

# Apology By Plato Translated By Benjamin Jowett

## The *Apology* by Plato translated by Benjamin Jowett

<https://ebooks.adelaide.edu.au/p/plato/p71ap/complete.html>

How you, O Athenians, have been affected by my accusers, I cannot tell; but I know that they almost made me forget who I was—so persuasively did they speak; and yet they have hardly uttered a word of truth. But of the many falsehoods told by them, there was one which quite amazed me;—I mean when they said that you should be upon your guard and not allow yourselves to be deceived by the force of my eloquence. To say this, when they were certain to be detected as soon as I opened my lips and proved myself to be anything but a great speaker, did indeed appear to me most shameless—unless by the force of eloquence they mean the force of truth; for if such is their meaning, I admit that I am eloquent. But in how different a way from theirs! Well, as I was saying, they have scarcely spoken the truth at all; but from me you shall hear the whole truth: not, however, delivered after their manner in a set oration duly ornamented with words and phrases. No, by heaven! but I shall use the words and arguments which occur to me at the moment; for I am confident in the justice of my cause [or, I am certain that I am right in taking this course. —JRO]: at my time of life I ought not to be appearing before you, O men of Athens, in the character of a juvenile orator—let no one expect it of me. And I must beg of you to grant me a favour:— If I defend myself in my accustomed manner, and you hear me using the words which I have been in the habit of using in the *agora*, at the tables of the money-changers, or anywhere else, I would ask you not to be surprised, and not to interrupt me on this account. For I am more than seventy years of age, and appearing now for the first time in a court of law, I am quite a stranger to the language of the place; and therefore I would have you regard me as if I were really a stranger, whom you would excuse if he spoke in his native tongue, and after the fashion of his country:—Am I making an unfair request of you? Never mind the manner, which may or may not be good; but think only of the truth of my words, and give heed to that: let the speaker speak truly and the judge decide justly.

And first, I have to reply to the older charges and to my first accusers, and then I will go on to the later ones. For of old I have had many accusers, who have accused me falsely to you during many years; and I am more afraid of them than of Anytus and his associates, who are dangerous, too, in their own way. But far more dangerous are the others, who began when you were children, and took possession of your minds with their falsehoods, telling of one Socrates, a wise man, who speculated about the heaven above, and searched into the earth beneath, and made the worse appear the better cause. The disseminators of this tale are the accusers whom I dread; for their hearers are apt to fancy that such enquirers do not believe in the existence of the gods. And they are many, and their charges against me are of ancient date, and they were made by them in the days when you were more impressible than you are now—in childhood, or it may have been in youth—and the cause when heard went by default, for there was

**Apology by Plato Translated by Benjamin Jowett** is a seminal text that captures the essence of Socratic philosophy through the lens of one of history's most influential figures, Socrates himself. The dialogue portrays Socrates' defense during his trial in 399 BC, where he faced charges of impiety and corrupting the youth of Athens. This translation by Benjamin Jowett, first published in the 19th century, is celebrated for its clarity and fidelity to the original text, providing readers with a profound understanding of Socratic

thought and the philosophical principles that underpin Western philosophy.

## Historical Context

### The Trial of Socrates

To fully appreciate the significance of the *Apology*, one must understand the historical and cultural context in which it was written. Socrates was charged with:

- Impiety: Not believing in the gods of the state.
- Corrupting the youth: Leading the younger generation away from traditional Athenian values.

The trial was held in a democratic Athens, where public opinion was often swayed by rhetoric and populism. Socrates stood as a critic of the societal norms, engaging in dialectical methods that challenged the status quo.

### Plato's Role

Plato, a student of Socrates, wrote the *Apology* as a dramatic reenactment of his mentor's defense. As one of Socrates' most ardent followers, Plato's account serves both as a historical document and a philosophical treatise. The dialogue emphasizes key themes such as:

- The nature of wisdom.
- The importance of virtue.
- The concept of the examined life.

## Structure of the *Apology*

The *Apology* is divided into three main parts:

### 1. The Defense

Socrates begins his defense by addressing the jury and acknowledging the prejudices against him. He refutes the accusations by:

- Emphasizing his role as a seeker of truth.
- Highlighting his commitment to philosophical inquiry.

- Arguing that he has been misunderstood as a sophist rather than a philosopher.

Socrates argues that he has been guided by a divine inner voice, or "daimonion," which has led him to question those who claim to possess wisdom.

## **2. The Socratic Method**

A significant part of Socrates' defense is his use of the Socratic method, a form of cooperative argumentative dialogue. This technique involves:

- Asking a series of questions.
- Encouraging critical thinking.
- Challenging assumptions.

Through this method, Socrates demonstrates that many who claim to be wise are, in fact, ignorant. This approach not only defends his character but also serves to illuminate the ignorance of his accusers.

## **3. The Conclusion and Sentencing**

After presenting his defense, Socrates is found guilty. In the concluding remarks, he discusses the concept of death and the fear of it. He posits that:

- Death is either a dreamless sleep or a transition to another realm.
- A philosopher should welcome death as it represents the ultimate form of knowledge.

Socrates ultimately chooses not to propose an alternative punishment, believing that a virtuous life cannot be bought or bartered.

# **Key Themes and Philosophical Implications**

The Apology is rich with themes that resonate through the ages. Some of the most significant include:

## **1. The Nature of Wisdom**

Socrates famously claims that "I know that I am intelligent because I know that I know nothing." This statement encapsulates the essence of Socratic wisdom, which positions ignorance as a prerequisite for genuine knowledge.

## 2. The Examined Life

One of the most quoted lines from the Apology is Socrates' assertion that "the unexamined life is not worth living." This emphasizes the importance of self-reflection and philosophical inquiry as essential components of a meaningful existence.

## 3. Virtue and Ethics

Socrates argues that virtue is the highest good and that one must strive to cultivate it. He suggests that:

- Knowledge is inherently tied to virtue.
- An individual's moral character is paramount to their happiness.

## Benjamin Jowett's Translation

### Overview of Jowett's Translation

Benjamin Jowett's translation of the Apology is notable for its accessibility and literary quality. Jowett, a scholar and philosopher, aimed to present Plato's works in a manner that would resonate with contemporary readers while preserving the original meanings and nuances.

### Features of Jowett's Translation

Some key features of Jowett's translation include:

- Clarity: Jowett's language is straightforward, making complex philosophical ideas easier to understand.
- Faithfulness to the Text: He endeavors to maintain the integrity of Plato's original dialogue, ensuring philosophical concepts are accurately conveyed.
- Scholarly Footnotes: Jowett provides contextual notes that help readers grasp the historical and philosophical backgrounds of the text.

## Impact and Legacy

The impact of the Apology extends far beyond its original context. It has influenced countless philosophers, writers, and thinkers, including:

- Renaissance Humanists: Who found in Socrates a model for intellectual inquiry and moral integrity.

- Modern Philosophers: Such as Kierkegaard and Nietzsche, who grappled with the implications of Socratic thought.

Moreover, the Apology has become a foundational text in the study of ethics, epistemology, and political philosophy, encouraging individuals to engage in critical self-examination and to question societal norms.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, Apology by Plato Translated by Benjamin Jowett is not just a defense of Socrates but a profound exploration of philosophical inquiry, ethics, and the nature of wisdom. Through Socrates' words, readers are challenged to examine their own lives and beliefs. Jowett's translation allows modern audiences to connect with these timeless ideas, ensuring that the legacy of Socrates and the philosophical tradition he represents continues to thrive. The Apology remains a crucial text for anyone seeking to understand the foundations of Western thought and the importance of living an examined life.

## **Frequently Asked Questions**

### **What is the central theme of Plato's 'Apology' as translated by Benjamin Jowett?**

The central theme of Plato's 'Apology' is the defense of Socrates against the charges of corrupting the youth and impiety, emphasizing the importance of seeking truth and wisdom.

### **How does Benjamin Jowett's translation of 'Apology' differ from other translations?**

Benjamin Jowett's translation is known for its literary quality and philosophical clarity, providing a balance between fidelity to the original text and accessibility for modern readers.

### **What philosophical ideas does Socrates present in his defense in 'Apology'?**

Socrates presents ideas such as the examined life being worth living, the value of virtue over material wealth, and the importance of questioning and pursuing knowledge.

### **What role does irony play in Socrates' defense in the 'Apology'?**

Irony plays a significant role in Socrates' defense as he often contrasts his supposed ignorance with the claimed wisdom of his accusers, highlighting their lack of true knowledge.

## How does Jowett's translation capture Socrates' character in 'Apology'?

Jowett's translation captures Socrates' character as steadfast, eloquent, and unyielding in his commitment to truth, showcasing his philosophical integrity and moral courage.

## What is Socrates' view on death as expressed in the 'Apology'?

Socrates views death as a potential blessing rather than a fearsome end, suggesting that it may lead to a better existence or a continuation of the pursuit of knowledge.

**What impact did Jowett's translation of 'Apology' have on the study of Plato's works?**

Jowett's translation has had a lasting impact on the study of Plato's works by making them more accessible and influencing subsequent interpretations and discussions in philosophy.

What is the historical context of the trial of Socrates as presented in 'Apology'?

The trial of Socrates took place in 399 BC in Athens, where he was charged with impiety and corrupting the youth, reflecting the tensions of Athenian democracy and its values at the time.

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