17.03. Introduction to Political Thought
Lecture Outline: Plato’s *Apology of Socrates*

Dates
Socrates b. 470 BC d. 399 (Socrates convicted 280-220 by Athenian jury)
Plato b. 428/427 d. 348/347

I. Background
A. Plato’s use of the dialogue form
   1. Philosophical arguments tailored to the audience
   2. The audience in the *Apology*: hostile and unphilosophical
B. Political context

II. *Apology* as a document of Socrates’s life and philosophical activity
A. Commitment to testing claims of wisdom or knowledge
   1. Socratic method: *elenchus* (interrogation, examination)
   2. Embarrassing people as a means of educating them
B. Pursuit of life’s most important question: What is the best way to live?
C. Portrait of Socratic citizenship: not conventionally political but loyal to Athens
D. Socratic irony: claims to know less than he does

III. The charges and accusers
A. Past charges (accusers: anonymous and/or dead)
   1. Socrates is a busybody who investigates things he shouldn’t
   2. Makes the weaker argument appear the stronger
      a. Comparison with the Sophists
      b. Socrates is politically dangerous, not a patriot
B. Present charges (accusers: Meletus, Anytus, Lycon)
   1. Impiety
   2. Corrupting the youth

IV. Socrates’s defense
A. Response to past charges: Doesn’t make any claims of practical wisdom or knowledge
   Why then do the Athenians think he makes such claims? (Story of the oracle)
B. Response to present charges
   1. Corrupting the youth: He could not intentionally corrupt/harm the youth
      because he knows that harming someone will lead to retaliation
   2. Impiety: Silent on question of whether he believes in any gods at all
C. Digression on his way of life
   1. Socratic citizenship as superior to the old Homeric model
   2. Unconventional patriotism through interrogating the laws and fellow citizens

V. Conclusion:
A. Critique of political life from the point of view of philosophy
B. Limits of reason