

Plato's Apology of Socrates

How you, men of Athens, have been affected by my accusers, I do not know¹. For my part, even I nearly forgot myself because of them, so persuasively did they speak. And yet they have said, so to speak, nothing true. I wondered most at one of the many falsehoods they told, when they said that you should beware that you are not deceived by me, since I am a clever speaker. They are not ashamed that they will immediately be refuted by me in deed, as soon as it becomes apparent that I am not a clever speaker at all; this seemed to me to be most shameless of them—unless of course they call a clever speaker the one who speaks the truth. For if this is what they are saying, then I too would agree that I am an orator—but not of their sort. So they, as I say, have said little or nothing true, while from me you will hear the whole truth—but by Zeus, men of Athens, not beautifully spoken speeches like theirs, adorned with phrases and words; rather, what you hear will be spoken at random in the words that I happen upon—for I trust that the things I say are just—and let none of you expect otherwise. For surely it would not be becoming, men, for someone of my age to come before you fabricating speeches like a youth. And, men of Athens, I do very much beg and beseech this of you: if you hear me speaking in my defense² with the same speeches I am accustomed to speak both in the marketplace at the money—tables, where many of you have heard me, and elsewhere, do not wonder or make a disturbance³ because of this. For this is how it is: now is the first time I have come before a law court, at the age of seventy; hence I am simply⁴ foreign to the manner of speech here. So just as, if I really did happen to be a foreigner, you would surely sympathize with me if I spoke in the dialect and way in which I was raised, so also I do beg this of you now (and it is just, at least as it seems to me): leave aside the manner of my speech—for perhaps it may be worse, but perhaps better—and instead consider this very thing and apply your mind to this: whether the things I say are just or not. For this is the virtue⁵ of a judge, while that of an orator is to speak the truth.

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So first, men of Athens, it is just for me to speak in defense against the first false charges against me and the first accusers, and next against the later charges and the later accusers. For many have accused me to you, even long ago, talking now for many years and saying nothing true; and I fear them more than Anytus⁶ and those around him, although they too are dangerous. But the others are more dangerous, men. They got hold of the many of you from childhood, and they accused me and persuaded you—although it is no more true than the present charge—that there is a certain Socrates, a wise man⁷ a thinker⁸ on the things aloft, who has investigated all things under the earth, and who makes the weaker

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speech the stronger.⁹ Those, men of Athens, who have scattered this report about, are my dangerous accusers. For their listeners hold that investigators of these things also do not believe in gods. Besides, there are many of these accusers, and they have been accusing for a long time now. Moreover, they spoke to you at the age when you were most trusting, when some of you were children and youths, and they accused me in a case that simply went by default, for no one spoke in my defense. And the most unreasonable thing of all is that it is not even possible to know and to say their names, unless a certain one happens to be a comic poet.¹⁰ Those who persuaded you by using envy and slander—and those who persuaded others, after being convinced themselves—all of these are most difficult to get at. For it is also not possible to have any of them come forward here and to refute him, but it is necessary for me simply to speak in my defense as though fighting with shadows and refuting with no one to answer. So you too must deem it to be as I say: that there have been two groups of accusers, the ones accusing me now, and the others long ago of whom I speak: and you must also suppose that I should first speak in defense against the latter, for you heard them accusing me earlier and much more than these later ones here.

Well, then, a defense speech must be made, men of Athens, and an attempt must be made in this short time to take away from you this slander, which you acquired over a long time. Now I would wish that it may turn out like this, if it is in any way better both for you and for me, and that I may accomplish something by making a defense speech. But I suppose this is hard, and I am not at all unaware of what sort of thing it is. Nevertheless, let this proceed in whatever way is dear to the god, but the law must be obeyed and a defense speech must be made.

So let us take up from the beginning what the accusation is, from which has arisen the slander against me—which, in fact, is what Meletus¹¹ trusted in when he brought this indictment against me. Well, then. What did the slanderers say to slander me? Their sworn statement, just as though they were accusers, must be read: “Socrates does injustice¹² and is meddlesome, by investigating the things under the earth and the heavenly things, and by making the weaker speech the stronger, and by teaching others these same things.” It is something like this. For you yourselves also used to see these things in the comedy of Aristophanes: a certain Socrates was carried around there, claiming that he was treading on air and spouting much other drivel about which I have no expertise, either much or little.¹³ And I do not say this to dishonor this sort of knowledge,¹⁴ if anyone is wise in such things (may I never be prosecuted with such great lawsuits by Meletus!); but in fact I, men of Athens, have no share in these things. Again, I offer the many¹⁵

of you as witnesses, and I maintain that you should teach and tell each other, those of you who have ever heard me conversing and there are many such among you—tell each other, then, if any of you ever heard me conversing about such things, either much or little, and from this you will recognize that the same holds also for the other things that the many say about me.

But in fact none of these things is so; and if you have heard from anyone that I attempt to educate human beings and make money from it, that is not true either. Though this too seems to me to be noble,¹⁶ if one should be able to educate human beings, like Gorgias of Leontini, and Prodicus of Ceos, and Hippias of Elis.¹⁷ For each of them, men, is able, going into each of the cities, to persuade the young—who can associate with whomever of their own citizens they wish to for free—they persuade these young men to leave off their associations with the latter, and to associate with themselves instead, and to give them money and acknowledge gratitude besides.

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And as for that, there is another man here, from Paros, a wise man, who I perceived was in town; for I happened to meet a man who has paid more money to sophists than all the others, Callias, the son of Hipponicus.¹⁸ So I questioned him (for he has two sons):

“Callias,” I said, “If your two sons had been born colts or calves, we would have been able to get and hire an overseer for them who could make the two of them noble and good¹⁹ in their appropriate virtue, and he would have been someone from among those skilled with horses or skilled in farming. But as it is, since they are two human beings, whom do you have in mind to get as an overseer²⁰ for the two of them? Who is knowledgeable in such virtue, that of human being and citizen?²¹ For I suppose you have considered it, since you possess sons. Is there someone,” I said, “or not?”

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“Quite so,” he said.

“Who,” I said, “and where is he from, and for how much does he teach?”

“Evenus,” he said, “Socrates, from Paros: five minae.”²²

And I regarded Evenus as blessed if he should truly have this art²³ and teaches at such a modest rate. As for myself, I would be pluming²⁴ and priding myself on it if I had knowledge of these things. But I do not have knowledge of them, men of Athens. Perhaps, then, one of you might retort, “Well, Socrates, what is your affair?²⁵ Where have these slanders against you come from? For surely if you were in fact practicing nothing more uncommon than others, such a report and account would not then have arisen, unless you were doing something different from the many. So tell us what it is, so that we do not deal unadvisedly with you.”

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In this, it seems to me, what the speaker says is just, and I will try to demonstrate to you what ever it is that has brought me this

name and slander. So listen. Now perhaps I will seem to some of you to be joking. Know well, however, that I will tell you the whole truth. For I, men of Athens, have gotten this name through nothing but a certain wisdom. Just what sort of wisdom is this? That which is perhaps human wisdom; for probably I really am wise in this. But those of whom I just spoke might perhaps be wise in some wisdom greater than human, or else I cannot say what it is. For I, at least, do not have knowledge of it, but whoever asserts that I do lies and speaks in order to slander me.

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Now please, men of Athens, do not make a disturbance, not even if I seem to you to be boasting somewhat. For “not mine is the story”²⁶ that I will tell; rather, I will refer it to a speaker trustworthy to you. Of my wisdom, if indeed it is wisdom of any kind, and what sort of thing it is, I will offer for you as witness the god in Delphi. Now you know Chaerephon, no doubt. He was my comrade from youth as well as a comrade of your multitude, and he shared in your recent exile and returned with you. You do know what sort of man Chaerephon was, how vehement he was in whatever he would set out to do.²⁷ And in particular he once even went to Delphi and dared to consult the oracle about this—now as I say, do not make disturbances, men—and he asked whether there was anyone wiser than I. The Pythia²⁸ replied that no one was wiser. And concerning these things his brother here will be a witness for you, since he himself has met his end.

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Now consider why I say these things: I am going to teach you where the slander against me has come from. When I heard these things, I pondered them like this: “What ever is the god saying, and what riddle is he posing? For I am conscious that I am not at all wise, either much or little. So what ever is he saying when he claims that I am wisest? Surely he is not saying something false, at least; for that is not sanctioned for him.” And for a long time I was at a loss about what ever he was saying, but then very reluctantly I turned to something like the following investigation of it.

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I went to one of those reputed²⁹ to be wise, on the ground that there, if anywhere, I would refute the divination³⁰ and show the oracle, “This man is wiser than I, but you declared that I was wisest.” So I considered him thoroughly—I need not speak of him by name, but he was one of the politicians³¹—and when I considered him and conversed with him, men of Athens, I was affected something like this: it seemed to me that this man seemed to be wise, both to many other human beings and most of all to himself, but that he was not. And then I tried to show him that he supposed he was wise, but was not. So from this I became hateful both to him and to many of those present.

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For my part, as I went away, I reasoned with regard to myself: “I am wiser than this human being. For probably neither of us knows

anything noble and good, but he supposes he knows something when he does not know, while I, just as I do not know, do not even suppose that I do. I am likely to be a little bit wiser than he in this very thing: that whatever I do not know, I do not even suppose I know.”

From there I went to someone else, to one of those reputed to be wiser than he, and these things seemed to me to be the same. And there I became hateful both to him and to many others.

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After this, then, I kept going to one after another, all the while perceiving with pain and fear that I was becoming hated. Nevertheless it seemed to be necessary to regard the matter of the god as most important. So I had to go, in considering what the oracle was saying, to all those reputed to know something. And by the dog,³² men of Athens—for it is necessary to speak the truth before you—I swear I was affected something like this: those with the best reputations seemed to me nearly the most deficient, in my investigation in accordance with the god, while others with more paltry reputations seemed to be men more fit in regard to being prudent.³³ Indeed, I must display my wandering to you as a performing of certain labors³⁴ so that the divination would turn out to be unrefuted.

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After the politicians I went to the poets, those of tragedies and dithyrambs, and the others, in order that there I would catch myself in the act of being more ignorant than they. So I would take up those poems of theirs which it seemed to me they had worked on the most, and I would ask them thoroughly what they meant, so that I might also learn something from them at the same time. I am ashamed to tell you the truth, men; nevertheless, it must be said. Almost everyone present, so to speak, would have spoken better than the poets did about the poetry that they themselves had made. So again, also concerning the poets, I soon recognized that they do not make what they make by wisdom, but by some sort of nature and while inspired, like the diviners and those who deliver oracles.³⁵ For they too say many noble things, but they know nothing of what they speak. It was apparent to me that the poets are also affected in the same sort of way. At the same time, I perceived that they supposed, on account of their poetry, that they were the wisest of human beings also in the other things, in which they were not. So I went away from there too supposing that I had turned out to be superior to them in the very same thing in which I was to the politicians.

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Finally, then, I went to the manual artisans. For I was conscious that I had knowledge of nothing, so to speak, but I knew that I would discover that they, at least, had knowledge of many noble things. And I was not played false about this: they did have knowledge of things which I did not have knowledge of, and in this way they were wiser than I. But, men of Athens, the good craftsmen

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also seemed to me to go wrong in the same way as the poets: because he performed his art nobly, each one deemed himself wisest also in the other things, the greatest things—and this discordant note of theirs seemed to hide that wisdom. So I asked myself on behalf of the oracle whether I would prefer to be as I am, being in no way wise in their wisdom or ignorant in their ignorance, or to have both things that they have. I answered myself and the oracle that it profits me to be just as I am.

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This is the examination, men of Athens, from which I have incurred many hatreds, the sort that are harshest and gravest, so that many slanders have arisen from them, and I got this name of being “wise.” For those present on each occasion suppose that I myself am wise in the things concerning which I refute someone else, whereas it is probable, men, that really the god is wise, and that in this oracle he is saying that human wisdom is worth little or nothing. And he appears to say this of Socrates and to have made use of my name in order to make me a pattern, as if he would say, “That one of you, O human beings, is wisest, who, like Socrates, has become cognizant that in truth he is worth nothing with respect to wisdom.”

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That is why even now I still go around seeking and investigating in accordance with the god any townsman or foreigner I suppose to be wise. And whenever someone does not seem so to me, I come to the god’s aid and show that he is not wise. And because of this occupation, I have had no leisure, either to do any of the things of the city worth speaking of or any of the things of my family. Instead, I am in ten—thousandfold poverty because of my devotion to the god.

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In addition to these things, the young who follow me of their own accord—those who have the most leisure, the sons of the wealthiest—enjoy hearing human beings examined. And they themselves often imitate me, and in turn they attempt to examine others. And then, I suppose, they discover a great abundance of human beings who suppose they know something, but know little or nothing. Thereupon, those examined by them are angry at me, not at themselves, and they say that Socrates is someone most disgusting and that he corrupts the young. And whenever someone asks them, “By doing what and teaching what?” they have nothing to say, but are ignorant. So in order not to seem to be at a loss, they say the things that are ready at hand against all who philosophize: “the things aloft and under the earth” and “not believing in gods” and “making the weaker speech the stronger.” For I do not suppose they would be willing to speak the truth, that it becomes quite clear that they pretend to know, but know nothing. So since they are, I suppose, ambitious and vehement and many, and since they speak about me in an organized and persuasive

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way, they have filled up your ears, slandering me vehemently for a long time.

From among these men, Meletus attacked me, and Anytus and

³⁶ Lycon, Meletus being vexed on behalf of the poets, Anytus on behalf of the craftsmen and the politicians, and Lycon on behalf of the orators. Therefore, as I said when I began, it would be a wonder to me if I should be able in this short time to take away from 24a

you this slander which has become so great. This is the truth for you, men of Athens; I am hiding nothing from you either great or small in my speech, nor am I holding anything back. And yet I 24

a know rather well that I incur hatred by these very things; which is also a proof that I speak the truth, and that this is the slander against me, and that these are its causes. Whether you investigate these things now or later, you will discover that this is so. b

So about the things which the first accusers accused me of, let this be a sufficient defense speech before you. But against Meletus, the “good and patriotic,” as he says, and the later accusers, I will try to speak next in my defense. Now again, just as though these were other accusers, let us take up their sworn statement. It is something like this: it asserts that Socrates does injustice by corrupting the young, and by not believing in the gods in whom the city believes, but in other daimonia³⁷ that are novel. The charge is of this sort³⁸ But let us examine each one of the parts of this charge. c

Now he asserts that I do injustice by corrupting the young. But I, men of Athens, assert that Meletus does injustice, in that he jests in a serious matter, easily bringing human beings to trial, pretending to be serious and concerned about things for which he never cared³⁹ at all. That this is so, I will try to display to you as well. Now come here, Meletus, tell me: do you not regard it as most important how the youth will be the best possible? d

[MELETUS]⁴⁰ I do.

[SOCRATES] Come now, tell these men, who makes them better? For it is clear that you know, since you care, at least. For since you have discovered the one who corrupts them, as you say, namely me, you are bringing me before these men and accusing me. But the one who makes them better—come, tell them and reveal to them who it is.

Do you see, Meletus, that you are silent and have nothing to say? And yet does it not seem to be shameful to you, and a sufficient proof of just what I say, that you have never cared? But tell, my good man, who makes them better? 24d

[MELETUS] The laws.

[SOCRATES] But I am not asking this, best of men, but rather what human being is it who knows first of all this very thing, the laws? e

[MELETUS] These men, Socrates, the judges.

[SOCRATES] What are you saying, Meletus? Are these men here

able to educate the young, and do they make them better?

[MELETUS] Very much so.

[SOCRATES] All of them, or some of them, and some not?

[MELETUS] All of them.

[SOCRATES] Well said, by Hera,⁴¹ and you speak of a great abundance of beneficers. What then? Do the listeners here make them better or not?

[MELETUS] These too.

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[SOCRATES] And what about the Councilmen?⁴²

[MELETUS] The Councilmen too.

[SOCRATES] Well, Meletus, then surely those in the Assembly,⁴³ the Assemblymen, do not corrupt the youth? Or do all those too make them better?

[MELETUS] Those too.

[SOCRATES] Then all the Athenians, as it appears, make them noble and good except me, and I alone corrupt them. Is this what you are saying?

[MELETUS] I do say this, most vehemently.

[SOCRATES] You have charged me with great misfortune. Now answer me. Does it seem to you to be so also concerning horses? That all human beings make them better, while one certain one is the corrupter? Or is it wholly opposite to this, that one certain one is able to make them better—or very few, those skilled with horses—while the many, if they ever associate with horses and use them, corrupt them? Is this not so, Meletus, both concerning horses, and all the other animals?

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Of course it is, altogether so, whether you and Anytus deny or affirm it. For it would be a great happiness for the young if one alone corrupts them, while the others benefit them. But in fact, Meletus, you have sufficiently displayed that you never yet gave an thought to the young. And you are making your own lack of care plainly apparent, since you have cared nothing about the things for which you bring me in here.

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But tell us further, Meletus, before Zeus, whether it is better to dwell among upright citizens or villainous ones?

Sir, answer. For surely I am asking nothing hard. Do not the villainous do something bad to whoever are nearest to them, while the good do something good?

[MELETUS] Quite so.

[SOCRATES] Is there anyone, then, who wishes to be harmed by those he associates with, rather than to be benefited?

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Keep answering, my good man. For the law orders you to answer. Is there anyone who wishes to be harmed?

[MELETUS] Of course not.

[SOCRATES] Come then, do you bring me in here saying that I voluntarily corrupt the young and make them more villainous, or

involuntarily?

[MELETUS] Voluntarily, I say.

[SOCRATES] What then, Meletus? Are you so much wiser at your age than I at mine, that you have become cognizant that the bad always do something bad to those who are closest to them, and the good do something good; whereas I have come into so much ignorance that I am not even cognizant that if I ever do something wretched to any of my associates, I will risk getting back something bad from him? So that I do so much bad voluntarily, as you assert? Of this I am not convinced by you, Meletus, nor, do I suppose, is any other human being. But either I do not corrupt, or if I do corrupt, I do it involuntarily, so in both cases what you say is false.

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And if I corrupt involuntarily, the law is not that you bring me in here for such involuntary wrongs, but that you take me aside in private to teach and admonish me. For it is clear that if I learn, I will at least stop doing what I do involuntarily. But you avoided associating with me and teaching me, and you were not willing to, but instead you brought me in here, where the law is to bring in those in need of punishment, not learning.

But in fact, men of Athens, what I was saying is already clear, that Meletus never cared about these things either much or little.

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Nevertheless, speak to us, how do you say that I corrupt the youth, Meletus? Or is it clear, according to the indictment that you brought, that it is by teaching them not to believe” in the gods in whom the city believes, but in other daimonia that are novel? Do you not say that it is by teaching these things that I corrupt them?

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[MELETUS] I certainly do say this, most vehemently!

[SOCRATES] Then before these very gods, Meletus, about whom our speech now is, speak to me and to these men still more plainly. For I am not able to understand whether you are saying that I teach them to believe that there are gods of some sort—and so I myself do believe that there are gods and am not completely atheistic and do not do injustice in this way—but that I do not believe in those in whom the city believes, but in others, and this is what you charge me with, that I believe in others. Or do you assert that I myself do not believe in gods at all and that I teach this to others?

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[MELETUS] This is what I say, that you do not believe in gods at all.

[SOCRATES] Wondrous Meletus, why do you say this? Do I not even believe, then, that sun and moon are gods, as other human beings do?

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[MELETUS] No, by Zeus, judges, since he declares that the sun is stone and the moon is earth.

[SOCRATES] Do you suppose you are accusing Anaxagoras,⁴⁵ My dear Meletus? And do you so much despise these men here and suppose that they are so inexperienced in letters that they do not

know that the books of Anaxagoras of Clazomenae are full of these speeches? Moreover, do the young learn these things from me, when it is sometimes possible for them to buy them in the orchestra for a drachma,⁴⁶ if the price is very high, and then to laugh at Socrates if he pretends that they are his own, especially since they are so strange? But before Zeus, is this how I seem to you? Do I believe there is no god?

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[MELETUS] You certainly do not, by Zeus, not in any way at all!

[SOCRATES] You are unbelievable, Meletus, even, as you seem to me, to yourself. This man seems to me, men of Athens, to be very hubristic and unrestrained, and simply to have brought this indictment with a certain hubris and unrestraint and youthful rashness. He is like someone testing me by putting together a riddle: "Will Socrates the 'wise' recognize that I am jesting and contradicting myself, or will I deceive him and the rest of the listeners?" For he himself appears to me to be contradicting himself in the indictment, as if he were to say, "Socrates does injustice by not believing in gods, but believing in gods." And yet this is the conduct of one who jokes.

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Now consider with me, men, how he appears to me to be saying this. And you answer us, Meletus. But you others, as I begged of you from the beginning, please remember not to make disturbances if I make the speeches in my accustomed way.

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Is there any human being, Meletus, who believes that there are human matters, but does not believe in human beings?

Let him keep answering, men, and let him not make disturbances again and again. Is there anyone who does not believe in horses, but believes in horse-matters? Or anyone who does not believe in flute-players, but believes in flute-matters?

There is not, best of men. If you do not wish to answer, I say it for you and for these others. But at least answer what comes next. Is there anyone who believes that there are daimonic matters, but does not believe in daimons?

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[MELETUS] There is not.

[SOCRATES] How helpful you were by answering reluctantly when compelled by these men! Now then, you say that I believe in and teach daimonia; so whether they are novel or ancient, at any rate I do believe in daimonia according to your speech, and you also swore to this in the indictment. But if I believe in daimonia, then surely there is also a great necessity that I believe in daimons. Is this not so?

Of course it is. I set you down as agreeing, since you do not answer. And do we not believe that daimons are either gods or children of gods? Do you affirm this or not?

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[MELETUS] Quite so.

[SOCRATES] Therefore if I do believe in daimons, as you say, and

if, on the one hand, daimons are gods of some sort, then this would be what I say you are riddling and jesting about, when you say that I do not believe in gods, and again that I believe in gods, since in fact I do believe in daimons. 27d

On the other hand, if daimons are certain bastard children of gods, whether from nymphs or from certain others of whom it is also said they are born, then what human being would believe that there are children of gods, but not gods? It would be as strange as if someone believed in children of horses or asses—mules—but did not believe that there are horses and asses.⁴⁷ But, Meletus, there is no way that you did not bring this indictment either to test us in these things, or else because you were at a loss about what true injustice you might charge me with. There is no device by which you could persuade any human being who is even slightly intelligent, that it is not the part of the same man to believe in both daimonia and divine things, and further that this same man believes in neither daimons nor gods nor heroes.⁴⁸ 28a

But in fact, men of Athens, that I do not do injustice according to Meletus' indictment, does not seem to me to require much of a defense speech, but even this is sufficient. But what I was saying earlier—that I have incurred much hatred, and among many men—know well that this is true. And this is what will convict me, if it does convict me: not Meletus or Anytus, but the slander and envy of the many. This has convicted many other good men too, and I suppose it will also convict me. And there is no danger that it will stop with me. b

Perhaps, then, someone might say, “Then are you not ashamed, Socrates, of having followed the sort of pursuit from which you now run the risk of dying?”

I would respond to him with a just speech: “What you say is ignoble, fellow⁴⁹ if you suppose that a man who is of even a little benefit should take into account the danger of living or dying, but not rather consider this alone whenever he acts: whether his actions are just or unjust, and the deeds of a good man or a bad. For according to your speech, those of the demigods who met their end at Troy would be paltry, especially the son of Thetis. Rather than endure anything shameful, he despised danger so much that when his mother (a goddess) spoke to him as he was eager to kill Hector—something like this, as I suppose: ‘Son, if you avenge the murder of your comrade Patroclus and kill Hector, you yourself will die; for straightway,’ she says, ‘after Hector, your fate is ready at hand’—he, upon hearing this, belittled death and danger, fearing much more to live as a bad man and not to avenge his friends. d
‘Straightway,’ he says, ‘may I die, after I inflict a penalty on the doer of injustice, so that I do not stay here ridiculous beside the curved ships, a burden on the land.’ Surely you do not suppose

that he gave any thought to death and danger?”⁵⁰

This is the way it is, men of Athens, in truth. Wherever someone stations himself, holding that it is best, or wherever he is stationed by a ruler, there he must stay and run the risk, as it seems to me, and not take into account death or anything else compared to what is shameful. So I would have done terrible deeds, men of Athens, if, when the rulers whom you elected to rule me stationed me in Potidaea and Amphipolis and at Delium,⁵¹ I stayed then where they stationed me and ran the risk of dying like anyone else, but when the god stationed me, as I supposed and assumed, ordering me to live philosophizing and examining myself and others, I had then left my station because I feared death or any other matter whatever.

Terrible that would be, and truly then someone might justly bring me into a law court, saying that I do not believe that there are gods, since I would be disobeying the divination, and fearing death, and supposing that I am wise when I am not. For to fear death, men, is in fact nothing other than to seem to be wise, but not to be so. For it is to seem to know what one does not know: no one knows whether death does not even happen to be the greatest of all goods for the human being; but people fear it as though they knew well that it is the greatest of evils. And how is this not that reproachable ignorance of supposing that one knows what one does not know? But I, men, am perhaps distinguished from the many human beings also here in this, and if I were to say that I am wiser than anyone in anything, it would be in this: that since I do not know sufficiently about the things in Hades,⁵² so also I suppose that I do not know. But I do know that it is bad and shameful to do injustice and to disobey one's better, whether god or human being. So compared to the bad things which I know are bad, I will never fear or flee the things about which I do not know whether they even happen to be good.

So that not even if you let me go now and if you disobey Anytus — who said that either I should not have been brought in here at the beginning, or, since I was brought in, that it is not possible not to kill⁵³ me (he said before you that if I am acquitted, soon your sons, pursuing what Socrates teaches, will all be completely corrupted —if you would say to me with regard to this, “Socrates, for now we will not obey Anytus; we will let you go, but on this condition: that you no longer spend time in this investigation or philosophize; and if you are caught still doing this, you will die — if you would let me go, then, as I said, on these conditions, I would say to you, “I, men of Athens, salute you and love you, but I will obey⁵⁴ the god rather than you; and as long as I breathe and am able to, I will certainly not stop philosophizing, and I will exhort you and explain this to whomever of you I happen to meet, and I

will speak just the sorts of things I am accustomed to: ‘Best of men, you are an Athenian, from the city that is greatest and best reputed for wisdom and strength: are you not ashamed that you care for having as much money as possible, and reputation, and honor, but that you neither care for nor give thought to prudence, and truth, and how your soul will be the best possible?’ And if one of you disputes it and asserts that he does care, I will not immediately let him go, nor will I go away, but I will speak to him and examine and test him. And if he does not seem to me to possess virtue, but only says he does, I will reproach him, saying that he regards the things worth the most as the least important, and the paltrier things as more important. I will do this to whomever, younger or older, I happen to meet, both foreigner and townsman, but more so to the townsmen, inasmuch as you are closer to me in kin.

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“Know well, then, that the god orders this. And I suppose that until now no greater good has arisen for you in the city than my service to the god. For I go around and do nothing but persuade you, both younger and older, not to care for bodies and money before, nor as vehemently as, how your soul will be the best possible I say: ‘Not from money does virtue come, but from virtue comes money and all of the other good things for human beings both privately and publicly.’ If, then, I corrupt the young by saying these things, they may be harmful. But if someone asserts that what I say is other than this, he speaks nonsense. With a view to these things, men of Athens,” I would say, “either obey Anytus or not, and either let me go or not, since I would not do otherwise, not even if I were going to die many times.”

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Do not make disturbances, men of Athens, but abide by what I begged of you, not to make disturbances at the things I say, but to listen. For, as I suppose, you will even be helped by listening. For in fact I am going to tell you certain other things at which you will perhaps cry out; but do not do this in any way. For know well that if you kill me, since I am the sort of man that I say I am, you will not harm me more than yourselves. For Meletus or Anytus would not harm me—he would not even be able to—for I do not suppose it is sanctioned that a better man be harmed by a worse. Perhaps, however, he might kill or banish or dishonor⁵⁵ me. But this man no doubt supposes, and others too, that these are great evils, while I do not suppose that these are, but much rather doing what this man here is now doing: attempting to kill a man unjustly.

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So I, men of Athens, am now far from making a defense speech on my own behalf, as someone might suppose. I do it rather on your behalf, so that you do not do something wrong concerning the gift of the god to you by voting to condemn me. For if you kill me, you will not easily discover another of my sort, who—even if it is rather ridiculous to say—has simply been set upon the city by

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the god, as though upon a great and well-born horse who is rather sluggish because of his great size and needs to be awakened by some gadfly. Just so, in fact, the god seems to me to have set me upon the city as someone of this sort: I awaken and persuade and reproach each one of you, and I do not stop settling down everywhere upon you the whole day. Someone else of this sort will certainly not easily arise for you, men. Well, if you obey me, you will spare me. But perhaps you may be vexed, like the drowsy when they are awakened, and if you obey Anytus and slap me, you would easily kill me. Then you would spend the rest of your lives asleep, unless the god sends you someone else in his concern for you. 31a

That I happen to be someone of this sort, given to the city by the god, you might apprehend from this: it does not seem human, on the one hand, that I have been careless of all my own things and that for so many years now I have endured that the things of my family be uncared for; and on the other hand, that I always do your business, going to each of you privately, as a father or an older brother might do, persuading you to care for virtue. If I was getting something out of this, and if I was receiving pay while I exhorted you to these things, it would be somewhat reasonable. But as it is, even you yourselves see that the accusers, who accused me so shamelessly in everything else, in this have not been able to become so utterly shameless as to offer a witness to assert that I ever took any pay or asked for it. For, I suppose, I offer a sufficient witness that I speak the truth: my poverty. 31c

Perhaps, then, it might seem to be strange that I do go around counseling these things and being a busybody in private, but that in public I do not dare to go up before your multitude to counsel the city. The cause of this is what you have heard me speak of many times and in many places, that something divine and daimonic⁵⁶ comes to me, a voice—which, of course, is also what Meletus wrote about in the indictment, making a comedy over it. d

This is something which began for me in childhood: a sort of voice comes, and whenever it comes, it always turns me away from whatever I am about to do, but never turns me forward. This is what opposes my political activity, and its opposition seems to me altogether noble. For know well, men of Athens, if I had long ago attempted to be politically active, I would long ago have perished, and I would have benefited neither you nor myself. Now do not be vexed with me when I speak the truth. For there is no human being who will preserve his life if he genuinely opposes either you or any other multitude and prevents many unjust and unlawful things from happening in the city. Rather, if someone who really fights for the just is going to preserve himself even for a short time, it is necessary for him to lead a private rather than a e 32a

public life.

I for my part will offer great proofs of these things for you—not speeches, but what *you* honor, deeds. Do listen to what happened to me, so that you may see that I would not yield even to one man against the just because of a fear of death, even if I were to perish by refusing to yield. I will tell you vulgar things, typical of the law courts, but true. I, men of Athens, never held any office in the city except for being once on the Council. And it happened that our tribe, Antiochis, held the prytany⁵⁷ when you wished to judge the ten generals (the ones who did not pick up the men from the naval battle) as a group—unlawfully, as it seemed to all of you in the time afterwards. I alone of the prytanes opposed your doing anything against the laws then, and I voted against it. And although the orators were ready to indict me and arrest me, and you were ordering and shouting, I supposed that I should run the risk with the law and the just rather than side with you because of fear of prison or death when you were counseling unjust things.⁵⁸

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Now this was when the city was still under the democracy. But again, when the oligarchy came to be, the Thirty summoned five of us into the Tholos, and they ordered us to arrest Leon the Salaminian and bring him from Salamis to die.⁵⁹ They ordered many others to do many things of this sort, wishing that as many as possible would be implicated in the responsibility. Then, however, I showed again, not in speech but in deed, that I do not even care about death in any way at all—if it is not too crude to say so — but that my whole care is to commit no unjust or impious deed. That government, as strong as it was, did not shock me into doing anything unjust. When we came out of the Tholos, the other four went to Salamis and arrested Leon, but I departed and went home. And perhaps I would have died because of this, if that government had not been quickly overthrown. And you will have many witnesses of these things.

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Do you suppose, then, that I would have survived so many years if I had been publicly active and had acted in a manner worthy of a good man, coming to the aid of the just things and, as one ought, regarding this as most important? Far from it, men of Athens; nor would any other human being.

But through all my life, if I was ever active in public at all, it is apparent that I was the sort of man (and in private I was the same) who never conceded anything to anyone contrary to the just—neither to anyone else, nor to any of those who my slanderers say are my students.⁶⁰ I have never been anyone's teacher; but if anyone, whether younger or older, desired to hear me speaking and doing my own things, I never begrudged it to him. And I do not converse only when I receive money, and not when I do not receive it: rather, I offer myself to both rich and poor alike for questioning, and if anyone wishes to hear what I say, he may answer me. And whether any of them becomes an upright man or not, I would not justly be held responsible, since I have never promised or taught any instruction to any of them. If someone says that he has ever learned from me or heard privately anything that every-

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one else did not, know well that he does not speak the truth. But why, then, do some enjoy spending so much time with me? You have heard, men of Athens; I told you the whole truth. It is because cause they enjoy hearing men examined who suppose they are wise, but are not. For it is not unpleasant.

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I have been ordered to practice this by the god, as I affirm, from divinations, and from dreams, and in every way that any divine allotment ever ordered a human being to practice anything at all. These things, men of Athens, are both true and easy to test.

Now if I for my part am corrupting some of the young, and have already corrupted others, and if any of them, when they became older, had recognized that I ever counseled them badly in anything while they were young, then now, no doubt, they should have come forward to accuse me and take their vengeance. If they themselves were not willing to, then some of their families—fathers and brothers and their other relatives—should now have remembered it and taken their vengeance if their families had suffered anything bad from me.

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In any event, there are present here many of them whom I see: first of all Crito here, of my age and deme, the father of Critobulus here; next, Lysanias the Sphettian, the father of Aeschines here; further, here is Antiphon the Cephisean, the father of Epigenes. Moreover, here are others whose brothers have spent time in this way: Theozotides' son Nicostratus, the brother of Theodotus (and Theodotus has met his end, so that he, at least, would not beg him not to), and Demodocus' son Paralus, whose brother was Theages. And here is Ariston's son Adeimantus, whose brother is Plato here, and Aeantodorus, whose brother is Apollodorus here.⁶¹

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And I can tell you of many others, from among whom Meletus should particularly have offered someone as a witness during his own speech. If he forgot then, let him offer one now—I will yield—and let him say if he has anyone of this sort at all. But you will discover that it is wholly opposite to this, men; that everyone is ready to come to aid me, the corrupter, the one who does evil to their families, as Meletus and Anytus say. Now the corrupted ones themselves would perhaps have a reason to come to my aid. But the uncorrupted ones, their relatives, are now older men, so what other reason would they have to come to my aid except the correct and just one, that they are conscious that Meletus speaks falsely, while I am being truthful?

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Well then, men. These, and perhaps other such things, are about all I would have to say in my defense. Perhaps someone among you may be indignant when he recalls himself, if, in contesting a trial even smaller than this trial, he begged and supplicated the judges with many tears, bringing forward his own children and many others of his family and friends, so as to be pitied as much as possible, while I will do none of these things, although in this too I

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am risking, as I might seem, the extreme danger. Perhaps, then, someone thinking about this may be rather stubborn toward me, and, angered by this very thing, he may set down his vote in anger. If there is someone among you like this—for I, at least, do not deem that there is, but if there is—to me it seems decent for me to say to this man, —I, best of men, surely do have some family; for this is also just what Homer says: not even I have grown up ‘from an oak or a rock/ but from human beings.’⁶² So that I do have a family, and sons too, men of Athens, three of them, one already a youth, and two still children. Nevertheless I will bring none of them forward here in order to beg you to vote to acquit me.

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Why, then, will I do none of these things? Not because I am stubborn, men of Athens, nor because I dishonor you. Whether I am daring with regard to death or not is another story; but at any rate as to reputation, mine and yours and the whole city’s, to me it does not seem to be noble for me to do any of these things. For I am old and have this name; and whether it is true or false, it is reputed at least that Socrates is distinguished from the many human beings in some way. If, then, those of you who are reputed to be distinguished, whether in wisdom or courage or any other virtue at all, will act in this way, it would be shameful. I have often seen some who are just like this when they are judged: although they are reputed to be something, they do wondrous deeds, since they suppose that they will suffer something terrible if they die—as though they would be immortal if you did not kill them. They seem to me to attach shame to the city, so that a foreigner might take it that those Athenians who are distinguished in virtue—the ones whom they pick out from among themselves for their offices and other honors—are not at all distinguished from women. For those of you, men of Athens, who are reputed to be something in any way at all, should not do these things; nor, whenever we do them, should you allow it. Instead, you should show that you would much rather vote to convict the one who brings in these piteous dramas and makes the city ridiculous than the one who keeps quiet.

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Apart from reputation, men, to me it also does not seem to be just to beg the judge, nor to be acquitted by begging, but rather to teach and to persuade. For the judge is not seated to give away the just things as a gratification, but to judge them. For he has not sworn to gratify whoever seems favorable to him, but to give judgement according to the laws. Therefore we should not accustom you to swear falsely, nor should you become accustomed to it. For neither of us would be pious.⁶³

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So do not deem that I, men of Athens, should practice such things before you which I hold to be neither noble nor just nor pious, and certainly, by Zeus, above all not when I am being prosecuted

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for impiety by Meletus here. For plainly, if I should persuade and force you by begging, after you have sworn an oath, I would be teaching you not to hold that there are gods, and in making my defense speech I would simply be accusing myself of not believing in gods. But that is far from being so. For I believe, men of Athens, as none of my accusers does. And I turn it over to you and to the god to judge me in whatever way it is going to be best both for me and for you.

*[The jury votes on Socrates' innocence or guilt, and a majority finds him guilty as charged. Meletus then makes a speech proposing the death penalty, and Socrates must offer a counterproposal.]*⁶⁴

Many things contribute to my not being indignant, men of Athens, at what has happened—that you voted to convict me and one of them is that what has happened was not unexpected by me. But I wonder much more at the number of the votes on each side. For I at least did not suppose it would be by so little, but by much. But as it is, as is Rely, if only thirty of the votes had fallen differently, I would have been acquitted. So as it seems to me, I have even now been acquitted as far as Meletus is concerned; and not only have I been acquitted, but it is clear to everyone that if Anytus and Lycon had not come forward to accuse me, he would have had to pay a fine of a thousand drachmae, since he would not have gotten a fifth of the votes.⁶⁵

At any rate, the man proposes death as my desert.⁶⁶ Well, then. What counterproposal shall I make to you, men of Athens? Or is it not clear that it should be whatever I am worthy of? What then? What am I worthy to suffer or to pay because I did not keep quiet during my life and did not care for the things that the many do—moneymaking and household management, and generalships, and popular oratory, and the other offices, and conspiracies and factions that come to be in the city—since I held that I myself was really too decent to survive if I went into these things? I did not go into matters where, if I did go, I was going to be of no benefit either to you or to myself; instead, I went to each of you privately to perform the greatest benefaction, as I affirm, and I attempted to persuade each of you not to care for any of his own things until he cares for himself, how he will be the best and most prudent possible, nor to care for the things of the city until he cares for the city itself, and so to care for the other things in the same way. What, then, am I worthy to suffer, being such as this? Something good, men of Athens, at least if you give me what I deserve according to my worth in truth—and besides, a good of a sort that would be fitting for me. What, then, is fitting for a poor man, a benefactor, who needs to have leisure to exhort you? There is nothing more fitting, men of Athens, than for such a man to be given his meals in the Prytaneum, much more so than if any of you has won a victory

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at Olympia with a horse or a two— or four-horse chariot.⁶⁷ For he makes you seem to be happy, while I make you be so; and he is not in need of sustenance, while I am in need of it. So if I must propose what I am worthy of in accordance with the just, I propose this: to given my meals in the Prytaneum.

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Perhaps then, when I say this, I seem to you to speak in nearly the same way as when I spoke about lament and supplication — quite stubbornly. It is not like that, men of Athens, but rather like this, I am convinced that I do not do injustice to any human being voluntarily, but I am not persuading you of this. For we have conversed with each other a short time. Since, as I suppose, if you had a law like any other human beings, not to judge anyone in a matter of death in one day alone, but over many, you would be persuaded.⁶⁸ But, as it is, it is not easy in a short time to do away with any great slanders.

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I, being convinced indeed that I do not do injustice to anyone, am far from doing injustice to myself, and from saying against myself that I myself am worthy of something bad, and from proposing this sort of thing as my desert. What would I fear? That I might suffer what Meletus proposes for me, about which I say that I do not know whether it is good or bad? Or instead of this, should I choose something from among the things that I know well are bad and propose that? Should it be prison? And why should I live in jail, enslaved to the authority that is regularly established there, the Eleven?⁶⁹ Or money, and imprisonment until I pay? But for me this is the same as what I was saying just now, for I have no money to pay.

Well, should I propose exile, then? For perhaps you would grant me this as my desert. I would certainly be possessed by much love of soul,⁷⁰ men of Athens, if I were so unreasonable that I were not able to reason that you who are my fellow citizens were not able to bear my ways of spending time and my speeches, but that instead they have become quite grave and hateful to you, so that you are now seeking to be released from them: will others, then, bear them easily? Far from it, men of Athens. Noble indeed would life be for me, a human being of my age, to go into exile and to live exchanging one city for another, always being driven out! For I know well that wherever I go, the young will listen to me when I speak, just as they do here. And if I drive them away, they themselves will drive me out by persuading their elders. But if I do not drive them away, their fathers and families will drive me out because of these same ones.

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Perhaps, then, someone might say, “By being silent and keeping quiet, Socrates, won’t you be able to live in exile for us?” It is hardest of all to persuade some of you about this. For if I say that this is to disobey the god and that because of this it is impossible to keep quiet, you will not be persuaded by me, on the ground that I am being ironic.⁷¹ And on the other hand, if I say that this even happens to be a very great good for a human being—to make

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speeches every day about virtue and the other things about which you hear me conversing and examining both myself and others—and that the unexamined life is not worth living for a human being, you will be persuaded by me still less when I say these things. This is the way it is, as I affirm, men; but to persuade you is not easy.

And at the same time, I am not accustomed to deem myself worthy of anything bad. For if I had money, I would have proposed as much money as I could pay, for that would not harm me. But as it is, I do not have any—unless, of course, you wish me to propose as much money as I am able to pay. Perhaps I would be able to pay you, say, a mina of silver. So I propose that much. But Plato here, men of Athens, and Crito and Critobulus and Apollodorus bid me to propose thirty minae⁷² and they will stand as guarantors. So I propose that much, and they will be trustworthy guarantors of the money for you.

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[Voting between the penalties proposed by the accuser and the accused, the jury condemns Socrates to death. He has time to make some further remarks before he is taken away to prison to await execution.]

For the sake of a little time, men of Athens, you will get a name and be charged with the responsibility, by those wishing to revile the city, for having killed Socrates, a wise man. For those wishing to reproach you will assert that I am wise, even if I am not. At any rate, if you had waited a short time, this would have come about for you of its own accord. For you see that my age is already far advanced in life and close to death. I say this not to all of you, but to those who voted to condemn me to death.

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I also say the following to these same ones. Perhaps you suppose, men of Athens, that I have been convicted because I was at a loss for the sort of speeches that would have persuaded you, if I had supposed that I should do and say anything at all to escape the penalty.⁷³ Far from it. Rather, I have been convicted because I was at a loss, not however for speeches, but for daring and shamelessness and willingness to say the sorts of things to you that you would have been most pleased to hear: me wailing and lamenting, and doing and saying many other things unworthy of me, as I affirm—such things as you have been accustomed to hear from others. But neither did I then suppose that I should do anything unsuitable to a free man because of the danger, nor do I now regret that I made my defense speech like this: I Much prefer to die having made my defense speech in this way than to live in that way.

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For neither in a court case nor in war should I or anyone else devise a way to escape death by doing anything at all. In battles it often becomes clear that one might escape death, at least, by letting

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go of his arms and turning around to supplicate his pursuers. And there are many other devices to escape death in each of the dangers, if one dares to do and say anything at all. But I suspect it is not hard, men, to escape death, but it is much harder to escape villainy. For it runs faster than death.⁷⁴ And now I, since I am slow and old, am caught by the slower, while my accusers, since they are clever and sharp, are caught by the faster, by evil. And now I go away, condemned by you to pay the penalty of death, while they have been convicted by the truth of wretchedness and injustice. And I abide by my penalty, and so do they. Perhaps these things even had to be so, and I suppose there is due measure in them.

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After this, I desire to deliver oracles to you, O you who voted to condemn me. For in fact I am now where human beings particularly deliver oracles: when they are about to die.⁷⁵ I affirm, you men who condemned me to death, that vengeance will come upon you right after my death, and much harsher, by Zeus, than the sort you give me by killing me. For you have now done this deed supposing that you will be released from giving an account⁷⁶ of your life, but it will turn out much the opposite for you, as I affirm. There will be more who will refute you, whom I have now been holding back; you did not perceive them. And they will be harsher, inasmuch as they are younger, and you will be more indignant. For if you suppose that by killing human beings you will prevent someone from reproaching you for not living correctly, you do not think nobly. For that kind of release is not at all possible or noble; rather, the kind that is both noblest and easiest is not to restrain others, but to equip oneself to be the best possible. So, having divined these things for you who voted against me, I am released.

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But with those who voted for me I would be pleased to converse or behalf of this affair which has happened, while the officials are occupied and I do not yet go to the place where, when I do go, I must die. Please stay with me, men, for this much time; nothing prevents our telling tales⁷⁷ to one another as long as it is possible. For I am willing to display to you, as to friends, what ever this thing means which has occurred to me just now. For to me, judges — for by calling you judges I would address you correctly⁷⁸ — something wondrous has happened. For my customary divination from the *daimonion* was always very frequent in all former time, opposing me even in quite small matters if I were about to do something incorrectly. Now, you yourselves see what has occurred to me, these very things which someone might suppose to be, and are believed to be, extreme evils. But the sign of the god did not oppose me when I left my house this morning, nor when I came up here to the law court, nor anywhere in the speech when I was about to say anything, although in other speeches it has often

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stopped me in the middle while I was speaking. But as it is, it has nowhere opposed me either in any deed or speech, concerning this action. What, then, do I take to be the cause of this? I will tell you. Probably what has occurred to me has turned out to be good, and there is no way that those of us take it correctly who suppose that being dead is bad. In my view, a great proof of this has happened. For there is no way that the accustomed sign would not have opposed me unless I were about to do something good.

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Let us also think in the following way how great a hope there is that it is good. Now being dead is either of two things. For either it is like being nothing and the dead man has no perception of anything, or else, in accordance with the things that are said, it happens to be a sort of change and migration of the soul from the place here to another place.

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And if in fact there is no perception, but it is like a steep in which the sleeper has no dream at all, death would be a wondrous gain. For I suppose that if someone had to select that night in which he slept so soundly that he did not even dream and had to compare the other nights and days of his own life with that night, and then had to say on consideration how many days and nights in his own life he has lived better and more pleasantly than that night, then I suppose that the Great King⁷⁹ himself, not to mention some private man, would discover that they are easy to count in comparison with the other days and nights. So if death is something like this, I at least say it is a gain. For all time appears in this way indeed to be nothing more than one night.

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On the other hand, if death is like a journey from here to another place, and if the things that are said are true, that in fact all the dead are there, then what greater good could there be than this, judges? For if one who arrives in Hades, released from those here who claim to be judges, will find those who are judges in truth — the very ones who are said to give judgment there, Minos and Rhadamanthys, and Aeacus, and Triptolemus,⁸⁰ and those of the other demigods who turned out to be just in their own lives — would this journey be a paltry one? Or again, to associate with Orpheus and Musaeus and Hesiod and Homer,⁸¹ how much would any of you give? For I am willing to die many times if these things are true, since especially for myself spending time there would be wondrous: whenever I happened to meet Palamedes and Telemonian Ajax,⁸² or anyone else of the ancients who died because of an unjust judgment, I would compare my own experiences with theirs. As I suppose, it would not be unpleasant. And certainly the greatest thing is that I would pass my time examining and searching out among those there—just as I do to those here—who among them is wise, and who supposes he is, but is not. How much would one give, judges, to examine him who led the great

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army against Troy, or Odysseus, or Sisyphus,⁸³ or the thousand others whom one might mention, both men and women? To converse and to associate with them and to examine them there would be inconceivable⁸⁴ happiness. Certainly those there surely do not kill on this account. For those there are happier than those here not only in other things but also in that they are immortal henceforth for the rest of time, at least if the things that are said are in fact true. c
41c

But you too, judges, should be of good hope toward death, and you should think this one thing to be true: that there is nothing bad for a good man, whether living or dead, and that the gods are not without care for his troubles. Nor have my present troubles arisen of their own accord, but it is clear to me that it is now better, after all, for me to be dead and to have been released from troubles. This is also why the sign did not turn me away anywhere, and I at least am not at all angry at those who voted to condemn me and at my accusers. And yet it was not with this thought in mind that they voted to condemn me and accused me: rather, they supposed they would harm me. For this they are worthy of blame. d
e

This much, however, I beg of them: when my sons grow up, punish them, men, and pain them in the very same way I pained you, if they seem to you to care for money or anything else before virtue. And if they are reputed to be something when they are nothing, reproach them just as I did you: tell them that they do not care for the things they should, and that they suppose they are something when they are worth nothing. And if you do these things, we will have been treated justly by you, both I myself and my sons. 42a

But now it is time to go away, I to die and you to live. Which of us goes to a better thing is unclear to everyone except to the god.⁸⁵

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