

## DEFENCE OF SOCRATES

I don't know\* how you, fellow Athenians,\* have been 17a  
 affected by my accusers, but for my part I felt myself  
 almost transported by them, so persuasively did they  
 speak. And yet hardly a word they have said is true. Among  
 their many falsehoods, one especially astonished me: their  
 warning that you must<sup>5</sup> be careful not to be taken in by  
 me, because I am a clever speaker. It seemed to me the  
 height of impudence on their part not to be embarrassed  
 at being refuted straight away by the facts, once it became  
 apparent that I was not a clever speaker at all—unless  
 indeed they call a 'clever' speaker one who speaks the  
 truth. If that is what they mean, then I would admit to  
 being an orator, although not on a par with them. 5

As I said, then, my accusers have said little or nothing  
 true; whereas from me you shall hear the whole truth,  
 though not, I assure you, fellow Athenians, in language  
 adorned with fine words and phrases or dressed up, as  
 theirs was: you shall hear my points made spontaneously  
 in whatever words occur to me—persuaded as I am that  
 my case is just. None of you should expect anything to be  
 put differently, because it would not, of course, be at all  
 fitting at my age, gentlemen, to come before you with  
 artificial speeches, such as might be composed by a young  
 lad. 5

One thing, moreover, I would earnestly beg of you,  
 fellow Athenians. If you hear me defending myself with  
 the same arguments I normally use at the bankers' tables  
 in the market-place (where many of you have heard me)  
 and elsewhere, please do not be surprised or protest on  
 that account. You see, here is the reason: this is the first  
 time I have ever appeared before a court of law, although  
 I am over 70; so I am literally a stranger to the diction of  
 this place. And if I really were a foreigner, you would nat-  
 urally excuse me, were I to speak in the dialect and style  
 in which I had been brought up; so in the present case as 5  
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well I ask you, in all fairness as I think, to disregard my manner of speaking—it may not be as good, or it may be better—but to consider and attend simply to the question whether or not my case is just; because that is the duty of a judge, as it is an orator's duty to speak the truth.

To begin with, fellow Athenians, it is fair that I should defend myself against the first set of charges falsely brought against me by my first accusers, and then turn to the later charges and the more recent ones. You see, I have been accused before you by many people for a long time now, for many years in fact, by people who spoke not a word of truth. It is those people I fear more than Anytus and his crowd, though they too are dangerous. But those others are more so, gentlemen: they have taken hold of most of you since childhood, and made persuasive accusations against me, yet without an ounce more truth in them. They say that there is one Socrates, a 'wise man',\* who ponders what is above the earth and investigates everything beneath it, and turns the weaker argument into the stronger.\*

Those accusers who have spread such rumour about me, fellow Athenians, are the dangerous ones, because their audience believes that people who inquire into those matters also fail to acknowledge the gods.\* Moreover, those accusers are numerous, and have been denouncing me for a long time now, and they also spoke to you at an age at which you would be most likely to believe them, when some of you were children or young lads; and their accusations simply went by default for lack of any defence. But the most absurd thing of all is that one cannot even get to know their names or say who they were—except perhaps one who happens to be a comic playwright.\* The ones who have persuaded you by malicious slander, and also some who persuade others because they have been persuaded themselves, are all very hard to deal with: one cannot put any of them on the stand here in court, or cross-examine anybody, but one must literally engage in a sort of shadow-boxing to defend oneself, and cross-examine without any one to answer. You too, then, should allow, as I just said,

that I have two sets of accusers: one set who have accused me recently, and the other of long standing to whom I was just retreating. And please grant that I need to defend myself against the latter first, since you too heard them accusing me earlier, and you heard far more from them than from these recent critics here.

Very well, then. I must defend myself, fellow Athenians, and in so short a time\* must try to dispel the slander which you have had so long to absorb. That is the outcome I would wish for, should it be of any benefit to you and to me, and I should like to succeed in my defence\*—though I believe the task to be a difficult one, and am well aware of its nature. But let that turn out as God wills: I have to obey the law\* and present my defence.

Let us examine, from the beginning, the charge that has given rise to the slander against me—which was just what Meletus relied upon when he drew up this indictment. Very well then, what were my slanderers actually saying when they slandered me? Let me read out their deposition, as if they were my legal accusers:

'Socrates is guilty of being a busybody, in that he inquires into what is beneath the earth and in the sky, turns the weaker argument into the stronger, and teaches others to do the same.'

The charges would run something like that. Indeed, you can see them for yourselves, enacted in Aristophanes' comedy: in that play, a character called 'Socrates' swings around, claims to be walking on air,\* and talks a lot of other nonsense on subjects of which I have no understanding, great or small.

Not that I mean to belittle knowledge of that sort, if anyone really is learned in such matters—no matter how many of Meletus' lawsuits I might have to defend myself against—but the fact is, fellow Athenians, those subjects are not my concern at all.\* I call most of you to witness yourselves, and I ask you to make that quite clear to one another, if you have ever heard me in discussion (as many of you have). Tell one another, then, whether any of you

5 has ever heard me discussing such subjects, either briefly or at length; and as a result you will realize that the other things said about me by the public are equally baseless.

In any event, there is no truth in those charges. Moreover, if you have heard from anyone that I undertake to educate people and charge fees, there is no truth in that either—though for that matter I do think it also a fine thing if anyone is able to educate people, as Gorgias of Leontini, Prodicus of Ceos, and Hippias of Elis profess to. Each of them can visit any city, gentlemen, and persuade its young people, who may associate free of charge with any of their own citizens they wish, to leave those associations, and to join with them instead, paying fees and being grateful into the bargain.

On that topic, there is at present another expert here, a gentleman from Paros; I heard of his visit, because I happened to run into a man who has spent more money on sophists\* than everyone else put together—Callias, the son of Hipponicus. So I questioned him, since he has two sons himself.

‘Callias,’ I said, ‘if your two sons had been born as colts or calves, we could find and engage a tutor who could make them both excel superbly in the required qualities—and he’d be some sort of expert in horse-rearing or agriculture. But seeing that they are actually human, whom do you intend to engage as their tutor? Who has knowledge of the required human and civic qualities? I ask, because I assume you’ve given thought to the matter, having sons yourself. Is there such a person,’ I asked, ‘or not?’

‘Certainly,’ he replied.  
‘Who is he?’ I said; ‘Where does he come from, and what does he charge for tuition?’

‘His name is Evenus, Socrates,’ he replied; ‘He comes from Paros, and he charges 5 minas.’\*

I thought Evenus was to be congratulated, if he really did possess that skill and imparted it for such a modest charge. I, at any rate, would certainly be giving myself fine airs and graces if I possessed that knowledge. But the fact is, fellow Athenians, I do not.

Now perhaps one of you will interject: ‘Well then, Socrates, what is the difficulty in your case? What is the source of these slanders against you? If you are not engaged in something out of the ordinary, why ever has so much rumour and talk arisen about you? It would surely never have arisen, unless you were up to something different from most people. Tell us what it is, then, so that we don’t jump to conclusions about you.’

That speaker makes a fair point, I think, and so I will try to show you just what it is that has earned me my reputation and notoriety. Please hear me out. Some of you will perhaps think I am joking, but I assure you that I shall be telling you the whole truth.

You see, fellow Athenians, I have gained this reputation on account of nothing, but a certain sort of wisdom. And what sort of wisdom is that? It is a human kind of wisdom, perhaps, since it might just be true that I have wisdom of that sort. Maybe the people I just mentioned\* possess wisdom of a superhuman kind; otherwise I cannot explain it. For my part, I certainly do not possess that knowledge; and whoever says I do is lying and speaking with a view to slandering me—

Now please do not protest, fellow Athenians, even if I should sound to you rather boastful. I am not myself the source of the story I am about to tell you, but I shall refer you to a trustworthy authority. As evidence of my wisdom, if such it actually be, and of its nature, I shall call to witness before you the god at Delphi.\*

You remember Chaerephon, of course. He was a friend of mine from youth, and also a comrade in your party, who shared your recent exile and restoration.\* You recall too what sort of man Chaerephon was, how impetuous he was in any undertaking. Well, on one occasion he actually went to the Delphic oracle, and had the audacity to put the following question to it—as I said, please do not make a disturbance, gentlemen—he went and asked if there was anyone wiser than myself, to which the Pythia responded\* that there was no one. His brother here will testify to the court about that story, since Chaerephon himself is deceased.

b Now keep in mind why I have been telling you this: it is because I am going to explain to you the origin of the slander against me. When I heard the story, I thought to myself: 'What ever is the god saying? What can his riddle mean?\*' Since I am all too conscious of not being wise in any matter, great or small, what ever can he mean by pronouncing me to be the wisest? Surely he cannot be lying: for him that would be out of the question.\*

c So for a long time I was perplexed about what he could possibly mean. But then, with great reluctance, I proceeded to investigate the matter somewhat as follows. I went to one of the people who had a reputation for wisdom, thinking there, if anywhere, to disprove the oracle's utterance and declare to it: 'Here is someone wiser than I am, and yet you said that I was the wisest.'

d So I interviewed this person—I need not mention his name, but he was someone in public life; and when I examined him, my experience went something like this, fellow Athenians: in conversing with him, I formed the opinion that, although the man was thought to be wise by many other people, and especially by himself, yet in reality he was not. So I then tried to show him that he thought himself wise without being so. I thereby earned his dislike, and that of many people present; but still, as I went away, I thought to myself: 'I am wiser than that fellow, anyhow. Because neither of us, I dare say, knows anything of great value; but he thinks he knows a thing when he doesn't; whereas I neither know it in fact, nor think that I do. At any rate, it appears that I am wiser than he in just this one small respect: if I do not know something, I do not think that I do.'

e Next, I went to someone else, among people thought to be even wiser than the previous man, and I came to the same conclusion again; and so I was disliked by that man too, as well as by many others.

Well, after that I went on to visit one person after another. I realized, with dismay and alarm, that I was making enemies; but even so, I thought it my duty to attach the highest importance to the god's business; and

therefore, in seeking the oracle's meaning, I had to go on to examine all those with any reputation for knowledge. And upon my word,\* fellow Athenians—because I am obliged to speak the truth before the court—I truly did experience something like this: as I pursued the god's inquiry, I found those held in the highest esteem were practically the most defective, whereas men who were supposed to be their inferiors were much better off in respect of understanding.

b Let me, then, outline my wanderings for you, the various 'labours' I kept undertaking,\* only to find that the oracle proved completely irrefutable. After I had done with the politicians, I turned to the poets—including tragedians, dithyrambic poets,\* and the rest—thinking that in their company I would be shown up as more ignorant than they were. So I picked up the poems over which I thought they had taken the most trouble, and questioned them about their meaning, so that I might also learn something from them in the process.

c Now I'm embarrassed to tell you the truth, gentlemen, but it has to be said. Practically everyone else present could speak better than the poets themselves about their very own compositions. And so, once more, I soon realized this truth about them too:\* it was not from wisdom that they composed their works, but from a certain natural aptitude and inspiration, like that of seers and soothsayers\*—because those people too utter many fine words, yet know nothing of the matters on which they pronounce. It was obvious to me that the poets were in much the same situation; yet at the same time I realized that because of their compositions they thought themselves the wisest people in other matters as well, when they were not. So I left, believing that I was ahead of them in the same way as I was ahead of the politicians.

d Then, finally, I went to the craftsmen, because I was conscious of knowing almost nothing myself, but felt sure that amongst them, at least, I would find much valuable knowledge. And in that expectation I was not disappointed: they did have knowledge in fields where I had none, and in

that respect they were wiser than I. And yet, fellow Athenians, those able craftsmen seemed to me to suffer from the same failing as the poets: because of their excellence at their own trade, each claimed to be a great expert also on matters of the utmost importance; and this arrogance of theirs seemed to eclipse their wisdom. So I began to ask myself, on the oracle's behalf, whether I should prefer to be as I am, neither wise as they are wise, nor ignorant as they are ignorant, or to possess both their attributes; and in reply, I told myself and the oracle that I was better off as I was.

The effect of this questioning, fellow Athenians, was to earn me much hostility of a very vexing and trying sort, which has given rise to numerous slanders, including this reputation I have for being 'wise'—because those present on each occasion imagine me to be wise regarding the matters on which I examine others. But in fact, gentlemen, it would appear that it is only the god who is truly wise; and that he is saying to us, through this oracle, that human wisdom is worth little or nothing.\* It seems that when he says 'Socrates', he makes use of my name, merely taking me as an example—as if to say, 'The wisest amongst you, human beings, is anyone like Socrates who has recognized that with respect to wisdom he is truly worthless.'

That is why, even to this day, I still go about seeking out and searching into anyone I believe to be wise, citizen or foreigner, in obedience to the god. Then, as soon as I find that someone is not wise, I assist the god\* by proving that he is not. Because of this occupation, I have had no time at all for any activity to speak of, either in public affairs or in my family life; indeed, because of my service to the god, I live in extreme poverty.

In addition, the young people who follow me around of their own accord,<sup>†</sup> the ones who have plenty of leisure because their parents are wealthiest, enjoy listening to people being cross-examined. Often, too, they copy my example themselves, and so attempt to cross-examine others. And I imagine that they find a great abundance of people who suppose themselves to possess some knowledge, but

really know little or nothing. Consequently, the people they question are angry with me, though not with themselves, and say that there is a nasty pestilence abroad called 'Socrates', who is corrupting the young.

Then, when asked just what he is doing or teaching, they have nothing to say, because they have no idea what he does; yet, rather than seem at a loss, they resort to the stock charges against all who pursue intellectual inquiry, trotting out 'things in the sky and beneath the earth', 'failing to acknowledge the gods', and 'turning the weaker argument into the stronger'. They would, I imagine, be loath to admit the truth, which is that their pretensions to knowledge have been exposed, and they are totally ignorant. So because these people have reputations to protect, I suppose, and are also both passionate and numerous, and have been speaking about me in a vigorous and persuasive style, they have long been filling your ears with vicious slander. It is on the strength of all this that Meletus, along with Anytus and Lycon, has proceeded against me: Meletus is aggrieved for the poets, Anytus for the craftsmen and politicians, and Lycon for the orators.\* And so, as I began by saying, I should be surprised if I could rid your minds of this slander in so short a time, when so much of it has accumulated.

There is the truth for you, fellow Athenians. I have spoken it without concealing anything from you, major or minor, and without glossing over anything. And yet I am virtually certain that it is my very candour that makes enemies for me—which goes to show that I am right: the slander against me is to that effect, and such is its explanation. And whether you look for one now or later, that is what you will find.

So much for my defence before you against the charges brought by my first group of accusers. Next, I shall try to defend myself against Meletus, good patriot that he claims to be, and against my more recent critics. So once again, as if they were a fresh set of accusers, let me in turn review their deposition. It runs something like this:

'Socrates is guilty of corrupting the young, and of failing to acknowledge the gods acknowledged by the city, but introducing new spiritual beings\* instead.'

Such is the charge: let us examine each item within it.

Meletus says, then, that I am guilty of corrupting the young. Well I reply, fellow Athenians, that Meletus is guilty of trifling in a serious matter, in that he brings people to trial on frivolous grounds, and professes grave concern about matters for which he has never cared at all.\* I shall now try to prove to you too that that is so. Step forward, Meletus, and answer me. It is your chief concern, is it not, that our younger people shall be as good as possible?

—It is.

Very well, will you please tell the judges who influences them for the better—because you must obviously know, seeing that you care? Having discovered me, as you allege, to be the one who is corrupting them, you bring me before the judges here and accuse me. So speak up, and tell the court who has an improving influence.

You see, Meletus, you remain silent, and have no answer. Yet doesn't that strike you as shameful, and as proof in itself of exactly what I say—that you have never cared about these matters at all? Come then, good fellow, tell us who influences them for the better.

—The laws.

Yes, but that is not what I'm asking, excellent fellow. I mean, which *person*, who already knows the laws to begin with?

—These gentlemen, the judges, Socrates.

What are you saying, Meletus? Can these people educate the young, and do they have an improving influence?—Most certainly.

All of them, or some but not others?

—All of them.

My goodness, what welcome news, and what a generous supply of benefactors you speak of! And how about the audience here in court? Do they too have an improving influence, or not?

—Yes, they do too.

And how about members of the Council?\*

—Yes, the Councillors too.

But in that case, how about people in the Assembly, its individual members, Meletus? They won't be corrupting their youngsters, will they? Won't they all be good influences as well?

—Yes, they will too.

So every person in Athens, it would appear, has an excellent influence on them except for me, whereas I alone am corrupting them. Is that what you're saying?

—That is emphatically what I'm saying.

Then I find myself, if we are to believe you, in a most awkward predicament. Now answer me this. Do you think the same is true of horses? Is it everybody who improves them, while a single person spoils them? Or isn't the opposite true: a single person, or at least very few people, namely the horse-trainers, can improve them; while lay people spoil them,\* don't they, if they have to do with horses and make use of them? Isn't that true of horses as of all other animals, Meletus? Of course it is, whether you and Anytus deny it or not. In fact, I dare say our young people are extremely lucky if only one person is corrupting them, while everyone else is doing them good.

All right, Meletus. Enough has been said to prove that you never were concerned about the young. You betray your irresponsibility plainly, because you have not cared at all about the charges on which you bring me before this court.

Furthermore, Meletus, tell us, in God's name, whether it is better to live among good fellow citizens or bad ones. Come sir, answer: I am not asking a hard question. Bad people have a harmful impact upon their closest companions at any given time, don't they, whereas good people have a good one?

—Yes.

Well, is there anyone who wants to be harmed by his companions rather than benefited?—Be a good fellow and

keep on answering, as the law requires you to. Is there anyone who wants to be harmed?

—Of course not.

Now tell me this. In bringing me here, do you claim that I am corrupting and depraving the young intentionally or unintentionally?

—Intentionally, so I maintain.

Really, Meletus? Are you so much smarter at your age than I at mine as to realize that the bad have a harmful impact upon their closest companions at any given time, whereas the good have a beneficial effect? Am I, by contrast, so far gone in my stupidity as not to realize that if I make one of my companions vicious, I risk incurring harm at his hands? And am I, therefore, as you allege, doing so much damage intentionally?

That I cannot accept from you, Meletus, and neither could anyone else, I imagine. Either I am not corrupting them—or if I am, I am doing so unintentionally;\* so either way your charge is false. But if I am corrupting them unintentionally, the law does not require me to be brought to court for such mistakes, but rather to be taken aside for private instruction and admonition—since I shall obviously stop doing unintentional damage, if I learn better. But you avoided association with me and were unwilling to instruct me. Instead you bring me to court, where the law requires you to bring people who need punishment rather than enlightenment.

Very well, fellow Athenians. That part of my case is now proven: Meletus never cared about these matters, either a lot or a little. Nevertheless, Meletus, please tell us in what way you claim that I am corrupting our younger people. That is quite obvious, isn't it, from the indictment you drew up? It is by teaching them not to acknowledge the gods acknowledged by the city, but to accept new spiritual beings instead? You mean, don't you, that I am corrupting them by teaching them that?\*

—I most emphatically do.

Then, Meletus, in the name of those very gods we are now discussing, please clarify the matter further for me,

and for the jury here. You see, I cannot make out what you mean. Is it that I am teaching people to acknowledge that some gods exist—in which case it follows that I do acknowledge their existence myself as well, and am not a complete atheist, hence am not guilty on that count—and yet that those gods are not the ones acknowledged by the city, but different ones? Is that your charge against me—namely, that they are different? Or are you saying that I acknowledge no gods at all myself, and teach the same to others?

—I am saying the latter: you acknowledge no gods at all.

What ever makes you say that, Meletus, you strange fellow? Do I not even acknowledge, then, with the rest of mankind, that the sun and the moon are gods?\*

—By God, he does not, members of the jury, since he claims that the sun is made of rock, and the moon of earth! My dear Meletus, do you imagine that it is Anaxagoras you are accusing? Do you have such contempt for the jury, and imagine them so illiterate as not to know that books by Anaxagoras of Clazomenae are crammed with such assertions? What's more, are the young learning those things from me when they can acquire them at the bookstalls,\* now and then, for a drachma at most, and so ridicule Socrates if he claims those ideas for his own, especially when they are so bizarre? In God's name, do you really think me as crazy as that? Do I acknowledge the existence of no god at all?

—By God no, none whatever.

I can't believe you, Meletus—not, I think, can you believe yourself. To my mind, fellow Athenians, this fellow is an impudent scoundrel who has framed this indictment out of sheer wanton impudence and insolence. He seems to have devised a sort of riddle in order to try me out: 'Will Socrates the Wise tumble to my nice self-contradiction? Or shall I fool him along with my other listeners?' You see, he seems to me to be contradicting himself in the indictment. It's as if he were saying: 'Socrates is guilty of not acknowledging gods, but of acknowledging gods'; and yet that is sheer tomfoolery.

I ask you to examine with me, gentlemen, just how that appears to be his meaning. Answer for us, Meletus; and the rest of you, please remember my initial request not to protest if I conduct the argument in my usual manner.\*

Is there anyone in the world, Meletus, who acknowledges that human phenomena exist, yet does not acknowledge human beings?—Require him to answer, gentlemen, and not to raise all kinds of confused objections. Is there anyone who does not acknowledge horses, yet does acknowledge equestrian phenomena? Or who does not acknowledge that musicians exist, yet does acknowledge musical phenomena?\*

There is no one, excellent fellow: if you don't wish to answer, I must answer for you, and for the jurors here. But at least answer my next question yourself. Is there anyone who acknowledges that spiritual phenomena exist, yet does not acknowledge spirits?

—No.

How good of you to answer—albeit reluctantly and under compulsion from the jury. Well now, you say that I acknowledge spiritual beings\* and teach others to do so. Whether they actually be new or old is no matter: I do at any rate, by your account, acknowledge spiritual beings, which you have also mentioned in your sworn deposition. But if I acknowledge spiritual beings, then surely it follows quite inevitably that I must acknowledge spirits. Is that not so?—Yes, it is so: I assume your agreement, since you don't answer. But we regard spirits, don't we, as either gods or children of gods? Yes or no?

—Yes.

Then given that I do believe in spirits, as you say, if spirits are gods of some sort, this is precisely what I claim when I say that you are presenting us with a riddle and making fun of us: you are saying that I do not believe in gods, and yet again that I do believe in gods, seeing that I believe in spirits.

On the other hand, if spirits are children of gods,\* some sort of bastard offspring from nymphs—or from whom-ever they are traditionally said, in each case, to be born

—then who in the world could ever believe that there were children of gods, yet no gods? That would be just as absurd as accepting the existence of children of horses and asses<sup>†</sup>—namely, mules—yet rejecting the existence of horses or asses!

In short, Meletus, you can only have drafted this<sup>†</sup> either by way of trying us out, or because you were at a loss how to charge me with a genuine offence. How could you possibly persuade anyone with even the slightest intelligence that someone who accepts spiritual beings does not also accept divine ones,<sup>†</sup> and again that the same person also accepts neither spirits nor heroes? There is no conceivable way.

But enough, fellow Athenians. It needs no long defence, I think, to show that I am not guilty of the charges in Meletus' indictment; the foregoing will suffice. You may be sure, though, that what I was saying earlier is true: I have earned great hostility among many people. And that is what will convict me, if I am convicted: not Meletus or Anytus, but the slander and malice of the crowd. They have certainly convicted many other good men as well, and I imagine they will do so again; there is no risk of their stopping with me.

Now someone may perhaps say: 'Well then, are you not ashamed, Socrates, to have pursued a way of life which has now put you at risk of death?'

But it may be fair for me to answer him as follows: 'You are sadly mistaken, fellow, if you suppose that a man with even a grain of self-respect should reckon up the risks of living or dying, rather than simply consider, whenever he does something, whether his actions are just or unjust, the deeds of a good man or a bad one. By your principles, presumably, all those demigods who died in the plain of Troy\* were inferior creatures—yes, even the son of Thetis,\* who showed so much scorn for danger, when the alternative was to endure dishonour. Thus, when he was eager to slay Hector, his mother, goddess that she was, spoke to him—something like this, I fancy:

My child, if thou dost avenge the murder of thy friend, Patroclus,  
And dost slay Hector, then straightway [so runs the poem]  
Shalt thou die thyself, since doom is prepared for thee  
Next after Hector's.

10 But though he heard that, he made light of death and  
d danger, since he feared far more to live as a base man, and  
to fail to avenge his dear ones. The poem goes on:

Then straightway let me die, once I have given the wrongdoer  
His deserts, lest I remain here by the beak-prowed ships,  
An object of derision, and a burden upon the earth.

Can you suppose that he gave any thought to death or  
danger?

5 You see, here is the truth of the matter, fellow Athenians. Wherever a man has taken up a position because he considers it best, or has been posted there by his commander, that is where I believe he should remain, steadfast in danger, taking no account at all of death or of anything else rather than dishonour. I would therefore have been acting absurdly, fellow Athenians, if when assigned to a post at Potidaea, Amphipolis, or Delium\* by the superiors you had elected to command me, I remained where I was posted on those occasions at the risk of death, if ever any man did; whereas now that the god assigns me, as I became completely convinced, to the duty of leading the philosophical life by examining myself and others, I desert that post from fear of death or anything else. Yes, that would be unthinkable; and then I truly should deserve to be brought to court for failing to acknowledge the gods' existence, in that I was disobedient to the oracle, was afraid of death, and thought I was wise when I was not.

5 After all, gentlemen, the fear of death amounts simply to thinking one is wise when one is not: it is thinking one knows something one does not know. No one knows, you see, whether death may not in fact prove the greatest of all blessings for mankind; but people fear it as if they knew it for certain to be the greatest of evils. And yet<sup>1</sup> to think that one knows what one does not know must surely be the kind of folly which is reprehensible.

On this matter especially, gentlemen, that may be the nature of my own advantage over most people. If I really were to claim to be wiser than anyone in any respect, it would consist simply in this: just as I do not possess adequate knowledge of life in Hades,\* so I also realize that I do not possess it; whereas acting unjustly in disobedience to one's betters, whether god or human being, is something I *know* to be evil and shameful. Hence I shall never fear or flee from something which may indeed be a good for all I know, rather than from things I know to be evils.

Suppose, therefore, that you pay no heed to Anytus, but are prepared to let me go. He said I need never have been brought to court in the first place; but that once I had been, your only option was to put me to death.\* He declared before you that, if I got away from you this time, your sons would all be utterly corrupted by practising Socrates' teachings. Suppose, in the face of that, you were to say to me:

'Socrates, we will not listen to Anytus this time. We are prepared to let you go—but only on this condition: you are to pursue that quest of yours and practise philosophy no longer; and if you are caught doing it any more, you shall be put to death.'

Well, as I just said, if you were prepared to let me go on those terms, I should reply to you as follows:

'I have the greatest fondness and affection for you, fellow Athenians, but I will obey my god rather than you; and so long as I draw breath and am able, I shall never give up practising philosophy, or exhorting and showing the way to any of you whom I ever encounter, by giving my usual sort of message. "Excellent friend," I shall say; "You are an Athenian. Your city is the most important and renowned for its wisdom and power; so are you not ashamed that, while you take care to acquire as much wealth as possible, with honour and glory as well, yet you take no care or thought for understanding or truth, or for the best possible state of your soul?"

'And should any of you dispute that, and claim that he

5 does take such care, I will not let him go straight away  
 5 nor leave him, but I will question and examine and put  
 30a him to the test; and if I do not think he has acquired  
 goodness, though he says he has, I shall say, "Shame on  
 you, for setting the lowest value upon the most precious  
 things, and for rating inferior ones more highly!" That I  
 shall do for anyone I encounter, young or old, alien or  
 fellow citizen; but all the more for the latter, since your  
 5 kinship with me is closer.

Those are my orders from my god, I do assure you.  
 Indeed, I believe that no greater good has ever befallen you  
 in our city than my service to my god; because all I do is  
 to go about persuading you, young and old alike, not to  
 care for your bodies or for your wealth so intensely as for  
 the greatest possible well-being of your souls. 'It is not  
 wealth', I tell you, 'that produces goodness; rather, it is  
 from goodness that wealth, and all other benefits for human  
 beings, accrue to them in their private and public life.\*'

5 If, in fact, I am corrupting the young by those asser-  
 tions, you may call them harmful. But if anyone claims  
 that I say anything different, he is talking nonsense. In the  
 face of that I should like to say: 'Fellow Athenians, you  
 may listen to Anytus or not, as you please; and you may  
 let me go or not, as you please, because there is no chance  
 of my acting otherwise, even if I have to die many times  
 over—'

Stop protesting, fellow Athenians! Please abide by my  
 request\* that you not protest against what I say, but hear  
 me out; in fact, it will be in your interest, so I believe, to  
 do so. You see, I am going to say some further things to  
 you which may make you shout out—although I beg you  
 not to.

You may be assured that if you put to death the sort of  
 man I just said I was, you will not harm me more than  
 you harm yourselves. Meletus or Anytus would not harm  
 me at all; nor, in fact, could they do so, since I believe it is  
 out of the question for a better man to be harmed by his  
 inferior. The latter may, of course, inflict death or banish-  
 ment or disenfranchisement; and my accuser here, along

with others no doubt, believes those to be great evils. But  
 I do not. Rather, I believe it a far greater evil to try to kill  
 a man unjustly, as he does now.

At this point, therefore, fellow Athenians, so far from  
 pleading on my own behalf, as might be supposed, I am  
 pleading on yours, in case by condemning me you should  
 mistreat the gift which God has bestowed upon you—  
 because if you put me to death, you will not easily find  
 another like me. The fact is, if I may put the point in a  
 somewhat comical way, that I have been literally attached  
 by God to our city, as if to a horse—a large thorough-  
 bred, which is a bit sluggish because of its size, and needs  
 to be aroused by some sort of gadfly. Yes, in me, I believe,  
 God has attached to our city just such a creature—the  
 kind which is constantly alighting everywhere on you,  
 all day long, arousing, cajoling, or reproaching each and  
 every one of you. You will not easily acquire another such  
 gadfly, gentlemen; rather, if you take my advice, you will  
 spare my life. I dare say, though, that you will get angry,  
 like people who are awakened from their doze. Perhaps  
 you will heed Anytus, and give me a swat: you could hap-  
 pily finish me off, and then spend the rest of your life  
 asleep—unless God, in his compassion for you, were to  
 send you someone else.

That I am, in fact, just the sort of gift that God would  
 send to our city, you may recognize from this: it would  
 not seem to be in human nature\* for me to have neglected  
 all my own affairs, and put up with the neglect of my  
 family for all these years, but constantly minded your  
 interests, by visiting each of you in private like a father or  
 an elder brother, urging you to be concerned about good-  
 ness. Of course, if I were gaining anything from that, or  
 were being paid to urge that course upon you, my actions  
 could be explained. But in fact you can see for yourselves  
 that my accusers, who so shamelessly level all those other  
 charges against me, could not muster the impudence to  
 call evidence that I ever once obtained payment, or asked  
 for any. It is I who can call evidence sufficient, I think, to  
 show that I am speaking the truth—namely, my poverty.

Now it may perhaps seem peculiar that, as some say, I give this counsel by going around and dealing with others' concerns in private, yet do not venture to appear before the Assembly, and counsel the city about your business in public. But the reason for that is one you have frequently heard me give in many places: it is a certain divine or spiritual sign\* which comes to me, the very thing to which Meletus made mocking allusion in his indictment. It has been happening to me ever since childhood: a voice of some sort which comes, and which always—whenever it does come—restrains me from what I am about to do, yet never gives positive direction. That is what opposes my engaging in politics—and its opposition is an excellent thing, to my mind; because you may be quite sure, fellow Athenians, that if I had tried to engage in politics, I should have perished long since, and should have been of no use either to you or to myself.

And please do not get angry if I tell you the truth. The fact is that there is no person on earth whose life will be spared by you or by any other majority, if he is genuinely opposed to many injustices and unlawful acts, and tries to prevent their occurrence in our city. Rather, anyone who truly fights for what is just, if he is going to survive for even a short time, must act in a private capacity rather than a public one.

I will offer you conclusive evidence of that—not just words, but the sort of evidence that you respect, namely, actions. Just hear me tell my experiences, so that you may know that I would not submit to a single person for fear of death, contrary to what is just; nor would I do so, even if I were to lose my life on the spot. I shall mention things to you which are vulgar commonplaces of the courts, yet they are true.

Although I have never held any other public office in our city, fellow Athenians, I have served on its Council. My own tribe, Antiochis, happened to be the presiding commission\* on the occasion when you wanted<sup>1</sup> a collective trial for the ten generals who had failed to rescue the survivors from the naval battle.\* That was illegal, as you

all later recognized. At the time I was the only commissioner opposed to your acting illegally, and I voted against the motion. And though its advocates were prepared to lay information against me and have me arrested, while you were urging them on by shouting, I believed that I should face danger in siding with law and justice, rather than take your side for fear of imprisonment or death, when your proposals were contrary to justice.

Those events took place while our city was still under democratic rule. But on a subsequent occasion, after the oligarchy had come to power, the Thirty\* summoned me and four others to the round chamber,\* with orders to arrest Leon the Salaminian, and fetch him from Salamis\* for execution; they were constantly issuing such orders, of course, to many others, in their wish to implicate as many as possible in their crimes. On that occasion, however, I showed, once again not just by words, but by my actions, that I couldn't care less about death—if that would not be putting it rather crudely—but that my one and only care was to avoid doing anything sinful or unjust. Thus, powerful as it was, that regime did not frighten me into unjust action: when we emerged from the round chamber, the other four went off to Salamis and arrested Leon, whereas I left them and went off home. For that I might easily have been put to death, had the regime not collapsed shortly afterwards. There are many witnesses who will testify before you about those events.

Do you imagine, then, that I would have survived all these years if I had been regularly active in public life, and had championed what was right in a manner worthy of a brave man, and valued that above all else, as was my duty? Far from it, fellow Athenians: I would not, and nor would any other man. But in any public undertaking, that is the sort of person that I, for my part, shall prove to have been throughout my life; and likewise in my private life, because I have never been guilty of unjust association with anyone, including those whom my slanderers allege to have been my students.\*

I never, in fact, was anyone's instructor\* at any time.

But if a person wanted to hear me talking, while I was engaging in my own business, I never grudged that to anyone, young or old; nor do I hold conversation only when I receive payment, and not otherwise. Rather, I offer myself for questioning to wealthy and poor alike, and to anyone who may wish to answer in response to questions from me. Whether any of those people acquires a good character or not, I cannot fairly be held responsible, when I never at any time promised any of them that they would learn anything from me, nor gave them instruction. And if anyone claims that he ever learnt anything from me, or has heard privately something that everyone else did not hear as well, you may be sure that what he says is untrue.

Why then, you may ask, do some people enjoy spending so much time in my company? You have already heard, fellow Athenians: I have told you the whole truth—which is that my listeners enjoy the examination of those who think themselves wise but are not, since the process is not unamusing. But for me, I must tell you, it is a mission which I have been bidden to undertake by the god, through oracles and dreams,\* and through every means whereby a divine injunction to perform any task has ever been laid upon a human being.\*

That is not only true, fellow Athenians, but is easily verified—because if I do corrupt any of our young people, or have corrupted others in the past, then presumably, when they grew older, should any of them have realized that I had at any time given them bad advice in their youth, they ought now to have appeared here themselves to accuse me and obtain redress. Or else, if they were unwilling to come in person, members of their families—fathers, brothers, or other relations—had their relatives suffered any harm at my hands, ought now to put it on record and obtain redress.

In any case, many of those people are present, whom I can see: first there is Crito, my contemporary and fellow demesman, father of Critobulus here; then Lysanias of Sphertus, father of Aeschines here; next, Epigenes' father, Amiphon from Cephisia, is present; then again, there are

others here whose brothers have spent time with me in these studies: Nicostратus, son of Theozotides, brother of Theodotus—Theodotus himself, incidentally, is deceased, so Nicostратus could not have come at his brother's urging; and Paralius here, son of Demodocus, whose brother was Theages; also present is Ariston's son, Adimantus, whose brother is Plato here;\* and Aeantodorus, whose brother is Apollodorus here.

There are many others I could mention to you, from whom Meletus should surely have called some testimony during his own speech. However, if he forgot to do so then, let him call it now—I yield the floor to him—and if he has any such evidence, let him produce it. But quite the opposite is true, gentlemen: you will find that they are all prepared to support me, their corruptor, the one who is, according to Meletus and Anytus, doing their relatives mischief. Support for me from the actual victims of corruption might perhaps be explained; but what of the uncorrupted—older men by now, and relatives of my victims? What reason would they have to support me, apart from the right and proper one, which is that they know very well that Meletus is lying, whereas I am telling the truth?

There it is, then, gentlemen. That, and perhaps more of the same, is about all I have to say in my defence. But perhaps, among your number, there may be someone who will harbour resentment when he recalls a case of his own: he may have faced a less serious trial than this one, yet begged and implored the jury, weeping copiously, and producing his children here, along with many other relatives and loved ones, to gain as much sympathy as possible. By contrast, I shall do none of those things, even though I am running what might be considered the ultimate risk. Perhaps someone with those thoughts will harden his heart against me; and enraged by those same thoughts, he may cast his vote against me in anger. Well, if any of you are so inclined—not that I expect it of you, but if anyone *should* be—I think it fair to answer him as follows:

1 naturally do have relatives, my excellent friend, because—in Homer's own words\*—I too was "not born of oak nor of rock", but of human parents; and so I do have relatives—including my sons,\* fellow Athenians. There are three of them: one is now a youth, while two are still children. Nevertheless, I shall not produce any of them here, and then entreat you to vote for my acquittal.<sup>1</sup>

10 And why, you may ask, will I do no such thing? Not out of contempt or disrespect for you, fellow Athenians—whether or not I am facing death boldly is a different issue. The point is that with our reputations in mind—yours and our whole city's, as well as my own—I believe that any such behaviour would be ignominious, at my age and with the reputation I possess; that reputation may or may not, in fact, be deserved, but at least it is believed 35a that Socrates stands out in some way from the run of human beings. Well, if those of you who are believed to be pre-eminent in wisdom, courage, or any other form of goodness, are going to behave like that, it would be demeaning.

I have frequently seen such men when they face judgment: they have significant reputations, yet they put on astonishing performances, apparently in the belief that by dying they will suffer something unheard of—as if they would be immune from death, so long as you did not kill them! They seem to me to put our city to shame: they could give any foreigner the impression that men pre-eminent among Athenians in goodness, whom they select from their own number to govern and hold other positions, are no better than women.\* I say this, fellow Athenians, because none of us<sup>1</sup> who has even the slightest reputation should behave like that; nor should you put up with us if we try to do so. Rather, you should make one thing clear: you will be far more inclined to convict one who stages those pathetic charades and makes our city an object of derision, than one who keeps his composure.

10 But leaving reputation aside, gentlemen, I do not think it right to entreat the jury, nor to win acquittal in that way, instead of by informing and persuading them. A

juror does not sit to dispense justice as a favour, but to determine where it lies. And he has sworn, not that he will favour whomever he pleases, but that he will try the case according to law. We should not, then, accustom you to transgress your oath, nor should you become accustomed to doing so: neither of us would be showing respect towards the gods. And therefore, fellow Athenians, do not require behaviour from me towards you which I consider neither proper nor right nor pious—more especially now, for God's sake, when I stand charged by Meletus here with impiety: because if I tried to persuade and coerce you with entreaties in spite of your oath, I clearly *would* be teaching you not to believe in gods; and I would stand literally self-convicted, by my defence, of failing to acknowledge them. But that is far from the truth: I do acknowledge them, fellow Athenians, as none of my accusers do;\* and I trust to you, and to God, to judge my case as shall be best for me and for yourselves,

\* For many reasons, fellow Athenians, I am not dismayed by this outcome<sup>1</sup>—your convicting me, I mean—and especially because the outcome has come as no surprise to me. I wonder far more at the number of votes cast on each side, because I did not think the margin would be so narrow. Yet it seems, in fact, that if a mere thirty votes had gone the other way, I should have been acquitted.\* Or rather, even as things stand, I consider that I have been cleared of Meletus' charges. Not only that, but one thing is obvious to everyone: if Anytus had not come forward with Lycon to accuse me, Meletus would have forfeited 1,000 drachmas, since he would not have gained one-fifth of the votes cast.\*

But anyhow, this gentleman demands the death penalty for me. Very well, then: what alternative penalty\* shall I suggest to you, fellow Athenians? Clearly, it must be one I deserve. So what do I deserve to incur or to pay, for

<sup>1</sup> The verdict was 'Guilty'. Socrates here begins his second speech, proposing an alternative to the death penalty demanded by the prosecution.

having taken it into my head not to lead an inactive life? Instead, I have neglected the things that concern most people—making money, managing an estate, gaining military or civic honours, or other positions of power, or joining political clubs and parties which have formed in our city. I thought myself, in truth, too honest to survive if I engaged in those things. I did not pursue a course, therefore, in which I would be of no use to you or to myself. Instead, by going to each individual privately, I tried to render a service for you which is—so I maintain—the highest service of all. Therefore that was the course I followed: I tried to persuade each of you not to care for any of his possessions rather than care for himself, striving for the utmost excellence and understanding; and not to care for our city's possessions rather than for the city itself; and to care about other things in the same way.

So what treatment do I deserve for being such a benefactor? If I am to make a proposal truly in keeping with my deserts, fellow Athenians, it should be some benefit; and moreover, the sort of benefit that would be fitting for me. Well then, what is fitting for a poor man who is a benefactor, and who needs time free for exhorting you? Nothing could be more fitting,<sup>†</sup> fellow Athenians, than to give such a man regular free meals in the Prytaneum;\* indeed, that is far more fitting for him than for any of you who may have won an Olympic race with a pair or a team of horses: that victor brings you only the appearance of success, whereas I bring you the reality; besides, he is not in want of sustenance, whereas I am. So if, as justice demands, I am to make a proposal in keeping with my deserts, that is what I suggest: free meals in the Prytaneum.

Now, in proposing this, I may seem to you, as when I talked about appeals for sympathy, to be speaking from sheer effrontery. But actually I have no such motive, fellow Athenians. My point is rather this: I am convinced that I do not treat any human being unjustly, at least intentionally\*—but I cannot make you share that conviction, because we have conversed together so briefly. I say this, because if it were the law here, as in other jurisdictions,

that a capital case must not be tried in a single day, but over several,\* I think you could have been convinced; but as things stand, it is not easy to clear oneself of such grave allegations in a short time.

Since, therefore, I am persuaded, for my part, that I have treated no one unjustly, I have no intention whatever of so treating myself, nor of denouncing myself as deserving ill, or proposing any such treatment for myself. Why should I do that? For fear of the penalty Meletus demands for me, when I say that I don't know if that is a good thing or a bad one?\* In preference to that, am I then to choose one of the things I know very well to be bad, and demand that instead? Imprisonment, for instance? Why should I live in prison, in servitude to the annually appointed prison commissioners?\* Well then, a fine, with imprisonment until I pay? That would amount to what I just mentioned, since I haven't the means to pay it.

Well then, should I propose banishment? Perhaps that is what you would propose for me. Yet I must surely be obsessed with survival, fellow Athenians, if I am so illogical as that. You, my fellow citizens, were unable to put up with my discourses and arguments, but they were so irksome and odious to you that you now seek to be rid of them. Could I not draw the inference, in that case, that others will hardly take kindly to them? Far from it, fellow Athenians. A fine life it would be for a person of my age to go into exile, and spend his days continually exchanging one city for another, and being repeatedly expelled—because I know very well that wherever I go, the young will come to hear me speaking, as they do here. And if I repel them, they will expel me themselves, by persuading their elders; while if I do not repel them, their fathers and relatives will expel me on their account.\*

Now, perhaps someone may say: 'Socrates, could you not be so kind as to keep quiet and remain inactive, while living in exile?' This is the hardest point of all of which to convince some of you. Why? Because, if I tell you that that would mean disobeying my god, and that is why I cannot remain inactive, you will disbelieve me and think

that I am practising a sly evasion.\* Again, if I said that it really is the greatest benefit for a person to converse every day about goodness, and about the other subjects you have heard me discussing when examining myself and others—and that an unexamined life is no life for a human being to live\*—then you would believe me still less when I made those assertions. But the facts, gentlemen, are just as I claim them to be, though it is not easy to convince you of them. At the same time, I am not accustomed to think of myself as deserving anything bad. If I had money, I would have proposed a fine of as much as I could afford: that would have done me no harm at all. But the fact is that I have none—unless you wish to fix the penalty at a sum I could pay. I could afford to pay you 1 mina, I suppose, so I suggest a fine of that amount—

One moment, fellow Athenians. Plato here, along with Crito, Critobulus, and Apollodorus, is urging me to propose 30 minas,\* and they are saying they will stand surety for that sum. So I propose a fine of that amount, and these people shall be your sufficient guarantors of its payment.

\*

For the sake of a slight gain in time, fellow Athenians, you will incur infamy and blame from those who would denigrate our city, for putting Socrates to death<sup>1</sup>—a 'wise man'—because those who wish to malign you will say I am wise, even if I am not; in any case, had you waited only a short time, you would have obtained that outcome automatically. You can see, of course, that I am now well advanced in life, and death is not far off. I address that not to all of you, but to those who condemned me to death;\* and to those same people I would add something further.

Perhaps you imagine, gentlemen, that I have been convicted for lack of arguments of the sort I could have used to convince you, had I believed that I should do or say anything\* to gain acquittal. But that is far from true. I have

<sup>1</sup> The jury has now voted for the death penalty, and Socrates begins his final speech.

been convicted, not for lack of arguments, but for lack of brazen impudence and willingness to address you in such terms as you would most like to be addressed in—that is to say, by weeping and wailing, and doing and saying much else that I claim to be unworthy of me—the sorts of thing that you are so used to hearing from others. But just as I did not think during my defence that I should do anything unworthy of a free man because I was in danger, so now I have no regrets about defending myself as I did; I should far rather present such a defence and die, than live by defending myself in that other fashion.

In court, as in warfare, neither I nor anyone else should contrive to escape death at any cost. On the battlefield too, it often becomes obvious that one could avoid death by throwing down one's arms and flinging oneself upon the mercy of one's pursuers. And in every sort of danger there are many other means of escaping death, if one is shameless enough to do or to say anything. I suggest that it is not death that is hard to avoid, gentlemen, but wickedness is far harder, since it is fleetest of foot than death.\* Thus, slow and elderly as I am, I have now been overtaken by the slower runner; while my accusers, adroit and quick-witted as they are, have been overtaken by the faster, which is wickedness. And so I take my leave, condemned to death by your judgment, whereas they stand for ever condemned to depravity and injustice as judged by Truth.\* And just as I accept my penalty, so must they. Things were bound to turn out this way, I suppose, and I imagine it is for the best.

In the next place, to those of you who voted against me, I wish to utter a prophecy. Indeed, I have now reached a point at which people are most given to prophesying—that is, when they are on the point of death.\* I warn you, my executioners, that as soon as I am dead retribution will come upon you\*—far more severe, I swear, than the sentence you have passed upon me. You have tried to kill me for now, in the belief that you will be relieved from giving an account of your lives. But in fact, I can tell you, you will face just the opposite outcome. There will

d be more critics to call you to account, people whom I  
have restrained for the time being though you were un-  
aware of my doing so. They will be all the harder on you  
since they are younger, and you will rue it all the more—  
because if you imagine that by putting people to death  
you will prevent anyone from reviling you for not living  
rightly, you are badly mistaken. That way of escape is  
neither feasible nor honourable. Rather, the most hon-  
ourable and easiest way is not the silencing of others, but  
striving to make oneself as good a person as possible. So  
with that prophecy to those of you who voted against me,  
e I take my leave.

10 As for those who voted for my acquittal, I should like  
to discuss the outcome of this case while the officials are  
occupied, and I am not yet on the way to the place where  
I must die. Please bear with me, gentlemen, just for this  
short time: there is no reason why we should not have a  
word with one another while that is still permitted.

40a Since I regard you as my friends, I am willing to show  
you the significance of what has just befallen me. You see,  
gentlemen of the jury—and in applying that term to you,  
I probably use it correctly\*—something wonderful has  
just happened to me. Hitherto, the usual prophetic voice  
from my spiritual sign was continually active, and fre-  
quently opposed me even on trivial matters, if I was about  
to do anything amiss. But now something has befallen me,  
as you can see for yourselves, which one certainly might  
consider—and is generally held—to be the very worst of  
evils. Yet the sign from God did not oppose me, either  
when I left home this morning, or when I appeared here  
in court, or at any point when I was about to say anything  
during my speech; and yet in other discussions it has very  
often stopped me in mid-sentence. This time, though, it  
has not opposed me at any moment in anything I said or  
did in this whole business.

Now, what do I take to be the explanation for that?  
I will tell you: I suspect that what has befallen me is a  
blessing, and that those of us who suppose death to be an  
evil cannot be making a correct assumption. I have gained

every ground for that suspicion, because my usual sign  
could not have failed to oppose me, unless I were going  
to incur some good result.

And let us also reflect upon how good a reason there  
is to hope that death is a good thing. It is, you see, one  
or other of two things: either to be dead is to be non-  
existent, as it were, and a dead person has no awareness  
whatever of anything at all; or else, as we are told, the  
soul undergoes some sort of transformation, or exchan-  
ging of this present world for another. Now if there is, in  
fact, no awareness in death, but it is like sleep—the kind  
in which the sleeper does not even dream at all\*—then  
death would be a marvellous gain. Why, imagine that  
someone had to pick the night in which he slept so soundly  
that he did not even dream, and to compare all the other  
nights and days of his life with that one; suppose he had  
to say, upon consideration, how many days or nights in  
his life he had spent better and more agreeably than that  
night; in that case, I think he would find them easy to  
count compared with his other days and nights—even if  
he were the Great King of Persia,\* let alone an ordinary  
person. Well, if death is like that, then for my part I call  
it a gain; because on that assumption the whole of time  
would seem no longer than a single night.

On the other hand, if death is like taking a trip from  
here to another place, and if it is true, as we are told, that  
all of the dead do indeed exist in that other place, why  
then, gentlemen of the jury, what could be a greater bless-  
ing than that? If upon arriving in Hades, and being rid  
of these people who profess to be 'jurors', one is going  
to find those who are truly judges, and who are also  
said to sit in judgment there\*—Minos, Rhadamanthys,  
Aeacus, Triptolemus, and all other demigods who were  
righteous in their own lives—would that be a disappoint-  
ing journey?

Or again, what would any of you not give to share  
the company of Orpheus and Musaeus, of Hesiod and  
Homer? I say 'you,' since I personally would be willing  
to die many times over, if those tales are true. Why?

b Because my own sojourn there would be wonderful, if I  
 could meet Palamedes, or Ajax, son of Telamon, or any-  
 one else of old who met their death through an unjust  
 verdict. Whenever I met them, I could compare my own  
 5 experiences with theirs—which would be not unamusing,  
 I fancy—and best of all, I could spend time questioning  
 and probing people there, just as I do here, to find out who  
 among them is truly wise, and who thinks he is without  
 being so.

c What would one not give, gentlemen of the jury, to be  
 able to question the leader of the great expedition against  
 Troy,\* or Odysseus, or Sisyphus, or countless other men  
 and women\* one could mention? Would it not be unspeak-  
 able good fortune to converse with them there, to mingle  
 with them and question them? At least that isn't a reason,  
 5 presumably, for people in that world to put you to death  
 —because amongst other ways in which people there are  
 more fortunate than those in our world, they have become  
 immune from death for the rest of time, if what we are  
 told is actually true.

d Moreover, you too, gentlemen of the jury, should be of  
 good hope in the face of death, and fix your minds upon  
 this single truth: nothing can harm a good man, either  
 in life or in death; nor are his fortunes neglected by the  
 gods. In fact, what has befallen me has come about by no  
 mere accident; rather, it is clear to me that it was better  
 5 I should die now and be rid of my troubles.\* That is also  
 the reason why the divine sign at no point turned me back;  
 and for my part, I bear those who condemned me, and my  
 accusers, no ill will at all—though, to be sure, it was not  
 with that intent that they were condemning and accusing  
 me, but with intent to harm me—and they are culpable  
 e for that. Still, this much I ask of them.\* When my sons  
 come of age, gentlemen, punish them: give them the same  
 sort of trouble that I used to give you, if you think they  
 care for money or anything else more than for goodness,  
 5 and if they think highly of themselves when they are of  
 no value. Reprove them, as I reprov'd you, for failing to  
 care for the things they should, and for thinking highly

of themselves when they are worthless. If you will do that, 42a  
 then I shall have received my own just deserts from you,  
 as will my sons.

But enough. It is now time to leave—for me to die, and  
 for you to live—though which of us has the better destiny  
 is unclear to everyone, save only to God.\*