The Apology

PLATO

EUTHYPHRO · APOLOGY · CRITO ·
MENO · GORGIAS · MENEXENUS

Translated with Comment by
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TRANSLATION

SOCRATES / MELETUS

The Speech of Defense (17a–35d)

Introduction (17a–18a)

17a SOC. To what degree, Gentlemen of Athens, you have been affected by my accusers, I do not know. I, at any rate, was almost led to forget who I am—so convincingly did they speak. Yet hardly anything they have said is true. Among their many falsehoods, I was especially surprised by one: they said you must be on guard b lest I deceive you, since I am a clever speaker. To have no shame at being directly refuted by facts when I show myself in no way clever with words—that, I think, is the very height of shamelessness. Unless, of course, they call a man a clever speaker if he speaks the truth. If that is what they mean, why, I would even admit to being an orator—though not after their fashion.

These men, I claim, have said little or nothing true. But from me, Gentlemen, you will hear the whole truth. To be sure, it will not be prettily tricked out in elegant speeches like theirs, words c and phrases all nicely arranged. On the contrary, you will hear me speak naturally in the words which happen to occur to me. For I believe what I say to be just, and let no one of you expect otherwise. Besides, it would hardly be appropriate in a man of my age, Gentlemen, to come before you making up speeches like a boy.[1] So I must specifically ask one thing of you, Gentlemen. If

1. Meletus was quite young when he lodged his prosecution. See *Euthyphro* 2b.

you hear me make my defense in the same words I customarily use at the tables in the Agora, and other places where many of you have heard me, please do not be surprised or make a dis-
d turbance because of it. For things stand thus: I am now come into court for the first time; I am seventy years old; and I am an utter stranger to this place. If I were a foreigner, you would
18a unquestionably make allowances if I spoke in the dialect and manner in which I was raised. In just the same way, I specifically ask you now, and justly so, I think, to pay no attention to my manner of speech—it may perhaps be poor, but perhaps an improvement—and look strictly to this one thing, whether or not I speak justly. For that is the virtue of a judge, and the virtue of an orator is to speak the truth.

Statement (18a–19a)

SOC. First of all, Gentlemen, it is right for me to defend myself against the first false accusations lodged against me, and my first accusers; and next, against later accusations and later accusers.
b For the fact is that many accusers have risen before you against me; at this point they have been making accusations for many years, and they have told no truth. Yet I fear them more than I fear Anytus and those around him—though they too are clever. Still, the others are more dangerous. They took hold of most of you in childhood, persuading you of the truth of accusations which were in fact quite false: "There is a certain Socrates . . . wise man . . . thinker on things in the Heavens . . . inquirer into things beneath Earth . . . making the weaker argument stronger."
c Those men, Gentlemen of Athens, the ones who spread that report, are my dangerous accusers; for their hearers believe that those who inquire into such things acknowledge no gods.

Again, there have been many such accusers, and they have now been at work for a long time; they spoke to you at a time when you were especially credulous—some of you children, some only a little older—and they lodged their accusations quite by default, no one appearing in defense. But the most absurd thing is that
d one cannot even know or tell their names—unless perhaps in the case of a comic poet.[2] But those who use malicious slander to persuade you, and those who, themselves persuaded, persuade

2. A reference to Aristophanes, whose description of Socrates in the *Clouds* has in effect just been quoted, and who will later (19c) be mentioned by name.

others—all these are most difficult to deal with. For it is impossible to bring any one of them forward as a witness and cross-examine him. I must rather, as it were, fight with shadows in making my defense, and question where no one answers.

Please grant, then, as I say, that two sets of accusers have risen against me: those who now lodge their accusations, and those
c who lodged accusations long since. And please accept the fact that I must defend myself against the latter first. For in fact you heard their accusations earlier, and with far greater effect than those which came later.

Very well then. A defense is to be made, Gentlemen of Athens.
19a I am to attempt to remove from you in this short time that prejudice which you have been so long in acquiring. I might wish that this should come to pass, if it were in some way better for you and for me—wish that I might succeed in my defense. But I think that difficult, and its nature hardly escapes me. Still, let that go as pleases the God; the law must be obeyed, and a defense conducted.

Refutation of the Old Accusers (19a–24b)

SOC. Let us then take up from the beginning the charges which
b have given rise to the prejudice—the charges on which Meletus in fact relied in lodging his indictment. Very well, what do those who slander me say? It is necessary to read, as it were, their sworn indictment: "Socrates is guilty of needless curiosity and meddling interference, inquiring into things beneath Earth and in the Sky, making the weaker argument stronger, and teaching others to do
c the same." The charge is something like that. Indeed, you have seen it for yourselves in a comedy by Aristophanes—a certain Socrates being carried around on the stage, talking about walking on air and babbling a great deal of other nonsense, of which I understand neither much nor little. Mark you, I do not mean to disparage such knowledge, if anyone in fact has it—let me not be brought to trial by Meletus on such a charge as that! But Gentlemen, I have no share in it. Once again, I offer the majority
d of you as witnesses, and ask those of you who have heard me in conversation—there are many among you—inform each other, please, whether any of you ever heard anything of that sort. From that you will recognize the nature of the other things the multitude says about me.

The fact is that there is nothing in these accusations. And if

you have heard from anyone that I undertake to educate men,
e and make money doing it, that is false too. Once again, I think
it would be a fine thing to be able to educate men, as Gorgias of
Leontini does, or Prodicus of Ceos, or Hippias of Elis. For each
of them, Gentlemen, can enter any given city and convince the
20a youth—who might freely associate with any of their fellow citizens
they please—to drop those associations and associate rather with
them, to pay money for it, and give thanks in the bargain. As a
matter of fact, there is a man here right now, a Parian, and a
wise one, who, as I learn, has just come to town. For I happened
to meet a person who has spent more money on Sophists than
everyone else put together: Callias, son of Hipponicus. So I asked
him—for he has two sons—"Callias," I said, "if your two sons
were colts or calves, we could get an overseer for them and hire
b him, and his business would be to make them excellent in their
appropriate virtue. He would be either a horse-trainer or a
farmer. But as it is, since the two of them are men, whom do you
intend to get as an overseer? Who has knowledge of that virtue
which belongs to a man and a citizen? Since you have sons, I'm
sure you have considered this. Is there such a person," I said,
"or not?"

"To be sure," he said.

"Who is he?" I said. "Where is he from, and how much does
he charge to teach?"

"Evenus, Socrates," he said. "A Parian. Five minae."[3]

And I counted Evenus fortunate indeed, if he really possesses
c that art and teaches it so modestly. For my own part, at any rate,
I would be puffed up with vanity and pride if I had such knowl-
edge. But I do not, Gentlemen.

Perhaps one of you will ask, "But Socrates, what is this all
about? Whence have these slanders against you arisen? You must
surely have been busying yourself with something out of the or-
dinary; so grave a report and rumor would not have arisen had
you not been doing something rather different from most folk.
Tell us what it is, so that we may not take action in your case
d unadvisedly." That, I think, is a fair request, and I shall try to
indicate what it is that has given me the name I have. Hear me,
then. Perhaps some of you will think I joke; be well assured that
I shall tell you the whole truth.

3. Callias's answer is in the "short-answer" style of the Sophists. Cf. *Gorgias* 449b*ff.*, *Protagoras* 334e–335c.

Gentlemen of Athens, I got this name through nothing but a
kind of wisdom. What kind? The kind which is perhaps pecu-
e liarly human, for it may be I am really wise in that. And perhaps
the men I just mentioned are wise with a wisdom greater than
human—either that, or I cannot say what. In any case, I have no
knowledge of it, and whoever says I do is lying and speaks to my
slander.

Please, Gentlemen of Athens. Do not make a disturbance, even
if I seem to you to boast. For it will not be my own words I utter;
I shall refer you to the speaker, as one worthy of credit. For as
witness to you of my own wisdom—whether it is wisdom of a
kind, and what kind of wisdom it is—I shall call the God at
Delphi.

You surely knew Chaerephon. He was my friend from youth,
21a and a friend of your democratic majority. He went into exile with
you,[4] and with you he returned. And you know what kind of a
man he was, how eager and impetuous in whatever he rushed
into. Well, he once went to Delphi and boldly asked the oracle—
as I say, Gentlemen, please do not make a disturbance—he asked
whether anyone is wiser than I. Now, the Pythia[5] replied that no
one is wiser. And to this his brother here will testify, since
Chaerephon is dead.

b Why do I mention this? I mention it because I intend to inform
you whence the slander against me has arisen. For when I heard
it, I reflected: "What does the God mean? What is the sense of
this riddling utterance? I know that I am not wise at all; what
then does the God mean by saying I am wisest? Surely he does
not speak falsehood; it is not permitted to him." So I puzzled for
a long time over what he meant, and then, with great reluctance,
I turned to inquire into the matter in some such way as this.

I went to someone with a reputation for wisdom, in the belief
c that there if anywhere I might test the meaning of the utterance
and declare to the oracle that "this man is wiser than I am, and
you said I was wisest." So I examined him—there is no need to
mention a name, but it was someone in political life who pro-
duced this effect on me in discussion, Gentlemen of Athens—
and I concluded that though he seemed wise to many other men,
and most especially to himself, he was not. I tried to show him

4. The leading democrats in Athens were forced into exile when the Thirty Tyrants came to power in 404 B.C.

5. The Priestess of Apollo, whose major shrine was Delphi.

this; and thence I became hated, by him and by many who were
d present. But I left thinking to myself, "I am wiser than that man. Probably neither of us knows anything worthwhile; but he thinks he does and does not, and I do not and do not think I do. So it seems at any rate that I am wiser in this one small respect: I do not think I know what I do not." I then went to another man who was reputed to be even wiser, and the same thing seemed true
e again; there too I became hated, by him and by many others.

Nevertheless, I went on, perceiving with grief and fear that I was becoming hated, but still, it seemed necessary to put the God first—so I had to go on, examining what the oracle meant by
22a testing everyone with a reputation for knowledge. And by the Dog,[6] Gentlemen—I must tell you the truth—I swear that I had some such experience as this: it seemed to me, as I carried on inquiry in behalf of the God, that those most highly esteemed for wisdom fell little short of being most deficient, and that others reputedly inferior were men of more discernment.

But really, I must tell you of my wanderings, the labors I performed[7]—all to the end that I might not leave the oracle untested. From the politicians I went to the poets—tragic, dithy-
b rambic, and the rest—thinking that there I would discover myself manifestly less wise by comparison. So I took up poems over which I thought they had taken special pains, and asked them what they meant, so as also at the same time to learn from them. Now, I am ashamed to tell you the truth, Gentlemen, but still, it must be told. There was hardly anyone present who could not give a better account than they of what they had themselves pro-
c duced. So presently I came to realize that poets too do not make what they make by wisdom, but by a kind of native disposition or divine inspiration, exactly like seers and prophets. For the latter also utter many fine things, but know nothing of the things they speak. That is how the poets also appeared to me, while at the same time I realized that because of their poetry they thought themselves the wisest of men in other matters—and were not. Once again, I left thinking myself superior to them in just the way I was to the politicians.

Finally I went to the craftsmen. I was aware that although I
d knew scarcely anything, I would find that they knew many fine

6. A humorous oath. The Dog is the Egyptian dog-headed god, Anubis.
7. I.e., like Heracles.

things. In this I was not mistaken: they knew things that I did not, and in that respect were wiser. But, Gentlemen of Athens, it seemed to me that the poets and our capable public craftsmen had exactly the same failing: because they practiced their own arts well, each deemed himself wise in other things, things of great importance. This mistake quite obscured their wisdom.
e The result was that I asked myself on behalf of the oracle whether I would accept being such as I am, neither wise with their wisdom nor foolish with their folly, or whether I would accept then wisdom and folly together and become such as they are. I answered, both for myself and the oracle, that it was better to be as I am.

From this examination, Gentlemen of Athens, much enmity
23a has risen against me, of a sort most harsh and heavy to endure, so that many slanders have arisen, and the name is put abroad that I am "wise." For on each occasion those present think I am wise in the things in which I test others. But very likely, Gentlemen, it is really the God who is wise, and by his oracle he means to say that "human nature is a thing of little worth, or none." It appears that he does not mean this fellow Socrates, but uses my
b name to offer an example, as if he were saying that "he among you, Gentlemen, is wisest who, like Socrates, realizes that he is truly worth nothing in respect to wisdom." That is why I still go about even now on behalf of the God, searching and inquiring among both citizens and strangers, should I think some one of them is wise; and when it seems he is not, I help the God and prove it. Due to this pursuit, I have no leisure worth mentioning
c either for the affairs of the City or for my own estate; I dwell in utter poverty because of my service to God.

Then too the young men follow after me—especially the ones with leisure, namely, the richest. They follow of their own initiative, rejoicing to hear men tested, and often they imitate me and undertake to test others; and next, I think, they find an ungrudging plenty of people who know little or nothing but think they have some knowledge. As a result, those whom they test become angry at me, not at themselves, and say that "this fellow Socrates
d is utterly polluted, and corrupts the youth." And when someone asks them what it is this Socrates does, what it is he teaches, they cannot say because they do not know; but so as not to seem at a loss, they mutter the kind of things that lie ready to hand against anyone who pursues wisdom: "things in the Heavens and beneath the Earth," or "not acknowledging gods," or "making the weaker

argument stronger." The truth, I suppose, they would not wish to state, namely, that it is become quite clear that they pretend
e to knowledge and know nothing. And because they are concerned for their pride, I think, and zealous, and numerous, and speak vehemently and persuasively about me, they have long filled your ears with zealous slander. It was on the strength of this that Meletus attacked me, along with Anytus and Lycon—Meletus angered on behalf of the poets, Anytus on behalf of the public craftsmen and the politicians, Lycon on behalf of the or-
24a ators. So the result, as I said to begin with, is that I should be most surprised were I able to remove from you in this short time a slander which has grown so great. There, Gentlemen of Athens, you have the truth, and I have concealed or misrepresented nothing in speaking it, great or small. Yet I know quite well that it is just for this that I have become hated—which is in fact an indication of the truth of what I say—and that this is the basis of the
b slander and charges against me. Whether you inquire into it now or hereafter you will find it to be so.

Refutation of Meletus (24b–28a)

SOC. Against the charges lodged by my first accusers, let this defense suffice. But for Meletus—the good man who loves his City, so he says—and for my later accusers, I shall attempt a further defense. Once more then, as before a different set of accusers, let us take up their sworn indictment.[8] It runs something like this: it says that Socrates is guilty of corrupting the youth, and of not acknowledging the gods the City acknowledges, but other
c new divinities. Such is the charge. Let us examine its particulars.

It claims I am guilty of corrupting the youth. But I claim, Gentlemen of Athens, that it is Meletus who is guilty—guilty of jesting in earnest, guilty of lightly bringing men to trial, guilty of pretending a zealous concern for things he never cared about at all. I shall try to show you that this is true.

Come here, Meletus. Now tell me. Do you count it of greatest
d importance than the young should be as good as possible?

MEL. I do.

SOC. Then come and tell the jurors this: Who improves them? Clearly you know, since it is a matter of concern to you. Having

8. The exact indictment is probably preserved in D.L. II.40; cf. Xenophon, *Memorabilia* I.i.1.

discovered, so you say, that I am the man who is corrupting them, you bring me before these judges to accuse me. But now come and say who makes them better. Inform the judges who he is.

You see, Meletus. You are silent. You cannot say. And yet, does this not seem shameful to you, and a sufficient indication of what I say, namely, that you never cared at all? Tell us, my friend. Who improves them?

MEL. The laws.

e SOC. But I did not ask you that, dear friend. I asked you what man improves them—whoever it is who in the first place knows just that very thing, the laws.

MEL. These men, Socrates. The judges.

SOC. Really, Meletus? These men here are able to educate the youth and improve them?

MEL. Especially they.

SOC. All of them? Or only some?

MEL. All.

SOC. By Hera, you bring good news. An ungrudging plenty of
25a benefactors! But what about the audience here. Do they improve them or not?

MEL. They too.

SOC. And members of the Council?

MEL. The Councilors too.

SOC. Well then, Meletus, do the members of the Assembly, the Ecclesiasts, corrupt the young? Or do they all improve them too?

MEL. They too.

SOC. So it seems that every Athenian makes them excellent except me, and I alone corrupt them. Is that what you are saying?

MEL. That is exactly what I am saying.

SOC. You condemn me to great misfortune. But tell me, do you
b think it is so with horses? Do all men improve them, while some one man corrupts them? Or quite to the contrary, is it some one man or a very few, namely horse-trainers, who are able to improve them, while the majority of people, if they deal with horses and use them, corrupt them? Is that not true, Meletus, both of horses and all other animals? Of course it is, whether you and Anytus affirm or deny it. It would be good fortune indeed for the youth if only one man corrupted them and the rest benefited.
c But the fact is, Meletus, that you sufficiently show that you never gave thought to the youth; you clearly indicate your own lack of

concern, indicate that you never cared at all about the matters in which you bring action against me.

But again, dear Meletus, tell us this: Is it better to dwell among fellow citizens who are good, or wicked? Do answer, dear friend; surely I ask nothing hard. Do not wicked men do evil things to those around them, and good men good things?

MEL. Of course.

d SOC. Now, is there anyone who wishes to be harmed rather than benefited by those with whom he associates? Answer me, dear friend, for the law requires you to answer. Is there anyone who wishes to be harmed?

MEL. Of course not.

SOC. Very well then, are you bringing action against me here because I corrupt the youth intentionally, or unintentionally?

MEL. Intentionally, I say.

SOC. How can that be, Meletus? Are you at your age so much wiser

e than I at mine that you recognize that evil men always do evil things to those around them, and good men do good, while I have reached such a pitch of folly that I am unaware that if I do some evil to those with whom I associate, I shall very likely receive some evil at their hands, with the result that I do such great evil intentionally, as you claim? I do not believe you, Meletus, and I do not think anyone else does either. On the contrary: either I

26a do not corrupt the youth, or if I do, I do so unintentionally. In either case, you lie. And if I corrupt them unintentionally, it is not the law to bring action here for that sort of mistake, but rather to instruct and admonish in private; for clearly, if I once learn, I shall stop what I unintentionally do. You, however, were unwilling to associate with me and teach me; instead, you brought action here, where it is law to bring those in need of punishment rather than instruction.

Gentlemen of Athens, what I said is surely now clear: Meletus

b was never concerned about these matters, much or little. Still, Meletus, tell us this: How do you say I corrupt the youth? Or is it clear from your indictment that I teach them not to acknowledge the gods the City acknowledges, but other new divinities? Is this what you mean by saying I corrupt by teaching?

MEL. Certainly. That is exactly what I mean.

SOC. Then in the name of these same gods we are now discussing, Meletus, please speak a little more plainly still, both for me and

c for these gentlemen here. Do you mean that I teach the youth to

acknowledge that there are gods, and thus do not myself wholly deny gods, and am not in that respect guilty—though the gods are not those the City acknowledges, but different ones, and that this is the cause of my indictment, that they are different? Or are you claiming that I do not myself acknowledge any gods at all, and that I teach this to others?

MEL. I mean that. You acknowledge no gods at all.

d SOC. Ah, my dear Meletus, why do you say such things? Do I not at least acknowledge Sun and Moon as gods, as other men do?

MEL. No, no, Gentlemen and Judges, not when he says the Sun is a stone and the Moon earth.

SOC. My dear Meletus! Do you think it is Anaxagoras you are accusing? Do you so despise these judges here and think them so unlettered that they do not know it is the books of Anaxagoras of Clazomenae which teem with such statements? Are young men to learn these things specifically from me when they can buy them

e sometimes in the Orchestra for a drachma, if the price is high, and laugh at Socrates if he pretends they are his own—especially since they are so absurd? Well, dear friend, is that what you think? I acknowledge no gods at all?

MEL. No, none whatever.

SOC. You cannot be believed, Meletus—even, I think, by yourself. Gentlemen of Athens, I think this man who stands here before you is insolent and unchastened, and has brought this suit precisely out of insolence and unchastened youth. He seems to be

27a conducting a test by propounding a riddle: "Will Socrates, the wise man, realize how neatly I contradict myself, or will I deceive him and the rest of the audience?" For certainly it seems clear that he is contradicting himself in his indictment. It is as though he were saying, "Socrates is guilty of not acknowledging gods, and acknowledges gods." Yet surely this is to jest.

Please join me, Gentlemen, in examining why it appears to me that this is what he is saying. And you answer us, Meletus. The

b rest of you will please remember what I asked you at the beginning, and make no disturbance if I fashion arguments in my accustomed way.

Is there any man, Meletus, who acknowledges that there are things pertaining to men, but does not acknowledge that there are men? Let him answer for himself, Gentlemen—and let him stop interrupting. Is there any man who does not acknowledge that there are horses, but acknowledges things pertaining to

horsemanship? Or does not acknowledge that there are flutes, but acknowledges things pertaining to flute playing? There is not, my good friend. If you do not wish to answer, I'll answer for you and for the rest of these people here. But do please answer my question, at least: Is there any man who acknowledges that there
c are things pertaining to divinities, but does not acknowledge that there are divinities?

MEL. There is not.

SOC. How obliging of you to answer—reluctantly, and under compulsion from these gentlemen here. Now, you say that I acknowledge and teach things pertaining to divinities—whether new or old, still at least I acknowledge them, by your account; indeed you swore to that in your indictment. But if I acknowledge that there are things pertaining to divinities, must I surely not also acknowledge that there are divinities? Isn't that so? Of course it
d is—since you do not answer, I count you as agreeing. And divinities, we surely believe, are either gods or children of gods? Correct?

MEL. Of course.

SOC. So if I believe in divinities, as you say, and if divinities are a kind of god, there is the jesting riddle I attributed to you; you are saying that I do not believe in gods, and again that I do believe in gods because I believe in divinities. On the other hand, if divinities are children of gods, some born illegitimately of nymphs,[9] or others of whom this is also told,[10] who could possibly
e believe that there are children of gods, but not gods? It would be as absurd as believing that there are children of horses and asses, namely, mules, without believing there are horses and asses. Meletus, you could not have brought this indictment except in an attempt to test us—or because you were at a loss for any true basis of prosecution. But as to how you are to convince anyone of even the slightest intelligence that one and the same man can believe that there are things pertaining to divinities and gods,
28a and yet believe that there are neither divinities nor heroes—there is no way.

Digression: Socrates' Mission to Athens (28a–34b)

SOC. Gentlemen of Athens, I do not think further defense is needed

9. Aesclepius, for example, son of Apollo and the nymph Coronis. Note that nymphs are themselves goddesses.

10. For example, Achilles, son of the nymph Thetis and Peleus, a mortal father; or Heracles, son of Zeus and Alcmene, a mortal mother.

to show that, by the very terms of Meletus' indictment, I am not guilty; this, surely, is sufficient. But as I said before, a great deal of enmity has risen against me among many people, and you may rest assured this is true. And that is what will convict me, if I am convicted—not Meletus, not Anytus, but the grudging slander of
b the multitude. It has convicted many another good and decent man; I think it will convict me; nor is there any reason to fear that with me it will come to a stand.

Perhaps someone may say, "Are you not ashamed, Socrates, at having pursued such a course that you now stand in danger of being put to death?" To him I would make a just reply: You are wrong, Sir, if you think that a man worth anything at all should take thought for danger in living or dying. He should look when he acts to one thing: whether what he does is just or unjust, the work of a good man or a bad one. By your account, those demigods and heroes who laid down their lives at Troy would be of
c little worth—the rest of them, and the son of Thetis. Achilles so much despised danger instead of submitting to disgrace that when he was intent on killing Hector his goddess mother told him, as I recall, "My son, if you avenge the slaying of your comrade Patroclus with the death of Hector, you yourself shall die; for straightway with Hector is his fate prepared for you."[11] Achilles heard, and thought little of the death and danger. He was more afraid to live as a bad man, with friends left unavenged.
d "Straightway let me die," he said, "exacting right from him who did the wrong, that I may not remain here as a butt of mockery beside crook-beaked ships, a burden to the earth." Do you suppose that he gave thought to death and danger?

Gentlemen of Athens, truly it is so: Wherever a man stations himself in belief that it is best, wherever he is stationed by his commander, there he must I think remain and run the risks, giving thought to neither death nor any other thing except disgrace. When the commanders you chose stationed me at Potidaea
e and Amphipolis and Delium,[12] I there remained as others did, and ran the risk of death; but I should indeed have wrought a fearful thing, Gentlemen of Athens, if then, when the God stationed me, as I thought and believed, obliging me to live in the

11. This is not a wholly accurate quotation from the *Iliad*, but describes the scene at XVIII 94*ff*.

12. All battles in which Socrates fought with conspicuous bravery. See *Symposium* 220d–221b, *Laches* 181b.

29a pursuit of wisdom, examining myself and others—if then, at that point through fear of death or any other thing, I left my post. That would have been dreadful indeed, and then in truth might I be justly brought to court for not acknowledging the existence of gods, for willful disobedience to the oracle, for fearing death, for thinking myself wise when I am not.

For to fear death, Gentlemen, is nothing but to think one is wise when one is not; for it is to think one knows what one does not know. No man knows death, nor whether it is not the greatest
b of all goods; and yet men fear it as though they well knew it to be the worst of evils. Yet how is this not folly most to be reproached, the folly of believing one knows what one does not? I, at least, Gentlemen, am perhaps superior to most men here and just in this, and if I were to claim to be wiser than anyone else it would be in this: that as I have no satisfactory knowledge of things in the Place of the Dead, I do not think I do. I do know that to be guilty of disobedience to a superior, be he god or man, is shameful evil.

So as against evils I know to be evils, I shall never fear or flee from things which for aught I know may be good. Thus, even if
c you now dismiss me, refusing to do as Anytus bids—Anytus, who said that either I should not have been brought to trial to begin with or, since brought, must be put to death, testifying before you that if I were once acquitted your sons would pursue what Socrates teaches and all be thoroughly corrupted—if with this in view you were to say to me, "Socrates, we shall not at this time be persuaded by Meletus, and we dismiss you. But on this condition: that you no longer pass time in that inquiry of yours, or pursue philosophy. And if you are again taken doing it, you die."
d If, as I say, you were to dismiss me on that condition, I would reply that I hold you in friendship and regard, Gentlemen of Athens, but I shall obey the God rather than you, and while I have breath and am able I shall not cease to pursue wisdom or to exhort you, charging any of you I happen to meet in my accustomed manner: "You are the best of men, being an Athenian, citizen of a city honored for wisdom and power beyond all others. Are you then not ashamed to care for the getting of
e money, and reputation, and public honor, while yet having no thought or concern for truth and understanding and the greatest possible excellence of your soul?" And if some one of you disputes this, and says he does care, I shall not immediately dismiss him and go away. I shall question him and examine him and test
30a him, and if he does not seem to me to possess virtue, and yet

says he does, I shall rebuke him for counting of more importance things which by comparison are worthless. I shall do this to young and old, citizen and stranger, whomever I happen to meet, but I shall do it especially to citizens, in as much as they are more nearly related to me. For the God commands this, be well assured, and I believe that you have yet to gain in this City a greater good than my service to the God. I go about doing nothing but persuading you, young and old, to care not for body or money
b in place of, or so much as, excellence of soul. I tell you that virtue does not come from money, but money and all other human goods both public and private from virtue. If in saying this I corrupt the youth, that would be harm indeed. But anyone who claims I say other than this speaks falsehood. In these matters,
c Gentlemen of Athens, believe Anytus, or do not. Dismiss me, or do not. For I will not do otherwise, even if I am to die for it many times over.

Please do not make a disturbance, Gentlemen. Abide in my request and do not interrupt what I have to say, but listen. Indeed, I think you will benefit by listening. I am going to tell you certain things at which you may perhaps cry out; please do not do it. Be well assured that if you kill me, and if I am the sort of man I claim, you will harm me less than you harm yourselves. There is no harm a Meletus or Anytus can do me; it is not pos-
d sible, for it does not, I think, accord with divine law that a better man should be harmed by a worse. Meletus perhaps can kill me, or exile me, or disenfranchise me; and perhaps he and others too think those things great evils. I do not. I think it a far greater evil to do what he is now doing, attempting to kill a man unjustly. And so, Gentlemen of Athens, I am far from making a defense for my own sake, as some might think; I make it for yours, lest
e you mistake the gift the God has given you and cast your votes against me. If you kill me, you will not easily find such another man as I, a man who—if I may put it a bit absurdly—has been fastened as it were to the City by the God as, so to speak, to a large and well-bred horse, a horse grown sluggish because of its size and in need of being roused by a kind of gadfly. Just so, I think, the God has fastened me to the City. I rouse you. I per-
31a suade you. I upbraid you. I never stop lighting on each one of you, everywhere, all day long. Such another will not easily come to you again, Gentlemen, and if you are persuaded by me, you will spare me. But perhaps you are angry, as men roused from

sleep are angry, and perhaps you will swat me, persuaded by Meletus that you may lightly kill. Then will you continue to sleep out your lives, unless the God sends someone else to look after you.

That I am just that, a gift from the God to the City, you may
b recognize from this: It scarcely seems a human matter merely, that I should take no thought for anything of my own, endure the neglect of my house and its affairs for these long years now and ever attend to yours, going to each of you in private like a father or elder brother, persuading you to care for virtue. If I got something from it, if I took pay for this kind of exhortation, that would explain it. But as things are, you can see for yourselves that even my accusers, who have accused me so shamefully of everything else, could not summon shamelessness enough to pro-
c vide witnesses to testify that I ever took pay or asked for it. For it is enough, I think, to provide my poverty as witness to the truth of what I say.

Perhaps it may seem peculiar that I go about in private advising men and busily inquiring, and yet do not enter your Assembly in public to advise the City. The reason is a thing you have heard me mention many times in many places, that something divine
d and godlike comes to me—which Meletus, indeed, mocked in his indictment.[13] I have had it from childhood. It comes as a kind of voice, and when it comes, it always turns me away from what I am about to do, but never toward it. That is what opposed my entering political life, and I think it did well to oppose. For be well assured, Gentlemen of Athens, that had I attempted to enter political affairs, I should long since have been destroyed—to the
e benefit of neither you nor myself.

Please do not be angry at me for telling the simple truth. It is impossible for any man to be spared if he publicly opposes you or any other democratic majority, and prevents many unjust and
32a illegal things from occurring in his city. He who intends to fight for what is just, if he is to be spared even for a little time, must of necessity live a private rather than a public life.

I shall offer you a convincing indication of this—not words, but what you respect, deeds. Hear, then, what befell me, so that you may know that I will not through fear of death give way to

13. The suggestion is that Meletus lodged his accusation of acknowledging new (or strange) gods because of the Sign. Cf. *Euthyphro* 3b.

any man contrary to what is right, even if I am destroyed for it. I shall tell you a thing which is tedious—it smacks of the law courts—but true. Gentlemen of Athens, I never held other office
b in the City, but I was once a member of the Council. And it happened that our Tribe, Antiochis, held the Prytany when you decided to judge as a group the cases of the ten generals who had failed to gather up the bodies of the slain in the naval battle—illegally, as later it seemed to all of you. But at the time, I alone of the Prytanies opposed doing a thing contrary to law, and cast my vote against it. And when the orators were ready to im-
c peach me and have me arrested—you urging them on with your shouts—I thought that with law and justice on my side I must run the risk, rather than concur with you in an unjust decision through fear of bonds or death. Those things happened while the City was still under the Democracy. But when the oligarchy came, the Thirty in turn summoned me along with four others to the Rotunda and ordered us to bring back Leon the Salamanian from Salamis so that he might be executed, just as they ordered many others to do such things, planning to implicate as
d many people as possible in their own guilt. But I then showed again, not by words but deeds, that death, if I may be rather blunt, was of no concern whatever to me; to do nothing unjust or unholy—that was my concern. Strong as it was, that oligarchy did not so frighten me as to cause me to do a thing unjust, and when we departed the Rotunda, the other four went into Salamis and brought back Leon, and I left and went home. I might have been killed for that, if the oligarchy had not shortly afterward
e been overthrown. And of these things you will have many witnesses.

Now, do you think I would have lived so many years if I had been in public life and acted in a manner worthy of a good man, defending what is just and counting it, as is necessary, of first importance? Far from it, Gentlemen of Athens. Not I, and not
33a any other man. But through my whole life I have shown myself to be that sort of man in public affairs, the few I've engaged in; and I have shown myself the same man in private. I never gave way to anyone contrary to what is just—not to others, and certainly not to those slanderously said to be my pupils. In fact, I have never been teacher to anyone. If, in speaking and tending to my own affairs, I found anyone, young or old, who wished to hear me, I never begrudged him; nor do I discuss for a fee and

b not otherwise. To rich and poor alike I offer myself as a questioner, and if anyone wishes to answer, he may then hear what I have to say. And if any of them turned out to be useful men, or any did not, I cannot justly be held responsible. To none did I promise instruction, and none did I teach; if anyone says that he learned from me or heard in private what others did not, you may rest assured he is not telling the truth.

Why is it, then, that some people enjoy spending so much time c with me? You have heard, Gentlemen of Athens; I told you the whole truth. It is because they enjoy hearing people tested who think they are wise and are not. After all, it is not unamusing. But for my own part, as I say, I have been ordered to do this by God—in oracles, in dreams, in every way in which other divine apportionment orders a man to do anything.

These things, Gentlemen of Athens, are both true and easily d tested. For if I am corrupting some of the youth, and have corrupted others, it must surely be that some among them, grown older, if they realize that I counseled them toward evil while young, would now come forward to accuse me and exact a penalty. And if they were unwilling, then some of their relatives—fathers, brothers, other kinsmen—would now remember, and exact a penalty, if their own relatives had suffered evil at my hands. Certainly there are many such men I see present. Here is Crito, e first, of my own age and deme,[14] father of Critobulus; then there is Eysanias of Sphettos, father of Aeschines[15] here. Next there is Antiphon of Cephisus, father of Epigenes. Then there are others whose brothers engaged in this pastime. There is Nicostratus, son of Theozotides, brother of Theodotus—and Theodotus is dead, so he could not have swayed him—and Paralus here, son 34a of Demococus, whose brother was Theages. And here is Adeimantus, son of Ariston, whose brother is Plato here; and Aeantodorus, whose brother is Apollodorus here. I could name many others, some of whom at least Meletus ought certainly have provided in his speech as witnesses. If he forgot it then, let him do it now—I yield the floor—and let him say whether he has any witnesses of the sort. You will find that quite to the contrary, Gentlemen, every one of these men is ready to help me, I, who corrupt their relatives, as Meletus and Anytus claim. Those who

14. Alopece. A deme was roughly the equivalent of a township.
15. Who, like Plato, went on to write Socratic dialogues.

b are themselves corrupted might perhaps have reason to help me; but their relatives are older men who have not been corrupted. What reason could they have for supporting me except that it is right and just, because they know Meletus is lying and I am telling the truth?

Peroration (34b–35d)

SOC. Very well, then, Gentlemen. This, and perhaps a few other things like it, is what I have to say in my defense. Perhaps some c of you will remember your own conduct and be offended, if when brought to trial on a lesser charge than this, you begged your judges with tearful supplication and caused your children along with other relatives and a host of friends, to come forward so that you might be the more pitied, whereas I shall do none of these things, even though I am, as it would seem at least, in the extremity of danger. Perhaps someone with this in mind may become hardened against me; angered by it, he may cast his vote d in anger. If this is true of any of you—not that I expect it, but if it is—I think it might be appropriate to say, "I too have relatives, my friend; for as Homer puts it, I am not 'of oak and rock,' but born of man, so I have relatives—yes, and sons too, Gentlemen of Athens, three of them, one already a lad and two of them children. Yet not one of them have I caused to come forward here, and I shall not beg you to acquit me." Why not? Not out of stubbornness, Gentlemen of Athens, nor disrespect for you. e Whether or not I am confident in the face of death is another story; but I think that my own honor, and yours, and that of the whole City would suffer, if I were to behave in this way, I being of the age I am and having the name I have—truly or falsely it 35a being thought that Socrates is in some way superior to most men. If those of you reputed to be superior in wisdom or courage or any other virtue whatever were men of this sort, it would be disgraceful; I have often seen such people behave surprisingly when put on trial, even though they had a reputation to uphold, because they were persuaded that they would suffer a terrible thing if they were put to death—as though they would be immortal if you did not kill them. I think they cloak the City in shame, so that a stranger might think that those men among the Athenians who are superior in virtue, and whom the Athenians b themselves judge worthy of office and other honors, are not better than women. These are things, Gentlemen of Athens, which

those of you who have a reputation to uphold ought not to do; nor if we defendants do them, ought you permit it. You ought rather make it clear that you would far rather cast your vote against a man who stages these pitiful scenes, and makes the City a butt of mockery, than against a man who shows quiet restraint.

But apart from the matter of reputation, Gentlemen, it does
c not seem to me just to beg a judge, or to be acquitted by begging; it is rather just to teach and persuade. The judge does not sit to grant justice as a favor, but to render judgment; he has sworn no oath to gratify those whom he sees fit, but to judge according to law. We ought not accustom you, nor ought you become accustomed, to forswear yourselves; it is pious in neither of us. So do not consider it right, Gentlemen of Athens, that I do such things in your presence as I believe to be neither honorable nor just nor
d holy, especially since, by Zeus, it is for impiety that I am being prosecuted by this fellow Meletus here. For clearly, if I were to persuade and compel you by supplication, you being sworn as judges, I would teach you then indeed not to believe that there are gods, and in making my defense I would in effect accuse myself of not acknowledging them. But that is far from so; I do acknowledge them, Gentlemen of Athens, as none of my accusers does, and to you and to the God I now commit my case, to judge in whatever way will be best for me and also for you.

The Counterpenalty (35e–38b)

c I am not distressed, Gentlemen of Athens, at what has happened,
36a nor angered that you have cast your votes against me. Many things contribute to this, among them the fact that I expected it. I am much more surprised at the number of votes either way; I did not think the censure would be by so little, but by more. As it is, it seems, if only thirty votes had fallen otherwise, I would have been acquitted.[16] And so far as Meletus at least is concerned, it seems to me, I am already acquitted—and more than acquitted, since it is clear that if Anytus and Lycon had not come forward to accuse me, Meletus would have been fined a thousand drach-
b mas for not obtaining a fifth part of the vote.

The man demands death for me. Very well. Then what coun-

16. Granting that there were 500 judges, the vote must have been 280 to 220.

terpenalty shall I propose to you, Gentlemen of Athens?[17] Clearly something I deserve, but what? What do I deserve to pay or suffer because I did not through life keep quiet, and yet did not concern myself, as the multitude do, with money or property or military and public honors and other office, or the secret societies and
c political clubs which keep cropping up in the City, believing that I was really too reasonable and temperate a man to enter upon these things and survive? I did not go where I could benefit neither you nor myself; instead, I went to each of you in private, where I might perform the greatest service. I undertook to persuade each of you not to care for anything which belongs to you before first caring for yourselves, so as to be as good and wise as possible, nor to care for anything which belongs to the City before caring for the City itself, and so too with everything else in the
d same way. Now, what do I deserve to suffer for being this sort of man? Some good thing, Gentlemen of Athens, if penalty is really to be assessed according to desert. What then is fitting for a poor man who has served his City well, and needs leisure to exhort you? Why, Gentlemen of Athens, nothing is more fitting for such a man than to be fed in the Prytaneum,[18] at the common table of the City—yes, and far more fitting than for one of you who has been an Olympic victor in the single-horse or two- or four-horse chariot races. For he makes you seem happy, whereas I make you happy in truth; and he does not need subsistence, and
e I do. If then I must propose a penalty I justly deserve, I propose
37a that, public subsistence in the Prytaneum.

Perhaps some of you will think that in saying this I speak much as I spoke of tears and pleading, out of stubborn pride. That is not so, Gentlemen of Athens, though something of this sort is: I am persuaded that I have not intentionally wronged any man, but I cannot persuade you of it; we have talked so short a time.
b Now, I believe if you had a law, as other men do, that cases involving death shall not be decided in a single day, that you would be persuaded; but as things are, it is not easy in so short a time to do away with slanders grown so great. Being persuaded,

17. Under Athenian law, the prosecutor proposed a penalty, and the convicted defendant a counterpenalty; the jury was required to choose between them without alteration. The usual practice was for a convicted person to propose a penalty as heavy as he could bear short of that which the prosecutor demanded, in hope that the jury might accept it.

18. Public subsistence in the Prytaneum was a great honor, traditionally given to Olympic victors in major events.

however, that I have wronged no one, I am quite unwilling to wrong myself, or to claim that I deserve some evil and propose any penalty of the kind. What is there to fear? That I may suffer the penalty Meletus proposes, when as I say, I do not know whether it is good or evil? Shall I choose instead a penalty I know very well to be evil? Imprisonment, perhaps? But why should I live in prison, a slave to men who happen to occupy office as the
c Eleven? A fine, then, and prison till I pay it? But that comes to the same thing, since I have no money to pay it. Shall I then propose exile? Perhaps you would accept that. But I must indeed love life and cling to it dearly, Gentlemen, if I were so foolish as
d to think that although you, my own fellow-citizens, cannot bear my pursuits and discussions, which have become so burdensome and hateful that you now seek to be rid of them, others will bear them lightly. No, Gentlemen. My life would be fine indeed, if at my age I went to live in exile, always moving from city to city, always driven out. For be well assured that wherever I go, the young men will listen to what I say as they do here; if I turn them away, their fathers and relations will drive me out in their
e behalf.

Perhaps someone may say, "Would it not be possible for you to live in exile, Socrates, if you silently kept quiet?" But this is the hardest thing of all to make some of you believe. If I say that
38a to do so would be to disobey the God, and therefore I cannot do it, you will not believe me because you will think that I am being sly and dishonest.[19] If on the other hand I say that the greatest good for man is to fashion arguments each day about virtue and the other things you hear me discussing when I examine myself and others, and that the unexamined life is not for man worth living, you will believe what I say still less. I claim these things are so, Gentlemen; but it is not easy to convince you. At the same time, I am not accustomed to think myself deserving of any evil.
b If I had money, I would propose a fine as great as I could pay—for there would be no harm in that. But as things stand, I have no money, unless the amount I can pay is the amount you are willing to exact of me. I might perhaps be able to pay a mina of

19. That is, an *eiron*. "Irony" was regarded as a defect of character, not a virtue, as Theophrastus's portrait in the *Characters* of the ironical man makes clear.

silver.[20] So I propose a penalty in that amount. But Plato here, Gentlemen of Athens, and Crito and Critobulus and Apollodorus bid me propose thirty minae, and they will stand surety. So I propose that amount. You have guarantors sufficient for the sum.

Epilogue (38c–42a)

c For the sake of only a little time, Gentlemen of Athens, you are to be accused by those who wish to revile the City of having killed Socrates, a wise man—for those who wish to reproach you will say I am wise even if I am not. And if you had only waited a little, the thing would have come of its own initiative. You see my age. You see how far spent my life already is, how near I am to death.

d I say this, not to all of you, but to those of you who voted to condemn me. To them I also say this: Perhaps you think, Gentlemen of Athens, that I have been convicted for lack of words to persuade you, had I thought it right to do and say anything to be acquitted. Not so. It is true I have been convicted for a lack; not a lack of words, but lack of bold shamelessness, unwillingness to say the things you would find it pleasant to hear—weeping and wailing, saying and doing many things I claim to be unworthy of
e me, but things of the sort you are accustomed to hear from others. I did not then think it necessary to do anything unworthy of a free man because of danger; I do not now regret so having conducted my defense; and I would far rather die with that defense than live with the other. Neither in court of law nor in war ought I or any man contrive to escape death by any means pos-
39a sible. Often in battle it becomes clear that a man may escape death by throwing down his arms and turning in supplication to his pursuers; and there are many other devices for each of war's dangers, so that one can avoid dying if he is bold enough to say and do anything whatever. It is not difficult to escape death, Gentlemen; it is more difficult to escape wickedness, for wicked-
b ness runs faster than death. And now I am old and slow, and I have been caught by the slower runner. But my accusers are

20. It is useless to try to give modern money equivalents, but the ultimate fine proposed is substantial: Aristotle gives one mina as the conventional ransom for a prisoner of war (*Nicomachean Ethics* V 1134b21). Why did Socrates propose a fine at all, or accept his friends' offer of suretyship? See 29d–30b, 30d–e.

clever and quick, and they have been caught by the faster runner, namely Evil. I now take my leave, sentenced by you to death; they depart, convicted by Truth for injustice and wickedness. I abide in my penalty, and they in theirs. That is no doubt as it should be, and I think it is fit.

c I desire next to prophesy to you who condemned me. For I have now reached that point where men are especially prophetic—when they are about to die. I say to you who have decreed my death that to you there will come hard on my dying a punishment far more difficult to bear than the death you have visited upon me. You have done this thing in the belief that you would be released from submitting to examination of your lives. I say that it will turn out quite otherwise. Those who come to examine
d you will be more numerous, and I have up to now restrained them, though you perceived it not. They will be more harsh inasmuch as they are younger, and you shall be the more troubled. If you think by killing to hold back the reproach due you for not living rightly, you are profoundly mistaken. That release is neither possible nor honorable. The release which is both most honorable and most easy is not to cut down others, but to take proper care that you will be as good as possible. This I utter as prophecy to you who voted for my condemnation, and take my leave.

e But with you who voted for my acquittal, I should be glad to discuss the nature of what has happened, now, while the authorities are busy and I am not yet gone where, going, I must die. Abide with me, Gentlemen, this space of time; for nothing pre-
40a vents our talking with each other while we still can. To you, as my friends, I wish to display the meaning of what has now fallen to my lot. A remarkable thing has occurred, Gentlemen and Judges—and I correctly call you Judges. My accustomed oracle, which is divine, always came quite frequently before in everything, opposing me even in trivial matters if I was about to err. And now a thing has fallen to my lot which you also see, a thing which some might think, and do in fact believe, to be ultimate among evils. But the Sign of the God did not oppose me early
b this morning when I left my house, or when I came up here to the courtroom, or at any point in my argument in anything I was about to say. And yet frequently in other arguments, it has checked me right in the middle of speaking; but today it has not opposed me in any way, in none of my deeds, in none of my words. What do I take to be the reason? I will tell you. Very likely

what has fallen to me is good, and those among us who think
c that death is an evil are wrong. There has been convincing indication of this. For the accustomed Sign would surely have opposed me, if I were not in some way acting for good.

Let us also consider a further reason for high hope that death is good. Death is one of two things. Either to be dead is not to exist, to have no awareness at all, or it is, as the stories tell, a kind of alteration, a change of abode for the soul from this place to another. And if it is to have no awareness, like a sleep when the
d sleeper sees no dream, death would be a wonderful gain; for I suppose if someone had to pick out that night in which he slept and saw no dream, and put the other days and nights of his life beside it, and had to say after inspecting them how many days and nights he had lived in his life which were better and sweeter, I think that not only any ordinary person but even the Great King[21] himself would find them easily numbered in relation to
e other days, and other nights. If death is that, I say it is gain; for the whole of time then turns out to last no longer than a single night. But if on the contrary death is like taking a journey, passing from here to another place, and the stories told are true, and all who have died are there—what greater good might there be,
41a my Judges? For if a man once goes to the place of the dead, and takes leave of those who claim to be judges here, he will find the true judges who are said to sit in judgment there—Minos, Rhadamanthus, Aeacus, Triptolemus, and the other demigods and heroes who lived just lives. Would that journey be worthless? And again, to meet Orpheus and Musaeus, Hesiod and Homer—how much would any of you give? I at least would be willing to die
b many times over, if these things are true. I would find a wonderful pursuit there, when I met Palamedes, and Ajax, son of Telemon, and any others among the ancients done to death by unjust verdicts, and compared my experiences with theirs. It would not, I think, be unamusing. But the greatest thing, surely, would be to test and question there as I did here: Who among them is wise? Who thinks he is and is not? How much might one give, my
c Judges, to examine the man who led the great army against Troy, or Odysseus, or Sisyphus, or a thousand other men and women one might mention—to converse with them, to associate with them, to examine them—why, it would be inconceivable happi-

21. Of Persia, a proverbial symbol of wealth and power.

ness. Especially since they surely do not kill you for it there. They are happier there than men are here in other ways, and they are already immortal for the rest of time, if the stories told are true.

But you too, my Judges, must be of good hope concerning
d death. You must recognize that this one thing is true: there is not evil for a good man either in living or in dying, and the gods do not neglect his affairs. What has now come to me did not occur of its own initiative. It is clear to me that to die now and be released from my affairs is better for me. That is why the Sign did not turn me back, and I bear no anger whatever toward those who voted to condemn me, or toward my accusers. And yet, it was not with this in mind that they accused and convicted me.
e They thought to do harm, and for that they deserve blame. But this much would I ask of them: When my sons are grown, Gentlemen, exact a penalty of them; give pain to them exactly as I gave pain to you, if it seems to you that they care more for wealth or anything else than they care for virtue. And if they seem to be something and are nothing, rebuke them as I rebuked you, because they do not care for what they ought, because they think
42a themselves something and are worth nothing. And should you do that, both I and my sons will have been justly dealt with at your hands.

But it is now the hour of parting—I to die and you to live. Which of us goes to the better is unclear to all but the God.

III: TH