

APOLOGY

PLATO

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In 399 B.C., when he was seventy years old, Socrates stood trial for impiety. The charges were brought by three young men: Anytus, who wrote the indictment, Meletus, who served as the primary prosecutor, and Lycon.¹ The Apology is Plato's version of the speech Socrates gave in his own defense.² It is not known how closely the work corresponds with what Socrates actually said at the trial.

INTRODUCTION³

SOCRATES: Men of Athens, I don't know how you have been affected by my accusers.⁴ 17
As for me, they spoke so persuasively that I almost forgot who I am. And yet hardly any
of what they said is true. I was most amazed by one of the many lies that they told: they
said that you must be on guard not to be deceived by me, because I'm a clever speaker. I
thought this was the most shameless part of their conduct: they're not ashamed that b
they'll be proved wrong straight away by the facts, when I show myself not to be a clever
speaker at all. Unless, that is, they call someone a clever speaker for speaking the truth.
If that's what they mean, then I'd agree that I'm an orator—but not in their way. Now, as
I said, they've said little or nothing true; but you will hear nothing but the truth from me. c
Men of Athens, you'll hear no speeches finely tricked out with words and phrases and
carefully arranged, as theirs are. Rather, you'll hear things said at random with the words
that occur to me. For I trust that what I say is just; and none of you should expect

¹ Anytus was a democratically minded politician and the proprietor of a successful tannery that he inherited from his father (a self-made man); Meletus was the son of a poet; and Lycon, was a democratic politician who was suspected of treachery and whose wife had a reputation for promiscuity. (The biographical information in this note and elsewhere in these translations is drawn primarily from Debra Nails' *The People of Plato: A Prosopography of Plato and Other Socratics* [Hackett, 2002].)

² The title is not a translation, but a transliteration, of the Greek word "*apologia*," which means "defense."

³ All headings in this and other translations are interpolations into Plato's text.

⁴ The judges are regularly referred to as "men of Athens" because they were selected at random from the citizenry. It is not certain how many judges served at this trial, but it would have been considerably more than in a modern American trial, perhaps as many as 500.

anything else. For surely it would not be fitting for someone of my age to come before you like a youngster making up speeches.

And I urgently beg and beseech you, men of Athens, if you hear me making my defense in the same words that I've been accustomed to using in the marketplace at the bankers' tables (where many of you have heard me) and elsewhere, don't be surprised or raise a ruckus on this account. For the fact is that this is the first time I have come before the court, although I am seventy years old. I am, therefore, an utter foreigner to the manner of speech here. Just as if I were really a foreigner, you would, of course, pardon me if I spoke in the dialect and manner in which I had been brought up, so I now make this request of you (which seems fair to me): disregard the manner of my speech (for it may be worse or better) and observe and pay attention only to whether or not what I say is just; for that is the virtue of a judge, and an orator's virtue is to speak the truth. 18

It is right for me first to defend myself against my first accusers and the first false accusations brought against me, and then against the later accusations and my later accusers. For many people have accused me to you for many years already, and none of what they say is true. I fear them more than Anytus and the rest, though they are also dangerous. But these others are more dangerous, gentlemen. They got hold of most of you in childhood, had your confidence, and accused me without any truth, saying: "There is a certain Socrates, a wise man, a ponderer of the things in the air and an investigator of the things beneath the earth, and someone who makes the weaker argument the stronger." Men of Athens, the people who spread this rumor are dangerous accusers. For those who hear them think that men who investigate these matters do not even believe in gods. Besides, there are many of these accusers, and they've already been making their accusations for a long time. Moreover they spoke to you at an age at which you would believe them most readily—some of you, in youth; most of you, in childhood. And they won their case by default, since nobody appeared in my defense. c

But the most unreasonable thing of all is that it is not even possible to know and say their names, except when one of them happens to be a writer of comedies.⁵ And all those people who persuaded you by means of envy and slander (some of whom persuaded others, because they themselves had been persuaded) are extremely difficult to cope with; for it's not even possible to call any of them up here for cross-examination. I am compelled, in making my defense, simply to fight with shadows, as it were, and to cross-examine without anybody to answer. Be kind enough, then, to bear in mind, as I say, that I have two sets of accusers: the people who have just made their accusation, and the others—those who, as I was just saying, made theirs long ago. Keep in mind that I must defend myself first against the latter; for you heard them making their charges first and much more forcefully than my later accusers. d e

Well, then, I must make a defense, men of Athens, and I must try in so short a time to remove from you this prejudice that you have been acquiring for such a long time. Now I hope that this will happen—it's better you and for me—and that I'll succeed with my defense. But I think it is difficult, and I am not at all deceived about its nature. Nevertheless, let this be as is the gods wish. The law must be obeyed and I must make a defense. 19

⁵ The writer to whom Socrates refers is Aristophanes. In his play, the *Clouds* (first produced in 423 B.C.), Socrates is portrayed as running a school, "The Thinkery," where he expounds cosmological and biological theories and teaches (for a fee) how to make unjust arguments win over just ones in court.

DEFENSE AGAINST FIRST ACCUSERS

SOCRATES: Now let's take this up from the beginning: What is the accusation from which the false prejudice against me has arisen (the prejudice that Meletus relied on when he brought this suit against me)? What did those who aroused the prejudice say to arouse it? I must, as it were, read their sworn statement as if they were plaintiffs: "Socrates is a criminal and a busybody, investigating the things beneath the earth and in the heavens and making the weaker argument stronger and teaching others these same things." It's something of that sort. For you yourselves saw these things in Aristophanes' comedy, a "Socrates" being carried about there, proclaiming that he was treading on air and uttering a great deal of other nonsense, about which I know nothing at all.⁶ I don't say this to cast dishonor upon such knowledge, if anyone is wise about such matters. (May I never have to defend myself against Meletus on so great a charge as that!) But, men of Athens, I have nothing to do with these things. As witnesses I offer most of you: I ask all you who have ever heard me conversing (and there are many among you) to inform one another and to tell if anyone ever heard me talking about such things at all. From this you will see that the other things that the majority say about me are the same way.⁷

In fact none of these things are true, and if you've heard from anyone that I undertake to teach people and that I make money by it, that is not true either. This also seems to me to be a fine thing, if one were able to teach people, as Gorgias of Leontini and Prodicus of Ceos and Hippias of Elis are. For each of these men, gentlemen, is able to go into any city and persuade the young men, who can associate for free with any of their fellow citizens that they wish, to give up the association with those men and to associate with them and pay them money and be grateful besides.

And there is also another wise man here, a Parian, who I learned was in town; for I happened to meet a man who has spent more on sophists than all the rest, Callias, the son of Hipponicus.⁸ I asked him—for he has two sons—"Callias," I said, "if your two sons had happened to be two colts or two calves, we could get and hire an overseer for them who would make them excellent in the kind of excellence proper to them; and he would be a horse-trainer or a husbandman; but now, since they are two human beings, who do you have in mind to get as an overseer? Who has knowledge of that kind of excellence, that of a man and a citizen?"⁹ For I think you have looked into the matter, since you have sons. Is there anyone," I asked, "or not?" "Certainly," he said. "Who," I said, "and where's he from, and what does he charge for his teaching?" "Evenus," he said,

⁶ In the scene in question, the character Socrates says the following: "I am traversing the air and contemplating the sun. . . . I have to suspend my brain and mingle the subtle substance of my mind with this air, which is of like nature, in order clearly to penetrate the things of heaven. I wouldn't have discovered anything, if I had remained on the ground to consider from below the things that are above; for the earth, by its force, attracts the sap of the mind to itself. It's just the same as with the watercress." Shortly thereafter he summons the clouds (for which the play is named), referring to them as "great goddesses for the lazy, to whom we owe all, thoughts, speeches, trickery, roguery, boasting, lies, sagacity." Earlier, in the play, his disciples praise him for his theory of gnat flatulence.

⁷ The phrase translated "The majority" is "*hoi polloi*"—literally "the many." It is sometimes used in English to refer derisively to "the masses" or ordinary people.

⁸ On Callias and Hipponicus, see my footnote 5 to the *Protagoras*.

⁹ The word translated "excellence" here is "*aretē*." When applied to human beings, it is usually translated "virtue."

“Socrates, from Paros, five minas.”¹⁰ And I called Evenus blessed, if he really had this art and taught at such a reasonable price. If I understood these things myself, I would be vain and put on airs; but I do not understand them, men of Athens. c

SOCRATES' UNUSUAL OCCUPATION

SOCRATES: Now perhaps someone might ask: “But, Socrates, what is your occupation? Where have these prejudices against you come from? For surely all these rumors and talk didn't arise while you were doing nothing out of the ordinary. They wouldn't have arisen unless you were doing something other than most people; so tell us what it is, so that we won't act unadvisedly in your case.” The man who says this seems to me to be right, and I will try to show you what it is that has brought about my reputation and aroused the prejudice against me. So listen. Perhaps I'll seem to some of you to be joking, but be assured, everything I'm going to say is true. d

The fact is, men of Athens, that I have acquired this reputation on account of nothing other than a sort of wisdom. What kind of wisdom is it? Human wisdom, perhaps. Perhaps I am indeed wise with this wisdom; and perhaps the men I was just speaking about are wise with some wisdom greater than human. I don't know what to say, since I don't understand it. (Anyone who says that I do is lying and speaking to arouse prejudice against me.) Men of Athens, don't interrupt me with noise, even if I seem to you to be boasting. What I'm saying doesn't originate with me. The speaker I'll refer you to is a person of weight. I will offer you the god of Delphi as a witness to my wisdom (if it is wisdom at all) and its nature. e

You know Chaerephon. He was my friend from youth and a friend of most of you, and shared in the recent exile and return.¹¹ You know the kind of man Chaerephon was, how impetuous in whatever he undertook. Well, once he went to Delphi and was so bold as to ask the oracle this question; and, gentlemen, don't raise a ruckus at what I say; for he asked if there was anyone wiser than me. Now the Pythia replied that there was no one wiser.¹² And his brother here can attest to this for you, since Chaerephon is dead. 21

Consider why I'm saying this; I am going to tell you where the prejudice against me has come from. When I heard this, I thought to myself: “What in the world does the god mean, and what is his riddle? For I'm aware that I am not wise at all. What then does he mean by declaring that I am the wisest? He certainly cannot be lying, since that's not possible for him.” And for a long time I was at a loss as to what he meant; then with great reluctance I started to investigate as follows. b

I went to one of those who had a reputation for wisdom, thinking that there, if anywhere, I could prove the utterance wrong and reply to the oracle: “This man is wiser c

¹⁰ The mina was a unit of currency. Five minas would be more than a skilled laborer would make in 18 months and would be enough for a small family to subsist on for about three years. It has been approximated that five minas would have been the total value of all of Socrates' property (including his house).

¹¹ Many members of the democratic faction in Athens, which would have included most of the judges, had to leave the city during the reign of an oligarchic faction, The Thirty, who were in power for approximately a year. Chaerephon, who would have been in his seventies at the time, chose to go into exile with the democratic faction. Socrates remained in the city.

¹² The Pythia was the priestess at Delphi, who would go into a trance and answer questions, speaking (so it was thought) for the god Apollo.

than I am, but you said I was wisest.” I don’t need to name the man, but it was one of the public men with regard to whom I had this kind of experience. Examining him, men of Athens, and conversing with him, I thought that, though he seemed to be wise to many other people, and especially to himself, he was not so. Then I tried to show him that, though he thought he was wise, he was not. As a result, he came to hate me, as did many of those present. As I went away, I thought to myself, “I am wiser than this man; for neither of us really knows anything fine and good, but this man thinks he knows something when he does not, whereas when I do not know anything, I don’t think that I do. So I seem to be wiser than this man at any rate in this small way: I don’t think I know what I don’t know.” I went from him to someone else who was reputed to be wiser, and these same things seemed to me to be true; and I came to be hated both by him and by many others. d

After this I went on down the list of such men. I noticed, to my sorrow and alarm, that I was hated, but nevertheless I thought that I must consider the god’s business to be of the highest importance. So I had to go, investigating the meaning of the oracle, to all those who were reputed to know anything. And by the dog, men of Athens (for I must speak the truth to you), this is what I experienced as I investigated at the god’s behest: with respect to prudence, those who had the most reputation seemed to me to be almost the most deficient, and others who were of less repute seemed to be superior men. 22

I must relate to you my wanderings as I performed my Herculean labors (so to speak) in order to prove the oracle irrefutable. After the statesmen, I went to the poets, the ones who write tragedies, the ones who write dithyrambs, and the others. I thought I could catch myself being more ignorant than they are. So, taking up the poems of theirs that seemed to me to have been most carefully elaborated by them, I asked them what they meant, so that I could learn something from them at the same time. Now I am ashamed to tell you the truth, gentlemen; but still it must be told. Any of the bystanders, as you might say, could have spoken better than they could about the poems that they themselves had composed. So again in the case of the poets, also, I recognized this, that they composed the thing they did not by wisdom but by nature and because they were inspired, like the prophets and givers of oracles; for these people also say many fine things, without knowing what they’re talking about. It was evident to me that something like this happens with the poets as well. At the same time, I noticed that, on account of their poetry, they thought that they were the wisest of men in other areas as well, though they were not. So I went away from them thinking that I was also superior to them in the same way as I was to the statesmen. b c

Finally I went to the artisans. For I was aware that I knew practically nothing, but I knew I would find that they knew many fine things. And in this I was not deceived; they did know things I didn’t, and in this way they were wiser than I am. But, men of Athens, the good craftsmen also seemed to me to have the same failing as the poets: each of them thought, because he practiced his art well, that he was very wise in the other, most important respects, and this mistake of theirs overshadowed their wisdom. So I asked myself on behalf of the oracle whether I would prefer to be as I am, with neither their wisdom nor their error, or to be as they are in both respects. I replied to myself and to the oracle that it was better for me to be as I am. d e

Now, men of Athens, much hatred of very harsh and terrible sort has arisen against me from this investigation. Many prejudices have resulted from this, and I am called a 23

wise man. For in each case, the bystanders think that I am wise about the topics on which I refute the other person. But, gentlemen, I'm afraid that the god is really wise and means the following by his oracle: "Human wisdom is worth little or nothing." And it appears that when he says "Socrates," he is using my name as an example, as if he were to say: "Men, the wisest one among you is he, who, like Socrates, knows that he is worthless with respect to wisdom." b

So even now, I'm still going around at the god's behest and searching for and investigating anyone, whether citizen or foreigner, who I think is wise. And, if I do not think he is, I assist the god and show that he is not wise. Because of this occupation I have no leisure to attend to the city's affairs, or indeed to my own. I am in great poverty on account of my service to the god. c

And, in addition to these things, the young men who have the most leisure, the sons of the richest men, accompany me of their own accord, find pleasure in hearing people being examined, and often imitate me themselves, and then they undertake to examine others; and then, I fancy, they find plenty of people who think they know something, but know little or nothing. As a result, therefore, those who are examined by them are angry with me, instead of being angry with themselves, and say that "Socrates is a most abominable person and is corrupting the youth." d

And when anyone asks them "By doing or teaching what?" they have nothing to say and don't know; and, so that that don't seem to be at a loss, they say the things that are handy to say against all the philosophers: "the things in the air and the things beneath the earth" and "not believing in the gods" and "making the weaker argument the stronger." I'm sure they wouldn't want to say the truth: that they have been proved to be pretending to know, when they know nothing. Since these people are ambitious, vehement, and numerous, and since they are speaking about me constantly and convincingly, they have filled your ears with vehement slanders both in the past and in the present. From among these people, Meletus attacked me, and Anytus and Lycon. (Meletus was upset on the poets' behalf, Anytus on that of the artisans and statesmen, and Lycon on that of orators.) So, as I said in the beginning, I'll be surprised if I am able to remove this prejudice from you in so short a time when it has grown so large. There you have the truth, men of Athens, and I speak without hiding or disguising anything at all from you. Yet I know pretty well that I'm making myself hated by acting like this; which is also a proof that I am speaking the truth and that this is the prejudice against me and these are its causes. And whether you investigate this now or hereafter, you will find that it is so. b

DEFENSE AGAINST CURRENT ACCUSERS

SOCRATES: Now I've given you a sufficient defense as far as the accusations made against me by my first accusers are concerned. I'll try to defend myself next against Meletus, the good and patriotic (as he says), and the later ones. So once more, as if these were another set of accusers, let us take up in turn their sworn statement. It goes something like this: it states that Socrates is a criminal because he corrupts the youth and does not believe in the gods the city believes in, but in other new spiritual beings. c

Such is the accusation. But let us examine each point of this accusation. He says I am a wrongdoer because I corrupt the youth. But I, men of Athens, say Meletus is a wrongdoer, because he jokes about serious things, lightly involving people in a lawsuit,

pretending to be zealous and concerned about things that never cared about at all. And I will also try to make it clear to you that this is so.

Come here, Meletus, tell me: don't you consider it of great importance that the youth are as good as possible? d

MELETUS: I do.

SOCRATES: Come now, tell these gentlemen who makes them better? For it is evident that you know, since you care about it. For you have found the one who corrupts them, as you say, and you bring me before these gentlemen and accuse me; and now, come, tell who makes them better and inform them who he is.

Do you see, Meletus, that you are silent and cannot tell? And yet doesn't it seem disgraceful to you and a sufficient proof of what I say—that you have never cared about it? But tell, my good man, who makes them better? e

MELETUS: The laws.

SOCRATES: But that is not what I'm asking, most excellent man. To begin with, what person knows the laws?

MELETUS: These men, Socrates, the judges.

SOCRATES: What are you saying, Meletus? Are these gentlemen able to instruct the youth, and do they make them better?

MELETUS: Certainly.

SOCRATES: All of them, or some of them and others not?

MELETUS: All.

SOCRATES: Well said, by Hera, and this is a great multitude of helpers you speak of. But how about this? Does the audience make them better, or not? 25

MELETUS: They do too.

SOCRATES: And how about the council members?

MELETUS: The council members too.

SOCRATES: But, Meletus, those in the assembly, the assemblymen, don't corrupt the youth, do they? Or do they too all make them better?

MELETUS: Them too.

SOCRATES: All the Athenians, then, it seems, make them excellent, except me; and I

alone corrupt them. Is this what you mean?

MELETUS: Yes, that is exactly what I mean.

SOCRATES: You have condemned me to great unhappiness! But answer me: Does it seem to you to be this way in the case of horses, that all of mankind makes them better and some one person injures them? Or is on the contrary that some one person is able to make them better—or rather, a very few people, the horse trainers—whereas most people, if they get involved with and use the horses, injure them? Isn't it this way, Meletus, both in the case of horses and in that of all other animals? b

Certainly it is, whether you and Anytus deny it or agree; for it would be a great blessing in the case of the youth if one alone corrupted them, while the others did them good. But, Meletus, you show clearly enough that you've never thought about the youth, and you exhibit clearly your own carelessness, that you have not cared at all for the things about which you bring me into court. c

Besides, tell us, by Zeus, Meletus, is it better to live among good citizens, or bad? Answer, my friend; I'm not asking anything hard. Don't the bad do something bad to those who are with them at any time and don't the good do something good?

MELETUS: Certainly.

SOCRATES: Is there then anyone who prefers to be injured by his associates rather than benefited? Answer, my good man; for the law orders you to answer. Is there anyone who prefers to be injured? d

MELETUS: "Of course not."

SOCRATES: Come on then, have you brought me here for corrupting the youth and making them worse voluntarily or involuntarily?

MELETUS: Voluntarily.

SOCRATES: What then, Meletus? Are you so much wiser at your age than I am at mine that you have recognized that the bad always do something bad to those nearest them, and the good something good; whereas I have reached such a depth of ignorance that I do not even know that if I make any of my associates bad, I am in danger of getting some harm from them, so that I do this great evil voluntarily, as you say? I don't believe this, Meletus, nor do I think anyone else in the world does! e 26

Either I do not corrupt them, or if I corrupt them, I do it involuntarily, so that you are lying in either case. Suppose I corrupt them involuntarily. The law is not to bring people into court for such involuntary errors, but to take them and instruct and admonish them in private. For it is clear that, if I am told about it, I'll stop doing something that I'm doing involuntarily. But you avoided associating with me and instructing me, and were unwilling to do so; yet you bring me here, where it is the law to bring those who need punishment, not instruction. But enough of this. Men of Athens, it is clear, as I said, that Meletus never cared at all about these things. b

Nevertheless, do tell us, Meletus, how do you say I corrupt the youth? Or isn't it evident, according to the indictment you brought, that it is by teaching them not to believe in the gods the city believes in, but in other new spiritual beings? Don't you say that it is by teaching this that I corrupt them?

MELETUS: That's exactly what I say.

SOCRATES: Then, Meletus, for the sake of these very gods about whom we're now speaking, make this clearer both to me and to these gentlemen. For I am unable to understand whether you say that I teach that there are some gods, and myself believe that there are some gods (and that I'm not altogether godless and not a wrongdoer in that way), but that these are not the gods that the city believes in, but other ones. Is this what you accuse me of, that I believe in other gods; or do you say that I do not myself believe in gods at all and that I teach this unbelief to other people? c

MELETUS: That is what I say, that you do not believe in gods at all.

SOCRATES: You amaze me, Meletus! Why do you say this? Do I not even believe that the sun and the moon are gods, as the rest of mankind do? d

MELETUS: No, by Zeus, judges, since he says that the sun is a stone and the moon, earth!

SOCRATES: My dear Meletus, do you think you are accusing Anaxagoras? And are you so contemptuous of these gentlemen that you think they're illiterate enough not to know, that the books of Anaxagoras the Clazomenian are full of such claims?¹³ Do the young learn from me what they can buy from time to time for a drachma at most in the orchestra, laughing at Socrates, when he pretends they are his own, especially since they're so absurd!¹⁴ But for heaven's sake, do you think that I do not believe there are any gods? e

MELETUS: No, by Zeus, I say that you don't believe in them at all.

SOCRATES: You cannot be believed, Meletus, not even, it seems to me, by yourself. Men of Athens, this man appears to me to be very vehement and unrestrained, and indeed to have brought this indictment in a spirit of vehemence and unrestraint and rashness. For he seems, as it were, to be trying out a riddle that he's made up. "Will Socrates, the wise man, recognize that I am joking and contradicting myself, or shall I deceive him and the others who hear me?" For he appears to me to contradict himself in his speech, as if he were to say, "Socrates is a wrongdoer, because he does not believe in gods, but does believe in gods." This is the part of a jester. So join me, gentlemen, in examining how he 27

¹³ Anaxagoras was a *phusikos*, from Clazomenae in Asia Minor. He moved to Athens sometime in the 460 and lived there or approximately 30 years until he was convicted of impiety and exiled. During his time in Athens he was closely associated with the statesman Pericles.

¹⁴ A drachma is equivalent to the daily wage of a skilled laborer. The *orchestra* or ("dancing place") was an area in the center of Athens' *agora* or marketplace. During festivals, dramas were enacted there. At other times, it seems to have been where the booksellers set up shop.

appears to me to say this. Meletus, do answer; and you, gentlemen, as I asked you in the beginning, please bear in mind not to raise a ruckus if I conduct my argument in the manner I'm used to. b

Is there any man who believes that there are human affairs no men? Let him answer, gentlemen, and not raise a ruckus in one way or another.

Is there anyone who does not believe in horses, but does believe in equine affairs? Or who does not believe that there flautists, but believes that there are flautist affairs?

There is not, most excellent man. If you do not want to answer, I'll tell you and these others here. But at least answer the next question: Is there anyone who believes that there are spiritual affairs, but does not believe that there are spirits? c

MELETUS: There isn't.

SOCRATES: Thank you for replying reluctantly when forced by these gentlemen. Now, you say that I believe in something spiritual, whether new or old, and that I teach this belief. But then I believe something spiritual at any rate, according to your statement, which you swore in your indictment. But if I believe in the spiritual, it is quite inevitable that I believe also in spirits; isn't that so?

It is. (I assume that you agree, since you do not answer.) But don't we think that the spirits are gods or children of gods? Yes, or no? d

MELETUS: Certainly.

SOCRATES: Then if I believe in spirits, as you say, if spirits are a kind of god, that would be the riddle and joke which I said you are telling when you say that I do not believe in gods, but yet do believe in gods, since I believe in spirits. On the other hand, maybe spirits are a kind of bastard children of gods, by nymphs or by any others—whoever their mothers are said to be. But what man would believe that there are children of gods, but no gods? It would be just as absurd as if one were to believe that there are children of horses and asses, namely mules, but no horses and asses. e

Meletus, you must have brought this suit either to test us or because you were loss as to what true wrongdoing you could accuse me of. But there is no way for you to persuade anyone who has even a little understanding that it is possible for someone to believe in spiritual and divine things and yet for that same person not to believe in spirits or gods or heroes. 28

Well then, men of Athens, I don't think much of a defense is needed to show that I am not guilty as charged by Meletus' indictment; what has been said is enough. But you know that what I said earlier is true—that a great hatred has arisen against me in the minds of many people. It is this that will cause my condemnation, if I am condemned, not Meletus or Anytus, but the prejudice and dislike of the majority. This has condemned many other good men, and I think it will continue to do so. There is no chance of its stopping with me. b

SOCRATES' ASSESSMENT OF HIS LIFE

SOCRATES: Someone might say: “Socrates, aren’t you ashamed of having followed such a pursuit, that you are now in danger of being put to death as a result?”

I would be right to reply: “You are wrong, sir, if you think a man who is any good at all ought to consider risk of life or death, rather than looking in his actions only to whether the things he does are right or wrong and whether he’s acting like a good or a bad man. According to your account, all the demigods who died at Troy would be bad, including the son of Thetis.¹⁵ He was contemptuous of danger, in comparison with enduring any disgrace. I believe his mother (and she was a goddess) said to him, when he was eager to slay Hector, something like this: ‘My son, if you avenge the death of your friend Patroclus and kill Hector, you yourself will die; for death is appointed to you right away, after Hector.’ When he heard this, he made light of death and danger, because he was much more afraid to live as a coward and not to avenge his friends. He said, ‘May I die right away, after doing vengeance upon the wrongdoer, instead of staying here, jeered at beside the curved ships, as burden on the earth.’ Do you think he considered death and danger?”¹⁶

This, in truth, is how it is, men of Athens: whenever a man stations himself somewhere, thinking that it is best to be there, or is stationed there by his commander, he must, it seems to me, remain there and run his risks, without considering death or anything else other than disgrace.

At Potidaea, Amphipolis and Delium, when the commanders you elected ordered me, I remained where they stationed me, like anybody else, and ran the risk of death.¹⁷ I would have done a terrible thing, if, having obeyed them, I then dissented my post through fear of death or anything else whatsoever when (as I believed and understood) the god ordered me to spend my life in philosophy, examining myself and others. It would be a terrible thing, and then in truth one could have justly brought me to court on the charge that I did not believe that there were gods, since I disobeyed the oracle and feared death and thought I was wise when I was not.

To fear death, gentlemen, is nothing other than to think one is wise when one is not: it is thinking one knows what one does not know. For all anyone knows, death may be the greatest of all blessings to man, but people fear it as though they knew it to be the worst of all things. Isn’t this the most reprehensible form of ignorance—thinking one knows what one does not know?

Perhaps, gentlemen, it is on this point and in this issue that I differ from other men; and if I were to say that I am wiser in anything, it would be in this: since I don’t know much about the other world, I do not think that I know. But I do know that it is bad and disgraceful to do wrong and to disobey one of my superiors, whether he is a god or a

¹⁵ The son of Thetis is Achilles, the hero of the *Iliad*.

¹⁶ The relevant episode is recounted in the *Iliad* XVIII, lines 94 and following.

¹⁷ Socrates had been a foot soldier in the Peloponnesian war (431-404 B.C.), a conflict between the Athenian empire and a league lead by Sparta. Athens, which had been the main power in Greece, was ultimately defeated. Potidaea was the site of a siege that lasted over two years (432-430). The Athenian army eventually took the city, but were then defeated horribly in the battle (near Spartolus) on their way home. Delium and Amphipolis were the sites of two other battles (in 424 and 422, respectively), both of which Athens lost to the Spartans.

man. So I will never fear or avoid those things about which I do not know whether they are good or bad rather than those which I know are bad.

Therefore, even if you acquit me now (rather than believing Anytus, who said that now that I've been brought to trial, I must be put to death, or else I shouldn't have been brought at all, adding that if I were acquitted your sons would all be utterly ruined by practicing what I teach)—even if you say to me: “Socrates, this time we will not do as Anytus says, but we will let you go, but only on the condition that you no longer spend your time in this investigation or in philosophy, and if you are caught doing so again you will die”—even if you let me go on the condition I mentioned, I would say to you, “Men of Athens, I respect and love you, but I will obey the god rather than you, and as long as I live and am able to continue, I will never give up philosophy or stop exhorting you and pointing out the truth to any one of you that I might meet, saying in my accustomed way: ‘Most excellent man, as a citizen of Athens, the greatest of cities and the most famous for wisdom and power; aren't you ashamed to care for the acquisition of wealth and for reputation and honor, when you do not care or think about wisdom and truth and the perfection of your soul?’”

And if any of you disputes this and says that he does care, I will not let him go at once, nor will I go away. Rather I'll question and examine and test him, and if I find that he does not possess the virtue he says he does, I will rebuke him for scorning the things that are most important and caring more for things that are worth less. I'll do this to whomever I meet, to the young and old, to foreigners and citizens, but I'll do it especially to the citizens, since you are closely related to me.

Realize that the god commands me to do this, and I believe that no greater good ever came to pass in the city than my service to the god. For I go about doing nothing other than urging you, young and old, not to care for your bodies or your property more than, or even as much as, for the perfection of your souls. And I tell you that virtue does not come from money, but that money and everything else good for men (both individually and collectively) comes from virtue.¹⁸

If by saying these things I corrupt the youth, these things must be harmful; but if anyone asserts that I say other things than these, what he says is untrue. Therefore, I say to you, men of Athens: either do as Anytus tells you, or not, and either acquit me, or not, knowing that I will not change my conduct even if I have to die many times over.

Do not raise a ruckus, men of Athens! Continue to do what I asked of you—not to interrupt my speech with a ruckus, but listen to me, and I think you will benefit from listening. Now I am going to say some things to you at which you will perhaps cry out; but do not do so by any means. Realize that if you kill the sort of man that I say I am, you will not harm me as much as you harm yourselves. Neither Meletus nor Anytus could harm me; that would be impossible; for I don't think it is permitted for a better man to be harmed by a worse. He might, however, kill me or banish me or disfranchise me; and perhaps he thinks that he could do me great harm in this way. Others may think so too, but I do not. I think he does himself much greater harm by doing what he is doing now—killing a man unjustly.

And so, men of Athens, I am now making my defense not for my own sake, as one

¹⁸ Some scholars translate the last clause of this sentence differently to mean that virtue makes it the case that money and other things are good for human beings. Given things that Plato has Socrates say elsewhere, this reading is a bit closer to what we might expect Socrates to say here, but it is a far less natural way to understand the Greek.

might imagine, but rather for yours, so that you will not mistreat the god's gift to you by condemning me. For if you put me to death, you will not easily find another, who—
though it sounds ridiculous to say—will attach himself to the city as a gadfly does to a great and noble horse that is sluggish on account of his size and needs to be aroused by stinging. I think the god fastened me upon the city in some such capacity, and I go about rousing and urging and reproaching each one of you, constantly approaching you everywhere all day long. Another such person is not likely to come to you, gentlemen. If you take my advice, you'll spare me. Perhaps you'll be angry, like people awakened from a nap, and slap me, as Anytus advises, and easily kill me. Then you will pass the rest of your lives in slumber, unless the god, in his care for you, should send someone else to sting you.

You might realize that I am as I say, a kind of gift from the god, from the following: I have neglected all my own affairs and have been enduring the neglect of my concerns all these years, but I am always busy in your interest, coming to each one of you individually like a father or an elder brother and urging you to care for virtue. This is unlike human conduct. If I derived any profit from this and received pay for these exhortations, there would be some sense in it; but now you yourselves see that my accusers, though they accuse me of everything else in such a shameless way, have not been able to work themselves up to such a shamelessness as to produce a witness to testify that I ever taken or asked for a fee from anyone. But I think I have my poverty as a convincing witness that I speak the truth.

It may seem strange that, though I go about and interfere in other people's affairs to give this advice in private, I don't venture to come before your assembly and advise the city. But the reason for this, as you have heard me say at many times and places, is that something divine and spiritual comes to me, the very thing which Meletus ridiculed in his indictment. I have had this from my childhood; it is a sort of voice that comes to me, and when it comes it always holds me back from what I am thinking of doing, but never urges me forward. This is what opposes my engaging in politics. And I think this opposition is a very good thing; for you may be quite sure, men of Athens, that if I had tried to go into politics, I would have been put to death long ago and would have done no good to you or to myself.

Do not be angry with me for speaking the truth. The fact is that no man can save his life if he nobly opposes you or any other populace and prevents many unjust and illegal things from happening in the city. A man who really fights for the right, if he is to preserve his life for even a little while, must be a private citizen, not a public man. I will give you powerful proofs of this not mere words, but actions, which you honor more. listen to what happened to me, so that you'll be convinced that I would never yield to any one, through fear of death, if it was wrong to do so, but would die rather than yield. The story I'm about to tell you is ordinary and commonplace, but true.

I never held any other office in the city, men of Athens, but I served on the council.¹⁹ It turned out that my tribe presided when you wanted to judge collectively, rather than

¹⁹ Much of day to day business of the city was handled by a council of five-hundred men chosen by lot each year from the assembly, which was composed of all Athenian citizens. Athens was divided into ten tribes—political units devised a to facilitate the operations of the city in various ways. Each tribe had an equal number of members on the council, and the tribes took turns presiding over the city's affairs, with each tribe serving for one of the ten months

individually, the ten generals who had failed to gather up the dead after the naval battle.²⁰ This was illegal, as you all agreed afterwards.²¹ But at that time I was the only member of the committee who opposed doing anything contrary to the laws. The orators were ready to impeach and arrest me, and you urged them with shouts to do so, but I thought that I must run the risk to the end with law and justice on my side, rather than join with you, through fear of imprisonment or death, when your wishes were unjust.²²

That was when the democracy still existed. After the oligarchy was established, The Thirty sent for me with four others to come to the rotunda and ordered us to bring Leon the Salaminian from Salamis to be put to death.²³ They gave many such orders to others also, because they wished to implicate as many in their crimes as they could. I showed again, not only by words but in action, that I couldn't care less about death (if that's not too colloquial a way to put it), but that I did care a great deal about not doing anything unjust or impious. That government, with all its power, did not frighten me into doing anything unjust; when we came out of the rotunda, the other four went to Salamis and arrested Leon, and I simply went home. I might have been put to death for it, if the government had not fallen shortly afterwards. There are many witnesses to these events.

Do you believe that I could have lived so many years if I had been in public life and had acted as a good man should act, caring for justice and considering it of the highest importance? Far from it, men of Athens; nor could any other man. But you will find that through all my life, both in public (if I engaged in any public activity) and in private, I have always been the same as I am now, and I've never agreed with anyone to do act unjustly—neither with the people who my slanderers say were my students nor with anyone else.²⁴ I was never anyone's teacher. If anyone, whether young or old, wants to

of the Athenian calendar. Consequently, at any given time, the business of the city was primarily carried out by a committee of fifty men.

²⁰ The event in question happened in 406 B.C. after the battle of Arginusae, a major sea battle against an alliance lead by the Spartans. The Athenians won at great cost; twenty-five ships were wrecked. Two ships were ordered to collect the dead and injured, but the orders were rescinded when a storm made the mission dangerous and the crews resisted. Because failing to properly bury the dead was a religious taboo, an outcry arose in Athens against the ten generals in charge of the expedition.

²¹ Athenian law mandated individual trials in all capital cases.

²² Eight of the ten generals were ultimately brought up on charges (the other two were excused, because they were not at Arginusae at the time). Two of these eight fled and the other six stood trial collectively (despite Socrates' protestations). They were convicted and executed.

²³ In 404 B.C. Athens surrendered to Sparta. One of the terms of the surrender was that Athens would be governed according to its "ancient" form of government. However it was unclear what this ancient form of government was, and the Spartans set up a committee of thirty Athenian citizens to research the issue and to preside over the city until the required reforms were made. The Thirty (as they came to be called) set themselves up as rulers and by all accounts soon began to grossly abuse their power. For example, Aristotle tells us that they put more than fifteen hundred people to death. They were overthrown after about a year when the exiled democratic faction and their allies took up arms against them. The city then fell into several months of turmoil and civil war, which ended when an envoy from Sparta helped to broker a peace between the factions. The peace agreement included amnesty for almost all crimes committed during the reign of The Thirty (except for the crimes committed by The Thirty themselves and several others)

²⁴ In their youth, several of The Thirty had been among the young men who spent time with Socrates, talking with him and listening to his refutations of others. Likely some members of the democratic faction thought he was responsible for corrupting them or perhaps that he himself was somehow involved in their misdeeds. Anyone who thought this could not have brought Socrates to trial for it because of the amnesty, but some historians speculate that this is what really motivated Socrates accusers. This is especially plausible in the case of Lycon, whose son was executed by The Thirty.

hear me speaking and pursuing my mission, I have never objected. And I do not converse only when paid and not otherwise. Rather, I offer myself alike to rich and poor. I ask questions, and whoever wants can answer and hear what I say. I shouldn't be held responsible for whether any of them turns out well or badly, since I never promised or gave any instruction to any of them. If anyone says that he ever learned or heard anything privately from me that all the others did not, be assured that he is lying. b

Why then do some people love to spend a lot of their time with me? You have heard the reason, men of Athens; for I told you the whole truth; it is because they like to listen when people who think they are wise but are not get examined; for it is amusing. But I believe that I've been commanded to do this by the god through oracles and dreams and in every way in that any man was ever commanded by divine power to do anything whatsoever. This, Athenians, is true and easily tested. For if I am corrupting some of the young men and have corrupted others, surely some of them who have grown older, if they recognize that I ever gave them any bad advice when they were young, would by now have come forward to accuse me. Or, if they did not wish to do it themselves, some of their relatives—fathers or brothers or other family—would now tell the facts. c d

I see many of them here: first Crito here, who is of my own age and my own deme and is the father of Critobulus here.²⁵ Then there's Lysanias the Sphettian, father of Aeschines here; and also Antiphon of Cephissus, Epigenes' father. Then there are others whose brothers joined in my conversations: Nicostratus, Theozotides' son and Theodotus' brother—since Theodotus is dead now, he couldn't stop him by entreaties—and Demodocus' son Paralus (Theages was his brother) and Ariston's son Adimantus, whose brother is Plato here, and Aeantodorus, whose brother Apollodorus is present; and I can mention many others to you. e

Meletus certainly should have produced one of them as a witness in his speech. If he forgot to, then let him do so now; I yield the floor to him, and let him say so, if he has any such testimony. You will find that the exact opposite is the case, gentlemen; they are all ready to help me, the man who, according to Meletus and Anytus, corrupts and harms their relatives. Maybe those who are themselves corrupted have some motive in helping me. But their relatives are not corrupted and are already older man. What reason could they have for helping me other than the right and true one—that they know that Meletus is lying and that I am speaking the truth? 34 b

CONCLUSION

SOCRATES: Well, gentlemen, this, and perhaps more like this, is about all I have to say in my defense. Perhaps one of you may be offended remembering that, when he was on trial for something less serious than this, he begged and implored the judges with lots of tears, and brought forward his children and many other friends and relatives to arouse compassion, whereas I do none of these things, though I am, apparently, in the very greatest danger. Someone with these thoughts in mind might be harshly disposed toward me and cast his vote in anger. Now, if any one of you is so disposed (I don't believe there is such a person, but if there is), I think I'd be speaking fairly if I said to him, "My friend, I too have relatives, for, as Homer put it, I am 'not born of an oak or a rock,' but of c d

²⁵ Athens (and the surrounding area) was organized into districts called "demes."

human parents, so that I have relatives.” And, men of Athens, I have three sons, one nearly grown up, and two still children; but, nevertheless, I will not bring any of them here and beg you to acquit me. And why not? Not because I am stubborn, Athenians, or lack respect for you. Whether I fear death or not is another matter, but for the sake of my good name and yours and that of the whole city, I think it is not right for me to do any of these things because of my age and my reputation (whether it’s deserved or not); for, in any event, the prevailing opinion is that Socrates is in some way superior to most men. If those of you who are supposed to be superior, either in wisdom or in courage or in any other virtue whatsoever, were to behave in this way, it would be disgraceful. Why, I have often seen men who have some reputation behaving in the strangest manner, when they were on trial, as if they thought they were going to suffer something terrible if they were put to death—as if they’d be immortal if you didn’t kill them. It seems to me that they are a disgrace to the city and that any stranger might say: “The Athenians who excel in virtue—the men they themselves honor with offices and other marks of esteem—are no better than women.” Those of us who have any reputation at all ought not to commit such acts, men of Athens, and if we commit them, you ought not to allow it. You should make it clear that you will be much more ready to condemn a man who puts such pitiable scenes before you and makes the city ridiculous than one who keeps quiet.

But apart from the question of reputation, gentlemen, I think it is not right to implore a judge or to get acquitted by begging; we ought to inform and convince him. For a judge is not here to grant favors in matters of justice, but to give judgment; and his oath binds him not to do favors according to his pleasure, but to judge according to the laws. Therefore, we should not get you into the habit of breaking your oaths, nor should you fall into that habit (otherwise both of us would be acting irreverently). Therefore, men of Athens, do not demand of me that I act before you in a way which I consider neither honorable nor right nor pious, especially when impiety is the very thing for which Meletus here has brought me to trial. For it is clear that if I forced you to break your oaths by persuasion and supplication, I would teach you to disbelieve in the gods and, in making my defense, I would accuse myself of not believing in them. But that is far from the truth. I do believe in them, men of Athens, more than any of my accusers, and I entrust my case to you and to the god to decide it as is best for me and for you.

The judges return a guilty verdict. Meletus asks for the death penalty, and Socrates has to make a counter-proposal.

SOCRATES’ COUNTER-PROPOSAL

SOCRATES: For many reasons, men of Athens, I am not upset at this vote of condemnation you have cast against me. One of them is that your decision was not a

surprise to me. I am much more surprised by the number of votes for and against it; I did not expect so small a majority, but a large one. Now, it seems, if only thirty votes had been cast the other way, I would have been acquitted. And so, I think, so far as Meletus is concerned, I have been acquitted even now—and not merely acquitted, but anyone can see that, if Anytus and Lycon had not come forward to accuse me, he would have been fined a thousand drachmas for not receiving a fifth part of the votes. 36

And so the man proposes the penalty of death. Well, then, what should I propose as an alternative? Clearly I should propose what I deserve, shouldn't I? And what do I deserve to suffer or to pay, because in my life I did not keep quiet, and I neglected what most men care for—amassing money and property, and military offices, and public speaking, and the various offices and plots and parties that come up in the state? (I thought that I was really too honest to engage in those activities and survive.) What do I deserve because I refrained from those things by which I should have been of no use to you or to myself, and devoted myself to conferring upon each citizen individually what I regard as the greatest benefit? I tried to persuade each of you not to care for any of his belongings in preference to himself and his own perfection in goodness and wisdom, and not to care for the city's possessions in preference to the city itself, and to follow the same method in his care for other things. What, then, does a man like me deserve? d
Something good, men of Athens, if I must propose something truly in accordance with my deserts. And the good thing should be such as to be appropriate for me. Now what is appropriate for a poor man who is your benefactor, and who needs leisure to exhort you? There is nothing, men of Athens, so appropriate as that such a man be given his meals in the Prytaneum.²⁶ That is much more appropriate for me than for any of you who has won a race at the Olympic games with a pair of horses or a team. For he only makes you seem to be happy, whereas I make you really happy; and he does not need food, whereas I do. e
So, if I must propose a penalty in accordance with my deserts, I propose maintenance in the Prytaneum. 37

Perhaps some of you think that in saying this, and in what I said about lamenting and imploring, I am speaking in a spirit of bravado; but that is not the case. The truth is rather that I am convinced that I never intentionally wronged anyone; but I cannot convince you of this, for we have conversed with each other only a little while. I believe that, if you had a law, as some other people have, that capital cases should not be decided in one day, but only after several days, you would be convinced; but now it is not easy to rid you of great prejudices in a short time. So, since I'm convinced that I never wronged anyone, I am certainly not going to wrong myself, to say of myself that I deserve anything bad, and to propose any penalty of that sort for myself. Why should I? Through fear of the penalty that Meletus proposes, about which I say that I do not know whether it good or bad? Should I choose instead that something that I know is bad? b

What penalty should I propose? Imprisonment? Why should I live in prison, as a slave to whoever is in authority? Or should I propose a fine, with imprisonment until it is paid? But that is the same as what I said just now, since I have no money to pay with. Should I then propose exile as my penalty? Perhaps you would accept that. I'd have to be inordinately fond of life to be so irrational as to suppose that others will be willing to tolerate my conversation and my words, when you, who are my fellow citizens, found them so irksome and disagreeable that you could not tolerate them and are now seeking d

²⁶ The Prytaneum was a public building where victors in the Olympic games would be treated to celebratory meals.

to be rid of them. Far from it, men of Athens: a fine life I would lead if I went away at my time of life, wandering from city to city and always being driven out! For I know well that wherever I go, the young men will listen to my talk, as they do here; and if I drive them away, they will themselves persuade their elders to drive me out, and if I do not drive them away, their fathers and relatives will drive me out for their sakes. e

Someone might say, “Socrates, can’t you go away from us and live quietly, without talking?” Now this is the hardest thing to make some of you believe. For if I say that such conduct would be disobedience to the god and that therefore I cannot keep quiet, you will think I am joking and will not believe me; and if again I say that to talk every day about virtue and the other things about which you hear me talking and examining myself and others is the greatest good to man, and that the unexamined life is not worth living, you will believe me even less. 38

What I say is true, gentlemen, but it is not easy to convince you. Besides, I am not accustomed to think that I deserve anything bad. If I had money, I would have proposed a fine, as large as I could pay; for that would have done me no harm. But as it is—I have no money, unless you are willing to impose a fine which I could pay. I might perhaps pay a mina of silver. So I propose that penalty; but Plato here, men of Athens, and Crito and Critobulus, and Aristobulus tell me to propose a fine of thirty minas, saying that they’ll be security for it.²⁷ So I propose a fine of that amount, and they will be sufficient guarantors of payment.²⁸ b c

The judges sentences Socrates to death.

FINAL WORDS TO THE CITY

SOCRATES: It is for the sake of a short time that you will acquire the reputation and the blame for having killed Socrates, a wise man. For, you know, those who wish to revile you will say I am wise, even though I am not. If you had waited a little while, what you desire would have come to you of its own accord; for you see how old I am, how far advanced in life and how near death. I’m not talking to all of you, but to those who voted for my death. And I have something else to say to them: you may think, gentlemen, that I have been convicted through lack of such words as would have moved you to acquit me, if I had thought it right to do and say anything to get acquitted. Far from it. And yet it is through a lack that I have been convicted—not a lack of words, but of impudence and shamelessness, and of willingness to say the things to you that you wanted to hear. You d

²⁷ This is the second time in the *Apology* that Socrates makes reference to Plato’s presence. (The other is above at 34a). Most of Plato’s dialogues take place too early for him to have been present. And, in the case of at least one dialogue depicting a conversation for which he might have been present, Plato has another character remark on his absence (*Phaedo* 59b). So Plato’s mention of his own presence here may be his way of indicating that the *Apology* is (unlike these other works) an eyewitness account of what Socrates actually said.

²⁸ Thirty minas would take a skilled laborer about ten years to earn and would be enough money for a small family to subsist on for about 16 years.

would have liked to hear me wailing and lamenting and doing and saying many things e
that are, as I maintain, unworthy of me—the sort of things that you’re used to hearing
from others. But I did not think at the time that I should do anything unworthy of a free
man, just because of the danger I was in; and I don’t now regret having made my defense
as I did. I much prefer to die after such a defense than to live after a defense of the other
sort. For neither I nor any other man should try to escape death by every possible means, 39
either in court or in war. In battle, it is often clear that a man could avoid death by
throwing down his arms and begging for mercy from his pursuers; and there are many
other means of escaping death in dangers of various kinds, if one is willing to do and say
anything. But, gentlemen, it is not hard to escape death; it is much harder to escape
wickedness, for it runs faster than death. And now, since I am slow and old, I am caught b
by the slower runner, while my accusers, who are clever and quick, are caught by the
faster, wickedness. And now I will go away convicted by you and sentenced to death,
and they go convicted by the truth of villainy and wrong doing. And I’ll abide by my
penalty, and they by theirs. Perhaps these things had to be this way, and I think it’s as it
should be.

And now I wish to prophesize to you, you who have condemned me; for I am now at
the time when men most prophesize—the time just before death. I say to you, you men
who have slain me, that punishment will come upon you right away after my death, far c
more harsh than the punishment of death which you have sentenced me to. You have
done this to me because you hoped that you would be relieved from giving an account of
your lives, but I say that the result will be very different. There will be more men to force
you to give an account than there were before—men who I restrained, though you did not d
know it; and they will be more troublesome because they are younger, and you will be
more annoyed. For if you think that by putting men to death you will prevent anyone
from reproaching you for not acting as you should, you are mistaken. That sort of escape
is neither possible nor honorable. The easiest and most honorable escape is not by
suppressing others, but by making yourselves as good as possible. So, with this prophesy e
to those of you who condemned me, I leave you.²⁹

But, while the authorities are busy and before I go to the place where I must die, I
would like to discuss what has happened with those of you who voted for my acquittal.
Wait with me a while, my friends; for nothing prevents our chatting with each other
while there is time. I feel that you are my friends, and I wish to show you the meaning of 40
what has just happened to me. For, judges—and you’re the ones who I can correctly call
judges—a wonderful thing has happened to me. In the past, my customary prophetic sign
always spoke to me very frequently and opposed me even in very small matters, if I was
going to do anything I should not; but now, as you yourselves see, this thing which might
be thought, and is generally considered, the greatest of evils has come upon me; but the
divine sign did not oppose me either when I left my home in the morning or when I came b
here to the court or at any point of my speech, when I was about to say anything. And

²⁹ Was Socrates prophesy fulfilled? Some ancient sources report that Anytus, Meletus, and Lycon were later executed or exiled by the Athenians in a fit of remorse. These reports are probably false, but it is clear that, as Socrates predicted, other men took his accusers to task for the way they lived their lives. Plato does this with the *Apology* itself, and it is not the only work (by Plato and others) in which some of these men are portrayed in a very bad light. Indeed, thousands of years later, these three men are remembered for only one thing: their unjust prosecution of Socrates. This is not a happy ending for people who were anxious to preserve their reputations.

yet, on other occasions, it stopped me at many points in the midst of a speech; but now, in this affair, it has not opposed me in anything I was doing or saying. What then do I think is the reason for this? I'll tell you. What has happened to me is doubtless a good thing, and those of us who think death is an evil must be mistaken. A convincing proof of this been given to me; for the accustomed sign would surely have opposed me if I had not been going to meet with something good. c

Let us consider in another way also what good reason there is to hope that it is a good thing. For the state of death is one of two things: either it is virtually nothingness, so that the dead have no consciousness of anything, or it is, as people say, a change and migration of the soul from this to another place. And if it is unconsciousness, like a sleep in which the sleeper does not even dream, death would be a wonderful gain. For, I think, if anyone picked out a night in which he slept a dreamless sleep and compared it with the other nights and days of his life, and then said, after due consideration, how many days and nights in his life had passed more pleasantly than that night, I think that not only any private person, but even the great King of Persia himself would find that they were fewer than the other days and nights. So, if death is like this, I consider it a gain; for in that case, all time seems to be no longer than one night. But, on the other hand, if death is, as it were, a change of habitation from here to some other place, and if what we are told is true, that all the dead are there, what greater blessing could there be, judges? For if a man when he reaches the other world, after leaving behind these who claim to be judges, will find those who are really judges who are said to sit in judgment there, Minos and Rhadamanthus, and Aeacus and Triptolemus, and all the other demigods who were just men in their lives, would the change of habitation be undesirable? Or again, what would any of you give to meet with Orpheus and Musaeus and Hesiod and Homer? I am willing to die many times over, if these things are true. Whenever I meet Palamedes or Ajax, the son of Telamon, or any other men from the past who lost their lives through an unjust judgment, comparing my experience with theirs would be a wonderful way to spend my time. I think that would not be unpleasant. And the greatest pleasure would be to pass my time in examining and investigating the people there, as I do those here, to find out who among them is wise and who thinks he is when he is not. What price would any of you pay, judges, to examine the person who led the great army against Troy, or Odysseus, or Sisyphus, or countless others, both men and women, that I could mention? To converse and associate with them and examine them would be immeasurable happiness. At any rate, the folks there do not kill people for it; since, if what we are told is true, they are immortal for all future time, besides being happier in other respects than men are here. e

But you also, judges, must regard death hopefully and must bear in mind this one truth, that nothing bad can come to a good man either in life or after death, and the god does not neglect him. So, too, what has come to me has not come by chance, but I see clearly that it was better for me to die now and be freed from troubles. That is the reason why the sign never interfered with me, and I am not at all angry with those who condemned me or with my accusers. And yet it was not with that in view that they condemned and accused me, but because they thought they were hurting me. They deserve blame for that. However, I make this request of them: when my sons grow up, gentlemen, punish them by troubling them as I have troubled you; if they seem to you to care for money or anything else more than for virtue, and if they think they amount to something when they do not, rebuke them as I have rebuked you, because they do not d

care for what they ought, and think they amount to something when they are worth nothing. If you do this, both I and my sons shall have received just treatment from you. 42

But now the time has come to go away. I go to die, and you to live. Which of us goes to the better lot, no one knows but the god.