

The Examined Life
a mini-course on Plato's *Apology*
MDC-Brooklyn, December 2018

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Class Time: December 7, 14, and 21 from 12-3pm

Course Description

Socrates spent his life asking his fellow-citizens why they believed what they did. In 399 BC, he was put on trial for corrupting young people and disrespecting the religious customs of Athens. He lost his case and was sentenced to death. Plato's *Apology* contains Socrates' defense speech, but it is also a defense of his whole way of life. In this course, we will examine the questions about truth-telling, argument, and justice that the *Apology* raises. What place is there for truth-tellers in our society? Should we celebrate or punish dissent? Was Socrates right that the 'unexamined life is not worth living'?

Goals of the Course

- Thinking more clearly about truth and justice
- Improving skills in reading, argument, and discussion
- Developing resources for personal reflection and further conversation

Work for the Course

Your main task each week is to read and think about the assigned portion of the *Apology*. You are invited to bring a one-page reflection on the assigned readings to class. In your reflection you can discuss some of these questions as well as the specific ones below:

- What was the reading about?
- What was *surprising* about the reading?
- What did you agree or disagree with in the reading?
- What do you think you or someone else could learn from the reading?

Schedule

Class 1: December 7 // Reading: Plato, *Apology*, pages 20-29

Questions – Who is Socrates? Is he a teacher? Does he use words to deceive? Does he talk about issues that are better left alone?

Themes – truth, rumors, questioning authority/tradition

Class 2: December 14 // Reading: Plato, *Apology*, pages 29-35

Questions – Is Socrates fair to Meletus? Does Socrates really respond to the charges against him? What's the place of logical arguments in a courtroom?

Themes – argument, logic, rhetoric, harm and benefit

Class 3: December 21 // Reading: Plato, *Apology*, pages 35-42

Questions – Is Socrates' mission political or personal? Does society really need people like Socrates? Does the jury find Socrates dangerous or just annoying?

Themes – justice, punishment, unconventional thinking