Reading Questions for Plato’s *Apology*

1. What is the importance of Socrates’ asking the jury to excuse his manner of speaking?
2. What, according to Socrates, is the “virtue or excellence of a juror”?
3. How are the demands Socrates places on the jury related to his claim that he is only concerned with saying “what’s just or not”?
   a. What does this tell us about how Socrates sees himself and how he wants us to see the jury (perhaps the trial itself)?
4. Why do Socrates’ accusers believe that Socrates does not “acknowledge” the gods?
5. How is Socrates at a disadvantage in the trial? (Think about what he says about his reputation)
6. What are the charges against Socrates?
7. How does Socrates begin to challenge the charges? (19d)
8. Summarize Socrates’ account of his conversation with Callias.
   a. What does this have to do with the claim that Socrates corrupts the youth?
   b. What is required of a person who wants to train horses, and what does that have to do with teaching virtue?
9. Why are the people (for example, poets and craftspeople) Socrates “examines” unwise despite their having knowledge?
   a. Is there a difference between knowledge and wisdom?
10. Summarize Socrates’ exchange with Meletus, particularly the discussion the “improvement” of the youth. (~24c–25c)
   a. What does Socrates prove in this exchange?
      i. Think about what Meletus is forced to acknowledge and what Socrates is allowed to suggest about Meletus’ character.
   b. What do we learn about expertise (knowledge) and wisdom?
11. Summarize Socrates’ argument about intention and harm. (25d–26b)
12. Summarize Socrates’ defense against the charge that he doesn’t acknowledge the gods.
   a. How does Socrates turn this in his favor? (Recall Socrates’ claim that he is doing god’s work, as given to him by the oracle.)
13. Think about Socrates’ claims regarding justice, virtue, and his own position in the court.
   a. How do his claims relate to the following statement from Socrates: “So, men of Athens, I’m far from pleading in my own defense now, as might be supposed. Instead, I’m pleading in yours, so that you don’t commit a great wrong against the gods gift to you by condemning me” (30d5–30e).
   b. How has Socrates set the stage such that he can make this argument? (What has he been working to prove about the charges against him and the nature of wisdom?)
   c. Could a juror condemn Socrates and act in accord with wisdom and justice?

14. Why must one who fights for justice do so in private and what evidence does Socrates provide in defense of this claim?

15. What is the evidence that Socrates hasn’t corrupted (or at least not caused harm to) the youth?

16. What punishment does Socrates propose for himself, and why does he think it’s the most just punishment?

17. Why does Socrates oppose exile?

18. Socrates’ claim that “the unexamined life isn’t worth living” is arguably the foundation of Western philosophy, perhaps even Western society.
   a. Why would Socrates make this claim (in the context of the trial and in the context of his account of his vocation as a teacher)?
   b. What is the outcome of Socrates’ examination of his own life and his encouraging others to do so as well?
   c. Do you agree with Socrates here?

19. Summarize Socrates’ speeches to the two groups of jurors—the ones who sentenced him to death and the ones who did not.

20. What is Socrates’ view of death? (*If you’re interested in exploring the topic further, I suggest you take a look at Crito, a dialogue between Socrates and his friend Crito, who attempts to persuade Socrates to escape Athens and avoid his death sentence. You can find the text from numerous online sources, as well as in Trials of Socrates.)
   a. What do we learn about Socrates here?
   b. Can we make a judgment about the rest of the trial, and therefore his convictions about wisdom, justice, education, civic duty, and