

# SOCRATES' DEFENSE

(The Apology of Socrates)

ΑΠΟΛΟΓΙΑ ΣΩΚΡΑΤΟΥΣ

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Translated by Cathal Woods and Ryan Pack



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17a What you felt, men of Athens, on account of my accusers, I do not know. But I, even me, I almost forgot who I was because of them, so persuasively did they speak. And yet they have said practically nothing true. I was especially amazed by one of the many lies they told, the one in which they said that you should take care not to be deceived by me because I am a skilled speaker. Their lack of shame—that they would be exposed immediately by what I do, when I show myself not to be a clever speaker at all—this seems to me to be most disgraceful of them. Unless of course they mean to call "clever" someone who speaks the truth. Because if they mean this, I would admit that I am indeed an orator, but not by their standards.

b So as I say, these men have said little or nothing that is true, whereas from me you will hear the whole truth. Not, by Zeus, beautified speeches like theirs, men of Athens, and not ornamented with fine phrases and words, but you will hear me say the words that come to me at random—for I believe what I say is just—and let none of you expect otherwise. After all, it would surely not be fitting, gentlemen, for someone of my age to come before you composing speeches, as it might be for a young man. And this most of all, men of Athens, I beg and request of you: if in these speeches you hear me defending myself in the words I also usually say in the marketplace by the tables, where many of you have heard me, as well as elsewhere, don't be surprised and don't make a disturbance because of it. Because this is exactly how it is: I have now come before the court for the first time, at seventy years of age.\* So I am plainly a stranger to the manner of speech here. And so just as you would certainly have sympathy for me if I actually happened to be a stranger and spoke in the accent and manner in which I had been raised, now especially

c I ask you for this just request, at least as it seems to me, to disregard my manner of speech—maybe it's better, maybe it's worse—but to consider the following alone and pay attention to it, whether I say just things or not. For this is the virtue of a judge, while of an orator is to speak the truth.

d

18a

It is right for me to defend myself, Athenian men, first against the earliest untrue accusations alleged against me and the earliest accusers, and then against the later accusations and the later accusers. For many of my accusers came to you for many years ago now, saying nothing true, and I fear these more than Anytos and his friends, though indeed they are dangerous too. But these men are more dangerous, gentlemen, the one's who, taking most of you aside from childhood, persuaded you and made accusations against me that are no truer than his, that there is a certain Socrates, a clever man, a student of things in the sky, who has investigated everything under the earth and makes the weaker speech the stronger.

b These people, men of Athens, having spread this allegation, are my fearsome accusers, for those who have heard them think that the people who study these things do not acknowledge the gods. Moreover, these accusers are numerous and have been making accusations for a long time now. And what's more, they spoke to you at an age when you would be liable to believe them, some of you being children and youths, crudely making accusations against an absent person with no one else to make a rebuttal.

c

d       What is most unreasonable is that one can't know and name the  
 names of these people, except that one happens to be a comic playwright.\*  
 All these people who misled you with envy and slander—who having  
 themselves been persuaded then persuade others—these are most  
 aggravating. For it is not possible to summon them here to court or to  
 cross-examine any of them, but it is necessary, blunderingly, as if shadow-  
 boxing, to defend myself and conduct a cross-examination without anyone  
 responding. So you too must accept that my accusers are two-fold, as I  
 said, those who accused me recently and those who I mentioned from long  
 ago, and think that I must first defend myself against the latter. For you  
 e       heard their accusations against me sooner and much more often than those  
 of the later people.

19a       Well then. I must make a defense, men of Athens, and in such a  
 short time must try to banish this slander from you that you have held for  
 a long time. I would like it to turn out this way, that I would succeed in  
 defending myself, if that would be better for both you and me. But I think  
 this is difficult, and just what it is I'm attempting doesn't escape me at all.  
 Nevertheless, let the case proceed in whatever way the god favors; I must  
 obey the law and make my defense.

b       Let us consider, then, from the beginning, what the charge is, from  
 which the accusation against me arose, and which Meletos believed when  
 he brought this charge against me. Well then. What do the accusers really  
 say when they accuse me? Just as if they were charging me, it is necessary  
 to read out their indictment: "Socrates is guilty of meddling, of inquiring  
 into things under the earth and in the heavens, of making the weaker  
 c       speech the stronger and of teaching these very things"—something like  
 this. For even you yourselves have seen these things in the comedy of  
 Aristophanes, a certain Socrates being carried around up there, insisting  
 that he walks on air and spouting off a lot of other nonsense that I do not  
 claim to know anything about, either great or small. I don't speak in order  
 to dishonor such knowledge, if someone is wise about such things—in case  
 I would somehow be prosecuted by Meletos on such serious charges—but  
 in fact I have nothing to do with them, men of Athens, and I call on the  
 majority of you as witnesses, and I expect you to teach and inform one  
 d       another, those of you who have ever heard me in discussion—and this  
 includes many of you—tell one another if any of you heard me ever  
 discussing such things, either a lot or a little, and based on this you will  
 realize that the same is true of the other things that the many say about me.

e       But really none of this is the case, and if you have heard from  
 anyone that I endeavor to teach people and make money, this is certainly  
 not true. Though again I think that it is a fine thing if an individual is able  
 to teach people,\* such as Gorgias of Leontini and Prodicus of Chios and  
 Hippias of Elis. For each of these people, gentlemen, going into each of the  
 cities, to the young—who could learn whatever they wish from their own  
 20a       citizens for free—they convince them to leave their company and join  
 them, paying them money, and to feel grateful in addition!

Now there is currently another wise man, from Paros, who I have  
 discovered is in town because I happened to meet a man who has paid  
 more money to sophists than all the others combined, Kallias, son of

b Hipponicus. So I asked him—because he has two sons—"Kallias", I said, "If colts or calves had been born to you as sons, we could find and hire a trainer who would make them well-bred regarding the appropriate virtue; he would be some horse-trainer or farmer. But since they are humans, who do have in mind to hire as a trainer for them? Who is knowledgeable about such virtue, of the human being and of the citizen? Because I assume you have looked into it, since you have sons. Is there someone", I said, "or not?" "Certainly", said he. "Who?", I said, "and where from? And for how much does he teach?". "Evenus, Socrates.", he said, "From Paros; for five mina.\*". And I considered Evenus blessed, if he really has this skill and teaches for such a sweet-sounding price. I at any rate would take pride in myself and be boastful, if I knew these things. But in fact I don't know them, men of Athens.

c Perhaps some one of you might respond "But Socrates, what is it that you do? Where have these slanders against you come from? For surely it's not by busying yourself with the usual things that so much hearsay and talk has arisen, but by doing something different from most people? So tell us what it is, so that we don't judge your case rashly." The person who says this seems to me to speak justly, and I will try to show you what it is, precisely, that won me this reputation and slander.

d Listen, then. And while I will perhaps appear to some of you to be joking, rest assured that I will tell you the whole truth. For I, men of Athens, have acquired this reputation due to nothing other than a certain wisdom. What sort of wisdom is this? Quite likely it is human wisdom. There's a good chance that I actually have this kind of wisdom, while those men who I was speaking of just now might perhaps be wise with a wisdom more than human, or I don't know how I should put it, for I certainly don't have it, and whoever says I do is lying and is saying it as a slander against me. But don't interrupt me, men of Athens, not even if I strike you as boasting. The story I will tell you is not my own, but I will refer you to a trustworthy source for what I say, because I will present to you as a witness in my case—if I have any wisdom and of what sort it is—the god in Delphi.\*

e You know Chairephon, I presume. He was a companion of mine from youth and a comrade of yours in the democracy\* and joined you in the recent exile and returned with you. And you know how Chairephon was, how zealous he was about whatever he pursued, and in particular when he went to Delphi he was so bold as to ask this—and, as I say, don't interrupt, gentlemen—he asked if there was anyone wiser than me. The Pythian replied that no one was wiser. And his brother here will bear witness to you about these things, since he himself has died.

21a Think about why I mention this: I am going to teach you where the slander against me came from. Because when I heard this I pondered in the following way: "Whatever does the god mean? And what riddle is he posing? For I am not aware of being wise in anything great or small. What in the world, then, does he mean when he says that I am wisest? For certainly he does not lie; it is not permitted for him." And for a long time I puzzled over what he means.

b Then, very reluctantly, I embarked on some sort of trial of him. I

c went to one of the people who are thought to be wise, hoping to refute the oracle there if anywhere, and reply to its response: "This man here is wiser than me, though you said I was." So, scrutinizing this fellow—there's no need to say his name, he was one of the politicians—and when I was examining him I experienced something of the following sort, men of Athens. In talking with him it seemed to me that while this man was considered to be wise both by many other people and especially by himself, he was not. And so I tried to show him that he took himself to be wise, but was not. As a result I became hated by this man and by many of those present.

d And so, as I was going away, I was thinking to myself that I was wiser than this man, for starters. It's likely that neither of us knows anything worthwhile, but whereas he thinks he knows something when he doesn't know it, I, when I don't know something, don't think I know it either. It's likely, then, that by this I am indeed wiser in some small way than this man, in that I don't think myself to know what I don't know. Next, I went to another one of the people thought to be wiser than him and things seemed the same to me, and so I made an enemy of him as well as of many others.

e So, after this, I now went to one after another, realizing with pain and fear that I was becoming hated. But nevertheless I thought it necessary to consider the god's oracle to be of the utmost importance, so I had to continue going to all of the people thought to know something, looking into what the pronouncement means. And I swear by the dog, men of Athens, because I must tell you the truth, I really had something like the following experience: in my divine search those held in highest esteem seemed to me to be lacking just about the most, while others thought to be poorer were better men as far as wisdom is concerned.

22a I have to represent my wanderings to you as though I had toiled away at some task and I still couldn't refute the oracle. After the politicians I went to the poets, including those of tragedies and those of dithyrambs\* and others, so that there I would catch myself being more ignorant than them. Reading the works which I thought they had really labored over, I would ask them what they meant, so that at the same time I might also learn something from them. I am ashamed to tell you the truth, gentlemen, but nevertheless it must be told. Practically anybody present, so to speak, could have better explained what they had written. And so again I quickly realized the following about the poets: that they do not write what they write because of their wisdom but because they have a certain nature and are possessed, like the seers and fortune-tellers, who also say many fine things but know nothing about what they're saying. It seemed clear to me that the poets had undergone a similar experience. And at once I understood that, because of their writing, they thought themselves to be very wise even about other things that they weren't. So as a result of this I went away thinking that I was superior to them in the same way as I was to the politicians.

b So finally I went to the crafters, because I was aware that while I knew practically nothing, I knew that I would find that they knew many fine things. And in this I was not mistaken—they knew things I didn't and

e in this they were wiser than me. But, men of Athens, the noble crafters seemed to me to have the same flaw that the poets also had. Because each of them performed his craft well, he considered himself to be most wise about the greatest things—and this sour note of theirs overshadowed their wisdom. And so I asked myself on behalf of the oracle whether I would prefer to be just as I am, neither being at all wise in the ways that they are wise nor ignorant in the ways they are ignorant, or to be both, which they are. And I answered myself and the oracle that it would be best for me to be as I am.

23a As a result of this quest, men of Athens, a lot of hatred developed against me, and of the most challenging and oppressive kind, so that from it many slanders arose, and I gained this reputation of being wise. For on each occasion the bystanders thought that I myself was wise about the matter that I was examining the other person about. But in fact it's likely, gentlemen, that in truth the god is wise, and by this pronouncement he means the following: human wisdom is worth little or nothing. And he appears to be taking me as an example, speaking of this man Socrates, even using my name, just as if he said "Human beings, he among you is wisest who knows like Socrates that he is actually worthless with respect to wisdom." That's why, both then and now, I go around in accordance with the god, searching and making inquiries of anyone, citizen or stranger, who I think is wise. And if I then think he isn't, I assist the god and show him that he is not wise. And because of this busyness I lack the time to participate in any public affairs worth mentioning or for private business, but I am in great poverty because of my service to the god.

c Furthermore, the young people follow me around of their own accord, those with the most leisure, the sons of the very wealthy. They delight in hearing me examine people and they often imitate me, having a go at examining others afterwards. And, I think, they discover a great number of people who think they know something but know little or nothing. As a result, then, the people who are examined by them grow angry with me, but not them, and they say that Socrates is a most vile person and corrupts the young. And whenever anyone asks them what he does and what he teaches, they have nothing to say and are ignorant, but so as to not appear at a loss, they say these things that are handy against all philosophers, about "the heavenly things and the things under the earth" and "not acknowledging the gods" and "making the weaker speech the stronger". I believe it's because they don't want to tell the truth, that they are obviously pretending to know something even though they know nothing. Since they are ambitious and impetuous, I think, and there are many of them and they speak about me ruthlessly and persuasively, they have filled up your ears, badmouthing me violently for a long time. On the strength of this Meletos attacked me along with Anytos and Lycon, Meletos complaining on behalf of the writers, Anytos on behalf of the crafters and the politicians, and Lycon on behalf of the orators.

24a As a result, as I said in the beginning, I would be amazed if I could rid you of this slander in such a short time, since it has become so powerful. This, I assure you men of Athens, is the truth, and in speaking I conceal nothing, either big or small, or hold anything back. Indeed I get the

b impression that I am hated on account of these very things, which is an indication that I tell the truth, and that this is the slander against me and that these are the causes. And if you inquire into these things, either now or later, this is what you'll find.

c Concerning the charges of my initial accusers, let this defense before you be enough. Next I will try to defend myself against Meletos, the good and patriotic man, or so he says, and the later accusers. And once more, since these are different accusers, let's take up their indictment in turn. It goes something like this: they say Socrates is guilty of corrupting the young and not acknowledging the gods that the city does, but other strange spiritual things. The complaint is something along these lines. Let's examine this complaint point by point.

It says that I am guilty of corrupting the young. But I say, men of Athens, that Meletos is guilty, that he jokes in earnest, by carelessly bringing a person to trial, pretending to be serious about and to trouble himself over various matters, none of which was ever an interest of his. This is how it is, as I will try to demonstrate.

d Socrates (So): Here, Meletos, tell me: Don't you take as your highest priority how the young will be as good as possible?

Meletos (M): I certainly do.

So: Come now, tell these men, who makes them better? It's clear that you know. It's a concern of yours, since upon discovering the one who corrupts—me, as you claim—you bring me in front of these people here and accuse me. Come, state who is the one who makes them better and reveal to them who it is. ... You see, Meletos, that you are silent and unable to speak? Doesn't it seem shameful to you, and sufficient proof of exactly what I'm claiming, that it meant nothing to you? So tell us, my good man, who makes them better?

M: The laws.

e So: But that's not what I'm asking, best of men, but what man, whoever knows this very thing—the laws—in the first place?

M: These men, Socrates, the judges.

So: What do you mean, Meletos? These men can educate the young and make them better?

M: Definitely.

So: All of them, or some can and others can't?

M: All of them

25a So: Well done, by Hera! And what a great number of benefactors you speak of. What next? Do these listeners make them better or not?

M: These too.

So: Who else? The councilors?

M: Even the councilors.

So: Well, then, Meletos, surely those in the assembly, the assemblymen, they don't corrupt the young people? So do they all make them better, too?

M: These too.

So: Every Athenian, it seems, makes them fine and good except for me, and I alone corrupt them. Is this what you mean?

M: That's exactly what I mean.



- b So: You charge me with a great misfortune. But answer me: Do you think it's the same with horses? That those who make them better consists of everyone, while one person is their corrupter? Or isn't it the complete opposite of this: one individual can make them better, or very few, the horse-trainers, while the many corrupt the horses if they deal with them and use them? Isn't this how it is, Meletos, concerning both horses and every other animal? ... It certainly is, whether you and Anytos agree or disagree. It would be a great blessing concerning the young if only a single person corrupted them, and all the others benefited them. But, Meletos,
- c you have sufficiently demonstrated that you never before cared about the young, and you clearly reveal your indifference and that you have given no thought at all to the matters you indict me on.

Still, tell us, Zeus-swearing Meletos, whether it is better to live among good citizens or wicked ones? ... Answer, my good man—I'm not asking anything difficult, you know. Don't the wicked always do something bad to those who are closest to them, while the good do something good?

- M: Certainly.
- d So: But is there anyone who wishes to be harmed by those he associates with more than he wishes to be helped? ... Keep answering, my good man, for the law also requires you to answer. Is there anyone who wants to be harmed?

M: Of course not.

So: Come then, do you bring me here on charges of intentionally or unintentionally corrupting the young and making them worse?

M: Intentionally, I say.

- e So: What then, Meletos? Are you so much wiser at your age than I am at mine that you know that the wicked always do something bad to those who are very close to them, and the good do good, while I, on the other hand, have fallen into such great ignorance that I don't also know this, that if I make one of my associates bad, I risk being harmed by him? And yet I would do this great evil intentionally, as you claim?

- 26a I don't believe you, Meletos, and I think that no one else does, and either I do not corrupt, or if I do corrupt, I do so unintentionally, so that you are lying either way. If I corrupt unintentionally, the procedure is not to prosecute me here for such offenses, but to take me aside privately and teach and admonish me, since it is clear that if I learn, I will cease doing what I do unintentionally. You, however, fled from me and were unwilling to associate with me and teach me, but prosecuted me here, where the procedure is to prosecute those who need punishment rather than instruction.

- b And so, men of Athens, what I was saying is already clear, that Meletos never troubled himself about these matters in the slightest.

Nevertheless, tell us, Meletos, how do I corrupt the young, according to you? Or rather, isn't it clear from the indictment you wrote that I corrupt them by teaching them not to acknowledge the gods that the city recognizes, but other strange spiritual things? Don't you say that I corrupt them by teaching these things?

M: That's absolutely what I'm saying.

c So: But by the gods, Meletos, the very gods that the discussion is currently about, speak even more clearly to me and these people here, because I can't tell whether you mean that I teach them to believe that there are some gods—and so I would believe there are gods and am not entirely godless and am not I guilty of such—but not, however, the gods that the city believes in but others, and this is what you prosecute me for, that they are different, or, whether you mean that I do not acknowledge the gods at all and teach this to others?

M: That's what I mean, that you don't acknowledge the gods at all.

d So: Incredible Meletos, why do you say that? I don't believe the sun, or even the moon, to be gods, like other men do?

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

e So: Do you think you are prosecuting Anaxagoras, my dear Meletos? Do you have so much contempt for these men, and think them to be so unfamiliar with literature that they do not know that the books of Anaxagoras of Klazomenai\* are full of such claims? And what's more, do you think that the young learn from me what anyone who buys them at some time for a drachma, at most, on the floor of the agora can mock Socrates for if he pretends they are his, especially when they are so distinctive? By Zeus, is this how I appear to you? Believing that there are no gods?

M: You certainly don't, by Zeus; none whatsoever.

27a So: You are unbelievable, Meletos, and in truth unbelievable to yourself, I think. For the man seems to me, Athenian men, to be exceedingly arrogant and uncontrolled, and clumsily lodged this indictment out of hubris and lack of discipline and youthful zeal. He appears to be testing me, as though setting a riddle: "Will the wise Socrates realize that I am being facetious and contradicting myself, or will I deceive him and the other listeners?" For it looks to me as though he is saying contradictory things in his indictment, just as if he said "Socrates is guilty of not acknowledging the gods, and of acknowledging the gods." This is just like a riddler.

b Now join me in examining, gentlemen, in what way he seems to be saying these things. And you, Meletos, answer us. And as I begged of you at the beginning, gentlemen, remember not to interrupt if I speak in my customary way.

c Is there anyone, Meletos, who believes there are human matters, but does not believe in humans? ... Gentlemen, make him answer and not digress about other things. Is there anyone who does not believe there are horses, but believes there are equestrian matters? Or that there are not flute-players but in flute-playing matters? ... There is not, best of men—since you are unwilling to answer I will answer on behalf of you and these others. But at least answer the next question: Is there anyone who believes there are spiritual matters but does not believe there are spirits?

M: There is not.

So: How delightful, that you answered reluctantly when compelled by these men. And so you say that I acknowledge and teach about spirits, and whether they be novel or ancient I at any rate believe in spiritual

d matters, according to your accusation, and you even swear this in the indictment. But if I believe in spiritual matters, I absolutely must believe in spirits too. Isn't that so? ... Of course it is. I take it that you agree, since you're not answering. Now don't we think the spirits to be gods or the children of gods? Do you agree or not?

M: Yes indeed.

So: Well then, if I believe in spirits, as you say, then if, on the one hand, the spirits are gods of some sort, this is why I say you are riddling and being facetious, in that while I don't believe in gods, at the same time again I do believe in gods, since I indeed believe in spirits.

e If, on the other hand, the spirits are certain illegitimate children of gods—either by nymphs or by some others that they're said to come from—who among men would think the children of gods exist, but not gods? Similarly, it would be strange if someone believed in the children of horses, or of asses too, namely mules, but did not believe in horses and asses.

28a And so, Meletos, it must be that you brought this indictment in order to test us about these things, or were at a loss as to what true crime you might charge me with. How you could persuade anyone with even a little intelligence that one and the same man does not believe in both spiritual and divine matters, or again that this same man believes in neither spirits nor gods nor heroes—it's not possible!

b And so, men of Athens, it seems to me that it doesn't take much of a defense to show I am not guilty of what Meletos charges me with, and even this is enough. What I said earlier, on the other hand—that a great hatred of me arose and from many people—you know well to be true. This is what convicts me, if indeed it convicts me, and not Meletos or Anytos, but the slander and malice of many people. And I know that these people have convicted, and will convict, many other good men; there is no fear that they will stop with me.

c Perhaps then someone might say "Aren't you ashamed, Socrates, that you engaged in the kind of practice as a result of which you now risk dying?" In reply to this I would justly say, "You do not speak well, Sir, if you think a man who is worth anything must take the risk of living or dying into account, rather than looking to this alone, whether when he acts he acts justly or unjustly, and does the deeds of a good or bad man. For those demigods who met their ends in Troy would be fools according to you, especially the son of Thetis,\* who thought so little of the risk in comparison with enduring some disgrace that, when his mother, a god, told him, when he was eager to kill Hector, something like this, as I recall: "Son, if you avenge the slaying of your comrade Patroclus and kill Hector, you will be killed—because immediately after Hector," she said, "your fate is at hand", he, hearing this, belittled death and the danger and feared much more living as a coward and not avenging his friends, and said "May I die at once, having served justice to the unjust, and not remain here a laughing stock by the curved ships, a burden upon the earth." Do you think he cared about death or danger?"

This is how it is, men of Athens, in reality. Wherever someone positions himself, thinking it to be for the best, or is positioned by his

officer, he must, it seems to me, remain there and face the danger, and not put death or anything else ahead of disgrace. I would have done something terrible, men of Athens, if I abandoned my station for fear of either death or some other thing, when I was under orders from god to live my life, as I believed and accepted, seeking wisdom and examining both myself and others, but, when the officers whom you elected to command me in Potidea and Amphipolis and at Delium were positioning me, I remained and risked dying where these men stationed me, just like anyone else. It would be terrible, and truly under these circumstances someone could justly bring me to court for not believing that there are gods by defying the oracle and fearing death and thinking myself to be wise when I am not.

Indeed, to fear death, gentlemen, is nothing other than to regard oneself as wise when one is not; for it is to regard oneself as knowing what one does not know and no one knows whether death is not the greatest of all the goods for man, but they fear it as if they knew it to be the greatest of evils. And indeed, how could this ignorance not be reproachable, the ignorance of believing one knows what one does not know? But I, gentlemen, am perhaps superior to the majority of men to this extent and in this regard, and if indeed I seem to be wiser in any way than anyone, it would be in this, that I am not so certain about how things are in Hades and I do not think that I know.

But wrong-doing and defiance of one's superiors, whether god or man, *that* I know to be evil and shameful. So I will never fear nor flee things that for all I know could turn out to be good, rather than the evils that I know to be evil. So if you now acquitted me—rejecting Anytos, who said that either I should not have been brought here to trial in the first place, or, now that I have, executing me is unavoidable, and who tells you that if I were acquitted, your sons, practicing what Socrates teaches, would at once be thoroughly corrupted—if, referring to this, you said to me, "Socrates, we are not at present persuaded by Anytos and we acquit you, on the following condition, however, namely that you no longer spend your time on this quest and search for wisdom, and that if you are caught still doing this, you will die"—if, as I was saying, you were to acquit me on these conditions, I would say to you, "I cherish and love you, men of Athens, but I am more obedient to the god than to you, and so long as I have breath and am able I will not cease seeking wisdom and appealing and demonstrating to every one of you I come across, saying my customary things: "Best of men, you are an Athenian, of the greatest and most renowned city in regard to wisdom and power. Are you not ashamed that you care about how you will acquire as much money as possible, and reputation and honor, while you do not care or worry about wisdom and truth and how your soul might be as good as possible?"

And if one of you disputes this and says that he does care, right away I will not let him go or leave him but will question and scrutinize and cross-examine him, and if he does not appear to possess virtue, but he says he does, I will reproach him for considering the most valuable things to be of least importance and the most worthless to be of the greatest importance. I will do this for anyone I meet, young and old, stranger and

citizen, though more for the citizens, insofar as they are closer to me in blood.

- b Rest assured that the god command this, and I believe there has never been a greater good for the city than my service to the god. For I go around doing nothing other than persuading you, both young and old, not to care for your wealth and well-being ahead of or as intensely as caring for how your soul might be as good as possible, saying "Virtue does not come from wealth, but from virtue come wealth and all other human goods, both private and public." So if I corrupt the young by saying these things, they would be harmful; but if anyone claims that I say anything different than this, he is talking nonsense. "Men of Athens," I would say, "either be persuaded by Anytos, or not, or acquit me, or not, in light of the fact that I would not act differently, not even if I am destined to die again and again."
- c

- d Do not create a disturbance, men of Athens, but stick to what I begged of you, not to make a disturbance at what I say but to listen, since I think by listening you might even be helped. For I am about to say other things to you at which you will perhaps cry out; but don't do this, no matter what. Rest assured that if you kill me for being the kind of person I describe, you will not harm me more than yourselves. Neither Meletos or Anytos can do me any harm, it is not possible, since I think it is not permitted for a better man to be harmed by a worse one. He might kill or exile or disenfranchise me, but while he, perhaps, and others, might think somehow that these are great evils, I do not. But it is a much greater evil to do what this man here is doing right now, attempting to put a man to death unjustly.

- e Indeed, men of Athens, I am making a defense hardly at all for my own sake, as someone might suppose, but for yours, in case you do something wrong concerning the god's gift to you by condemning me. If you were to execute me you would not easily find another person like me, who is literally—although it is rather funny to say—attached to the city by the god as though to a horse that's great and noble though sluggish because of its size and needing to be provoked by a sort of gadfly, which is just the way, I think, the god attached me to the city, the sort of person who never ceases provoking you and persuading you and reproaching each one of you the whole day long everywhere I settle. You won't easily get another person like this, gentlemen, and if you are persuaded by me, you will spare me. Alternatively, being annoyed just like people roused from sleep, you might perhaps swat me, and persuaded by Anytos would put me to death without a second thought. And then you could live out your days in slumber, unless out of his concern for you the god sends you someone else.
- 31a

- b You can tell from the following that I am the kind of person who is given by the god to the city: it is not human to disregard all my affairs and to endure the neglect of my household for so many years now but always to be acting for your sake, going to each person privately just like a father or elder brother, urging you to pay attention to virtue. If I had gained something from these actions and received payment for inciting you in this way, they would make some sense. But you yourselves see now that my

c accusers, while so shameless in everything else, in bringing this particular charge lacked the audacity to present a witness to the effect that I ever charged anyone a fee or asked for one. Yet I provide adequate witness that I am telling the truth, I believe: my poverty.

d Perhaps it might be thought strange that I privately go about giving advice and getting myself involved, while publicly I do not dare go to our assembly to advise the city. The reason for this is something you have often heard me mention in many places, that something divine and spiritual comes to me, which Meletos jokingly included in the indictment. This has been coming to me as a kind of voice, beginning in childhood, and, whenever it comes, it always diverts me from what I am about to do, but never urges me on. This is what prevented me from doing anything political, and I think it was entirely right to oppose me. Rest assured, men of Athens, if I had long ago tried my hand at political matters, long ago I would have perished and benefited neither you nor myself. And do not be offended by my telling the truth; there is no man who could save himself from you or any other populace while honestly opposing you and hindering many unjust and unlawful things from happening in the city. 32a Rather, someone who genuinely fights for what is just, if he wishes to survive even for a short time, must engage in private practice but not in public politics.

I will provide you with ample evidence for this; not words, but what you admire, deeds. Listen to what happened to me, so that you may know that I did not fear death over justice and yield to anyone, though I might then lose my life by not yielding. What I will relate is tiresome and lawyerly, but true. I, Athenian men, never held any other office in the city except being on the council. And it so happened that our Antiochis tribe was presiding when you resolved to judge as a group—contrary to law as you all came to realize later—the ten generals who did not rescue the people forsaken in the naval battle. At that time I alone of the committee members was opposed you to you doing anything contrary to the laws and I voted against it. With the orators ready to indict and arrest me and you inciting them and raising a ruckus, I thought it more important for me to risk everything with law and justice on my side than to side with you, for fear of imprisonment or death, when you were contemplating unjust actions.

This was when the city was still a democracy. But again, when the oligarchy came to power, the Thirty summoned me and four others into the Rotunda and ordered us to bring Leon the Salaminian from Salamis for execution; they made many such demands of a lot of other people, in order to tarnish as many as possible with their guilt. Then once again I demonstrated, not in speech but in action, that I couldn't care less about death, if it's not too blunt to say, but I care the world about this: avoiding doing anything unjust or unholy. That regime did not intimidate me into doing something unjust, even though it was so powerful. And so when we exited the Rotunda, the other four left for Salamis and brought back Leon, but I left and headed home. And I might have been put to death for this, if the regime had not been quickly overthrown. And there are many who will bear witness to these events before you.

33a Do you think I would have lasted for so many years if I had engaged in politics and, acting in the manner worthy of a good man, I came to the aid of justice and rightly made it my utmost concern? Far from it, men of Athens, and neither would any other man. Throughout my whole life, I have shown myself to be the same sort of man in public, if I really did anything, as in private, never conceding anything illegal either to those who clearly slander me by saying they are my students, or to anyone else.

b I have never been anyone's teacher, but if anybody desired to listen to me talking and conducting my own inquiries, whether young or old, I never rejected anyone. Nor do I converse if I receive money but refuse to if I don't, but I allow rich and poor alike to question me, and likewise if anyone wishes to hear whatever I have to say in reply. And if any of them turn out to be good, or not good, I cannot justly be held responsible. I never promised any instruction to any of them nor did I teach them, and if someone says that he learned anything from me or heard privately what all the others did not hear, rest assured that he is not speaking the truth.

c But why then do people enjoy spending a lot of time with me? You have heard why, men of Athens—I told you the whole truth. It is because they enjoy hearing me expose those who think themselves wise but are not, for it is not unpleasant. I was commanded to do this, as I say, by the god, both in oracles and dreams and in every way that any divine fate at all ever ordered a man to do anything whatsoever. This is the truth, men of  
d Athens, and easily tested. Because if I am indeed corrupting some of the young and have corrupted others, if any of them realized when they were older that I recommended something evil at some point when they were young, they should now come forward and accuse me and avenge themselves. If they themselves were reluctant, someone from their family, a father or brother or some other relative, should call it to mind and take revenge, if they ever suffered any evil at my hands.

e In any case, many of them are present here, who I can see. First there is Crito here, who is my contemporary and from my district and the father of this man, Critoboulos. Next there is Lysanias of Sphektos, father of Aeschines here. Also, this here is Antiphon of Cephissos, father of Epigenes. These others have brothers who spent their time in this way: Nicostratos son of Theozotides, brother of Theodotos—Theodotos who died, which means that he could not have begged him not to testify—and Paralios here, son of Demodocus, whose brother was Theages. And here is  
34a Adeimantos, son of Ariston, the brother of Plato here, and Aiantodoros, brother of this man, Apollodoros. I have many others I could mention to you, some of whom Meletos certainly should have brought forth as a witness during his own presentation. If he forgot then, let him call them now—I yield my time—and let him speak if he has anyone of this kind.

b Instead you will find the complete opposite of this, gentlemen; they are all ready to help me, the corruptor, the one who harms their kin, as Meletos and Anytos claim. Those who were corrupted perhaps would have a reason to help me. But the uncorrupted, who are already old men and who are their relatives, do they have any other reason for helping me except the right and just one, that they know just as well as Meletos does

that he is lying, while I tell the truth?

c Well then, gentlemen. This is roughly what I should say in my defense and maybe other similar points. One of you might be angry when he is reminded of his own conduct—if he begged and beseeched the judges with many tears when fighting a lesser contest than this one, bringing forth his children so that they would especially pity him, and other members of his family and many friends, whereas I will do none of this, even though I run, I might suppose, the ultimate risk. Someone who realized this might be more hard-hearted towards me and resenting this  
d might cast his vote in anger. If this is really how any of you feel—I don't expect that it is, but if so—it seems reasonable for me to say to that person "I, Sir, have a family, you know, and was born neither "from oak or from rock" as the expression of Homer\* goes, but from human beings, so that I have a family too, and indeed sons, gentlemen, three of them, one already a teenager and two who are children. But nonetheless I will not beg you to acquit me by bringing any of them here."

e So why then won't I do any of these things? Not out of stubbornness, men of Athens, nor out of disrespect for you. Whether or not I am confident in the face of death is another story, but with respect to reputation, both mine and yours and the whole city's, I don't think it's right for me to do any of these things at my age and with my reputation. Be it true or false, at any rate people have decided that Socrates is in fact  
35a superior to most men in some respect and if any of you acted like that while thinking himself to be superior either in wisdom or courage or in any other virtue, it would be shameful. I have often seen some people like this when they are on trial, thinking themselves to be something, carrying on remarkably, as though they thought that something terrible would happen if they die, as if they would be immortal if you did not kill them.

b And these people seem to bring shame upon the city, so that some stranger might think that the foremost of the Athenians in virtue, whom the Athenians nominate ahead of themselves for offices and other honors, they are no better than women. Those of you who are thought to be something in any way whatsoever, men of Athens, should not do these things, and if we do them you should not permit it but make this very thing clear, that you will more readily convict a person who puts on these miserable theatrics and makes a laughingstock of the city than one who holds his peace.

c Apart from reputation, gentlemen, I do not think it is right to beg the judges nor to be acquitted by begging, but to teach and persuade instead. The judge does not sit for this reason, to hand out justice as a gift, but for the purpose of judging the case. He did not swear to do favors for whoever he feels like, but to judge according to the laws. We should not accustom you to breaking your oath and neither should you accustom yourselves; neither of us would then be acting piously. Do not, then, men of Athens, expect that I should act towards you in a way that I think is  
d neither fine nor just nor holy, especially when, by Zeus, I am charged precisely with impiety by Meletos here. Clearly, if by begging I persuaded and convinced you who had sworn an oath, I would be teaching you to think that the gods do not exist, and in defending myself I would



obviously be accusing myself of not acknowledging the gods. But this is not at all how things are, since I believe, men of Athens, whereas none of my accusers believe. And I trust you and the god to decide my case in whatever way you think is best both for me and for you.

[The judges vote and Socrates is found guilty by 280 votes to 220. The next stage of the trial involves each side proposing a penalty. The prosecution proposes the death penalty.]

e  
36a Many other things contribute to my lack of anger, men of Athens, over what has just happened, that you found me guilty, and I am not surprised that what happened happened. Indeed, I am much more amazed at the final number of each of the votes, since I, at least, did not think it would be by such a small margin, but by a large one. It now appears that if only thirty votes had changed sides, I would have been acquitted. I myself think that I was acquitted of Meletos' charges, and not just acquitted—it is clear to everyone that if Anytos and Lycon had not joined him in accusing me, he would have owed a thousand drachmas for not receiving a fifth of the votes.\*

b

The man proposes death as my penalty. Well then. Shall I make a counterproposal to you, Athenian men? Or is it clear what I deserve? What, then? What do I deserve to suffer or pay, knowing that I have not gone about quietly throughout my life but I have paid no attention to what the masses care about, money and estate and generalships and political power and other offices and clubs and political parties present in the city, realizing that in reality I am too honorable a person to pursue these things and survive. I did not participate in the things that it would likely have helped neither you nor myself for me to get into, but I set about accomplishing the greatest good, as I declare, by going to each of you privately, trying to persuade each one of you not to put concern for any of his own affairs ahead of concern for how he himself might be as good and wise as possible, nor to put political influence ahead of the city itself, and to care for other things in the same way—what do I deserve for being such a person? Something good, men of Athens, if I must indeed make a proposal truly in accordance with merit. And more than that, some good which fitting for me. What then is fitting for a poor man in need of a benefactor to be at leisure to instruct you? There is nothing more fitting, Athenian men, than to feed such a man at the prytaneum, even moreso than if one of you had won a race on a single horse, or in a two- or four-horse chariot at Olympia. For while he makes you think that you are happy, I make you happy, and while he does not need the nourishment, I do. So if I must propose a penalty according to justice based on merit, I propose this, dinner in the prytaneum.

c  
d  
e  
37a

Perhaps in saying this I seem to be speaking to you in about the same way as I spoke about pitying and imploring—out of arrogance. But it is not because of that, Athenian men, but more because of the following sort of thing: I am convinced that I wrong no man willingly. But I cannot convince you of this, since we have been talking it over with each other for only a short time, whereas, I think, if your practice was the same as other

- b people's, to deliberate about death penalty cases not just for one day but for many, you would be convinced. But, as it stands, it's not easy to demolish great slanders in a short time.

- c Since I am convinced that I do no wrong, I am far from wronging myself and saying against myself that I deserve something bad and proposing something of the sort for myself. Why should I? Because I'm afraid of something? So that I can avoid what Meletos proposes for me, when I claim not to know whether it is good or bad? Should I choose something that I am sure is something bad instead of this, and propose it as a penalty? What? Prison? And why must I live in the prison, enslaved to the authorities currently in power, the Eleven?\* Or how about a fine, with imprisonment until I have paid? But in my case this is the same as what I just said, since I don't have money to pay with.

- d Well then, shall I propose exile? You would probably accept this. But I would have an excessive love of life, men of Athens, if I were so stupid that I was unable to infer from the fact that you, my fellow citizens, could not bear my discussions and speeches, but they became so burdensome and so resented that you now seek to be free of them—would others willingly put up with them? Far from it, men of Athens. It would be a fine life for me, a man going into exile at my age, to spend my life being driven out and traipsing from one city to another. I'm quite sure that wherever I might go, the young will listen to me speak, just like here. And if I drive them away, they themselves will persuade their elders to drive me away; and if I don't drive them away, their fathers and relations will do so on their behalf.

- 38a Perhaps someone might say, "Can't you live quietly and peacefully in exile, Socrates, for our sake?" This is the hardest thing of all to make some of you believe. For if I say that this would be to disobey the god and so, because of this, I cannot live peacefully, you would think I was being ironic and not believe me. If instead I say that in fact this is the greatest good for a man, to talk every day about virtue and the other things you hear me converse about examining both myself and others—the life without examination being not worth living for a man—you would believe this even less if I said it. As I say, this is how things are, gentlemen; it is not easy to persuade you.

- b And at the same time I am not accustomed to thinking of myself as worthy of anything bad. If I had money, I would propose as much money as I could pay, since it wouldn't harm me at all. But as it is I don't have it, unless you are willing to propose as much as I can pay. And perhaps I could somehow pay you a mina of silver. So I propose that amount. ...

Plato here, Athenian men, and Crito and Critoboulos and Apollodoros, they order me to propose thirty minas, and they guarantee it. So I propose that amount, and these men will be dependable guarantors of your silver.

[The jury votes in favor of the death penalty, 360-140.]

c You will gain the reputation and responsibility among those who wish to criticize the city, men of Athens, for putting Socrates to death, a wise man—they say I am wise, even if I am not, those people who wish to rebuke you—just so you could gain a little time, whereas if you had waited a short time, this would have happen for you of its own accord, since you see that I am already advanced in years and that death is near. I say this  
d not to all of you, but to those who voted to execute me.

And I say the following to those same people: perhaps you think, gentlemen, that I was condemned because I lacked the words that would convince you, as if I thought I must do and say everything possible to escape the charge. Far from it. I was condemned by a lack, certainly not of words, but of audacity and shamelessness and my unwillingness to say to you what would be sweetest for you to hear—to hear me lamenting and wailing and doing and saying many other things that are unworthy of me,  
e as I say, which you are used to hearing from other people. But I did not think at the time that I should do anything slavish on account of the danger.

Nor do I now regret how I defended myself—I would much rather choose to die having made that kind of defense than live having made the other kind. Neither on trial nor in war should I or anyone else resort to this  
39a so that he avoids death by doing everything possible. Indeed, in battles it often becomes clear that a man could escape death by throwing aside his arms and begging his pursuers for mercy, and there are many other ways of fleeing death in each dangerous situation, provided one has the audacity to do and say anything.

It's not that it's easy to escape death, gentlemen, but it's much  
b harder to escape villainy, since it runs faster than death. And now, because I am a slow old man, I am being overtaken by the slower of the two, and my accusers, because they are clever and keen, by the swifter, by wickedness. And I am going away now, having been condemned to death by you, while they have been condemned to wickedness and injustice by the truth. And both I and they will keep to our punishment. I suppose this is how it had to be, and I think it's reasonable.

c Next, I want to foretell the future to you my condemners, since I am now at the moment when men especially prophesy, whenever they are about to be put to death. I declare that retribution will come to you swiftly after my death, you men who have killed me, more troublesome, by Zeus, than the retribution you took when you put me to death. You have done this just now trying to avoid giving an account of your life, but I think the complete reverse will occur. You will have more prosecutors, who I was  
d holding back until now, though you did not notice, and by as much as they are younger they will be more troublesome, and you will be more enraged. If you think that killing people will prevent anyone from rebuking you for not living properly, you are not thinking straight, since this escape is scarcely possible nor noble, whereas escape from the other is noblest and easiest, not cutting down others but equipping oneself so that one can be as good as possible. With this prophecy to you who sentence me, I depart.

e I would gladly discuss what has come to pass with those who acquitted me, while the officials are busy and I am not yet on my way to

40a the place where I must die when I arrive. Wait with me, gentlemen, for that long, since nothing prevents us from chatting together while we can. Since you are my friends, I want to show to you the meaning of what just happened to me.

Something surprising happened to me, judges—and by calling you "judges" I would be using the word appropriately. Always in the past my usual divine prophetic sense was very strong and would even oppose me on detailed points if I was about to do something improper. But what happened to me just now, as you yourselves see, was what people might think, and do think, to be the worst of evils. And yet the sign of the god  
b has not opposed me either when I left home at dawn, nor when I arrived here in court, nor at any point during my speech when I was about to say something, whereas in many other speeches it has often stopped me, right as I was speaking. But now in this affair it has not been opposed to anything I have said or done.

So what do I take to be the cause of this? I will tell you. There's a good chance that what has happened to me is a good thing and that we  
c understand death incorrectly, those of us who think death is something bad. I have strong evidence for this, since it is impossible that my customary sign would have failed to oppose me, unless I was about to do something good.

Let us also consider how there is great hope that it's a good thing in the following way: Now, death is one of two things, since it's either a kind of not being, and the dead person has no perception of anything, or, according to what is said, it is a certain change and migration of the soul from its place here to another place.

And if it is the absence of perception and the kind of sleep when  
d someone sleeps without having any dreams, death would be a wonderful gift—because I think if someone took that night when he slept so soundly that he did not have a dream and compared the other nights and days of his life with this night, and when he looked, had to say how many days and nights he had lived in his life that were better and more sweet than this night, I think that he, not only a private citizen but the great king,  
e would find it easy to count them in comparison with other days and nights—if death is like this, I claim it is a gift, since all of time would seem to be nothing more than a single night.

If, in turn, death is a kind of migration from here to another place, and what's said is true and perhaps all of the dead are there, what greater good could there be than this, judges? If someone arrived in Hades, having  
41a moved on from these so-called judges here, he will find those who were truly judges, who are also said to judge there, Minos and Rhadamanthos and Aiakos and Triptolemos and as many other demi-gods who were judges in their own life-times. Would it be unpleasant to depart? Or on the other hand, to spend time with Orpheus and Musaios and Hesiod and Homer, how much would any of you give? I am willing to die many times  
b if this is true, since I personally would find life there to be most amazing, if I could meet with Palamedes and Ajax, son of Telamon, and any of the other ancients who was put to death by an unjust decision, and measure my experience against theirs. I think it would not be unpleasant. And the

greatest thing would be examining and tracking down which of them is wise and who thinks so but isn't, just like I do to people here.

c      How much, judges, would you give to quiz the leader of the great army against Troy, or Odysseus, or Sisyphus, or many others one might mention, both men and women, who it would be indescribably marvelous to debate with, there, and pass the time and investigate? I should certainly hope that the people there would not put someone to death for that, since the people there are happier than those here in other respects and are even immortal for the rest of time, if what is said is true.

d      And so you too must be optimistic about death, judges, and hold this one thing to be true, that for a good man there is nothing evil either in life or in death. And neither do their deeds go unnoticed by the gods. My own actions did not happen by themselves, but it is clear to me that it was to my advantage to die now and be released from my troubles. Because of this, my sign never deterred me and I am not at all angry at those who voted against me nor at my accusers, even though they did not vote against me or accuse me with this in mind, but instead did so intending to harm me, and they deserve to be blamed for this.

e      Nonetheless, I request the following from them: look after my sons, when they have grown, gentlemen. Avenge yourselves by giving them the same trouble I gave you, if they seem to prioritize money or anything else ahead of virtue or if they think that are something when they are not. Reproach them as I reproached you, that they do not care about what they ought to and that they think they are something special when they are worth nothing. If you would do this, I will have been served justice by you, along with my sons.

42a

And now it really is time to depart, I to be executed and you to continue living. But which of us goes to a better life is unclear to everyone except to the god.

## NOTES

- 17d *seventy*. The year is 399 BCE, which puts Socrates' birth at 469 BCE. Other references to Socrates' age are made by him at 17c, 25d, 34e, 37d, *Crito* 43b, 49a, 52e
- 18d *a comic playwright*. In his play *Clouds* of 423, Aristophanes had portrayed a Socrates who was head of a 'Thinkery' of students engaged in natural science and cosmological speculation, and in argumentation. His name is given in 19c. The caricature seems to be a combination of two types: the natural scientist and the sophist, for which see the next note.
- 19e-20a *able to teach ... a wise man*. The names given are all names of *sophists* (20a), teachers of rhetoric, typically, for a fee.
- 20b *five mina*. (See also 38b for "a mina of silver".) A mina was 100 silver drachmas (see 26e, 36b) and a drachma was equivalent to 6 obols. Daily earnings ranged from 2-6 obols. Admission to the theatre was two obols. Pay for being a judge (jury duty) was two obols.
- 20e-21b *Delphi ... Pythia*. At Delphi one could ask questions of the god Apollo via his oracle, a priestess known as the Pythia.
- 21a *in the democracy ... in the recent exile*. Athens was subject to violent political turmoil between rival factions who wanted to restrict the ruling positions to a small number (oligarchs) or broaden it to more (democrats). See also 32c.
- 22a *dithyramb*. A hymn to Dionysus, sung by a chorus.
- 26d *Anaxagoras of Klazomenai*. A natural scientist who lived from 500 to 428 BCE. An associate of Pericles. He was charged, like Socrates, with impiety, and was sentenced to exile.
- 28c-d The son of Thetis is Achilles. His reply to his mother's prophecy is from *Iliad* 18.98.
- 34d *expression of Homer*. From *Odyssey* 19.163.
- 36a-b *a fifth of the votes*. 280 votes divided by 3 accusers is 93.33 votes each, less than 1/5 of 500. Burnet (p. 229) states that the guilty verdict was due to "the special position of Anytus, who was notoriously a moderate man."
- 37c *The Eleven*. Elected officials in charge of prisons, executions and confiscations. See [Athenian Constitution 52](http://www.yale.edu/lawweb/avalon/medieval/athe6.htm#52) at <http://www.yale.edu/lawweb/avalon/medieval/athe6.htm#52>.