

Plato's *Apology of Socrates*

How you, men of Athens, have been affected by my accusers, I do not know.¹ 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 shameful 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

17a

b

Reprinted (with revisions) from Thomas G. West, *Plato's Apology of Socrates: An Interpretation, with a New Translation*. Copyright © 1979 by Cornell University, and published by Cornell University Press.

In the Athenian democracy of this time prosecutions could be initiated by any citizen or group of citizens. The trial was conducted before a jury of probably five hundred citizens (called "judges") selected by lot. There were officials to regulate the proceedings and to take care of documents, but no "judge" in our sense. The trial proceeded in two stages: determination of innocence or guilt, then determination of penalty in case of guilt. In the first stage the prosecutors or accusers (in this trial there were three) presented their arguments in separate speeches, after which the accused gave his defense speech (*apologia*). Socrates' *apologia* concludes at 35d. The jury then voted on the defendant's innocence or guilt; Socrates was voted guilty. There being no fixed penalty in Athenian law for Socrates' crimes, each party had to propose a penalty for the jury to choose between. Socrates' accuser proposed the death penalty; Socrates presents his counterproposal in the second speech of the *Apology* (35e–38b). The jury voted to condemn him to death, probably by a larger margin than the vote for "guilty" (Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers* II.42). Socrates had time to make a short third speech to the jurymen and bystanders while the officials were still busy with matters pertaining to the trial (38c–end), after which he was taken away to jail to await execution.

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.

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

²To "speak in defense" is *apologēsisimi*. In the title, "apology" (*apologia*) means "defense speech."

³The large Athenian juries often made known their approval or disapproval of a speaker by cheers, shouts of anger, or jeers.

⁴"Simply" in Greek is *aitichnōs*; the word may be used as a pun on *aitichnōs*, "artlessly." On *technē* ("art") see 22d-e and n. 23.

⁵"Virtue" (*aretē*) is the specific excellence of a thing. That excellence may or may not involve what we call morality. Socrates speaks of the virtue of coins and cattle at 20b.

⁶Anytus was the most important of Socrates' three accusers, although he did not himself initiate the prosecution (Meletus did: *Euthyphro* 2b). Anytus appears in Plato's *Meno* (89e-92a), where he becomes angry with Socrates and threatens him in a discussion in which Socrates appears to praise the sophists and attack the politicians in their capacity as educators of the young. Anytus was said to be a tanner by trade.

Socrates, a wise man,⁷ a thinker⁸ on the things aloft, who has investigated all things under the earth, and who makes the weaker 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.

⁷"Wisdom" (*sophia*), for the Greeks as for us, can denote the highest achievement of the mind, but in this context the epithet "wise" (*sophos*)—like our "wise guy"—suggests a frivolous cleverness not consistent with a man's proper seriousness. ("Wisdom" may also indicate technical skill in a manual or fine art, as at 22d-e.)

⁸Socrates is accused of being a *phronētistēs*, a "thinker" or "worrier." This term, which implies excessive intellectuality, appears frequently in the *Clouds*. The related verb *phronōtizō* ("think" or "worry") is consistently translated as "give thought to."

⁹To make the weaker speech the stronger" is to use clever argument to accomplish an unjust or improper purpose. See *Clouds* 112-118.

¹⁰The poet is Aristophanes, who portrayed Socrates in his *Clouds*, first produced in 423, twenty-four years before the trial.

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

19a

b

c

d

e

¹¹Meletus, who led the prosecution against Socrates, was “young and unknown” in Athens (*Euthyphro* 2b). He or his father is thought to have been a poet, since Socrates says Meletus indicted him “on behalf of the poets” (23e).

¹²The expression “to do injustice” in an indictment means “to commit a crime”, the specific counts then follow.

¹³Socrates refers to *Clouds* 218–225, where he is suspended in a basket and utters his “treading on air” line (225). That line is mockingly repeated by Strepsades at the end of the play during the burning of Socrates’ “thinkery” (1503). The *Clouds* presents Socrates as an investigator of the things aloft (171–173), as a teacher of how to make the weaker speech the stronger (1148–1153), and as a disbeliever in Zeus and the traditional gods (365ff.). His students in the play “investigate the things beneath the earth” (188). Cf. Socrates’ account of himself as a young man in *Phaedo* 96a–96d.

¹⁴We have consistently used “knowledge” to translate *epistēmē*, a word whose original meaning is skill or know-how in doing or making. *Epistēmē* is derived from *epistasthai*, always translated “to have knowledge.” Other “know” verbs are *oidanai* (whose root sense is “to have seen”), always translated “to know,” and *gignōskēin*, translated “recognize” or “be cognizant.”

¹⁵“The many” (*hoi polloi*), an expression referring here to the majority of the jurymen, also suggests the “vulgar multitude” that we still hear in the words *hoi polloi*.

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.

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

19e

20a

b

¹⁶“Noble” is usually used to translate *kalon* in the *Apology*; it could also be rendered as “beautiful” (as at 17c and frequently in the *Clouds*) or “fine.” The word suggests the splendid brilliance of something that shines forth, with the capacity for illumination and perhaps also deception.

¹⁷These three men were known as “sophists” (the word is related to *sophia*, “wise”; see n. 7), and all were foreigners, as Socrates emphasizes. The sophists were held in low esteem by both the old-fashioned aristocratic gentlemen and the democratic politicians. Socrates’ accuser Anytus says in the *Meno*, “It is apparent that they main and corrupt those who associate with them” (91c). Gorgias (from Leontini, a Greek city in Sicily), a famous teacher of rhetoric, taught that the art of persuasive speech is the chief part of education and that the possession of that art enables one to accomplish anything one likes by ruling other men (*Gorgias* 449–452). Prodicus (from Ceos, an Aegean island), a grammarian and philologist, stressed the need for precision in the use of words (*Protagoras* 339e–341c). Hippias (from Elis, a city of southern Greece) prided himself on the scope and diversity of his knowledge, which included that of the heavenly things (*Hippias Major* 285c). The remarkable money-making abilities of these three men are discussed at the beginning of the *Hippias Major*. Protagoras, the most famous sophist of all, was dead by the time of Socrates’ trial.

¹⁸Callias, a wealthy Athenian notorious for his dissolute and corrupt manner of life, was a generous patron of sophists. In the *Protagoras* two of the three sophists mentioned above appear as guests at his house. One of Callias’ two sons reputedly was born of Callias’ wife’s mother when she was a mistress of his (Andocides, *On the Mysteries* 124–132).

¹⁹In Greek, “noble and good” (*kalos kai agathos*) is the normal expression for a “perfect gentleman.” The term was often applied to the old aristocratic families. We have translated the phrase literally to preserve the original force of the words, but the “perfect gentleman” sense of the combination “noble and good” should also be remembered whenever it occurs.

²⁰Socrates puns on the words *epistates* (overseer) and *episthion* (knowledgeable), implying that the only suitable overseer is one who knows the art of education (20c).

human being and citizen?²¹ For I suppose you have considered it, since you possess sons. Is there someone," I said, "or not?"

20b

"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

c

plumning²⁴ 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."

d

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.

e

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 trustwor-

thy 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 was in what-

21a

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.

b

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.

I went to one of those reputed²⁹ to be wise, on the ground that here, 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 consid-

c

²¹Alternative translation: "such virtue, human and political" (*anthropion te kai politikon*). On the meaning of "human being," see n. 49.

²²Evenus (from the Aegean island of Paros), besides teaching for pay, wrote lyric poetry and discussed rhetorical technique (*Phaedo* 60d–61c and *Platichrus* 267a), a few fragments of his poetry have survived. Five minae was not a large fee; Protagoras was said to have charged 100 minae. (See n. 72 on the value of a mina.)

²³Art is *techné*, the specialized knowledge that guides the various human undertakings, especially those involving production of something.

²⁴To plume oneself (*kalyptesthai*) contains the stem *kal-*, "noble" (n. 16).

²⁵"Affair" is *pragma*, from *prattin*, "do" or "practice." Elsewhere, *pragma* is usually "matter" or "trouble."

²⁶Socrates seems to quote part of a verse from the lost tragedy *Melampyros the Wise*, "not mine is the tale, but from my mother"; however, he replaces Euripides' word for tale, *mythos*, with *logos* (cf. *Symposium* 177a, where the word is quoted correctly). The verse occurs in a rational-

tic account of the generation of the world that omits any mention of gods. Alternatively, Socrates could be alluding to Euripides' *Helen*, in which Menelaus, shipwrecked and dressed in rags, says, "[the] statement [*logos*] is not mine, but rather a word of wise men: nothing is stronger than terrible necessity" (513–514).

²⁷Chaerephon, the principal companion of Socrates in the *Clouds*, shows his impetuosity at the beginning of the *Charmides*, where Socrates calls him a "madman." According to Aristophanes he was pale and withered (*Clouds* 504) and his nickname was "the bat" (*Birds* 1266). Chaerephon also appears at the beginning of the *Gorgias*.

²⁸Your recent exile refers to the supporters of democracy in Athens who were compelled to escape the city during the brief but murderous reign of the oligarchy (the "Thirty Tyrants"). See 32c and n. 59 on the Thirty.

²⁹The Pythia was the title of the priestess who delivered Apollo's oracles at Delphi.

³⁰Be reputed and "seem" are the consistent translations of *dokrin*, from which derives the word *doxa*, "opinion" or "reputation." The realm of *doxa* proves to be a principal focus of Socrates' investigation described here.

³¹"Divination" is *manteion*, which may also mean "prophecy." From the same root comes *mantis* (diviner, seer, prophet).

³²"Politician" is *politikos*, one who stands at the forefront of the public life of the polis (city). The term *politikos* is not pejorative; it might also be translated "statesman."

ered 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.

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.

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 unfuted. 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

21c

d

e

22a

b

³²"By the dog" is an oath apparently unique to Socrates. He swears "by the dog, the Egyptians' god" at *Gorgias* 482b; "the dog" may be Anubis, the mediator between the upper and lower world, whose Greek counterpart is Hermes.

³³The Greek word *phronimos*, translated "prudent," ranges in meaning from merely "sensible" (as seems to apply here) to "wise."

³⁴The expression "certain labors" recalls the famous labors of Heracles, the traditional Greek hero; less obviously, Socrates' "wandering" may allude to the wise Odysseus' long voyage from Troy back to his home in Ithaca, described in Homer's *Odyssey*.

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.

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 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.

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

22b

c

d

e

23a

³⁵The word for "make" here is *poiein*, which in this context also means "compose [poetry]". The English and Greek words for poetry and poem derive from *poiein*. A poet who composes "by a sort of nature" (in contrast to a man who possesses an art) writes without the guidance of a plan or thought of which he is fully aware. "While inspired" (*enthousiazontes*) is from *enthos*, "having a god within." Socrates elsewhere speaks of such poetic composition as being directed by "divine allotment" (*Ion* 534c). He seems to mean that it is like the orderly motions and works of nature, which are produced by no manifestly embodied intelligence.

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."

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.

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

From among these men, Meletus attacked me, and Anytus and Lycon,³⁶ 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 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 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.

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 *daimonia*³⁷ that are novel. The charge is of this sort.³⁸ But let us examine each one of the parts of this charge.

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?

[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.

³⁷*Daimonia*, the neuter plural of the adjective *daimonion* ("daimonic"), may be translated "daimonic things" or "daimonic beings," perhaps even "divinities." The word has been left untranslated wherever it is used as a substantive in order to leave open what the "daimonics" in question may be. As an adjective it will be translated "daimonic." For Socrates, "the daimonic" seems to be the realm between the divine (the gods) and the merely human. A daimon, as explained at 27d–e, is a being half-divine and half-human. See also *Symposium* 201d–204c.

³⁸The original of the indictment seems best preserved in Diogenes Laertius II.40: "Socrates does injustice by not believing in the gods in whom the city believes, and by bringing in other *daimonia* that are novel; he also does injustice by corrupting the young." Xenophon's version differs in only one word: instead of "bringing in" he has "carrying in" (*Memorabilia* I.1.1). In Socrates' present version of the indictment (admittedly not accurate, since he says it is "something like this"), (1) he reverses the original order of the impiety and corruption charges, and (2) he boldly drops the word "bringing in," changing the meaning of the charge from "introducing" to "believing in" novel *daimonia*.

³⁹"Care" is *melete*; Socrates puns on Meletus' name by arguing that "Mr. Care doesn't really care." Meletus may also mean long practice, study, or attention.

⁴⁰We have added the names of the speakers in brackets. They are not in the original text.

³⁶Little is known of Lycon; he may be the Lycon of Xenophon's *Symposium*, a slow-witted but decent gentleman, whose son was beloved by Callias (n. 18).

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.

e

[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?

[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.

25a

[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?

b

⁴¹"By Hera" is an oath usually used by women. Hera, a god of marriage and of the life of women, is frequently connected with the birth and nurture of children.

⁴²The Council (*boule*) was an administrative body of five hundred members, which supervised the day-to-day domestic affairs of the city. Its members were selected by lot for a one-year term of office.

⁴³The Assembly (*ekklesia*), the highest authority in democratic Athens, was composed of whatever adult male citizens happened to attend any given meeting. All important questions of public policy were determined by the Assembly.

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 any 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.

c

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?

d

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.

e

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.

26a

But in fact, men of Athens, what I was saying is already clear, that Meletus never cared about these things either much or little. Nevertheless, speak to us, how do you say that I corrupt the

b

youth, Meletus? Or is it clear, according to the indictment that you brought, that it is by teaching them not to believe⁴⁴ 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?

[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?

[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?

[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

⁴⁴The word translated “believe (in)” (*hōmizēin*) may also mean “acknowledge” or “respect.” It is related to *hōmos*, “custom” or “law.” To believe in (*hōmizēin*) gods, then, may be understood either as orthodoxy, the inward conviction that they exist, or as orthopraxy, the outward demonstration of respect (by performance of the proper sacrifices, for example). Socrates plays on this ambiguity of believe/acknowledge in the following cross-examination of Meletus. (The word *hōmizēin*, not related to *hōmizēin*, is usually translated “hold” but sometimes “believe.”)

⁴⁵The philosopher Anaxagoras, from the Greek city of Clazomenae, lived in Athens when Socrates was a young man. He was a friend of Pericles and apparently taught that the nature of things can be understood without reference to the city’s gods. According to Plutarch, Anaxagoras was indicted on a charge of impiety, but he avoided prosecution by fleeing the city (*Pericles* 32). Socrates criticizes Anaxagoras’ philosophical teachings, to which he was attracted as a young man, in *Phaedo* 97b–99c.

⁴⁶One drachma was the daily allowance for young men in training to be military officers, a very modest sum. The “orchestra” was apparently an area of the marketplace where books were sold.

are so strange? But before Zeus, is this how I seem to you? Do I believe there is no god?

[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.

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.

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?

[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?

[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 daemons. 27d

On the other hand, if daemons 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 daemons 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, fellow,⁴⁹ if you suppose that a man who is of even a little

⁴⁷An "ass" is *onos*, and a "mule" is *hemionos*, "half-ass." The word *hemionos* is analogous to, and in the present context reminds one of, *hemithios*, "demigod" (literally, "half-god").
⁴⁸Socrates concludes with a complex flourish. The last sentence means: if someone believes in *daimonia*, daemonic things, he also believes in *theia*, divine things; further, the same man must also believe in daemons, gods, and heroes. "Heroes" are demigods or "half-gods," children of one mortal and one divine parent. Socrates adds "heroes" here to prepare his introduction of the demigod Achilles, son of the goddess Thetis and the mortal Peleus. On heroes and daemons, see *Catylgus* 397d–398e, where Socrates presents the account of the *Apology* in a more playful manner.

⁴⁹"Fellow" is literally "human being," an address that carries a somewhat contemptuous tone in Greek. "Human being" is *anthropos*, any member of the human race, as opposed to *anēr*, a "real man" or male human being. The life of an *anēr* (like Achilles) is distinguished by its dedication to manly excellence, which shows itself above all in politics and war. "Manliness"—*andria*—is the Greek word for courage. Socrates is implicitly accused here of not being an *anēr*. Although Socrates proceeds to compare himself to Achilles, he implicitly proposes a standard of human excellence higher than that of mere manliness.

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 palty, 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, befitting death and danger, fearing much more to live as a bad man and not to avenge his friends. '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 c

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, d

⁵⁰Socrates refers in this passage to a crucial turning-point in the plot of Homer's *Iliad*, the epic poem about the Greek war against Troy, whose story would have been familiar to every Athenian. Achilles, whose youthful beauty and excellence as a warrior distinguish him from the other heroes, withdraws from the war when he is publicly insulted by Agamemnon, the commander of the Greek army. Achilles enlists the aid of Zeus, who supports his cause by sustaining the Trojan army's success as long as Achilles remains absent from the war. But when Patroclus, Achilles' closest friend, is killed by the Trojan hero Hector, Achilles' angry desire for revenge leads him back into the fight, although he knows from a prophecy that when he kills Hector, he must die soon thereafter. There follows a crescendo of violence which culminates in Achilles' slaying of Hector, and the poem ends with the return of Hector's body to the Trojans and his burial. Socrates' "quotation" from the *Iliad* departs somewhat from the original text, which reads:

"Swifly doomed, child, you will be for me, since you say such things: for straightway after Hector, your fate is ready at hand."
 Greatly burdened, Achilles swift of feet addressed her:
 "Straightway may I die, since I was not to aid my comrade when he was killed. Very far from his fatherland he has perished; he needed me to become his protector from destruction. But now, since I am not returning to my dear fatherland's earth, and did not in any way become a light to Patroclus and to my other comrades, many of whom went down before glorious Hector, I sit beside the ships, a vain burden on the land."
 (XVIII.95–104)

Homer's Achilles chooses to avenge Patroclus out of grief and anger, while Socrates' Achilles, more concerned with how he looks to others, fears doing anything shameful and appearing ridiculous. "Further, in Homer the death of Patroclus is for Achilles the private loss of his dearest friend, while Socrates transforms it into a crime that deserves punishment (and so Hector rather than Patroclus is dwelt upon): Patroclus' death is a "murder" and Achilles will inflict a penalty [*istiké*, also the word for justice] on the doer of injustice."

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

28d

e

29a

b

c

⁵¹These three battles of the war between Athens and Sparta are described in Thucydides' history (Potidaea: I.56–65, II.58, 70; Amphipolis: V.6–10; Delium: IV.90–101). Socrates is reported to have aided Alcibiades when he was wounded at Potidaea and to have retreated bravely at Delium (*Symposium* 220d–221b, *Laches* 189b). Potidaea was a costly and inconclusive victory; Amphipolis and Delium were decisive defeats. George Anastaplo points out that on each occasion the Athenian commander who stationed Socrates at his post died during the battle. ("Human Being and Citizen: A Beginning to the Study of the *Apology of Socrates*," in *Human Being and Citizen*, p. 24.)

⁵²In Greek poetry, Hades is the insubstantial abode for the shades or shadows of the dead (*Odyssey* XI). Strictly speaking, Hades is Pluto, the god of the underworld, and the expression translated "in Hades" is literally "in Hades' [house]." The name for Hades (*Haidēs*) is a variant on the word "unseen" (*aidēs*).

⁵³In Greek the word "kill," used in a legal context, may mean "condemn to death."

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.

"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."

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

29c

d

e

30a

b

c

⁵⁴Here and elsewhere the word "obey" is *peithesthai*, passive of *peithein*, "persuade." (Exception: "disobey" in 29c is *apiston*, literally, "not trust.")

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.

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 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 setting 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.

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 be-

30c

d

e

31a

b

⁵⁵As a legal term, to “dishonor” someone is to deprive him of the rights and privileges pertaining to citizenship.

come 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.

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. 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 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

31c

d

e

32a

b

⁵⁶For other references to Socrates' *daimonion*, the “daimonic something” that comes to him, see 40a–c below and *Euthyphro* 3b, *Republic* 496c, *Theaetetus* 151a, *Phaedrus* 242b–c, *Euthydemus* 272e, and *Theages* 128d–131a (the latter is an extended account). See also Xenophon, *Memorabilia* I.1.2–9 and his *Apology* 4, 12–13.

⁵⁷The citizen-body of Athens was divided into ten administrative units called “tribes.” Each year fifty men were selected by lot from each of the tribes to serve on the Council (n. 42) for a one-year term. The year was divided into ten parts called “prytanies,” and each group of fifty served as “prytanes” during one of these periods. Among their other responsibilities, the prytanes arranged for meetings of the Council and Assembly. When the Assembly met, certain of the prytanes were chosen by lot to be its chairman.

battle) as a group—unlawfully, as it seemed to all of you in the time afterwards. I alone of the prytaenes 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

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 Tholoi, 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

32b

c

d

⁵⁸Athens and Sparta, the two leading cities of the Greek world, fought an exhausting twenty-seven-year war which ended with a decisive Athenian defeat in 404 B.C., five years before Socrates' trial in 399. The story of that war is told in Thucydides' history and in Xenophon's *Hellenica* Books I and II. Two years before the end of the war, in 406, the Athenians won a major victory in a naval battle fought near the Aegean island of Arginusae. However, on account of the confusion following the battle and a storm that arose soon afterwards, the disabled ships and the Athenians still at sea, both alive and dead, could not be rescued as the ten generals had intended. When the generals returned to Athens, eight of them were accused by Theramenes, an unscrupulous and ambitious politician, of neglecting their duty. One of the ten was not accused, and one had died after the battle. (Socrates uses here the word *amutreshai* for "pick up"; in this context, the word can mean particularly "to take up dead bodies for burial.") This may imply that the most important omission by the generals was the failure to pick up the dead for burial, a crucial rite in the Greek tradition of piety.) Theramenes cleverly manipulated the Assembly of the people, and it was led to condemn the eight to death as a group, although it was evident that many or perhaps all of them were innocent of wrongdoing. Socrates happened to be one of the prytaenes who were chairmen of the Assembly, and he maintained that such a procedure was against the law on the ground that the generals should have been tried separately. His protest was ineffectual, for his fellow prytaenes easily yielded to the loud threats of the politicians and the Assembly. The six generals who were in Athens were executed. (Xenophon, *Hellenica* I.6–7.)

⁵⁹The arrest and execution without trial of Leon, who was reputed to be a perfectly just man, was one of the harshest of the many injustices committed by the oligarchy. This regime, later called the "Thirty Tyrants," was installed in Athens by the victorious Spartans at the end of the Peloponnesian War. At first the Thirty confined their executions to unpopular informers and demagogues, but soon their scope extended to many former supporters of the democracy as well as wealthy citizens and foreign residents, whose riches offered a tempting target. Many of those who were sympathetic to the democracy left Athens and went into exile. These exiles, among whom Anytus (later Socrates' accuser) was prominent, overthrew the oligarchy by force of arms in 403 after it had ruled less than one year. Only in 401—two years before Socrates' trial—did the partisans of the democracy finally overcome the oligarchs themselves, who had withdrawn to a small town outside Athens. (Xenophon, *Hellenica* II.3–4 [Leon of Salamis is mentioned at II.3.39f.; Aristotle, *Athenian Constitution* 34–40; Lysias, *Against Agoratus* 78.)

The Tholoi was a round building where, under the democracy, the prytaenes met, sacrificed, and dined. The Thirty apparently made it one of their chief government buildings.

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 Tholoi, 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.

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

32d

e

33a

⁶⁰Socrates refers obliquely to the claim that several of his students later became prominent in anti-democratic politics. According to Xenophon, Socrates' alleged corruption of Alcibiades and Critias was a leading concern of his prosecutors (*Memorabilia* I.2.12–48). This claim probably could not be raised explicitly because the amnesty of 403, proclaimed when the democracy was reestablished, prohibited prosecutions for crimes committed before that date.

Alcibiades, a brilliant and ambitious man who had associated with Socrates as a youth, was involved in several scandalous actions that contributed to popular suspicion of Socrates. On the night before an Athenian naval expedition departed on its disastrous attempt to conquer Sicily (415), many of the statues of Hermes in Athens were mutilated. As the investigation of this incident proceeded, it was alleged or discovered that certain wealthy and educated men had privately made mockery of the Eleusinian Mysteries, a venerable Athenian rite whose details were supposed to be kept secret from all except those formally initiated. The people of Athens feared that these incidents portended a conspiracy against the democracy and evil for the Sicilian venture. Among those implicated in the profanation of the Mysteries was Alcibiades, who had meanwhile departed for Sicily as one of the commanders chosen by the Athenians for the expedition. His political enemies arranged for him to be tried in absentia for impiety, and he was convicted and sentenced to death. Alcibiades then fled to Sparta, where he successfully aided the Spartans in their war efforts against Athens. He was permitted to return to Athens for a short period later in the war, after he had changed sides again and won several naval victories for the Athenians. However, soon afterwards, suspected of anti-democratic intrigue, he was exiled for the last time. In sum, Alcibiades was said to be "the most unrestrained and hubristic and violent of all those in the democracy" (*Memorabilia* I.2.12). Critias and Charmides, two other former associates of Socrates, were involved in the infamous oligarchy of the Thirty. (In the *Charmides* Plato portrays Socrates in a friendly philosophical conversation with them that occurred in 431, many years before the trial.) Critias, who had also been implicated in the mutilation of the Hermæ, was the leading figure in the Thirty; he was said to be "the most greedy and violent and murderous of all those in the oligarchy" (*Memorabilia* I.2.12). Charmides, a younger relative of Critias, was one of the "Ten in the Piræus" who ruled Athens' seaport as deputies of the Thirty. Both men died violently in a pitched battle with the exiled democrats. Both, incidentally, were relatives of Plato. (Thucydides VI–VIII, esp. VI.17–29, 53, 60–61; Xenophon, *Hellenica* I.1–II.4; Andocides, *On the Mysteries*.)

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 everyone 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 they enjoy hearing men examined who suppose they are wise, but are not. For it is not unpleasant.

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.

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 Acontodorus, whose brother is Apollodorus here.⁶¹

⁶¹These friends and acquaintances of Socrates were probably present as listeners (24e), not jurors.

Crito: He was a sober, well-to-do gentleman of ordinary intelligence, a friend to Socrates not because of philosophy, but because of their common life in proximity. They came from the same "deme" (a neighborhood-sized political subdivision of Athens). Crito offers to pay for Socrates' escape from prison in the *Crito*. He helps Socrates care for his body in the *Phaedo*,

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?

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

concerning himself with Socrates' wife and children, his final bath, and his burial. He also appears in the *Euthydemus* and in Xenophon, *Memorabilia* 1.2.48, II.9.

Critobulus: Crito calls his son "puny" and despairs of educating him in *Euthydemus* 271b and 306d–307a. Critobulus seems to be a rather silly boy who spends his time going to comedies and has no serious friends (Xenophon, *Oeconomicus* 3.7, *Memorabilia* II.6; cf. 1.3–8–10, 3.13). He was present at Socrates' death (*Phaedo* 99b).

Lysanias is otherwise unknown. Sphettus was the name of an Athenian deme. Aeschines wrote Socratic dialogues, of which a few fragments survive. He was once prosecuted for nonpayment of a debt. He was present at Socrates' death.

Antiphon is otherwise unknown. Cephalus was an Athenian deme.

Epigenes: Socrates exhorts him to remedy his poor bodily condition by exercise in Xenophon, *Memorabilia* III.12. He was present at Socrates' death (*Phaedo* 99b).

Nicostratus, Theozotides, Theodotus, and Paralus are otherwise unknown.

Demodocus: An older man than Socrates, he held in his lifetime many of the highest offices in Athens (*Thaëges* 127e). In the *Thaëges* he requests that Socrates undertake to educate his son Theages. There is a dialogue attributed to Plato, probably spurious, entitled *Demodocus*.

Theages: In the *Thaëges* Socrates is reluctant to accept him as a student. Socrates remarks in the *Republic*: "In everything else Theages has been prepared to fall away from philosophy, but the sickness of his body, keeping him away from politics, holds him back" (496b–c).

Adeimantus: This elder brother of Plato converses with Socrates in the *Republic*. He is presented there as a sober, pedestrian man without outstanding gifts.

Plato: The author mentions himself only three times in his dialogues; the other two places are below, 38b, and *Phaedo* 99b, where he is said to have been prevented by sickness from attending Socrates on the day he died.

Acontodorus is otherwise unknown.

Apollodorus: Xenophon says he was a great admirer of Socrates, but "otherwise simple" (*Apology* 28). A companion once told him, "You are always alike, Apollodorus. For you always speak badly of yourself and others, and you seem to me to believe that simply everyone, beginning with yourself, is wretched except Socrates" (*Symposium* 173d). When Apollodorus cannot control his lament at the sight of Socrates dying, Socrates chastises him, as well as the others attending him, for their womanlike conduct (*Phaedo* 117d).

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 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.

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 pitious dramas and makes the city ridiculous than the one who keeps quiet.

⁶²The phrase “from an oak or a rock” occurs twice in Homer. (1) In the *Odyssey*, when Penelope asks her husband Odysseus, who has returned home in disguise, to tell her of his ancestry, she says, “for you are not of an oak of ancient story, or a rock.” Odysseus responds with a tale full of “many falsehoods” (XIX.163, 203). (2) In the *Iliad* Hector utters this phrase pathetically in his last speech to himself before he is killed by Achilles (XXII.126). The word for “I have grown up” (*pephigka*) contains the same root as *physis*, “nature.”

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 judgment 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

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 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 likely, 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

⁶³“Pious” here translates *eusebes*, and “impiety” in the next paragraph is *asebeia*. However, “pious” at 35d is *hosios*, and “impious” at 32d is *anosios*. For the difference between the Greek words, see *Euthyphro* m. 17 and 18.

⁶⁴The italicized explanatory remarks inserted into the translation are by the translators.
⁶⁵In order to discourage frivolous or malicious prosecutions, Athenian law prescribed a fine against the accuser if less than one-fifth of the jury voted for conviction. If there were 500 men in Socrates’ jury, 280 voted for conviction and 220 for acquittal. (Two hundred eighty is one-

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 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

36b

half of 500 plus 30; Socrates says that a change of 30 votes would have acquitted him.) When he says that Meletus would not have gotten one-fifth of the votes without the other two accusers, Socrates seems to be assuming playfully that each accuser contributed precisely one-third of the total votes for conviction. (One-fifth of the votes is 100; one-third of 280 is ninety-three, seven less than 100.) Or Socrates may simply be attributing most of the vote to convict to the persuasive authority of the politician Anytus.

⁶⁶The Greek word for “propose as (one’s) desert” is *timisthai*, whose root meaning is simply “estimate or value at a certain publicly recognized price” or “honor or reward [someone with something]” (cf. *timē*, “honor” or “price”). By extension the word came to be used in court to mean “assess the punishment due.” But Socrates insists upon using the word in its original, nonjudicial sense, whereby it may refer to the worth or value of a man, good or bad. When Socrates says, “What shall I propose [as my punishment]?” he is also saying, “What [good or bad thing] do I deserve?” or “How shall I honor myself?” This ambiguity cannot be translated, but the reader should keep it in mind throughout this section. (The word “counterproposal,” *antitithēsis*, has the same ambiguity.) *Timisthai* will be variously translated as “propose as [my] desert,” “propose [i.e., as a penalty or reward],” “give [me] what I deserve.”

⁶⁷On the Prytaneum, see Introduction, p. 21 bottom.

what I am worthy of in accordance with the just, I propose this: to be given my meals in the Prytaneum.

36c
37a

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 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 great slanders.

b

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.

c

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

e

⁶⁸Sparta, the arch-enemy of Athens, had such a policy.

⁶⁹The Eleven were the administrators, chosen by lot, in charge of the prison and executions.

⁷⁰The term “love of soul” (*philopsychia*) has a collateral sense of “cowardice.”