Apology

by Plato

Benjamin Jowett (trans., d. 1893)

The Apology *is a record—probably not a completely accurate record, but likely nearly so—of Socrates's defense speech at his trial. When it begins, Socrates's accusers, Meletus, Anytus, and Lycon, have just finished speaking, and now it is Socrates's turn to address the jury. Except for in a few places where Meletus answers Socrates's questions, Socrates is the speaker throughout.*

In a trial like this one, both sides made their case to the jury, which was composed of 501 citizens of Athens. The jury then voted on whether the defendant was innocent or guilty. If the defendant was found guilty, then both sides proposed a penalty, and the jury voted again.

The title 'Apology' is from the Greek word 'apologia', which means 'defense'—and so the title of this work is unrelated to the English work 'apology'.

How you, men of Athens, have been affected by my accusers, I cannot tell; but I know that they almost made me forget who I was—so persuasively did they speak. And yet they have hardly uttered a word of truth. But of the many falsehoods told by them, there was one which quite amazed me — I mean 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 they were certain to be detected as soon as I began and proved 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*; for if such is their meaning, I admit that I am eloquent. But in how different a way from their eloquence! Well, as I was saying, they have scarcely spoken the truth at all; but from me you shall hear the

whole truth—not, however, delivered after their manner in a set oration duly ornamented with words and phrases. No, by heaven, but I shall use the words and arguments that occur to me at the moment. For I trust that what I say is just, and at my time of life, I ought not to be appearing before you playing with words like a young orator—let no one expect that of me.

And I must beg you to grant me a favor. If I defend myself in my accustomed manner, and you hear me using the words that I have been in the habit of using in the marketplace, at the tables of the money-changers, or anywhere else, I would ask you not to be surprised, and not to interrupt me on this account. For I am more than seventy years of age and appearing now for the first time in a court of law. I am quite a stranger to the language of the place; and, therefore, I would have you regard me as if I were really a stranger, whom you would excuse if he spoke in his native tongue, and after the fashion of his country. And so now I make this request of you: never mind the manner in which I speak, which may or may not be good; but think only of the truth of my words, and give heed to this: let the speaker speak honestly and the judge decide justly.

And first, I have to reply to the older false accusations and to my first accusers, and then I will go on to the later ones. For many years, I have had many accusers who have accused me falsely to you, and I am more afraid of them than of Anytus and his associates, who are dangerous, too, in their own way. But far more dangerous are the earlier ones, who began their accusations when you were children, and took possession of your minds with their falsehoods, telling of one Socrates, a wise man, who speculated about the heaven above, and searched into the earth beneath, and made the worse argument appear the stronger one. Those who have spread this tale are the accusers whom I dread; for those who hear them are apt to believe that those who search into these things do not believe in the existence of the gods. And these accusers are many, and they have been making accusations against me for a long time. And they were made by them in the days when you were more impressible than you are now—in childhood, or it may have been in youth. And they accused me altogether in my absence, when there was no one to defend me.

And hardest of all, I do not know and cannot tell the names of my accusers; except that one of them happens to be a comic poet.[1] All who, from envy and malice, have persuaded you—and those who, being themselves persuaded, have persuaded others—all these men are most difficult to deal with; for I cannot call them up here, and cross-examine them, and therefore, I must simply fight with shadows in my own defense, and argue when there is no one who answers. I will ask you then to assume with me, as I was saying, that my opponents are of two kinds: my recent accusers and the earlier ones. And I hope that you will see the wisdom of my answering the latter first, for these accusations you heard long before the others, and much more often.

Well, then, I must make my defense, and endeavor to clear away in a short time, a prejudice that has lasted a long time. May I succeed, if to succeed be for my good and yours, or is likely to avail me in my cause. The task is not an easy one; I quite understand the nature of it. And so leaving the event with the god, in obedience to the law I will now make my defense.

I will begin at the beginning and ask what is the accusation that has given rise to this prejudice against me, and, in fact, has encouraged Meletus to bring his charge against me? Well, what do they say when they slander me? As if they were prosecuting me, I will sum up their words in an affidavit:

> Socrates is an evil-doer, and a curious person, who searches into things under the earth and in heaven, and he makes the worse argument appear the stronger one; and he teaches the aforesaid doctrines to others.

Such is the nature of the accusation. It is just what you have yourselves seen in the comedy of Aristophanes,[2] who has introduced a man whom he calls Socrates, going about and saying that he walks in air, and talking a deal of nonsense concerning matters of which I do not pretend to know either much or little—not that I mean to speak disparagingly of such knowledge, if anyone is wise about such matters. I should be very sorry if Meletus could bring so grave a charge against me. But the simple truth is, men of Athens, that I have nothing to do with these matters. Very many of those

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[1] This is Aristophanes.

[2] Aristophanes, *Clouds*.

here present are witnesses to the truth of this, and to them I appeal. Speak then, you who have heard me, and tell your neighbors whether any of you have ever known me to hold forth in few words or in many upon such matters. . . . You hear their answer. And from what they say of this part of the charge you will be able to judge the truth of the rest.

Just as little foundation is there for 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 others, this would, in my opinion, be an honorable thing. There is Gorgias of Leontium, and Prodicus of Ceos, and Hippias of Elis, who go the round of the cities, and are able to persuade the young men to leave their own citizens by whom they might be taught for nothing, and come to them whom they not only pay, but are thankful if they may be allowed to pay them. There is at this time a wise man from Paros residing in Athens, of whom I have heard. I came to hear of him in this way:

> I came across a man who has spent a world of money on the Sophists, Callias, the son of Hipponicus, and knowing that he had sons, I asked him, "Callias, if your two sons were foals or calves, there would be no difficulty in finding someone to put over them; we should hire a trainer of horses, or a farmer probably, who would improve and perfect them in their own proper virtue and excellence. But as they are human beings, whom are you thinking of placing over them? Is there anyone who understands human and political virtue? You must have thought about the matter, for you have sons; is there anyone?"
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> "There is," he said.
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> "Who is he?" said I, "And of what country? And what does he charge?"
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> "Evenus," he replied. "From Paros. And I pay him five minae.'[3]

[3] A mina was equal to 100 silver drachmas, and a drachma was equal to 6 obols. Callias, then, was paying Evenus the equivalent of 500 drachmas or 3,000 obols. At this time, daily earnings ranged from two to six obols. Admission to the theatre was two obols. Payment for jury duty was two obols. Hence, Callias was paying Evenus a considerable amount (Woods & Pack).

Happy is Evenus, I said to myself, if he really has this wisdom, and teaches at such a moderate charge. Had I the same, I should have been very proud and conceited. But the truth is that I have no knowledge of the kind.

I dare say, Athenians, that someone among you will reply, "Yes, Socrates, but what is the origin of these accusations which are brought against you? There must have been something strange which you have been doing? All these rumors and this talk about you would never have arisen if you had been like other men. Tell us, then, what is the cause of them, for we should be sorry to judge you hastily." Now I regard this as a fair challenge, and I will endeavor to explain to you the reason why I am called wise and have been slandered. Please listen then. And 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 has come from a certain sort of wisdom that I possess. If you ask me what kind of wisdom, I reply, wisdom such as may, perhaps, be attained by man, for to that extent I am inclined to believe that I am wise. Whereas, the persons of whom I was just speaking have a superhuman wisdom that I may fail to describe, because I have it not myself. And he who says that I have it speaks falsely for the purpose of slandering me.

And here, men of Athens, I must beg you not to interrupt me, even if I seem to say something extravagant. For the account that I will give you is not my own. I will refer you to a witness who is worthy of credit; that witness shall be the god of Delphi—he will tell you about my wisdom, if I have any, and of what sort it is.[4] You must have known Chaerephon. He was early a friend of mine, and also a friend of yours, for 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—as I was saying, I must beg you not to interrupt—he asked the oracle to tell him whether anyone was wiser than Socrates, and the Pythian answered that there was no one wiser. Chaerephon is dead himself, but his brother, who is in court, will confirm the truth of what I am saying.

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[4] Delphi, a city northwest of Athens, was the location of a shrine to the god Apollo. This god, it was believed, delivered his oracles (i.e., answers or just statements) through the priestess—or "Pythian"—at the shrine.

Why do I mention this? Because I am going to explain to you why the prejudice against me has arisen. When I heard the answer, I said to myself, "What can the god mean? And what is the interpretation of his puzzle?" For I know that I am not wise, either much or little. What then can he mean when he says that I am the wisest of men? And yet he is a god and cannot lie; that would be against his nature. After long consideration, I thought of a method of searching out his meaning. I reflected that if I could only find a man wiser than myself, then I might 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 whom I selected for examination; and the result was as follows. 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. And thereupon I tried to explain to him that he thought himself wise, but was not really wise; and the consequence was that he hated me, and his enmity was shared by several who were present and heard me. So I left him, saying to myself, as I went away, "Well, although I do not suppose that either of us knows anything really beautiful and good, I am better off than he is, for he knows nothing but thinks that he knows; I neither know nor think that I know. In this latter particular, then, I seem to have slightly the advantage of him." Then I went to another man who had still higher pretensions to wisdom, and my conclusion was exactly the same. Whereupon, I made another enemy of him, and of many others besides him.

Then I went to one man after another, being not unconscious of the hatred that I provoked, and I lamented and feared this. But necessity was laid upon me. The word of the god, I thought, ought to be considered first. And I said to myself, "Go I must to all who appear to know anything, and find out the meaning of the oracle." And I swear to you, Athenians, by the dog I swear!—for I must tell you the truth—the result of my mission was just this: I found that the men with the highest reputations appeared to me to be most deficient; and that others less esteemed were really wiser and better. But I must relate to you the wanderings and labors that I underwent, which I endured only to find at last that the oracle irrefutable.

After the politicians, I went to the poets; tragic, dithyrambic, and all sorts. And there, I said to myself, you will be instantly detected; now you will find out that you are

less wise than they are. Accordingly, I took them some of the most elaborate passages in their own poems, thinking that they would teach me something, and I asked what was the meaning of them. 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 not by wisdom do poets write poetry, but by a sort of natural inspiration and under the influence of enthusiasm; they are like prophets or soothsayers who also say many fine things, but do not understand the meaning of them. The poets appeared to me to be much in the same case; and I further observed that upon the strength of their poetry they believed themselves to be the wisest of men in other things in which they were not wise. So I departed, under the persuasion that I was superior to them, in the same way that I was to the politicians.

At last I went to the craftsmen. I was conscious that I knew nothing at all, as I may say, and I was sure that they knew many fine things; and here I was not mistaken, for they did know many things of which I knew nothing, and in this they certainly were wiser than I was. But I observed that even the best craftsmen fell into the same error as the poets. For each, because he excelled in the practice of his craft, thought that he was very wise in other most important matters, and this mistake of theirs obscured the wisdom that they really possessed. And therefore I asked myself, on behalf of the oracle, whether I would like to be as I was, neither having their knowledge nor their ignorance, or like them in both respects; and I answered, to myself and to the oracle, that I was better off as I was.

This investigation has led to my having many enemies of the worst and most dangerous kind, and has given occasion also to many prejudices. And 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, men of Athens, that the god only is wise. And by his answer to Chaerephon, 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. And so I go about, obedient to the god, and search and make investigations into the wisdom of any one, whether citizen or stranger, who appears to be wise. And if he is not wise, then on behalf of the oracle I show him that he is not wise. My

occupation quite absorbs me, and I have no time to give either to any public matter of interest or to any concern of my own, but I am in utter poverty by reason of my devotion to the god.

There is another thing. Young men of the richer classes, who have the most leisure, come about me of their own accord. They like to hear people examined, and they often imitate me, and proceed to examine others. There are plenty of persons, as they quickly discover, who think that they know something, but really know little or nothing. And then those who are examined by them instead of being angry with themselves are angry with me. "This damned Socrates," they say, "who corrupts the youth!" And then if somebody asks them, "Why, what evil does he practice or teach?" they do not know, and cannot tell; but in order that they may not appear to be at a loss, they repeat the ready charges that are used against all philosophers about teaching things up in the clouds and under the earth, and not believing there are gods, and making the worse argument appear the stronger one. For they do not like to confess that their pretending to possess knowledge has been detected—which is the truth. And as they are numerous and ambitious and energetic, they speak persuasively, both long ago and now, with their loud and vehement slanders against me. And this is the reason why my three accusers, Meletus and Anytus and Lycon, have set upon me. Meletus, angered with me on behalf of the poets; Anytus on behalf of the craftsmen and politicians; Lycon on behalf of the orators. And, as I said at the beginning, I cannot expect to get rid of such a mass of prejudice all in a moment. And this, men of Athens, is the truth and the whole truth. I have concealed nothing, I have held back nothing. And yet, I know that the plainness of my speech makes them hate me, and what is their hatred but a proof that I am speaking the truth? Hence has arisen the prejudice against me, and this is the reason of it. And whether you investigate now or hereafter, you will find that it is so.

I have said enough in my defense against the first of my accusers; I turn to the second group. They are headed by Meletus, that good man and true lover of his country, as he

calls himself. Against these, too, I must try to make a defense. Let their charge be read. It contains something of this kind:

> It says that Socrates is a doer of evil, who corrupts the youth; and who does not believe in the gods of the city, but has other new spiritual things.

Such is the charge; and now let us examine the particular counts.

He says that I am a doer of evil, and corrupt the youth; but I say, men of Athens, that Meletus is the doer of evil, in that he pretends to be in earnest when he is only in jest, and is so eager to bring men to trial from a pretended zeal and interest about matters in which he really never had the least interest. And the truth of this I will endeavor to show to you.

[1] Come hither, Meletus, and let me ask a question of you. You think a great deal about the improvement of youth?

Meletus: Yes, I do.

S: Tell these men, then, who improves the youth? For you must know, as you have taken the pains to discover their corrupter, and are citing and accusing me before them. Speak, then, and tell these men who improves the youth. Observe, Meletus, that you are silent, and have nothing to say. But is not this rather disgraceful, and a very considerable proof of what I was saying, that you have no interest in the matter? Speak up, friend, and tell us who makes them better.

M: The laws.

S: 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.

M: The men of the jury, Socrates, who are present in court.

S: What, do you mean to say, Meletus, that they are able to instruct and improve youth?

M: Certainly, they are.

S: What, all of them, or some only and not others?

M: All of them.

S: By the goddess Hera, that is good news! There are plenty of men who improve the youth, then. And what do you say of the audience, do they improve them?

M: Yes, they do.

S: And the senators?

M: Yes, the senators improve them.

S: But perhaps the members of the assembly corrupt them? Or do they too improve them?

M: They improve them.

S: Then every Athenian improves and elevates the youth; all with the exception of myself; and I alone am their corrupter? Is that what you affirm?

M: I do assert this very thing.

S: I am very unfortunate if you are right. But suppose I ask you a question: How about horses? Does one man do them harm while all the world does them good? Is not the exact opposite the truth? One man, or at least not many, is able to do them good. The trainer of horses, that is to say, does them good, and others who have to do with them instead injure them? Is not that true, Meletus, of horses, or of any other animals? Most assuredly it is; whether you and Anytus say *yes* or *no*. Happy indeed would be the condition of youth if they had one corrupter only, and all the rest of the world did them good.

But you, Meletus, have sufficiently shown that you never had a thought about the young. Your carelessness is seen in your not caring about the very things which you bring against me.

[2] And now, Meletus, I will ask you another question—by Zeus I will. Which is better, to live among bad citizens or among good ones? Answer, friend, I say; the question is one which may be easily answered. Do not the bad work some evil to those that are continually near them, but the good some good?

M: Certainly.

S: And is there anyone who would rather be injured than benefited by those around him? Answer, my good friend, the law requires you to answer—does anyone like to be injured?

M: Certainly not.

S: And when you accuse me of corrupting the youth and making them worse, do you allege that I corrupt them intentionally or unintentionally?

M: Intentionally, I say.

S: So, what then, Meletus? Are you so much wiser at your age than I am at mine that you know that the wicked always do something bad to those who are very close to them, and the good do good, while I, on the other hand, have fallen into such great ignorance that I don't also know this? That if I make one of my associates wicked, I risk being harmed by him? And I would do this great evil intentionally, as you claim? So you say, although neither I nor anyone else is ever likely to be convinced by you. Either I do not corrupt them, or I corrupt them unintentionally; and so you are lying either way. If my offense is unintentional, the procedure is not to prosecute me here for such offenses. You ought to have taken me privately and warned and admonished me; for if I am told about it, I should have left off doing what I only did unintentionally—no doubt I should. But you would have nothing to say to me and refused to correct me. And now you bring me up in this court, which is a place not of instruction, but of punishment.

[3] It will be very clear to you, Athenians, as I was saying, that Meletus has no care at all, great or small, about the matter. But still, I should like to know, Meletus, in what way I corrupt the youth. I suppose you mean, as I gather from your charges, that I teach them not to acknowledge the gods that the city acknowledges, but some other new divinities or spiritual things in their stead. Do you not say that, by teaching these things, I corrupt the youth?

M: Yes, certainly, that is what I say.

S: Then, by the gods, Meletus, of whom we are speaking, tell me and the court, in somewhat plainer terms, what you mean. For I do not as yet understand whether you say that I teach others to acknowledge some gods, and therefore that I do believe in the gods, and am not altogether an atheist—and so, this you do not accuse me of—but only you say that they are not the same the gods that the city recognizes—the charge is that they are different gods. Or, do you mean that I am an atheist simply, and a teacher of atheism?

M: I mean the latter—that you do not believe in any gods at all.

S: What an extraordinary statement! Why do you think so, Meletus? Do you mean that I do not believe, like other men, that the sun and moon are gods?

M: I assure you, gentlemen of the jury, that he does not, for he says that the sun is stone and the moon is earth.

S: Friend Meletus, do you think that you are accusing Anaxagoras? And do you have such a bad opinion of the men of this jury that you fancy them illiterate to such an extent as not to know that these doctrines are found in the books of Anaxagoras the Clazomenian, which are full of them? And moreover, the youth are said to be taught these ideas by me, when there are not unfrequently exhibitions of them at the theatre?[5] And they might pay their money there, and then laugh at Socrates if he pretends that these ideas were his own, especially since they are so absurd? And so, Meletus, you really think that I do not believe in any gods?

M: I swear by Zeus that you believe absolutely in none at all.

S: You cannot be believed, Meletus, and I am pretty sure that you do not believe yourself. I cannot help thinking, men of Athens, that Meletus is reckless and insolent, and that he has written this charge against me in a spirit of violence and unrestraint and rashness. Has he not created a puzzle, thinking to test me? He said to himself, "I shall see whether the wise Socrates will discover I am contradicting myself, or whether I shall be able to deceive him and the rest of them." For he certainly does appear to me to contradict himself in the indictment as much as if he said that Socrates is guilty of not believing in the gods, and yet of believing in them—but this is not like a person who is being earnest.

I should like you, men of Athens, to join me in examining what appears to me to be his inconsistency; and for you, Meletus, to answer. And I must remind the audience of my request that they would not make a disturbance if I speak in my accustomed manner.

Did ever a man, Meletus, believe in the existence of human events, and not of human beings? . . . I wish, men of Athens, that he would answer, and not be always trying to get up an interruption. Did ever any man believe in horsemanship, and not in horses? Or in flute-playing, and not in flute-players? No, my friend; I will answer to you and to the court, as you refuse to answer for yourself. There is no man who ever did. But now please answer the next question: Can a man believe in spiritual events and not believe in spirits?

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[5] Probably a reference to Aristophanes and to Euripides, and, perhaps, other dramatic poets who borrowed ideas from Anaxagoras.

M: He cannot.

S: 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 things—new or old, no matter for that. At any rate, I believe in spiritual things. And yet, if I believe in spiritual beings, how can I help believing in spirits? Must I not? To be sure I must; and therefore, I may assume that your silence gives consent. Now what are spirits? Are they not either the gods or the sons of the gods?

M: Certainly, they are.

S: But this is what I call the puzzle and joke invented by you: the demigods or spirits are gods, and you say first that I do not believe in the gods, and then again that I do believe in the gods; that is, if I believe in spirits. For if the spirits are the illegitimate children of the gods—whether by nymphs or by any other mothers, of whom they are said to be the children—what person will ever believe that there are not the gods if there are the children of the gods? You might as well affirm the existence of mules and deny the existence of horses and asses. Such nonsense, Meletus, could only have been intended by you so as to bring me to trial. You have put this into the indictment because you had nothing real of which to accuse me. But no one who has a bit of understanding will ever be convinced by you that the same man can believe in spiritual and divine things, and yet not believe that there are the gods and spirits and heroes.

I have said enough in answer to the charge of Meletus. Any elaborate defense is unnecessary, but I know only too well how many are the hatreds that I have incurred, and this is what will be my destruction if I am destroyed. Not Meletus, nor yet Anytus, but the dislike and prejudice of the multitude, 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.

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But, perhaps, someone will say, "And are you not ashamed, Socrates, of a course of life that is likely to bring you to your death?" To him, I may fairly answer, "There you are mistaken. A man who is good for anything ought not take into the account the risk of life or death. He ought only to consider whether, in doing anything, he is acting justly or unjustly and acting the part of a good man or of a bad one." Whereas, upon your

view, the heroes who fell at Troy were fools, and the son of Thetis[6] above all, 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 friend Patroclus and killed Hector, he would die himself. "Fate," she said, in these or the like 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 forthwith," he replied, "and be avenged of my enemy, rather than abide here by the beaked ships, a laughing-stock and a burden of the earth." Had Achilles any thought of death and danger?

For wherever a man's place is, whether the place which he has chosen or that in which he has been placed by a commander, there he ought to remain in the hour of danger. He should not think of death or of anything but of disgrace. And this, men of Athens, is the truth. Strange, indeed, would be my conduct, men of Athens, 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,[7] but now, when, as I thought and believed, the god ordered me to fulfil the philosopher's mission of examining myself and others, I were to desert my post through fear of death, or any other fear. That would indeed be strange, and I might justly be brought to trial for denying the existence of the gods if I disobeyed the oracle because I was afraid of death, thinking that I was wise when I was not wise. For to fear death is nothing else than to think oneself wise when one is not; for it is thinking one knows what one does not know.

No one knows whether death, which men in their fear believe to be the greatest evil, may not be the greatest good. Is not this ignorance of a disgraceful sort, the ignorance which is the conceit that a man knows what he does not know? And in this respect only I believe myself to differ from men in general, and may, perhaps, claim to be wiser than they are: whereas I know but little of the world below, I do not

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[6] The son of Thetis is Achilles.

[7] Potidaea, Amphipolis, and Delium refer to battles in which Socrates fought. Potidaea (432 B.C.E.) was a battle just prior to, and one cause of, the Peloponnesian War (431 – 404 B.C.E). Amphipolis (422 B.C.E.) and Delium (424 B.C.E.) were battles in the Peloponnesian war.

suppose that I know, but I do know that injustice and disobedience to a superior, whether the god or man, is evil and dishonorable, and I will never fear or avoid a thing that may possibly be good rather than one that is certainly evil.

And therefore, if you let me go now, and are not convinced by Anytus, who said that, either I ought never have been brought to trial at all, or, since I have been brought to trial, I must be put to death—and if not, if I escape punishment now, your sons will all be utterly ruined by listening to my words—if you say to me, "Socrates, this time we will not mind Anytus, and you shall be let off, but upon one condition, that you are not to investigate and practice philosophy anymore, and if you are caught doing so again, you shall die;" if this was the condition on which you let me go, I would reply, "Men of Athens, I honor and respect you, but I shall obey the god rather than you, and while I have life and strength I shall never cease from these investigations and the practice of philosophy, urging any one 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 caring for riches and how you may acquire them in greatest abundance, and for glory, and for honor, but care not for nor take any thought for wisdom and truth, and for your soul, and how it may be made most perfect?'" And if the person with whom I am speaking says, "Yes, but I do care," then I do not leave him or let him go at once, but I proceed to question and examine and cross-examine him, and if I think that he has no virtue in him, but only says that he has, I reproach him with undervaluing the greater, and overvaluing the less. And I shall repeat the same words to everyone whom I meet, young and old, citizen and foreigner, but especially to the citizens, inasmuch as they are my brethren. For know that this is the command of the god, and I believe that no greater good has ever happened in the city than my service to the god. For I do nothing but go about persuading you all, old and young alike, not to take thought for your body or for riches, but first and most to care about the improvement of your soul. I tell you that virtue does not spring from riches, but wealth and every other good of man, public as well as private, comes from virtue.

If, then, by saying these things, I corrupt the youth, these things must be harmful. But if any one says that I speak other things than these, he misleads you. Wherefore, 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 change my ways, not even if I have to die many times."

Men of Athens, do not interrupt, but hear me; there was an understanding between us that you should hear me to the end. I have something more to say, at which you may be inclined to cry out; but I believe that to hear me will be good for you, and therefore I beg that you will not cry out. I would have you know that if you kill such a man as I am, you will injure yourselves more than you will injure me. For neither Melitus nor Anytus will harm me; nor have they the power; for I do not think that it is possible for a better man to be injured by a worse. I do not deny that Anytus may, perhaps, condemn me to death, or drive me into exile, or imprison me; and he may imagine, and others may imagine, that he is inflicting a great injury upon me, 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 more harmful to the doer.

And now, Athenians, I am not making my defense for my own sake, as you may think, but for yours, so 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 another like me, who, though it is a ridiculous thing to say, is a sort of gadfly, given to the city by the god; and the city is a great and noble steed who is slow in his motions owing to his very size, and needs to be stirred into life. I am the gadfly that the god has attached to the city, and all day long and in all places, I am always fastening upon you, arousing and persuading and reproaching you. You will not easily find another like me, but if you take my advice you will 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 could sleep on for the remainder of your lives, unless the god in his care of you sent another gadfly.

But that I am given to you by the god, you might understand from this: if I had been like other men, I should not have neglected all my own affairs or patiently seen the neglect of them during all these years, and have been constantly attending to your concerns, coming to you individually like a father or elder brother, urging you to care for virtue. Such conduct, I say, is unlike human nature. If I had gained anything, or if my exhortations had been paid, there would have been some sense in my doing so; but now, as you see, not even my shameless accusers dare to say that I have ever exacted or

sought pay of any one; of that 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 giving advice in private and busying myself this way, but do not venture to come forward in public and advise the city. I will tell you why. You have heard me speak at different times and in different places of a divine sign that comes to me; it is the very thing that Meletus ridicules in his indictment. This sign, which is a kind of voice, first began to come to me when I was a child. It always, when present, forbids what I am going to do but never commands me to do anything. This is what deters me from entering politics. And rightly, as I think. For I am certain, men of Athens, that if I had engaged in politics, I should have perished long ago, and done no good either to you or to myself. And do not be offended at my telling you the truth. For the truth is that no man who opposes you or any other multitude, honestly striving against the many lawless and unrighteous deeds which are done in a state, will save his life. He who will fight for justice, 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, namely, actions. Let me relate to you a passage of my own life, that you may know that I would not yield through fear of death to any one contrary to what is just, even if by not yielding I must die. What I will tell you is ordinary and commonplace, but nevertheless true. The only office in the city that I ever held, men of Athens, was that of senator. The tribe Antiochis, which is my tribe, had the presidency at the trial of the generals who had not taken up the bodies of the slain after the battle of Arginusae.[8] You proposed to try the generals as a group, contrary to law, as you all realized afterwards; but at the time I was the only one of the committee 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.

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[8] This was a naval battle during the Peloponnesian War, and, although the Athenians won, a storm prevented them from rescuing those who were in sunken or disabled ships.

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 of Salamis, as they wanted to put him to death. And they gave many similar orders to many others, wishing to involve 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 bit for death, and that my great and only care was lest I should do an unrighteous or unjust thing. For that government, with all of its 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. For this, I might have lost my life, had not the power of the Thirty shortly afterwards come to an end. And many will witness to my words.

Now do you really imagine that I could have survived all these years, if I had engaged in politics, supposing that, like a good man, I had always maintained the right and had made justice, as I should, of the highest importance? No indeed, men of Athens, neither I nor any other man could have survived. But I have been always the same in all my actions, public as well as private, and never have I made a concession to anyone that was contrary to justice, neither to any one of these whom my accusers say are my students, nor to any other. Not that I have been a teacher. 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 any one, 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 claimed to teach him anything. And if anyone says that he has ever learned or heard anything from me in private that 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 those who think that they are wise but are not. For this is interesting. Now this duty has been imposed upon me by the god; through oracles, and dreams, and in every way in which the anyone was ever commanded by divine power to do anything whatsoever. This is true, Athenians, or, if not true, it would be soon refuted. For if I am or have been corrupting the youth, those of them

who are now grown up and have become sensible that I corrupted them in the days of their youth should come forward as accusers and take their revenge. Or if they do not like to come themselves, some of their relatives—fathers, brothers, or other relatives—should say what evil their families have suffered at my hands. Now is their time. Many of them I see in the court. There is Crito, who is of the same age and of the same deme as me, and there is Critobulus, his son, whom I also see. Then again there is Lysanias of Sphettus, who is the father of Aeschines—he is present; and also there is Antiphon of Cephisus, who is the father of Epigenes; and there are the brothers of several who have conversed with me. There is Nicostratus the son of Theosdotides, and the brother of Theodotus—now Theodotus himself is dead, and therefore he, at any rate, will not seek to stop him—and there is Paralus the son of Demodocus, who had a brother Theages; and Adeimantus the son of Ariston, whose brother Plato is present; and Aeantodorus, who is the brother of Apollodorus, whom I also see.

I might mention a great many others, some of whom Meletus should have produced as witnesses in the course of his speech; and let him still produce them. If he forgot it then, I will make way for him. And let him say it, if he has any testimony of the sort which he can produce. Nay, Athenians, the very opposite is the truth. For all these men are ready to give witness on behalf of the corrupter, of the injurer of their kindred, as Meletus and Anytus call me. And not the corrupted youth only—who might have some reason for assisting me—but their uncorrupted elder relatives. Why should they too support me with their testimony? Why, indeed, except for the sake of truth and justice, and because they know that I am speaking the truth, and that Meletus is not.

Well, Athenians, this and the like of this is all the defense that I have to offer. Yet a word more. Perhaps there may be someone in the jury who is offended by me, when he calls to mind how he himself on a similar, or even a less serious occasion, implored and begged the jury with many tears, and brought forward his children in court, which was a moving spectacle, together with a host of relatives and friends. Whereas I, who am probably in danger of my life, will do none of these things. The contrast may occur to his mind, and he may be set against me, and decide in anger because he is displeased at me on this account. Now if there be such a person among you,—mind, I do not say that there is,—to him I may fairly reply: My friend, I am a

man, and like other men, as Homer says it, am 'not born from wood or from stone' but have parents. And I have a family, yes, and sons—three in number, one almost a man, and two others who are still young. And yet, I will not bring any of them hither in order to beg you to acquit me. And why not? Not from any stubbornness or from lack of respect for you. Whether I am or am not afraid of death is another question, of which I will not now speak. But, having regard to public opinion, I feel that such conduct would not be honorable to myself, and to you, and to the whole city. One who has reached my age, and who is believed to be wise, ought not to demean himself. Whether this opinion of me is deserved or not, at any rate 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 your conduct! I have seen men of reputation, when they have been condemned, behaving in the strangest manner. They seemed to fancy that they were going to suffer something dreadful if they died, and that they could be immortal if you only allowed them to live. Such men, I think, are a dishonor to the city, and any stranger coming in would have said of them that the most eminent men of Athens, to whom the Athenians themselves give honor and command, are no better than women. And I say that these things ought not to be done by those of us who have a reputation; and if they are done, you ought not to permit them; you ought rather to show that you are far more disposed to condemn the man who gets up a woeful scene and makes the city ridiculous, than him who holds his peace.

But, setting aside the question of public opinion, there seems to be something wrong in asking a favor of the jury, and thus procuring an acquittal, instead of informing and convincing them. For the juror's 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, to violate your oath—there can be no virtue in that.

Do not then require me to do what I consider dishonorable and impious and wrong, especially now, when impiety is the very thing for which Meletus has brought me to trial. For if, men of Athens, by force of persuasion and pleading I could make you violate your oaths, then I should 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 in them. But that is not so—far otherwise. For I do believe that there are the gods, more than any of my accusers believe in them. And to you and to the god I commit my cause, to be determined by you as is best for you and for me.

The jury votes and its verdict is guilty. Both sides, Meletus and Socrates, now propose a penalty and the jury will vote again. Meletus asks that Socrates's penalty be death.

I am not grieved, men of Athens, at being convicted. I expected it and am only surprised that the votes are so nearly equal. I had thought that the majority against me would have been far larger. But had thirty votes gone over to the other side, I would have been acquitted. And I may say, I think, that I have escaped Meletus's charges. I may say also that, without the assistance of Anytus and Lycon, anyone can see that he would not have had a fifth of the votes, as the law requires, in which case he would have incurred a fine of a thousand drachmae.

And so, he proposes death as the penalty. And what shall I propose on my part, men of Athens? Clearly, a penalty that I deserve. What, then, is that? I have purposely not remained quiet during my whole life; and have been careless of what the many care for—wealth, and family interests, and military offices, and speaking in the assembly, and magistracies, and plots, and parties. Reflecting that I was really too honest a man to be involved in politics and live, I did not go where I could do no good to you or to myself; but I went, where I could do the greatest good, privately to every one of you and sought to persuade every man among you that he must look at himself, and seek virtue and wisdom before he looks to his private interests, and care for the city itself rather than for its interests; and that this should be the order in which he observes in all his actions. What shall be done to such a man as I? If such a man is given his due, then doubtless some good thing, men of Athens. And the good thing should be of a kind suitable to him. What would be a reward suitable to a poor man who is your benefactor, and who desires time that he may implore you? There can be no reward so fitting as being given meals in the Prytaneum; a reward that he deserves

far more than the citizen who has won the prize at Olympia in the horse or chariot race, whether the chariots were drawn by two horses or by many. For I am in want, and he has enough; and he only gives you the appearance of happiness, and I give you the reality. And if I am to estimate the penalty fairly, I should say that free meals in the Prytaneum is what I deserve.

Perhaps you think that I am speaking out of arrogance, as in what I said before about tears and begging before the jury. But this is not so. I speak rather because I am convinced that I never intentionally wronged any one, although I cannot convince you—the time has been too short; if there were a law in Athens, as there is in other cities, that a trial that could end with death as the penalty should not be decided in one day, then I believe that I would have convinced you. But I cannot in a moment refute great prejudices; and, as I am convinced that I never wronged another, I will assuredly not wrong myself. I will not say of myself that I deserve any evil, or propose any penalty. Why should I? Because I am afraid of the penalty of death that Meletus proposes? If I do not know whether death is a good or an evil, why should I propose a penalty that would certainly be an evil? Shall I say imprisonment? And why should I live in prison, and be the slave of the established magistracy, the Eleven? Or shall the penalty be a fine, and imprisonment until the fine is paid? But this is the same as that which I just now mentioned, for I have not money to pay it. And if I say exile, this may possibly be the penalty that you will accept. But I must indeed be blinded by the love of life, if I am so irrational as to expect that others are likely to endure me when you, who are my own fellow-citizens, cannot endure my discourses and words, and have found them so grievous and hateful that you will have no more of them. No indeed, men of Athens, that is not very likely. And what a life should I lead, at my age, wandering from city to city, ever changing my place of exile, and always being driven out? For I am quite sure that wherever I go, there, as here, the young men will flock to me; and if I drive them away, their elders will drive me out at their request; and if I let them come, their fathers and friends will drive me out for their sakes.

Someone will say: "Yes, Socrates, but can you live a silent and quiet life, and then you may go into a foreign city, and no one will interfere with you?" This is the most difficult thing of which to persuade some of you. For if I tell you that to do as you say would be a disobedience to the god, and therefore that I cannot go live quietly, you

will not believe that I am serious;[9] and if I say again that, every day, to talk about virtue, and of those other things about which you hear me examining myself and others, is the greatest good of man, and that the unexamined life is not worth living, you are still less likely to believe me.

Yet, I say what is true, although about this it is hard for me to persuade you. Also, I have never been accustomed to think that I deserve to suffer any harm. Had I money I might have estimated the offence at what I was able to pay, and not have been much the worse off. But I have none, and therefore I must ask you to proportion the fine to my means. Well, perhaps I could pay you a mina of silver, and therefore I propose that penalty.

Plato, Crito, Critobulus, and Apollodorus, my friends here, bid me say thirty minae, and they will guarantee it. Let thirty minae of silver be the penalty; for which sum they will be the guaranteers.

The jury votes and Socrates is sentenced to death.

Not much time will be gained, Athenians, in return for the evil name that you will get from the critics of the city, who will say that you killed Socrates, a wise man; for those who wish to revile you, will call me wise, even although I am not wise. If you had waited a little while, your desire would have been fulfilled by the course of nature. For I am far advanced in years, as you may see, and not far from death. I am speaking now not to all of you, but only to those who have condemned me to death. And, to them, I have another thing to say. You think that I was convicted because I did not say those things that would have moved you. Perhaps I should have left nothing undone or unsaid. Not so. The lack which led to my conviction was not of words—certainly not. But I had not the boldness or impudence or inclination to address you as you would have liked me to do, weeping and crying and lamenting, and saying and doing many things which you have been accustomed to hear from others, and which, as I maintain, are unworthy of me. I thought at the time that I ought not to do anything common or

[9] or *you will think that I am being ironical;*

mean when in danger: nor do I now repent of the style of my defense; I would rather die having spoken after my manner, than speak in your manner and live. For neither in battle nor yet at trial ought I or any man to use every way of escaping death. Often in battle there can be no doubt that if a man will throw away his arms, and fall on his knees before his pursuers, he may escape death; and in other dangers there are other ways of escaping death if a man is willing to say and do anything. The difficulty, my friends, is not to avoid death, but to avoid wickedness; for it runs faster than death. I am old and move slowly, and the slower one, death, has now overtaken me. My accusers are keen and quick, but the faster one, which is wickedness, has still overtaken them. And now, while I depart hence convicted by you and condemned to death, they too go their ways condemned by the truth of evil and injustice. I must abide by my sentence. Let them abide by theirs. I suppose that these things may be regarded as fated, and I think that they are well.

And now, you men who have condemned me, I wish to predict what will be your fate, for I am now in that place from which men most frequently prophesy, namely, when they are about to die. And I say to you who are my murderers, that, immediately after my departure, punishment far heavier than you have inflicted on me will surely await you. For you have done this, thinking that you should be freed from having to give an account of your lives. But that will not be as you suppose, far otherwise. For I say that there will be more accusers of you than there are now; those whom hitherto I have held back. And, as 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 reproaching you because you do not live well, you are mistaken; that is not a way of escape that is either possible or honorable; the simplest and the noblest way is not to cut down others, but for a man to take heed of himself and how he may be most perfect. With this prophecy to those who have condemned me, I take my leave.

Friends, who would have acquitted me, I would like also to talk with you about the what has come to pass, while the magistrates are busy, and before I go to the place at which I must die. Stay then a little while, for we may as well talk with one another while there is time. You are my friends, and I should like to show you the meaning of

this event which has happened to me. Gentlemen of the jury—for you I may truly call jurymen—I should like to tell you of a strange thing that has happened. Hitherto, the divine sign has constantly been in the habit of opposing me even about small matters if I was about to do anything that I should not. And now as you see there has come upon me that which may be thought, and is generally believed to be, the last and worst evil. But it made no 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 that I was going to say. I have often been stopped in mid-speech, but now, in this affair, it has not opposed me in anything that I was saying or doing. What explains this silence? I will tell you. What has happened to me is a good thing, and that those of us who think that death is an evil are in error. For my divine sign would surely have opposed me had I been going to some evil end and not to a good end.

Let us reflect in another way, and we shall see that there is great reason to hope that death is a good; for death is one of two things—either death is a 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 if he 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—and not even only a private person, but even the great king—will not find many such days or nights. Now if death be of such a nature, I say that to die is a good thing; for eternity is then only a single night.

But if death is the journey to another place, and there, as men say, all the dead abide, what good, my friends and gentlemen of the jury, can be greater than this? If indeed, when the traveler arrives in the world below, he is delivered from those who call themselves judges in this world, and finds the true judges who are said to give judgment there, Minos and Rhadamanthus and Aeacus and Triptolemus, and other sons of the god who were righteous in their own life, that journey will be worth making. What would not a man give if he might converse with Orpheus and Musaeus and Hesiod and Homer? Nay, if this be true, let me die many times over. I shall have a

great interest in there 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, I think, in comparing my experience with theirs. And the greatest pleasure would be to pass my time in examining and investigating the people there, as I do those here, to find out who among them is wise and who thinks he is when he is not. What would not a man give, gentlemen of the jury, to be able to examine the leader of the great Trojan expedition? Or Odysseus or Sisyphus? Or countless others, men and women too? What happiness would there be in conversing with them and asking them questions! In this other world they assuredly do not put a man to death for asking questions. For besides being happier than we are, they will be immortal, if what is said is true.

For these reasons, gentlemen of the jury, be of good cheer about death, and know with certainty, 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 my troubles; because of this, my divine sign did not try to stop me. For which reason, also, I am not angry with those who voted to condemn me, 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 of them. When my sons are grown, I would ask you, gentlemen, to 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. Reproach them, as I have reproached you, for not caring about that for which they ought to care, and thinking that they are something when really they are nothing. And if you do this, both I and my sons will have received just treatment from you.

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