurious (since the latter is not a criminal offense).
  - o Atheist and False Deities charges: First, Socrates demonstrates that Meletus knows little of Socrates' actual views, since he attributes to him those of Anaxagoras. Second, Socrates demonstrates that Meletus' charges are contradictory. For to believe in daimons is to believe in demigods, and to believe in demigods is to believe in the gods who gave rise to them. Consequently, one cannot be both an atheist (believe in no gods) and believe in daimons (“false gods”).
  - o More specifically, a *reductio ad absurdum*:

Meletus says:

1. Socrates believes in no gods (26c, 26e)
  2. Socrates acknowledges daimonic activities (26b, 27c).
  3. No one acknowledges X-activity and denies the existence of X (27b).
  4. Hence, no one acknowledges daimon-activity and denies the existence of daimons (27b; from 3).
  5. Hence, Socrates acknowledges the existence of daimons (27c; from 2, 4)
  6. Daimons are gods or children of gods (27c).
  7. Hence, Socrates believes in gods (27d; from 5, 6).
  8. Hence, Socrates believes in gods and believes in no gods (27d; from 1, 7).
- I.e., Meletus' indictment is contradictory, absurd.
- Harm and Justice: the quintessential Socratic principle
    - o Socrates maintains that “nothing bad can happen to a good man” (41c/d) and that it is better to suffer an injustice than to commit one (38e). He also says that it is not “lawful” for a “better man to be harmed by a worse” (30c) There he asserts that in killing him Athens will be harming itself far more than it harms him – i.e., by committing a gross injustice.
    - o In general, Socrates believes that it is only by committing an injustice (or other moral wrong) that one comes to any significant harm.
    - o See also *Republic* I for further expression of this view.
    - o See Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* for a development of this view of virtue as the defining excellence of a human.
  - Fear of Death: Socrates denies that death is to be feared and argues that it may well be a good.
    - o 29a-b: It is irrational to fear death because we do not know what death holds. (We do know that injustice is bad, and so should certainly fear it.)
    - o 40b-e: Socrates argues:
      1. Either death is complete loss of awareness, or in death one's awareness persists.
      2. If the former, then death is a benefit (like a good night's sleep).
      3. If the latter, then death is a benefit (because one can converse with the great dead).
      4. Hence, death is (likely) a benefit.