

Apology II 35e–42a¹

Introduction. After the guilty verdict, Socrates is given the chance to influence the punishment in a second speech. In the final part of his defence, after receiving the death sentence, Socrates explains why this verdict, while undeserved, is not a bad thing.

Questions.

1. The punishment ought to be deserved. What does Socrates suggest he deserves (36b–e)?
2. Why is exile not an option for Socrates (37c–e)?
3. And why is ‘quietly minding his own business’ no option either (37e–38a)?
- 4.★ What are your thoughts on Socrates’s point that the unexamined life is not worth living (38a)?
- 5.★ Socrates claims that while he is convicted to death, the jury is convicted to an unjust and immoral life (39b). How does he develop this point?
6. What is the role of the *daimonion* in Socrates’s acceptance of the death penalty (40a–c)?
- 7.★ What do you make of Socrates’s thoughts about death (40c–41c)?

Background. (a) At 35c, Socrates alludes to impiety. Here is the line of thought in outline. A just defence can only be grounded in convincing facts and arguments. To defend oneself with appeals to pity is not just: this only corrupts the jury, and hence invites perjury and injustice. But injustice is impious; and impiety is not consistent with religious duty (divine obligations) and belief. So, if someone is accused with impiety, yet defends oneself with appeals to pity, this very defence proves the charge. (b) When Socrates says he does not meet the expectations of the jury by pleading for his life (38d–e), this may be an allusion to Perikles’s emotional speeches before the Athenian court (to defend Aspasia; to defend himself). In *Gorgias* (522d), Socrates says that he would be really be hurt, if he were convicted because he did something unjust or immoral; but if he were sentenced to death for the lack of flattering oratory, he would bear his death with ease. In that passage, he eerily anticipates the charges against him (i.e. corrupting the young). In many respects, the powerful *Gorgias* reads like an epilogue to the *Apology*. (c) Towards the end, Socrates suggests that death is welcome (41d). The verb used in the passage is ἀπαλλαξείω (apallaxeiô), which hints at the desire to get rid, or being released, of something. This theme, i.e. that the soul is better off without the body, is discussed extensively the *Phaedo*. It is also echoed in the *Meditations* (1641), where Descartes argues that being embodied in a sense confuses thinking; the fact that the soul (while really distinct) is in a body, hinders the clear and distinct cognition of truths, or the workings of the intellect (see esp. *Med. VI*, ¶¶12–5).

¹ *The Last Days of Socrates*, pp. 64–70.

