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## MY APOLOGY

Woody Allen

Of all the famous men who ever lived, the one I would most like to have been was Socrates. Not just because he was a great thinker, because I have been known to have some reasonably profound insights myself, although mine invariably revolve around a Swedish airline stewardess and some handcuffs. No, the great appeal for me of this wisest of all Greeks was his courage in the face of death. His decision was not to abandon his principles, but rather to give his life to prove a point. I personally am not quite as fearless about dying and will, after any untoward noise such as a car backfiring, leap directly into the arms of the person I am conversing with. In the end, Socrates' brave death gave his life authentic meaning; something my existence lacks totally, although it does possess a minimal relevance to the Internal Revenue Department. I must confess I have tried putting myself in this great philosopher's sandals many times and no matter how often I do, I immediately wind up dozing off and having the following dream

*(The scene is my prison cell. I am usually sitting alone, working out some deep problem of rational thought like: Can an object be called a work of art if it can also be used to clean the stove? Presently I am visited by Agathon and Simmias.)*

**Agathon:** Ah, my good friend and wise old sage. How go your days of confinement?

**Allen:** What can one say of confinement, Agathon? Only the body may be circumscribed. My mind roams freely, unfettered by the four walls and therefore in truth I ask, does confinement exist?

**Agathon:** Well, what if you want to take a walk?

**Allen:** Good question. I can't.

*(The three of us sit in classical poses, not unlike a frieze. Finally Agathon speaks.)*

**Agathon:** I'm afraid the word is bad. You have been condemned to death.

**Allen:** Ah, it saddens me that I should cause debate in the senate.

**Agathon:** No debate. Unanimous.

**Allen:** Really?

**Agathon:** First ballot.

**Allen:** Hmmm I had counted on a little more support.

**Simmiias:** The senate is furious over your ideas for a Utopian state.

**Allen:** I guess I should never have suggested having a philosopher-king.

**Simmiias:** Especially when you kept pointing to yourself and clearing your throat.

**Allen:** And yet I do not regard my executioners as evil.

**Agathon:** Nor do I.

**Allen:** Er, yeah, well... for what is evil but merely good in excess?

**Agathon:** How so?

**Allen:** Look at it this way. If a man sings a lovely song it is beautiful. If he keeps singing, one begins to get a headache.

**Agathon:** True.

**Allen:** And if he definitely won't stop singing, eventually you want to stuff socks down his throat.

**Agathon:** Yes. Very true.

**Allen:** When is the sentence to be carried out?

**Agathon:** What time is it now?



**Allen:** Today!?

**Agathon:** They need the jail cell.

**Allen:** Then let it be! Let them take my life. Let it be recorded that I died rather than abandon the principles of truth and free inquiry. Weep not, Agathon.

**Agathon:** I'm not weeping. This is an allergy.

**Allen:** For to the man of the mind, death is not an end but a beginning.

**Simmias:** How so?

**Allen:** Well, now give me a minute.

**Simmias:** Take your time.

**Allen:** It is true, Simmias, that man does not exist before he is born, is it not?

**Simmias:** Very true.

**Allen:** Nor does he exist after his death.

**Simmias:** Yes. I agree.

**Allen:** Hmmm

**Simmias:** So?

**Allen:** Now, wait a minute. I'm a little confused. You know they only feed me lamb and it's never well-cooked.

**Simmias:** Most men regard death as the final end. Consequently they fear it.

**Allen:** Death is a state of non-being. That which is not, does not exist. Therefore death does not exist. Only truth exists. Truth and beauty. Each is interchangeable, but are aspects of themselves. Er, what specifically did they say they had in mind for me?

**Agathon:** Hemlock.

**Allen:** (*Puzzled*) Hemlock?

**Agathon:** You remember that black liquid that ate through your marble table?

**Allen:** Really?

**Agathon:** Just one cupful. Though they do have a back-up chalice should you spill anything.

**Allen:** I wonder if it's painful?

**Agathon:** They asked if you would try not to make a scene. It disturbs the other prisoners.

**Allen:** Hmmm...

**Agathon:** I told everyone you would die bravely rather than renounce your principles.

**Allen:** Right, right... er, did the concept of "exile" ever come up?

**Agathon:** They stopped exiling last year. Too much red tape.

**Allen:** Right... yeah... (*Troubled and distracted but trying to*

*remain self-possessed*) I er... so er... so what else is new?

**Agathon:** Oh, I ran into Isosceles. He has a great idea for a new triangle.

**Allen:** Right... right... *(Suddenly dropping all pretense of courage)* Look, I'm going to level with you—I don't want to go! I'm too young!

**Agathon:** But this is your chance to die for truth!

**Allen:** Don't misunderstand me. I'm all for truth. On the other hand I have a lunch date in Sparta next week and I'd hate to miss it. It's my turn to buy. You know those Spartans, they fight so easily.

**Simmias:** Is our wisest philosopher a coward?

**Allen:** I'm not a coward, and I'm not a hero. I'm somewhere in the middle.

**Simmias:** A cringing vermin.

**Allen:** That's approximately the spot.

**Agathon:** But it was you who proved that death doesn't exist.

**Allen:** Hey, listen I've proved a lot of things. That's how I pay my rent. Theories and little observations, A puckish remark now and then. Occasional maxims. It beats picking olives, but let's not get carried away.

**Agathon:** But you have proved many times that the soul is immortal.

**Allen:** And it is! On paper. See, that's the thing about philosophy—it's not all that functional once you get out of class.

**Simmias:** And the eternal "forms"? You said each thing always did exist and always will exist.

**Allen:** I was talking mostly about heavy objects. A statue or something. With people it's a lot different.

**Agathon:** But all that talk about death being the same as sleep.

**Allen:** Yes, but the difference is that when you're dead and somebody yells, "Everybody up, it's morning," it's very hard to find your

slippers.

*(The executioner arrives with a cup of hemlock. He bears a close facial resemblance to the Irish comedian Spike Milligan.)*

**Executioner:** Ah—here we are. Who gets the poison?

**Agathon:** *(Pointing to me)* He does.

**Allen:** Gee, it's a big cup. Should it be smoking like that?

**Executioner:** Yes. And drink it all because a lot of times the poison's at the bottom.

**Allen:** *(Usually here my behavior is totally different from Socrates' and I am told I scream in my sleep.)* No—I won't! I don't want to die! Help! No! Please!

*(He hands me the bubbling brew amidst my disgusting pleading and all seems lost. Then because of some innate survival instinct the dream always takes an upturn and a messenger arrives.)*

**Messenger:** Hold everything! The senate has re-voted! The charges are dropped. Your value has been reassessed and it is decided you should be honored instead.

**Allen:** At last! At last! They came to their senses! I'm a free man! Free! And to be honored yet! Quick, Agathon and Simmias, get my bags. I must be going. Praxiteles will want to get an early start on my bust. But before I leave, I give a little parable.

**Simmias:** Gee, that really was a sharp reversal. I wonder if they know what they're doing?

**Allen:** A group of men live in a dark cave. They are unaware that outside the sun shines. The only light they know is the flickering flame of a few small candles which they use to move around.

**Agathon:** Where'd they get the candles?

**Allen:** Well, let's just say they have them

**Agathon:** They live in a cave and have candles? It doesn't ring true.

**Allen:** Can't you just buy it for now?

**Agathon:** O.K., O.K., but get to the point.

**Allen:** And then one day, one of the cave dwellers wanders out of the cave and sees the outside world.

**Simmias:** In all its clarity.

**Allen:** Precisely. In all its clarity.

**Agathon:** When he tries to tell the others they don't believe him

**Allen:** Well, no. He doesn't tell the others.

**Agathon:** He doesn't?

**Allen:** No, he opens a meat market, he marries a dancer and dies of a cerebral hemorrhage at forty-two.

*(They grab me and force the hemlock down. Here I usually wake up in a sweat and only some eggs and smoked salmon calm me down.)* 📖

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