

THOUGHTAUDIO



THE APOLOGY

An Excerpt from The Republic

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I do not know, Athenians, how my accusers have affected you. But, I know that their arguments almost made me forget who I was — so persuasively did they speak. Yet, they hardly uttered a word of truth. Of the many falsehoods of which they spoke, there was one that especially amazed me — when they said that you should be upon your guard and not allow yourselves to be deceived by the “force of my eloquence”.

To say this, when this misstatement was certain to be detected as soon as I opened my lips and proving myself to be anything But, a great speaker, did indeed appear to me most shameless. Unless by the “force of eloquence” they mean the “force of truth” ... if this is what they meant, then I admit that I am eloquent, and in this way much different from their definition of eloquence. They have scarcely spoken the truth at all. But, from me you shall hear the whole truth. However, not delivered in their manner that is merely a set oration ornamented with words and phrases.

No, by heaven! I shall use the words and arguments that occur to me “at the moment”, since I am confident in the justice of my cause and I am certain that I am right in taking this course.

I will not to be appearing before you at this time in my life in the character of a juvenile orator — do not expect this from me. Accordingly, I must beg of you to grant me a favor:

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If I defend myself in my accustomed manner, and you hear me using words that I am in the habit of using in the agora, at the tables of the money-changers, or anywhere else, I ask you not to be surprised, and not to interrupt me on this basis alone.

For I am more than seventy years of age, and only now appearing for the first time in a court of law. I am quite a stranger to the language of the place. Therefore, regard me as a stranger, whom you would excuse if he spoke in his native tongue and after the fashion of his country — I hope this request is not unfair.

Never mind my manner of speech, which may or may not be good but try to focus only on the truth of my words, and give regard only to that. Let the speaker speak truly and the judge decide justly.



First, I will reply to the older charges and to my first accusers, and then I will go on to the later charges. Recently, I have had many accusers, who have falsely accused me for many years. I am more afraid of them than of Anytus and his associates, although they are dangerous, too but in their own way. Far more dangerous are the others accusers, who began when you were children, and took possession of your minds with their falsehoods, speaking of one

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Socrates, a wise man, who speculated about the heaven above, and searched into the earth beneath, and made the worse appear the better cause.

The disseminators of this tale are the accusers whom I dread since they think that my form of inquiry makes me a non-believer in the existence of the gods. These accusers are many, and their charges against me go back many years. They made them when you were more impressible than you are now — in childhood, or it may have been in youth.

Therefore, the judgment of the cause, by the time you heard it, was guilt by default, since there was no one to refute it. The hardest thing of all is that I do not know and cannot tell you my accuser's names ... unless in the chance case of a Comic poet.

It is these people, that have been persuaded by envy and malice — some of them having to first convince themselves—it is this class of men that are the most difficult to deal with.

Since I cannot face them and cross-examine them, I am left to fight with shadows in my own defense, and argue where there is no one who answers.

I will ask you to assume with me, as I was saying, that my opponents are of two kinds: one recent, the other ancient. I hope you see the propriety of answering

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the ancient accusers first, since these accusations you have heard for a much longer time and obviously much more often.

I must now start my defense, and endeavor to clear up immediately a long-standing slanderous accusation. Of course, I hope that I succeed, since then my success would be benefit both you and I, or at the least, benefit my cause. The task is not an easy one, although I completely understand the nature of it. I must leave the outcome with God. Therefore, in obedience to the law, I now make my defense.

I will begin at the source of my accusations and ask what the nature and basis for my charge, and then what encouraged Melitus to bring it against me. Let me summarize what the slanderers say since they are my prosecutors. Let me sum up their words by reading their sworn statement.

'Socrates is an evil-doer, and a peculiar person, who searches into things under the earth and in heaven, and he makes the worse appear the better cause ... and he teaches the these doctrines to others.'

This is the nature of the accusation: it is what you see in the comedy of Aristophanes. In his comedies, Aristophanes introduces a man he calls Socrates who goes around saying that he walks on air, and talks a great deal of nonsense concerning matters that I do not pretend to know much. I do not say this to speak disparagingly of any student of natural philosophy.

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I would be very sorry if Melitus could bring such a grave charge against me. However, the simple truth is that I have nothing to do with physical speculations. Many of those present here are witnesses to the truth of this statement, and I appeal to them. Speak then, those of you who have heard me, and tell your neighbors whether any of you have ever known me to speak, in few words or in many, upon such matters... No response ... Then you hear their answer.

From their negative response on this part of the charge, you can judge the basis of truth on the rest of the charges.

There is little foundation to the report that I am a teacher, and take money. This accusation has no more truth in it than the other.

Although, if a man were really able to instruct mankind and to receive money for giving this instruction, this would, in my opinion, be an honor to him. There is Gorgias of Leontium, and Prodicus of Ceos, and Hippias of Elis, who travel to various cities, and persuade the young men to leave their own citizens, who would teach them for nothing, and come to them, whom they not only pay but are thankful that they are allowed to pay them.

There is currently a Parian philosopher residing in Athens, of whom I have heard. Here is how I came to hear about him:

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I came across a man named Callias, the son of Hipponicus who spent an vast amount of money on the Sophists. Knowing that he had sons, I asked him: 'Callias, if your two sons were foals or calves, you wouldn't find it difficult to locate someone to care for them. Most likely, you would hire a trainer of horses, or a farmer perhaps, who would improve and perfect your animals in their own proper virtue and excellence. But, since your sons are human beings, who are you thinking of placing over them?

Is there anyone who understands human and political virtue? You must have thought about the matter, for these are your prized sons. Is there anyone?'

'There is,' he said.

'Who is he?' I asked, 'and what is his country? What does he charge?'

'Evenus the Parian,' he replied; 'he is the man, and his charge is five minae.' Evenus must be happy if he really has this wisdom, and teaches at such a premium charge, I said to myself. If my circumstances were the same, my wisdom so great that I was paid handsomely for it, I would have been very proud and conceited. However, the truth is that I have no knowledge of the kind.

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I dare say, Athenians, that some among you will reply, 'Yes, Socrates but what is the origin of these accusations that are brought against you? There must have been something strange in what have been doing? All these rumors and talk about you could not arise if you were like other men: tell us, then, what causes them, since we would regret judging you hastily.'

Now I regard this as a fair challenge, and I will endeavor to explain the reason why I am called wise and have such malevolent fame. Although some of you may think that I am joking, I declare that I will tell you the entire truth.

Men of Athens, this reputation of mine does come from a certain sort of wisdom I possess. If you ask me what kind of wisdom, I reply ... a type of wisdom that is, perhaps, attainable by man ... to this extent I am inclined to believe that I am wise.

Whereas, the persons I referred to, seems to have a superhuman wisdom that I cannot describe, because I do not have it myself ... and he that says that I have it, speaks falsely, and is misappropriating my true character.

Here, fellow Athenians, I beg you not to interrupt me, even if I seem to say something extravagant, because the words I will speak are not mine. I refer you to a witness who is worthy of credit. That witness is the God of Delphi ... he will tell you about my wisdom, if I have any, and what kind it is.

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You must have known Chaerephon. He was a longtime friend of mine, and also a friend of yours. If you remember, he shared in the recent exile of the people, and returned with you. Well, Chaerephon, as you know, was very impetuous in all his doings, and he went to Delphi and boldly asked the oracle to tell him whether anyone was wiser than I was. The Pythian prophetess answered, that there was no man wiser. Chaerephon is dead himself but his brother, who is in court, will confirm the truth in what I am saying.

Why do I mention this? To explain to you why I have such an evil name. When I heard the answer, I said to myself, “What can the god mean? ... and what is the interpretation of his riddle?” ... because I know that I have no wisdom, small or great. What then does he mean when he says that I am the wisest of men? Yet isn't he a god, and cannot lie, since that would be against his nature. After long consideration, I thought of a method of testing the question. I reflected that if I could find one man wiser than myself, then I could go to the god with a refutation in my hand. I would say to him, 'Here is a man who is wiser than I am but you said that I was the wisest.'

Accordingly, I went to one who had the reputation of wisdom, and observed him — his name I need not mention. He was a politician who I selected for examination. Here are the results: When I began to talk with him, I could not help thinking that he was not really wise, although he was thought wise by many, and still wiser by himself.

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I then tried to explain to him that he thought he was wise but that he was not really wise. The consequence was that he hated me, and several who were present and heard me shared his enmity toward me.

Therefore, I left him, saying to myself as I went away: Well, although I do not believe that either of us knows anything truly beautiful and good, I must admit, that I am better off than he is ... for he knows nothing, yet thinks that he knows and I neither know nor think that I know. In this small detail, then, I seem to have a slight advantage over him, because I do not think that I know things that I do not know.

Then I went to another who had still higher pretensions of wisdom. My conclusion was the same. Again, I made another enemy of him, and of many others besides him.

Then I went to one man after another, being conscious of the enmity that I provoked in people. I lamented and feared this reaction. Yet, necessity was laid upon me ... the word of God, I thought, ought to be considered first. Then I said to myself, I must go to all who appear to know, and find out the meaning of the oracle. I swear to you, Athenians, by the dog I swear! For I must tell you the truth — the result of my mission was as follows: I found that the men most celebrated for their wisdom appeared to me to be the farthest removed from it, and that others less esteemed were really wiser and better.

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I will tell you the tale of my wanderings and of the 'Herculean' labors, as I call them ... which I endured, only to find at last the oracle irrefutable. After the politicians, I went to the poets both tragic and dithyrambic, and all sorts of others. There, I said to myself, you will be instantly detected; now you will find out that you are more ignorant than they are.

Accordingly, I took them some of the most elaborate passages of their own writings, and asked them what their meaning was — thinking that they would teach me something.

Will you believe me? I am almost ashamed to confess the truth but I must say that there is hardly a person present who would not have talked better about their poetry than they did themselves.

Then I knew that it is not by wisdom that poets write poetry but by a sort of genius and inspiration. They are like diviners or soothsayers who also say many fine things but do not understand the meaning of them.

The poets appeared to me to be much the same case. I further observed that based upon the strength of their poetry they believed themselves to be the wisest of men in other, unrelated matters in which they were not wise at all. Therefore, I departed, realizing that I was superior to them for the same reason that I was superior to the politicians.

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At last, I went to the artisans. I was conscious that I knew nothing at all, and I was sure they knew many fine things. Here I was not mistaken, for they did know many things of which I was ignorant, and in these matters, they were certainly wiser than I was.

But, I observed that even the good artisans fell into the same error as the poets — because they were good workmen they thought that they also knew all sorts of other high matters ... and this defect in them overshadowed their wisdom. Therefore, I asked myself on behalf of the oracle, whether I would like to be as I was, having neither their knowledge nor their ignorance, or like them, having both their qualities of refined knowledge and blind ignorance. I answered to the oracle, and to myself, that I was better off as I was.

These series of inquisitions has led to me gaining many enemies of the worst and most dangerous kind, and has given occasion to much denigration. I am called wise, for my hearers always imagine that I myself possess the wisdom that I find wanting in others: But, the truth is fellow men of Athens, that only God is wise.

By his answer, he intends to show that the wisdom of men is worth little or nothing. He is not speaking of Socrates, he is only using my name by way of illustration, as if he said: “He is the wisest, who, like Socrates, knows that his wisdom is in truth worth nothing.”

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And so I go about the world, obedient to the god, and search and make inquiries into the wisdom of anyone, whether citizen or stranger, who appears to be wise, and if he is not wise ... then in vindication of the oracle ... I show him that he is not wise.

My occupation absorbs me, and I do not have for any public matter of interest or to any concern of my own ... and so I am in utter poverty because of my devotion to the god.

There is another thing. Young men of the richer classes, who do not have much to do, come to me on their own accord. They like to hear the pretenders examined ... and they often imitate me, and proceed to examine others. There are plenty of people, as they quickly discover, who think that they know something but really know very little or nothing. Then those who are examined by them, instead of being angry with themselves, are angry with me.

“This confounded Socrates,” they say, “this villainous misleader of youth!” If somebody asks them, “Why? What evil does he practice or teach?” ... they do not know, and cannot tell. But, in order that they do not appear to be at a loss, they repeat the ready-made charges that are used against all philosophers: about teaching things up in the clouds and under the earth, and having no gods, and making the worse appear the better cause ... because they do not like to confess that their pretense of knowledge has been detected – and this is the truth.

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Since they are numerous and ambitious and energetic, and are drawn up in battle array and have persuasive tongues, they have filled your ears with their loud and inveterate misrepresentations.

And this is the reason why my three accusers, Melitus and Anytus and Lycon have set these actions upon me... Melitus, who has a quarrel with me on behalf of the poets ... Anytus, on behalf of the craftsmen and politicians ... Lycon, on behalf of the rhetoricians ... and as I said at the beginning, I cannot expect to get rid of such a mass misrepresentation all in one moment.

And this, fellow men of Athens, is the truth and the whole truth. I have concealed nothing. I have dissembled nothing. Yet, I know that my plainness of speech makes them hate me, and what is their hatred But, a proof that I am speaking the truth? Hence, for this reason there has arisen the prejudice against me that is on trial today as you will verify in future enquiry.

I have said enough in my defense against the first class of my accusers. I turn to the second class.

These accusers are headed by Melitus, that good man and true lover of his country ... as he calls himself. Against these accusers, too, I must try to make a defense.

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Let me read their sworn statement: It says that Socrates is a doer of evil, who corrupts the youth ... who does not believe in the gods of the state but has other new divinities of his own.

Such is the charge. Now let's examine the particular counts. He says that I am a doer of evil, and corrupt the youth.

But, I say, fellow men of Athens, that Melitus is actually the evil doer. He pretends to be an earnest accuser, when in fact his words are a joke. He is so eager to bring men to trial with a pretended zeal and interest about matters in which he never had the smallest concern. The truth of this deception I will endeavor to prove to you.

Come here, Melitus, and let me ask you a question. You think a great deal about the improvement of youth?

Yes, I do.

Tell the judges, then, who is their improver ... because you must know, since you have taken the pains to discover their corrupter, and are citing and accusing me before them. Speak, then, and tell the judges who their improver is...Observe, Melitus, that you are silent, and have nothing to say. Isn't this rather disgraceful, and substantial proof of what I was saying ... that you have no interest in the matter? Speak up, friend, and tell us who their improver is.

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The laws. But, that, my good sir, is not my meaning. I want to know who the person is, who, in the first place, knows the laws. The judges, Socrates, who are present in court. What, do you mean to say, Melitus, that they are able to instruct and improve youth? Certainly they are. What, all of them, or only some of them and not others? All of them. By the goddess Hera, that is good news! There are plenty of improvers, then.

And what do you say of the audience, — do they improve them? Yes, they do. And the senators? Yes, the senators improve them. But, perhaps the members of the assembly corrupt them? — or do they too improve them? They improve them. Then every Athenian improves and elevates them; all with the exception of myself; and I alone am their corrupter? Is that what you affirm? That is what I stoutly affirm. I am very unfortunate if you are right. But, suppose I ask you a question: How about horses? Does one man do them harm and all the world good? Isn't this the exact opposite of the truth? One man is able to do them good, or at least not many ... that is to say, the trainer of horses does them good, and most others who have to associate with them mostly injure them? Is this not true, Melitus, of horses, or of any other animals? Most assuredly it is ... Whether you and Anytus say yes or no, happy indeed the condition of youth would be if they only had one corrupter and all the rest of the world were their improvers.

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However, you, Melitus, have sufficiently shown that you never had a thought about the young: your carelessness is seen in your not caring about the very things that you bring against me.

Now, Melitus, in the name of Zeus I will ask you another question: Which is better, to live among bad citizens, or among good ones?

Answer, friend ... the question is one that can easily be answered. Do not the good do their neighbors good, and the bad do them evil? Certainly. And is there anyone who would rather be injured than benefited by those who live with him? Answer, my good friend, the law requires you to answer ... does anyone like to be injured? Certainly not. And when you accuse me of corrupting and deteriorating the youth, do you allege that I corrupt them intentionally or unintentionally? Intentionally. But, you have just admitted that the good do their neighbors good, and the evil do them evil.

Now, is that a truth which your superior wisdom has recognized this early in life ... and am I, at my age, in such darkness and ignorance to not know that if a man with whom I have to live is corrupted by me ... I am very likely to be harmed by him ... and yet I corrupt him, and intentionally, too ... so you say ... although neither I nor any other human being is ever likely to be convinced by you.

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But, either I do not corrupt them, or I corrupt them unintentionally ... and on either view of the case you lie. If my offence is unintentional, the law has no cognizance of unintentional offences ... you ought to have taken me privately, and warned and admonished me.

Because if I had been better advised, I would have stopped doing what I only did unintentionally—there is no doubt I would. But, you had nothing to say to me and refused to teach me. Now you bring me to this court, which is not a place of instruction, but of punishment.

It will be very clear to you, Athenians, as I was saying, that Melitus has no care at all, great or small, about the matter. But, still I should like to know, Melitus, in what I am affirmed to corrupt the young.

I suppose you mean, as I infer from your indictment, that I teach them not to acknowledge the gods that the state acknowledges but instead some other new divinities or spiritual agencies. These are the lessons by which I corrupt the youth, as you say. Yes, that I say emphatically. Then, by the gods, Melitus, of whom we are speaking, tell me and the court, in somewhat plainer terms, what you mean! for I do not yet understand whether you affirm that I teach other men to acknowledge some gods, and therefore that I do believe in gods, and am not an entire atheist — this you do not lay to my charge, — but, only you say that they are not the same gods which the city recognizes — the charge is that

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they are different gods. Or, do you mean that I am an atheist simply, and a teacher of atheism?

I mean the latter — that you are a complete atheist. What an extraordinary statement! Why do you think so, Melitus? Do you mean that I do not believe in the godhead of the sun or moon, like other men? I assure you, judges, that he does not: for he says that the sun is stone, and the moon earth. Friend Melitus, you think that you are accusing Anaxagoras: and you have such a bad opinion of the judges, that you consider them illiterate to such a degree that they would not know that these doctrines are found in the books of Anaxagoras the Clazomenian, which are full of them. So, indeed, the youth are taught them by Socrates, when there are frequently exhibitions of them at the theatre ... and they might pay their money ...one drachma at the most ... and laugh at Socrates if he pretends to father these extraordinary views.

And so, Melitus, do you really think that I do not believe in any god? I swear by Zeus that you believe absolutely in none at all. Nobody will believe you, Melitus, and I am pretty sure that you do not believe yourself. I cannot help thinking, men of Athens, that Melitus is reckless and impudent, and that he has written this indictment in a spirit of mere wantonness and youthful bravado. Has he not compounded a riddle, thinking to try me? He said to himself: Let me see if the wise Socrates can discover my mocking contradiction, and if I can deceive him as well as the rest of them. Because he certainly does appear to contradict himself in the indictment since he says, on the one hand, that

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Socrates is guilty of not believing in the gods, and then on the other of believing in them ... these are not the thoughts of an earnest person.

I should like you, fellow Athenians, to join in the examination of what I believe to be his inconsistency ... Now Did ever man, Melitus, believe in the existence of human affairs, and not of human beings?...Did any man ever believe in horsemanship, and not in horses? Or in flute-playing, and not in flute- players? No, my friend ... I will answer you and the court since you refuse to answer for yourself. There is no man who ever did. Now please answer the next question: Can a man believe in spiritual and divine agencies, and not in spirits or demigods? He cannot.

How lucky I am to have extracted that answer, by the assistance of the court! But, then you swear in the indictment that I teach and believe in divine or spiritual agencies (new or old, no matter for that), so you say and swear in the affidavit ... and yet, if I believe in divine beings, how can I help believing in spirits or demigods — must I not? To be sure - I must ... and therefore I may assume that your silence gives consent.

Now what are spirits or demigods? Are they not either gods or the sons of gods? Certainly they are. But, this is what I call the jesting riddle invented by you: the demigods or spirits are gods, and you say first that I do not believe in gods ... and then again that I do believe in gods .. that is, if I believe in demigods. For if the demigods are the illegitimate sons of gods, whether by the nymphs or by any other mothers ... of whom they are said to be the sons ...

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what human being will ever believe that there are no gods if they are the sons of gods?

You might as well affirm the existence of mules, and deny that of horses and asses. Such nonsense, Melitus ... you could only have created these accusations this to make a trial of me. You have put this into the indictment because there was no real crime which to accuse me.

No one who has a particle of understanding will ever be convinced by you that the same men can believe in divine and superhuman things, and yet not believe that there are gods and demigods and heroes. I have said enough in answer to the charge of Melitus: any elaborate defense is unnecessary ... But, I know, only too well, how vast are the enmities I have incurred. This is what will be my destruction if I am destroyed ... not Melitus ... nor yet Anytus ... But, the envy and detraction of the world which has been the death of many good men and will probably be the death of many more ... there is no danger of my being the last of them.

Someone will say: Aren't you ashamed, Socrates, of a life course that is likely to bring you to an untimely end? To him I may fairly answer: There you are mistaken... a man who is good for anything should not calculate the chance of living or dying ... he should only consider whether in doing anything he is doing right or wrong ... acting the part of a good man or of a bad.

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Whereas, with your view, the heroes who fell at Troy were not good for much, and above all the son of Thetis, who altogether despised danger in comparison with disgrace ... and when he was so eager to slay Hector, his goddess mother said to him that if he avenged his companion Patroclus, and slew Hector, he would die himself ... 'Fate,' she said, in these or similar words, 'waits for you next after Hector;' he, receiving this warning ... utterly despised danger and death and instead of fearing them, feared rather to live in dishonor, and not to avenge his friend.

'Let me die right now then,' he replies, 'and be avenged of my enemy, rather than abide here by the crooked ships, a laughing-stock and a burden of the earth.'

Did Achilles have any thought of death and danger? For wherever a man's place is, whether it is a place he has chosen or a place chosen by a commander, there he should remain in the hour of danger. He should not think of death or anything But, of disgrace.

And this, fellow men of Athens, is a true saying. Strange, indeed, would be my conduct, if I who, when I was ordered by the generals whom you chose to command me at Potidaea and Amphipolis and Delium, remained where they placed me, like any other man, facing death — if now, when, as I conceive and imagine, God orders me to fulfill the philosopher's mission of searching into

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myself and other men ... I were to desert my post through fear of death, or any other fear.

That would indeed be strange, and I might justifiably be arraigned in court for denying the existence of the gods if I disobeyed the oracle because I was afraid of death - pretending that I was wise when I was not wise. For the fear of death is nothing else than attempting to appear to be wise without being so, since it is man's nature to appear to know that which he does not know.

And no one knows whether death, which men in their fear apprehend to be the greatest evil, may not be the greatest good. Isn't this ignorance disgraceful. The ignorance that is the conceit that a man thinks he knows what he does not know? Only in this respect, do I believe myself different from men in general, and can perhaps claim to be wiser than they are.

Whereas I know but little of the world of Hades, I do not suppose that I know. But, I do know that injustice and disobedience to a better, whether God or man, is evil and dishonorable ... and I will never fear or avoid a possible good rather than a certain evil.

Therefore if you let me go now, and are not convinced by Anytus, who said that since I had been prosecuted I must be put to death ... (or if not that I ought never to have been prosecuted at all) - and that if I escape now, your sons will all be utterly ruined by listening to my words ... if you say to me, Socrates, this

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time we will not back Anytus, and you shall be let off, but upon one condition ... that you are not to enquire and speculate in this way anymore, and that if you are caught doing so again you shall die. If this was the condition on which you let me go, I should reply: Men of Athens, I honor and love you ... But, I shall obey God rather than you ... and while I have life and strength, I shall never cease from the practice and teaching of philosophy, exhorting anyone whom I meet and saying to him after my manner: You, my friend, — a citizen of the great and mighty and wise city of Athens — are you not ashamed of heaping up the greatest amount of money and honor and reputation ... and caring so little about wisdom and truth and the greatest improvement of the soul ... which you never regard or heed at all?

And if the person with whom I am arguing, says: Yes, I do care ... then I will not leave him or let him go at once ... But, I will continue to interrogate and examine and cross-examine him ... and if I think that he has no virtue in him but only says that he has, I will reproach him with undervaluing the greater, and overvaluing the lesser.

And I shall repeat the same words to every one whom I meet, young and old, citizen and alien but especially to the citizens ... inasmuch as they are my brethren. For know that this is the command of God ... and I believe that no greater good has ever happened in the state than my service to the God. For I do nothing But, go about persuading you all, old and young alike, not to take

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thought for your persons or your properties but first and chiefly to care about the greatest improvement of the soul.

I tell you that virtue is not given by money, but that from virtue comes money and every other good of man, public as well as private. This is my teaching, and if this is the doctrine which corrupts the youth, I am a mischievous person. But, if anyone says that this is not my teaching, he is speaking an untruth.

Wherefore, fellow men of Athens, I say to you, do as Anytus bids or not as Anytus bids, and either acquit me or not ... But, whichever you do, understand that I shall never alter my ways, not even if I have to die many times.

I would have you know, that if you kill a one such as me, you will injure yourselves more than you will injure me. Nothing will injure me, not Melitus nor yet Anytus — they cannot, for a bad man is not permitted to injure a better than himself. I do not deny that Anytus may, perhaps, kill him, or drive him into exile, or deprive him of civil rights ... and he may imagine, and others may imagine that he is inflicting a great injury upon him - but, there I do not agree.

For the evil of doing as he is doing — the evil of unjustly taking away the life of another — is far greater. I am not going to argue for my own sake, as you may think but for yours, that you may not sin against the God by condemning me, who is his gift to you. For if you kill me, you will not easily find a successor to me, who, if I may use such a ludicrous figure of speech, am a sort of gadfly, given to the state by God - and the state is a great and noble steed who is tardy in his motions owing to his very size and requires to be stirred into

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life. I am that gadfly who God has attached to the state, and all day long and in all places am always fastening upon you, arousing and persuading and reproaching you. You will not easily find another like me, and therefore I would advise you to spare me.

I dare say that you may feel out of temper (like a person who is suddenly awakened from sleep), and you think that you might easily strike me dead as Anytus advises, and then you would sleep on for the remainder of your lives ... unless God in his care of you, sent you another gadfly. When I say that I am given to you by God, the proof of my mission is this ... if I had been like other men, I would not have neglected my own concerns during all these years, instead caring for your concerns by coming to you individually like a father or elder brother, exhorting you to regard virtue ... such conduct counteracts human nature. If I had gained anything, or if I was paid for my exhortations, there would have been some sense in my doing so; but now, as you will perceive, not even the impudence of my accusers dares to say that I have ever exacted or sought pay of anyone ... of this they have no witness.

And I have a sufficient witness to the truth of what I say — my poverty. Someone may wonder why I go about in private giving advice and busying myself with the concerns of others, but do not venture to come forward in public and advise the state. I will tell you why. You have heard me speak at sundry times and in divers places of an oracle or sign which comes to me, and is the divinity which Melitus ridicules in the indictment.

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This sign, which is a kind of voice, first began to come to me when I was a child; it always forbids but never commands me to do anything, which I am going to do. This is what deters me from being a politician.

For I am certain, that if I had engaged in politics, I should have perished long ago, and done no good either to you or to myself. Do not be offended by me telling you the truth: for the truth is that no man who goes to war with you or any other multitude, honestly striving against the many lawless and unrighteous deeds that are done in a state, will save his life. He, who will fight for the right, if he would live even for a brief space, must have a private station and not a public one.

I can give you convincing evidence of what I say, not words only but what you value far more — actions.

Let me relate to you a passage of my own life which will prove to you that I should never have yielded to injustice from any fear of death, and that 'as I should have refused to yield' I must have died at once. I will tell you a tale of the courts, not very interesting perhaps but nevertheless true. The only office of state that I ever held was that of senator:

The tribe Antiochis, which is my tribe, presided over the trial of the generals who had not taken up the bodies of the slain after the battle of Arginusae ... you

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proposed to try them in a body, contrary to law, as you realized afterwards. At the time I was the only one of the Prytanes who was opposed to the illegality, and I gave my vote against you; and when the orators threatened to impeach and arrest me, and you called and shouted, I made up my mind that I would run the risk, having law and justice with me, rather than take part in your injustice because I feared imprisonment and death. This happened in the days of the democracy. But, when the oligarchy of the Thirty was in power, they sent for me and four others into the rotunda, and told us to bring Leon the Salaminian from Salamis, because they wanted to put him to death. This is an example of the sort of commands that they always give with the intent of implicating as many as possible in their crimes ... and then I showed, not in word only But, in deed, that, if I may be allowed to use such an expression, I cared not a straw for death, and that my great and only care was that I should do an unrighteous or unholy thing ... because the strong arm of that oppressive power did not frighten me into doing wrong ... and when we came out of the rotunda, the other four went to Salamis and fetched Leon but I went quietly home .. in doing this I might have lost my life, if it hadn't been that the Thirty shortly afterwards come to an end. To these events, many will witness to my words.

Now do you really imagine that I could have survived all these years, if I had led a public life, supposing that like a good man I had always maintained the right and had made justice, as I should, the first thing? No indeed, men of Athens, neither I nor any other man.

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But, I have been always the same in all my actions, public as well as private, and I have never yielded any base compliance to those who are slanderously termed my disciples, or to any other ... Not that I have any regular disciples. But, if anyone likes to come and hear me while I am pursuing my mission, whether he be young or old, he is not excluded. Nor do I converse only with those who pay but anyone, whether he be rich or poor, may ask and answer me and listen to my words ... and whether he turns out to be a bad man or a good one, neither result can be justly attributed to me ... for I never taught or professed to teach him anything.

And if anyone says that he has ever learned or heard anything from me in private which all the world has not heard, let me tell you that he is lying. But, I shall be asked, Why do people delight in continually conversing with you? I have told you already, Athenians, the whole truth about this matter: they like to hear the cross-examination of the pretenders to wisdom ... there is amusement in it.

Now this duty of cross-examining other men has been imposed upon me by God ... and has been signified to me by oracles, visions, and in every way in which the will of divine power was ever intimated to anyone. This is true, fellow Athenians, or, if not true, would be soon refuted.

If I am or have been corrupting the youth, those who are now grown and look back and now realize that I gave them bad advice when they were young should

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come forward as accusers and take their revenge. Or if they do not want to come themselves, some of their relatives, fathers, brothers, or other kinsmen, should say what evil their families have suffered at my hands. Now is their time.

And let him say, if he has any testimony of the sort which he can produce. No, Athenians, the very opposite is the truth.

Yet a word more. Perhaps one of my accusers will recall, when he himself on a similar, or even a less serious occasion, when in a situation such as the one I am in now, prayed and entreated the judges with many tears ... how he produced his children in court — which was a moving spectacle, together with a host of relations and friends.

Whereas I, who am probably in danger of my life, will do none of these things. Now if there is such a person among you, to him I reply: My friend, I am a man, and like other men, a creature of flesh and blood, and not 'of wood or stone.' I have a family, yes, and sons, three in number, one almost a man, and two others who are still young. Yet I will not bring any of them here in order to petition you for an acquittal. And why not? Not from any self-assertion or want of respect for you. Whether I am or am not afraid of death is another question. But, having regard to public opinion, I feel that such conduct would be a discredit to myself, and to you, and to the whole state. One who has reached my years, and who has a name for wisdom, ought not to demean himself. Whether

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this opinion of me be deserved or not, the world has decided that Socrates is in some way superior to other men.

And if those among you who are said to be superior in wisdom and courage, and any other virtue, demean themselves in this way, how shameful is their conduct! I have seen men of reputation, when they have been condemned, behaving in the strangest manner: they seemed to think that they were going to suffer something dreadful if they died, and that they could be immortal if you only allowed them to live. I think these people are a dishonor to the state. But, setting aside the question of public opinion, there seems to be something wrong in asking a favor of a judge to obtain an acquittal, instead of informing and convincing him. His duty is, not to make a present of justice but to give judgment; and he has sworn that he will judge according to the laws and not according to his own good pleasure. And we ought not to encourage you, nor should you allow yourselves to be encouraged, in this habit of perjury — there can be no piety in that.

Then Do not require me to do what I consider dishonorable and impious and wrong, especially now, when I am being tried for impiety on the indictment of Melitus.

Because if by force of persuasion and entreaty I could overpower your oaths, then I would be teaching you to believe that there are no gods ... and in defending myself, I would simply convict myself of the charge of not believing

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in them. But, that is not so — the opposite is true. I do believe that there are gods and in a sense higher than any of my accusers believe in them. To you and to God I commit my cause, to be determined by you as is best for you and me.



There are many reasons why I am not grieved at the vote of condemnation. I expected it, and am only surprised that the votes are so nearly equal; for I had thought that the majority against me would have been far larger but now, had thirty votes gone over to the other side, I should have been acquitted. I say that I have escaped Melitus.

When I reflected that I was too honest a man to be a politician and live, remember - I did not go where I could do no good to you or to myself ... But, where I could do the greatest good - privately to every one of you ... that's where I went.

I sought to persuade every man among you that he must look to himself, and seek virtue and wisdom before he looks to his private interests, and look to the state before he looks to the interests of the state.

And now I depart from you, condemned to suffer the penalty of death and my accusers also go their ways condemned by the truth to suffer the penalty of

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villainy and wrong ... and I must abide by my award — let them abide by theirs.

And now, fellow men who have condemned me, I am compelled to prophesy to you since I am about to die since in the hour of death, men are gifted with prophetic power.

I prophesy to you who are my murderers, that immediately after my departure a punishment far heavier than you have inflicted on me surely awaits you. You have killed me because you wanted to escape the accuser ... not to give an account of your lives. But, events will not occur as you thought: far otherwise. For I say that there will be more accusers of you than there are now ... accusers whom up to now I have restrained: and since they are younger, they will be more inconsiderate with you, and you will be more offended at them. If you think that by killing men you can prevent someone from censuring your evil lives, you are mistaken — that way of escape is neither possible nor honorable. The easiest and the noblest way is not to disable others but to improve yourselves. This is the prophecy that I utter before my departure to the judges who have condemned me.

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Friends, who would have acquitted me, I would also like to talk with you about the thing that has come to pass - while the magistrates are busy, and before I go to the place at which I must die. Stay and let us talk with one another while there is time. You are my friends, and I should like to show you the meaning of this event that has happened to me.

My judges — for you I may truly call judges — I should like to tell you of a wonderful circumstance. From this point forward, the my divine faculty, the source of the internal oracle has constantly been in the habit of opposing me even in small matters if I was going to make a slip or error in any matter ... and now as you see there has come upon me seemingly the last and worst evil. But, the oracle made no sign of opposition, either when I was leaving my house in the morning, or when I was on my way to the court, or while I was speaking, at anything which I was going to say. Yet, before this, I have often been stopped in the middle of a speech but now in nothing I said or did today did the oracle opposed me. What is the explanation of this silence? I will tell you.

It is an intimation that what has happened to me is a good, and that those of us who think that death is an evil are in error ... because the customary sign of divine intuition would surely have opposed me if I had been going to evil and not to good. Let us reflect in another way, and we shall see that there is great reason to hope that death is a good; for one of two things — either death is a

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state of nothingness and utter unconsciousness, or, as men say, there is a change and migration of the soul from this world to another.

Now if you suppose that there is no consciousness but a sleep like the sleep of him who is undisturbed even by dreams, death will be an unspeakable gain. For if a person were to select the night in which his sleep was undisturbed even by dreams, and were to compare this with the other days and nights of his life, and then were to tell us how many days and nights he had passed in the course of his life better and more pleasantly than this one, I think that any man, I will not say only a private man but even the great king - will not find many peaceful days or nights when compared with the others. Now if death is of a pleasant nature, I say that to die is gain; for eternity is then only a single night of pleasantness.

But, if death is the journey to another place, and there, as men say, where all the dead abide, what good, my friends and judges, can be greater than this? If indeed when the pilgrim arrives in the world below, he is delivered from the professors of justice in this world, and finds the true judges who give judgment there - that pilgrimage will be worth making. What wouldn't a man give if he could converse with Orpheus and Musaeus and Hesiod and Homer? If this is true, let me die again and again. I myself, too, shall have a wonderful interest in meeting and conversing with Palamedes, and Ajax the son of Telamon, and any other ancient hero who has suffered death through an unjust judgment ... and there will be no small pleasure in comparing my own sufferings with theirs.

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Above all, I shall then be able to continue my search into true and false knowledge ... as in this world, so also in the next ... and I shall find out who is wise, and who pretends to be wise ... and who is not.

In another world, they do not put a man to death for asking questions: assuredly not. For besides being happier than we are, they will be immortal ... if what is said is true.

Wherefore, fellow judges, be of good cheer about death, and know certainly, that no evil can happen to a good man, either in life or after death. He and his are not neglected by the gods; nor has my own approaching end happened by mere chance. But, I see clearly that the time had arrived when it was better for me to die and be released from trouble ... hence the oracle gave no sign. And also for this reason, I am not angry with my condemners, or with my accusers. They have done me no harm ... although they did not mean to do me any good ... and for this, I may gently blame them.

Still I have a favor to ask. When my sons are grown up, I would ask you, my friends, to punish them ... trouble them, as I have troubled you. If they seem to care about riches, or anything more than about virtue ... or if they pretend to be something when they are really nothing — then reprove them, as I have reproved you, for not caring about that for which they ought to care, and thinking that they are something when they are really nothing. And if you do this, both my sons and I will have received justice at your hands.

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The hour of departure has arrived, and we go our ways — I to die, and you to live. Which is better only God knows?

THE END