Apology

PLATO

c. 428–348 BC

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Ἀπολογία Σωκράτους

Translated from the Greek with AI (Claude) and edited

FORAGE
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Apology · Plato (c. 428–348 BC)

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INTRODUCTION

In 399 BC, Socrates, then about seventy, stood trial before a jury of five hundred Athenian citizens. His accusers — Meletus, backed by Anytus and Lycon — charged him with not recognizing the gods the city recognizes, introducing new divine things, and corrupting the young. The penalty they asked for was death.

The *Apology* is Plato's version of what Socrates said in his own defense. Plato was in the courtroom. The title comes from the Greek *apologia*, a speech of defense. Socrates never apologizes.

The work has three parts: the defense itself, Socrates' response after the jury finds him guilty, and his final words after it sentences him to death.

The Defense

Socrates answers the old slanders and the new charges.

17a How you have been affected by my accusers, men of Athens, I don't know. As for me, they nearly made me forget myself, so persuasively did they speak. And yet hardly a word of what they've said is true. But of the many lies they told, one astonished me most: when they said that you must be careful not to be deceived by me, 17b since I'm a clever speaker. That they weren't ashamed that I would refute them on the spot, by the plain facts, as soon as it became clear that I'm not a clever speaker in any way at all—that seemed to me the most shameless thing about them, unless of course they call a clever speaker the one who speaks the truth. If that's what they mean, I would agree that I'm an orator—though not of their kind. So these men, as I say, have said little or nothing true, but from me you will hear the whole truth. Not, by Zeus, men of Athens, in elegantly crafted speeches like theirs, 17c nor dressed up with fine words and phrases. No, you will hear things said at random, in whatever words come to hand—for I trust that what I say is just—and let none of you expect anything else. It would hardly be fitting, gentlemen, for a man of my age to come before you making up speeches like a boy. And there's one thing, men of Athens, that I really do ask and beg of you. If you hear me making my defense in the same language I usually speak in, in the marketplace by the bankers' tables, where many of you have heard me, and elsewhere, don't 17d be surprised and don't make a disturbance on that account. For here's how things stand. This is the first time I have come up before a court, at seventy years of

age. So I'm simply a stranger to the way people speak here. Now if I really were a foreigner, you would surely forgive me for speaking in the dialect and manner [18a] I was brought up in. In just the same way I now make this request of you—a just one, as it seems to me: let my manner of speaking go—it may be worse, it may be better—and consider only this, and give your attention to it: whether what I say is just or not. For that is a juror's excellence, and an orator's is to tell the truth.

THE OLD ACCUSERS

Socrates answers the long-standing rumors that he studies the heavens and teaches for pay.

First, then, men of Athens, it's right for me to defend myself against the first false charges brought against me and against my first accusers, and then against the later charges and the [18b] later accusers. For many accusers have come before you against me, long ago now, over many years, saying nothing true; and I fear them more than Anytus and his associates, though these are dangerous too. But those others are more dangerous, gentlemen. They took hold of most of you from childhood and kept persuading you, accusing me—with nothing true—that there is a certain Socrates, a wise man, a thinker on the things in the heavens, who has investigated everything beneath the earth and makes the weaker argument the stronger. [18c] These men, men of Athens, the ones who spread this rumor, are my dangerous accusers. For those who hear it believe that people who investigate such things don't even believe in the gods.[1] Then again, these accusers are many, and they have been accusing me for a long time now; what's more, they spoke to you at the age when you would be most likely to believe them, when some of you were children or young men, prosecuting a case that simply went by default, with no one there to defend it. And the most unreasonable thing of all is that it isn't even possible to know their [18d]

1 Anytus, a prominent democratic politician, was one of Socrates' three prosecutors, with Meletus and Lycon.

names and tell them to you—unless one of them happens to be a comic poet. All those who used envy and slander to persuade you—and those who, persuaded themselves, persuaded others—all of these are the hardest to deal with. I can't bring any of them up here, or cross-examine a single one of them; I simply have to fight with shadows, as it were, making my defense and cross-examining with no one to answer. So you too should accept, as I say, that my accusers are of two kinds: some who accused me recently, and others [18e] long ago, the ones I'm speaking of. And you should agree that I must defend myself against those first; after all, you heard them accusing me earlier, and far more than these later ones.

Well then. I must make my defense, men of Athens, and try [19a] in so short a time to remove from you this slander which you have held for so long. I would like it to turn out that way, if that is better for both you and me, and I would like to accomplish something by my defense. But I think it is hard, and I'm well aware what sort of task it is. Still, let that go however the god pleases; I must obey the law and make my defense.

Let us go back to the beginning, then, and see what the accusation is from which [19b] the slander against me arose—the slander Meletus relied on when he brought this indictment against me. Well then: what exactly did the slanderers say when they slandered me? I must read out their sworn charge, as if they were formal prosecutors: "Socrates is guilty of wrongdoing and is a busybody, investigating the things beneath the earth and in the heavens, making the weaker argument the stronger, [19c] and teaching others these same things." It runs something like that. You saw this yourselves in Aristophanes' comedy: a Socrates swinging around up there, claiming he was walking on air and spouting a great deal of other nonsense—things I don't understand in the least, great or small.[2] And I don't say this to disparage such knowledge, if anyone is wise about such things—may I never have to defend myself against such serious charges from

2 Aristophanes' comedy *Clouds* (423 BC) portrayed Socrates suspended in a basket, running a school of cosmic speculation and verbal trickery.

Meletus!—but the fact is, men of Athens, I have no part in any of this. [19d] Once again I offer most of you as witnesses, and I ask all of you who have ever heard me in conversation—and there are many of you—to tell one another and explain. So tell one another whether any of you has ever heard me discussing such things, briefly or at length; and from this you will recognize that the other things most people say about me are of the same kind.

No, none of this is true; and if you've heard from anyone that I try to educate people and charge [19e] money for it, that isn't true either. Though this too seems to me a fine thing, if someone is able to educate people, like Gorgias of Leontini, Prodicus of Ceos, and Hippias of Elis. Each of these men, gentlemen, can go into any city and persuade the young—who can associate for free with whichever of their own fellow citizens they like—to abandon [20a] those associations and associate with them instead, paying money and being grateful to them besides.[3] And there's another wise man here, from Paros, who I learned was in town. I happened to meet a man who has spent more money on sophists than all the others put together, Callias the son of Hipponicus. So I asked him—he has two sons—"Callias," I said, "if your two sons had been born colts or calves, we could find and hire a trainer for them who [20b] would make them fine and good in the excellence proper to them; he would be some horse-trainer or farmer. But as it is, since they are human beings, whom do you have in mind to take as their trainer? Who has knowledge of this kind of excellence, the excellence of a human being and a citizen? I assume you've looked into it, since you have sons. Is there someone," I said, "or not?" "Certainly," he said.[4] "Who," I said, "and where is he from, and what does he charge?" "Evenus, Socrates," he said, "from Paros. Five minas." And I thought Evenus a lucky man, if he really [20c] has this skill and teaches it for so modest a fee. I, at any rate, would be preening and giving

3 Gorgias, Prodicus, and Hippias were celebrated traveling teachers—"sophists"—who charged fees for their instruction.

4 Callias, reputedly the richest man in Athens, was a famous patron of sophists.

myself airs if I knew these things. But I don't know them, men of Athens.[5]

THE ORACLE AT DELPHI

Socrates explains that Chaerephon asked the Delphic oracle, which said no one was wiser than Socrates.

Now perhaps one of you might interject: "But Socrates, what is it you do? Where have these slanders against you come from? Surely all this talk and rumor didn't arise while you were busying yourself with nothing more out of the ordinary than anyone else—not unless you were doing something different from most people. So tell us what 20d it is, so that we don't jump to conclusions about you." That seems to me a just thing to say, and I will try to show you what it is that has given me this name and this slander. So listen. Perhaps some of you will think I'm joking; but you can be sure that I will tell you the whole truth. For I have acquired this name, men of Athens, for no other reason than a certain wisdom. What sort of wisdom is that? The sort, perhaps, that is human wisdom. For it really may be that I'm wise in that. But the men I was speaking of 20e just now might be wise with some wisdom greater than human—or I don't know what to call it. For I certainly don't have that knowledge, and whoever says I do is lying and saying it to slander me. And please, men of Athens, don't make a disturbance, even if I seem to you to be making some big claim. For the words I'm about to speak aren't my own; I will refer you to a speaker you can trust. As witness to my wisdom—whether it is wisdom at all, and what kind—I will present to you the god at Delphi. You know Chaerephon, I think. He 21a was my friend from youth, and a friend of your democratic party too; he shared in the recent exile and came back with you.[6] And you know what Chaerephon was like, how intense in whatever he set out to do. Well, once he went to

5 Five minas was a large sum—well over a year's wages for a working man.

6 Chaerephon went into exile with the democrats during the oligarchic coup of 404 BC and returned with them when democracy was restored in 403.

Delphi and dared to ask the oracle this—and, as I said, don't make a disturbance, gentlemen—he asked whether anyone was wiser than I. And the Pythia answered that no one was wiser. His brother here will testify to you about this, since Chaerephon himself has died. 21b [7]

TESTING THE ORACLE

Socrates questions politicians, poets and craftsmen, finding each thinks he knows what he does not.

Now consider why I'm telling you this: I'm going to explain to you where the slander against me came from. When I heard this, I thought it over like this: "What on earth does the god mean? What is his riddle? I'm aware that I'm not wise in anything, great or small. So what can he mean by saying I'm the wisest? He surely isn't lying; that would not be right for him." For a long time I was at a loss as to what he meant. Then, very reluctantly, I turned to investigating it in something like this way. I went to one of those reputed to be wise, thinking that 21c there, if anywhere, I would refute the oracle and point out to it: "This man is wiser than I am, but you said I was." So I examined this man—I needn't mention his name; he was one of the politicians, and in examining him and talking with him, men of Athens, I had an experience something like this—it seemed to me that this man seemed wise to many other people and most of all to himself, but was not. And then I tried to show him that he thought he was wise but was not. 21d As a result I became hated by him and by many of those present. So as I went away I reasoned to myself: I am wiser than this man. It's likely that neither of us knows anything fine and good; but he thinks he knows something when he doesn't, whereas I, just as I don't know, don't think I do either. So I seem to be wiser than he is at least in this one small way: that what I don't know, I don't think I know either. Then I went to another man, one of those reputed to be

7 The Pythia was Apollo's priestess at Delphi, through whom the oracle spoke.

wiser than him, and 21e the very same thing seemed true to me; and there I became hated by him and by many others as well.

After that I went on to one after another, aware of the hatred I was incurring, and pained and afraid because of it; but all the same it seemed necessary to put the god's business first. So I had to go, in examining what the oracle meant, to all those with a reputation 22a for knowing something. And by the dog, men of Athens—for I must tell you the truth—this is what happened to me. As I searched in accordance with the god, those with the highest reputations seemed to me almost the most deficient, while others who were thought inferior seemed to be better men when it came to understanding. I must describe my wanderings to you, as though I were performing a series of labors, so that the oracle might prove to be beyond refutation.[8] After the politicians I went to the poets—the tragic poets, the 22b dithyrambic poets, and the rest—thinking that there I would catch myself red-handed being more ignorant than they were. So I would take up those of their poems that seemed to me most carefully worked, and ask them what they meant, so that I might learn something from them at the same time. I'm ashamed to tell you the truth, gentlemen; still, it must be told. Almost everyone present, you might say, would have talked better than the poets themselves about the poems they had made. So I soon realized about the poets too that it wasn't by wisdom that they made 22c what they made, but by some natural gift and in a state of inspiration, like the seers and oracle-singers. For these too say many fine things, but know nothing of what they are saying.[9] The poets too, it was clear to me, were affected in something like this way. And at the same time I noticed that because of their poetry they thought themselves the wisest of men in other things as well, where they were not. So I left there too, thinking I had the same advantage over them as over the politicians.

Finally I went to the craftsmen. For I was aware 22d that I knew practically nothing, and I knew I would find that they knew

8 "By the dog" was a characteristic oath of Socrates.

many fine things. And I wasn't wrong about that: they knew things I didn't know, and in that respect they were wiser than I. But, men of Athens, the good craftsmen too seemed to me to have the same failing as the poets: because he practiced his craft well, each of them thought himself wisest in the other, most important matters too—and this false note of theirs obscured [22e] the wisdom they did have. So I asked myself on behalf of the oracle whether I would prefer to be as I am, neither wise with their wisdom nor ignorant with their ignorance, or to have both, as they do. And I answered myself and the oracle that I was better off as I am.

From this examination, men of Athens, [23a] a great deal of hostility has arisen against me, of the harshest and most oppressive kind, so that many slanders have come from it, and I've been given this name: "wise." For on each occasion those present think that I myself am wise in the things in which I refute someone else. But it is likely, gentlemen, that in reality the god is wise, and that in this oracle he is saying this: that human wisdom is worth little or nothing. And he appears to be speaking of Socrates here, and to have made use of [23b] my name, taking me as an example, as if he were saying: "Human beings, the wisest among you is the one who, like Socrates, has recognized that in truth he is worth nothing when it comes to wisdom." So even now I still go around seeking and searching, in accordance with the god, for anyone, citizen or foreigner, I think is wise; and when he doesn't seem so to me, I come to the god's aid and show him that he is not wise. And because of this occupation I've had no leisure to do anything worth mentioning in the city's affairs, or in my own; instead I live in [23c] utter poverty because of my service to the god.

On top of this, the young men who follow me around of their own accord—those who have the most leisure, the sons of the richest families—enjoy hearing people being examined, and they themselves often imitate me and then try to examine oth-

9 Dithyrambs were choral hymns, originally to Dionysus, performed in competition at Athenian festivals.

ers. And then, I think, they find a great abundance of people who think they know something but know little or nothing. So as a result, the people they question get angry with me, not with themselves, [23d] and say that there's a certain Socrates, an utterly vile man, who corrupts the young. And when someone asks them what he does, what he teaches, to have this effect, they have nothing to say—they don't know—but so as not to seem at a loss, they trot out the charges that lie ready to hand against all philosophers: "things in the heavens and beneath the earth," and "not believing in gods," and "making the weaker argument the stronger." The truth, I suppose, they wouldn't care to tell: that they're being exposed as pretending to know when they know nothing. And so, since they're ambitious, I think, [23e] and vehement, and numerous, and speak about me in a concerted and persuasive way, they have filled your ears with their slanders—vehement slanders, and of long standing. It was on this basis that Meletus came after me, along with Anytus and Lycon: Meletus aggrieved on behalf of the poets, Anytus on behalf of the craftsmen and [24a] the politicians, Lycon on behalf of the orators. So, as I said when I began, I'd be amazed if I could clear this slander out of your minds in so short a time, when it has grown so large. There you have the truth, men of Athens, and I'm telling it to you without hiding anything, large or small, and without holding anything back. And yet I'm fairly sure that it's for these very things that I'm hated—which is itself evidence that I'm telling the truth, and that this is the slander against me, and these [24b] are its causes. Whether you look into it now or later, this is what you'll find.

QUESTIONING MELETUS

Socrates cross-examines Meletus on the charges of corrupting the young and not believing in the gods.

As for the charges my first accusers brought, let this be a sufficient defense before you. Next I'll try to defend myself against Meletus—that good man, who loves his city, as he says—and

against the later accusers. So once again, as if these were a second set of accusers, let's take up their sworn charge in its turn. It runs something like this: it says that Socrates is guilty of wrongdoing by corrupting the young, and by not believing in the gods the city [24c] believes in, but in other, new divine things. That is the charge. Let's examine each point of it one by one.

SOCRATES He says, then, that I'm guilty of wrongdoing by corrupting the young. But I say, men of Athens, that it's Meletus who is guilty of wrongdoing, because he jokes about serious matters, lightly hauling people into court, pretending to be serious about and to care for things he has never cared about in the least. That this is so, I'll try to show you as well. Come here, Meletus, and tell me: isn't it true that you [24d] regard it as of the greatest importance that the young should be as good as possible?[10]

MELETUS I do.

SOCRATES Then come, tell these men: who makes them better? Obviously you know, since it's something you care about. You've found the one who corrupts them, as you say—me—and you bring me before these men and accuse me. So come, tell them who makes them better; point him out to them.—You see, Meletus? You're silent; you have nothing to say. Don't you find that shameful—and proof enough of exactly what I'm saying, that you've never cared about it at all? Come on, my good man, tell us: who makes them better?

MELETUS The laws. [24e]

SOCRATES That's not what I'm asking, my excellent friend. I mean which human being—someone who, first of all, knows this very thing, the laws.

MELETUS These men here, Socrates—the jurors.

SOCRATES What are you saying, Meletus? These men are able to educate the young, and make them better?

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10 The name Meletus sounds like the Greek *melei*, "it is a care to"; Socrates plays on this throughout the exchange.

MELETUS Very much so.

SOCRATES All of them, or some of them and not others?

MELETUS All of them.

SOCRATES By Hera, that's good news—a great abundance of benefactors! And what about this: do the listeners here make them better, [25a] or not?

MELETUS They do too.

SOCRATES And what about the members of the Council?[11]

MELETUS The Council members too.

SOCRATES Well then, Meletus, surely it isn't the people in the Assembly, the assemblymen, who corrupt the young? Or do they too, all of them, make them better?

MELETUS They do too.

SOCRATES So it seems that every Athenian makes them fine and good except me, and I alone corrupt them. Is that what you're saying?

MELETUS That's exactly what I'm saying—emphatically.

SOCRATES You've convicted me of great misfortune! But answer me this: do you think it's like this with horses too? That [25b] all people make them better, and one person ruins them? Or is it the complete opposite: one person is able to make them better, or a very few—the horse-trainers—while most people, if they have to do with horses and use them, ruin them? Isn't that how it is, Meletus, both with horses and with all other animals? Of course it is, whether you and Anytus say no or yes. It would be great good fortune for the young if only one person corrupted them and everyone else [25c] did them good. But no, Meletus: you've shown well enough that you've never given a thought to the young, and you plainly reveal your own lack of care—that

11 The Council was a body of 500 citizens, chosen by lot, that prepared business for the Assembly.

you've never cared at all about the things you're bringing me to court for.

Now tell us further, Meletus, for Zeus's sake: is it better to live among good citizens or bad ones? Answer, my friend—I'm not asking anything hard. Don't bad people do some harm to whoever is closest to them at the time, and good people some good?

MELETUS Certainly. 25d

SOCRATES Is there anyone, then, who wants to be harmed by the people he spends time with rather than benefited? Answer, my good man—the law, after all, requires you to answer. Is there anyone who wants to be harmed?

MELETUS Of course not.

SOCRATES Well then: are you bringing me here on the grounds that I corrupt the young and make them worse intentionally, or unintentionally?

MELETUS Intentionally, I say.

SOCRATES What's this, Meletus? Are you so much wiser at your age than I am at mine that you have recognized that bad people always do some harm to those nearest 25e them, and good people good, while I've reached such a pitch of ignorance that I don't even know this—that if I make any of my companions wicked, I risk getting some harm from him—so that I do this great harm intentionally, as you claim? I don't believe you on this, Meletus, and I don't think anyone else in the world does either. Either I don't corrupt them, or if I do, 26a it's unintentionally—so either way you're lying. And if I corrupt them unintentionally, the law doesn't call for bringing people here for mistakes of that kind—unintentional ones—but for taking them aside in private to instruct and admonish them. Clearly, once I learn better, I'll stop doing what I do unintentionally. But you avoided spending time with me and teaching me; you weren't willing to. Instead you bring me here, where the law says to bring those who need punishment, not instruction.

But really, men of Athens, it's already clear, 26b as I was saying, that Meletus has never cared about these things, much or little.

Still, tell us, Meletus: how do you say I corrupt the young? Or is it obvious, going by the indictment you wrote, that I do it by teaching them not to believe in the gods the city believes in, but in other, new divine things? Isn't this what you mean—that it's by teaching this that I corrupt them?

MELETUS Yes, that's exactly what I mean—emphatically.

SOCRATES Then in the name of these very gods we're now discussing, Meletus, speak more clearly still, both to me and to these 26c men here. For I can't make out whether you're saying that I teach people to believe that some gods exist—in which case I myself believe that gods exist, and am not a complete atheist, and am not guilty of wrongdoing on that score—only not the ones the city believes in, but different ones, and that's your charge against me, that they're different; or whether you're saying that I don't believe in gods at all myself, and teach this to others.

MELETUS That's what I'm saying: that you don't believe in gods at all. 26d

SOCRATES Meletus, you astonishing man, what makes you say that? Don't I even believe that the sun and the moon are gods, as the rest of mankind does?

MELETUS No, by Zeus, judges, he doesn't—since he says the sun is a stone and the moon is earth.

SOCRATES Do you think you're accusing Anaxagoras, my dear Meletus? Do you think so little of these men—suppose them so unlettered—that they don't know that the books of Anaxagoras of Clazomenae are full of such theories? And what's more, the young learn these things from me, do they—things they can buy, now and then, for a drachma at most 26e in the orchestra, and then laugh at Socrates if he pretends they're his own, especially

when they're so outlandish? But for Zeus's sake, is that how I seem to you? I believe no god exists?[12]

MELETUS No, by Zeus, none—not in any way at all.

SOCRATES You're not to be believed, Meletus—not even, it seems to me, by yourself. Men of Athens, this man strikes me as thoroughly insolent and unrestrained, and he has written this indictment out of nothing but a kind of insolence and lack of restraint and youthful rashness. [27a] He's like someone who has made up a riddle to test me: "Will Socrates, the wise one, see that I'm joking and contradicting myself, or will I fool him and everyone else listening?" For he seems to me to contradict himself in the indictment, as if he were to say: "Socrates is guilty of wrongdoing by not believing in gods, but believing in gods." And that is the talk of someone playing games.

Look into it with me, gentlemen—how he seems to me to be saying this. And you, Meletus, answer us. And you, as I asked [27b] you at the start, please remember not to make an uproar if I conduct the discussion in my usual way.

Is there anyone in the world, Meletus, who believes that there are human affairs, but doesn't believe in human beings? Make him answer, gentlemen, and not keep raising one uproar after another. Is there anyone who doesn't believe in horses, but does believe in horse affairs? Or doesn't believe there are flute-players, but believes in flute-playing affairs? There isn't, my excellent man. If you don't want to answer, I'll tell you, and these others here. But answer the next one, at least: [27c] is there anyone who believes that there are divine affairs, but doesn't believe in spirits?[13]

MELETUS There isn't.

SOCRATES How good of you to answer—barely, and forced to by these men! So you say that I believe in and teach divine things,

12 Anaxagoras, a philosopher from Clazomenae who lived in Athens, held that the sun was a fiery stone. The "orchestra" was probably an open space in the marketplace where books were sold.

13 "Divine" here translates *daimonios*, the adjective formed from *daimon*, "spirit."

whether new or old; at any rate, by your account I believe in divine things, and you swore to it in your charge. But if I believe in divine things, then surely it's absolutely necessary that I believe in spirits too. Isn't that so? It is—I'll take it that you agree, since you don't answer. And don't we regard [27d] spirits as either gods or children of gods? Yes or no?

MELETUS Certainly.

SOCRATES So if I believe in spirits, as you say, then if spirits are some kind of gods, this would be what I mean by your riddling and joking: saying that I don't believe in gods and then again that I do believe in gods, since I believe in spirits. And if, on the other hand, spirits are children of gods—bastard children of some sort, born of nymphs or of whatever other mothers they're said to come from—what human being would believe that there are children of gods, but not gods? That would be as [27e] absurd as believing in the offspring of horses and donkeys—mules—but not believing that there are horses and donkeys. No, Meletus, it can only be that you wrote this indictment to test us, or because you were at a loss for any real wrongdoing to charge me with. But that you could persuade anyone with even a little sense that one and the same man can believe in divine things and things of the gods, and yet that same man believe in neither [28a] spirits nor gods nor heroes—there's no way that can be done.

HOLDING HIS POST

Socrates says a good man weighs only right and wrong, not death, and vows to keep philosophizing.

But really, men of Athens, that I'm not guilty of wrongdoing under Meletus' indictment doesn't seem to me to call for much of a defense; this is enough. But what I said earlier—that a great deal of hatred has built up against me, and among many people—you can be sure that's true. And that is what will convict me, if anything does: not Meletus, nor Anytus, but the slander and envy of the many. It has convicted many other good [28b] men, and

I think it will go on doing so. There's no danger it will stop with me.

Perhaps someone might say: "Aren't you ashamed, Socrates, to have pursued the kind of occupation that has now put you in danger of death?" To him I'd make a just reply: "You're wrong, my friend, if you think that a man who is of even a little use should weigh up the risk of living or dying, rather than considering only this, whenever he acts: whether what he does is just or unjust, the deed of a good man or of a bad one. By your account, [28c] the demigods who died at Troy would be worthless creatures—the son of Thetis above all. He so despised danger, compared with enduring anything shameful, that when he was eager to kill Hector and his mother, a goddess, spoke to him—something like this, I believe: 'My child, if you avenge the killing of your comrade Patroclus and kill Hector, you will die yourself; for straight after Hector,' she says, 'your own doom is ready'—he, hearing this, made light of death and danger, fearing far more [28d] to live as a coward and leave his friends unavenged. 'Let me die at once,' he says, 'once I've given the wrongdoer his due, so that I don't stay here, a laughingstock beside the curved ships, a burden on the earth.' You don't suppose he gave any thought to death and danger, do you?"[14]

This is how things truly stand, men of Athens. Wherever a man stations himself, believing it best, or is stationed by his commander, there, it seems to me, he must stay and face the danger, taking nothing into account—not death, nor anything else—before disgrace. So I would have done a terrible thing, men of [28e] Athens, if, when the commanders you elected to command me stationed me—at Potidaea and at Amphipolis and at Delium—I stayed where they stationed me, like anyone else, and ran the risk of dying; but when the god stationed me, as I thought and understood, to live my life philosophizing and examining myself and others, I then, out of fear of death [29a] or

14 The son of Thetis is Achilles; the lines adapt Homer, *Iliad* 18.94–104.

anything else whatever, deserted my post.[15] That would be terrible, and then someone really could justly bring me into court for not believing that gods exist—disobeying the oracle, and fearing death, and thinking I was wise when I'm not. For to fear death, gentlemen, is nothing other than to seem wise when one is not: it is to seem to know what one doesn't know. No one knows about death—not even whether it may be the greatest of all goods for a human being—yet people fear it as if they knew well 29b that it is the greatest of evils. And surely this is ignorance, the disgraceful kind: thinking one knows what one doesn't know. But I, gentlemen, here too, perhaps, differ from most people in just this respect; and if I were to claim to be wiser than anyone in anything, it would be in this: that not knowing enough about things in Hades, I don't think I know, either. But doing wrong, and disobeying one's better, whether god or man—that I know is bad and shameful. So rather than the evils I know to be evils, I will never fear or flee things that, for all I know, may turn out to be good. So even if 29c you acquit me now, disbelieving Anytus—who said that either I should never have been brought here in the first place, or, since I have been, that you couldn't possibly avoid putting me to death, telling you that if I got off, your sons would at once take up what Socrates teaches and all be utterly corrupted—if, in response to this, you were to say to me: "Socrates, this time we won't listen to Anytus; we acquit you, but on this condition: that you no longer spend your time in this inquiry, or philosophize; But if you are 29d caught still doing this, you will die."—if, as I said, you were to let me go on these terms, I would say to you: "Men of Athens, I hold you dear and I love you, but I will obey the god rather than you. As long as I draw breath and am able, I will never stop doing philosophy, urging you on and pointing things out to whichever of you I happen to meet, saying just what I always say: 'My excellent friend, you are an Athenian, a citizen of the greatest city, the one most renowned for wisdom and power. Aren't you

15 Socrates served as an infantryman at Potidaea (432–430 BC), Delium (424) and Amphipolis (422), campaigns in the war between Athens and Sparta.

ashamed to care about getting as much money as you can, [29e] and reputation and honor, while for understanding and truth, and for your soul—that it be as good as possible—you neither care nor give a thought?'" "And if any of you disputes this and says he does care, I won't let him go straight off, and I won't walk away. I'll question him, examine him, and cross-examine him. And if he doesn't seem to me to possess excellence, [30a] though he says he does, I'll reproach him for treating what is worth most as least important, and what is more trivial as more important. I will do this to anyone I meet, young or old, foreigner or fellow citizen—but more so to you citizens, since you are closer to me by birth. For this is what the god commands, make no mistake. And I believe no greater good has ever come to you in this city than my service to the god. All I do is go around trying to persuade you, young and old alike, not to care for your bodies [30b] or your money before, or as intensely as, your soul—how it may be as good as possible. I tell you: 'Excellence does not come from money; it is excellence that makes money and everything else good for human beings, in private and in public.' Now if by saying this I am corrupting the young, then this would be harmful. But if anyone claims I say anything other than this, he's talking nonsense. In view of this," I would say, "men of Athens, either do as Anytus says or don't, and either acquit me or don't—knowing that I [30c] would not act otherwise, not even if I am to die many times over."

THE GADFLY

Socrates calls himself a gadfly sent by the god to rouse the sluggish city.

Don't make a commotion, men of Athens. Hold to what I asked of you: not to make a commotion at what I say, but to listen. In fact I think you'll benefit from listening. I'm about to tell you some other things too, at which you may well shout out—but please don't do that. Make no mistake: if you kill me, being the sort of man I say I am, you will not harm me more than you

harm yourselves. Neither Meletus nor Anytus could harm me at all—he wouldn't be able to—for I don't think divine law permits 30d a better man to be harmed by a worse. He might, perhaps, kill me, or banish me, or strip me of my rights as a citizen. He, perhaps, and maybe someone else, think these are great evils. I don't. I think it is far worse to do what this man is doing now—trying to kill a man unjustly. So now, men of Athens, far from defending myself, as someone might think, I am defending you —so that you don't go wrong about the god's 30e gift to you by condemning me. For if you kill me, you won't easily find another like me: someone who has simply—even if it sounds rather comic to put it this way—been attached to the city by the god, as if to a horse that is large and well-bred but sluggish because of its size, and in need of being roused by some gadfly. That is just the role I think the god has given me in the city: I am the one who never stops rousing you, persuading you, and reproaching each one of you, 31a settling on you everywhere, all day long. Another like that won't easily come your way, gentlemen. If you take my advice, you'll spare me. But perhaps you'll be annoyed, like people woken from a doze, and you'll swat me—doing as Anytus says—and easily kill me. Then you would spend the rest of your lives asleep, unless the god, out of care for you, sent you someone else. That I really am the sort of man to have been given to the city by the god, you can see 31b from this: it doesn't look like something merely human, that I have neglected all my own affairs and put up with the neglect of my household for so many years now, while always attending to yours—going to each of you privately, like a father or an older brother, urging you to care about excellence. Now if I were getting something out of this, and taking pay for these exhortations, that would make some sense. But as it is, you can see for yourselves that my accusers, shameless as they've been in all their other accusations, couldn't bring themselves to be shameless enough on this one point— 31c to produce a witness that I ever charged anyone a fee, or asked for one. I think I offer a good enough witness that I'm telling the truth: my poverty.

THE DIVINE SIGN

Socrates explains that his divine sign has always kept him out of politics.

Now it may seem odd that I go around giving this advice in private and busying myself with others' affairs, but in public I don't venture to go up before your assembly and advise the city. The reason is something you have often heard me speak of, in many places: that something godlike and [31d] divine comes to me, a voice—the very thing Meletus made a mockery of in his indictment. It began in my childhood: a kind of voice that comes, and whenever it comes it always turns me away from what I'm about to do, but never urges me on. This is what opposes my taking part in politics—and a very fine thing it is, I think, that it does. For make no mistake, men of Athens: if I had tried long ago to engage in politics, I would have perished long ago, and done no good [31e] either to you or to myself. And don't be angry with me for telling the truth. There is no man who will survive if he genuinely opposes you, or any other mass of people, and tries to stop many unjust and unlawful things from happening in the city. [32a] Anyone who really fights for what is just, if he is going to survive even for a short time, must live as a private citizen, not a public man.

ARGINUSAE AND THE THIRTY

Socrates recounts defying the Assembly over the generals' trial and the Thirty over Leon of Salamis.

I'll give you strong proof of this—not words, but what you respect: deeds. Listen, then, to what happened to me, so that you know I would not give way to anyone against what is just out of fear of death, and that if I refused to give way I would even be ready to perish. What I'll tell you is tiresome stuff, the kind you hear in the law courts, but it is true. I have never, men of Athens, held any other office [32b] in the city, but I did serve on the Council. And it happened that our tribe, Antiochis, was presiding

when you decided to try the ten generals as a group—the ones who had failed to pick up the men from the naval battle. That was unlawful, as you all came to think later.[16] Then I alone of the presiding committee opposed your doing anything against the laws, and I voted against it. The orators were ready to lay information against me and have me arrested, and you were urging them on and shouting, but I thought I should run the risk on the side of 32c the law and what is just, rather than side with you in your unjust proposals out of fear of prison or death. That was while the city was still a democracy. But when the oligarchy came in, the Thirty in turn summoned me and four others to the Rotunda and ordered us to bring Leon of Salamis from Salamis to be put to death. They gave many such orders to many others too, wanting to implicate as many people as possible in their crimes.[17] But then 32d I showed once again, not in words but in action, that I don't care about death in the slightest—if that's not too blunt a way of putting it—but that my whole concern is not to do anything unjust or unholy. That regime, powerful as it was, did not frighten me into doing anything unjust. When we came out of the Rotunda, the other four went off to Salamis and brought Leon back, while I went off home. And I might well have been put to death for it, if the regime hadn't fallen soon afterward. And 32e you will have many witnesses to this.

So do you think I would have survived all these years if I had engaged in public affairs, and, acting as a good man should, had come to the aid of what is just, and made this, as one must, my highest concern? Far from it, men of Athens. Nor would any other 33a man. But throughout my whole life, if I ever did anything in public, I'll be shown to be that sort of man, and the same in private: never conceding anything contrary to what is just to anyone—whether to others, or to any of those my slanderers call my students. I have never been anyone's teacher. But if

16 The battle of Arginusae (406 BC). Members of the Council from each of the ten tribes took turns serving as its presiding committee.

17 The Thirty: the oligarchy that ruled Athens in 404–403 BC after its defeat by Sparta. The Rotunda (Tholos) was where the presiding committee met and dined.

anyone, young or old, wanted to hear me talking and going about my own business, I never begrudged it to anyone. Nor do I talk with people when I'm paid [33b] and not when I'm not. I make myself available to rich and poor alike to ask me questions, and, if someone prefers, to answer mine and hear what I have to say. And whether any of these people turns out good or not, I cannot justly be held responsible, since I never promised any of them any instruction and never taught them any. If anyone says he ever learned anything from me, or heard privately something that everyone else didn't hear too, you can be sure he isn't telling the truth.

Why is it, then, that some people enjoy spending so much [33c] time with me? You've heard, men of Athens—I told you the whole truth: they enjoy hearing people examined who think they are wise but aren't. It is not unpleasant. But for me, as I say, this is something I have been commanded to do by the god—through oracles, through dreams, and in every way in which any divine dispensation has ever commanded a human being to do anything at all. This, men of Athens, is both true and easy to test. For if among the young [33d] I really am corrupting some and have corrupted others, then surely some of them, now grown older and aware that I once gave them bad advice when they were young, ought to be coming up here now to accuse me and get their revenge. Or, if they themselves were unwilling, some of their families—fathers, brothers, and other relatives—if their kin had suffered some harm at my hands, ought to remember it now and take revenge. In any case, many of them are here; I can see them. First, Crito here, my contemporary [33e] and from my own district, father of Critobulus here; then Lysanias of Sphettus, father of Aeschines here; and Antiphon of Cephisia here, too, father of Epigenes. Then there are these others, whose brothers have spent their time in this pursuit: Nicostratus, son of Theozotides, brother of Theodotus—Theodotus has died, so he at least couldn't have begged his brother to hold back—and Paralius here, son of Demodocus, whose brother was Theages. And here is [34a] Adeimantus, son of Ariston, whose brother is Plato here,

and Aeantodorus, whose brother is Apollodorus here. I could name many others to you, and Meletus certainly should have produced one of them as a witness in his own speech. If he forgot then, let him produce one now—I yield the floor—and let him tell us if he has any such testimony.[18] But you'll find the very opposite, gentlemen: all of them ready to help me—the corrupter, the man doing harm to their families, as Meletus and 34b Anytus say. The corrupted themselves might well have a reason to help me. But the uncorrupted, older men by now, their relatives—what other reason do they have for helping me but the right and just one: that they know Meletus is lying and I am telling the truth?

NO APPEAL TO PITY

Socrates refuses to parade his family before the jury, and the jury votes to convict.

Well then, gentlemen. What I have to say in my defense is roughly this, and perhaps other things like it. But perhaps one of 34c you will be resentful when he remembers his own case—if, in a trial even less serious than this one, he begged and pleaded with the jurors with many tears, bringing up his little children to win as much pity as possible, and many of his other relatives and friends besides, while I, it seems, will do none of these things, even though I'm facing, as it might appear, the ultimate danger. Someone thinking about this might harden himself against me, and, angered by these very things, cast his vote in 34d anger. If any of you feels this way—I don't expect it of you, but if so—I think it would be reasonable to say to him: "My good man, I do have some family, of course. As Homer puts it, I too was not born 'from oak or from rock,' but from human beings. So I have family, and sons too, men of Athens—three of them: one already a young man, two still children. And yet I won't bring any of them up here and beg you to acquit me." Why, then, won't I do

18 Plato, the author, names himself here as present at the trial.

any of these things?[19] Not out of arrogance, men [34e] of Athens, nor out of disrespect for you. Whether or not I face death with confidence is another matter. But as regards reputation—mine, yours, and the whole city's—I don't think it's honorable for me to do any of these things, at my age and with the name I have, whether it's true or false. At any rate, people have [35a] made up their minds that Socrates stands out in some way from most people. So if those of you who are thought to stand out in wisdom or courage or any other excellence at all behave like that, it would be shameful. I have often seen men of that sort when they are on trial—men who are thought to be somebody, yet who behave in astonishing ways, as if they thought something terrible would happen to them if they died, as if they would be immortal so long as you didn't kill them. Such men seem to me to bring shame on the city, so that even a foreigner [35b] might suppose that the Athenians who are outstanding in excellence, whom the Athenians themselves pick out from among themselves for offices and other honors, are no better than women. You should not do these things, men of Athens, those of you who have any standing at all; nor, if we do them, should you allow it. You should make it clear instead that you'll be far readier to convict the man who stages these pitiful dramas and makes the city a laughingstock than the one who keeps his composure.

Reputation aside, gentlemen, it doesn't seem to me just [35c] to beg the juror, or to get off by begging; one should inform and persuade. The juror doesn't sit there to hand out justice as a favor, but to decide what is just. And he has sworn not to do favors for whomever he pleases, but to judge according to the laws. So we shouldn't get you into the habit of breaking your oath, and you shouldn't get into the habit; neither of us would be acting piously. So don't expect me, men of Athens, to do things before you that I believe are neither honorable nor [35d] just nor holy—least of all, by Zeus, when I am being prosecuted for impiety by Meletus here. For clearly, if I persuaded you and over-

19 The quotation is from Homer's *Odyssey* (19.163), where Penelope asks the disguised Odysseus about his origins.

powered you by begging, after you have sworn an oath, I would be teaching you not to believe that there are gods, and in my very defense I would simply be accusing myself of not believing in gods. But that is far from the truth. I do believe in them, men of Athens, as none of my accusers does. And I leave it to you and to the god to judge my case in whatever way will be best for me and for you.

The Counter-Penalty

Found guilty, Socrates must propose his own penalty.

35e Many things contribute, men of Athens, to my not being upset at what 36a has happened—that you have convicted me. Above all, what has happened is not unexpected. What surprises me much more is the number of votes on each side. I didn't think it would be this close; I thought it would be by a wide margin. As it is, it seems, if only thirty votes had gone the other way, I would have been acquitted. As far as Meletus is concerned, I think I've been acquitted even now. And not only acquitted: it is plain to everyone that if Anytus and Lycon hadn't come up to accuse me, he would have been fined 36b a thousand drachmas for failing to get a fifth of the votes.[1]

WHAT SOCRATES DESERVES

Asked to propose a penalty, Socrates says he deserves free meals in the Prytaneum.

So the man proposes death as my penalty. Very well. And what counter-penalty shall I propose to you, men of Athens? Clearly what I deserve, isn't it? What, then? What do I deserve to suffer or to pay, because I took it into my head not to lead a quiet life? I neglected what most people care about—making money and managing an estate, generalships and speeches before the Assembly and the other offices, and the sworn political clubs and factions that spring up in the city—because I believed

1 Socrates has been found guilty; each side now proposes a penalty. A prosecutor who won less than a fifth of the votes paid a heavy fine.

myself [36c] really too decent a man to survive if I went in for those things. I didn't go where I would be of no use either to you or to myself. Instead I went to each of you privately, to do what I say is the greatest of services: I tried to persuade each of you not to care for any of his possessions before caring for himself, how he might be as good and as full of understanding as possible, nor for the city's affairs before the city itself, and to care for everything else in the same [36d] way. So what do I deserve to suffer, being a man like that? Something good, men of Athens, if I really must propose what I truly deserve—and a good of a kind that would suit me, at that. What, then, suits a poor man who is your benefactor and needs leisure to go on exhorting you? There is nothing more fitting, men of Athens, than for such a man to be given his meals in the Prytaneum—far more fitting than for any of you who has won at Olympia with a single horse, or a pair, or a four-horse team. He makes you seem happy; I make you [36e] be happy. And he has no need of the food; I do. So if I must propose what I justly deserve, this is what [37a] I propose: meals in the Prytaneum.[2]

Perhaps in saying this, too, you think I'm talking much as I did about pity and pleading—out of sheer arrogance. That isn't how it is, men of Athens; it's more like this. I am convinced that I never willingly do wrong to any human being, but I can't convince you of it, because we have talked with each other for only a short time. I think that if you had a law, as some other people do, that a capital case must be decided not in a single day [37b] but over many, you would have been convinced. As it is, it isn't easy to dispel great slanders in a short time. Convinced as I am that I do no one wrong, I am certainly far from going to wrong myself—from saying against myself that I deserve something bad and proposing some such penalty for myself. Out of fear of what? Of suffering what Meletus proposes for me, when I say I don't know whether it is a good thing or a bad one? Instead of that, am I to choose something I know very well to be bad, and propose that?

2 The Prytaneum was the city's town hall, where free meals were given at public expense to honored citizens such as Olympic victors.

Imprisonment? [37c] And why should I live in prison, a slave to whoever holds office there at the time, the Eleven? A fine, then, and prison until I pay it? But for me that comes to the same thing I just mentioned, since I have no money to pay it with. Shall I propose exile, then? You might well accept that. I would have to be gripped by a great love of life, men of Athens, to be so irrational that I couldn't work this out: you, my own fellow citizens, were unable to bear my [37d] way of spending my time and my arguments—they became too burdensome and too hateful for you, so that now you're trying to be rid of them—and others, then, will bear them easily? Far from it, men of Athens.[3] A fine life it would be for me, then, a man of my age, to go off and live moving from one city to another, always being driven out. For I know very well that wherever I go, the young will listen to me talk, just as they do here. If I drive them away, they themselves will get me driven out by persuading their elders; [37e] if I don't drive them away, their fathers and relatives will drive me out for their sake.

THE UNEXAMINED LIFE

Socrates says the unexamined life is not worth living, offers a fine, and is sentenced to death.

Someone might say, then: "But Socrates, can't you leave us and live quietly, keeping your mouth shut?" This is the hardest thing of all to convince some of you of. If I say that this would be disobeying the god, and that for this reason it is impossible for me [38a] to keep quiet, you won't believe me; you'll think I'm being ironic. If instead I say that this actually is the greatest good for a human being—to discuss excellence every day, and the other things you hear me talking about as I examine myself and others—and that the unexamined life is not worth living for a human being, you'll believe me even less. Yet that is how things are, as I say, gentlemen; it just isn't easy to convince you. And besides, I'm not accustomed to thinking I deserve anything [38b] bad. If I

3 The Eleven were the officials in charge of the prison and of executions.

had money, I would have proposed a fine of as much as I could pay, since that would have done me no harm. But as it is, I don't —unless you're willing to set my penalty at whatever I can pay. I could perhaps pay you a mina of silver. So that is the penalty I propose.[4]

But Plato here, men of Athens, and Crito and Critobulus and Apollodorus urge me to propose thirty minas, and they themselves will stand surety. So I propose that amount, and these men will be reliable guarantors of the money to you.

4 A mina was a hundred drachmas: a real but modest sum.

Final Words

Sentenced to death, Socrates speaks to the jury one last time.

38c For the sake of a little time, men of Athens, you will get the name and the blame, from those who want to disparage the city, of having killed Socrates, a wise man—for those who want to reproach you will certainly say I'm wise, even if I'm not. If you had just waited a short while, this would have happened for you of its own accord. You can see my age: I am far along in life and close to death. I say this not 38d to all of you, but to those who voted for my death. And to these same people I say this as well. Perhaps you think, men of Athens, that I was convicted for lack of the kind of arguments with which I could have persuaded you, had I thought I should do and say anything at all to escape the charge. Far from it. I was convicted for a lack, yes—but not of arguments. It was a lack of brazenness and shamelessness, and of willingness to say to you the kind of things you would most have liked to hear: me wailing and lamenting and doing and 38e saying many other things unworthy of me, as I claim—the sort of things you are used to hearing from others. But I didn't think then that the danger justified my doing anything unworthy of a free man, nor do I regret now having defended myself this way. I would much rather die having made this defense than live by making that one. For neither in court nor in war should I or anyone else 39a contrive to escape death by doing anything whatever. In battle, too, it often becomes clear that a man could escape death by throwing down his arms and turning to beg his pursuers for mercy; and in every kind of danger there are many other devices for escaping death, if one is willing to do and say

anything at all. But I suspect, gentlemen, that the hard thing is not escaping death; far harder is escaping wickedness, [39b] for it runs faster than death. And now I, being slow and old, have been caught by the slower of the two, while my accusers, being clever and quick, have been caught by the faster—by vice. So now I go away condemned by you to pay the penalty of death, while they go away convicted by the truth of depravity and injustice. I abide by my penalty, and they by theirs. Perhaps things had to turn out this way, and I think it is fair enough. [39c]

A PROPHECY FOR THOSE WHO CONDEMNED HIM

Socrates warns those who condemned him that younger critics will soon call them to account.

Next I want to prophesy to you, you who voted to condemn me. For I am already at the point where people most often prophesy: when they are about to die. I tell you, you men who have killed me, that punishment will come upon you right after my death, far harsher, by Zeus, than the death you have dealt me. You have done this now in the belief that you will be free of having to give an account of your lives, but it will turn out quite the opposite for you, I tell you. There will be more people [39d] cross-examining you—people I have been holding back, though you didn't notice. And they will be harsher, since they are younger, and you will be more resentful. If you think that by killing people you will stop anyone from reproaching you for not living rightly, you are mistaken. That way of getting free is neither really possible nor honorable. The finest and easiest way is not to cut others down but to prepare oneself to be as good as possible. With this prophecy to you who voted to condemn me, I take my leave of you. [39e]

TO THOSE WHO VOTED TO ACQUIT

Socrates tells his supporters that his divine sign's silence shows that what has happened is good.

With those who voted to acquit me I would gladly talk over what has happened, while the officials are busy and I am not yet

going to the place where I must go to die. So stay with me, gentlemen, that long; nothing prevents us from talking together while we still can. To you, [40a] as my friends, I want to show what this thing that has happened to me really means. For to me, judges—and in calling you judges I would be using the name rightly—something remarkable has happened. My usual prophetic voice, the divine sign, was always very frequent in all the time before, and it would oppose me even in very small matters, if I was about to do something that wasn't right. But now there has happened to me what you can see for yourselves—what anyone might think, and what is generally held, to be the worst of evils. Yet [40b] the god's sign did not oppose me when I left home this morning, nor when I came up here to the court, nor at any point in my speech when I was about to say something. And yet in other speeches it has often stopped me in the middle of what I was saying. But now, in this whole affair, it hasn't opposed me anywhere, in anything I did or said. What do I take to be the reason? I'll tell you. It looks as though what has happened to me is a good thing, and there is no way we are right, [40c] those of us who think that being dead is an evil. I have had strong evidence of this. There is no way my usual sign would not have opposed me, if I were not about to do something good.

WHY DEATH IS NOT TO BE FEARED

Socrates argues death is either dreamless sleep or a journey to meet the dead, and both are good.

Let us consider it this way too, and see how much reason there is to hope that it is a good thing. Being dead is one of two things. Either it is like being nothing, and the dead man has no perception of anything at all; or, as we are told, it is a kind of change, a migration of the soul from this place here to another place. Now if there is no perception, but it is [40d] like sleep, when someone sleeping sees nothing, not even a dream, death would be a marvelous gain. For suppose someone had to pick out the night in which he slept so soundly that he didn't even dream, and set the

other nights and days of his life beside that night, and then had to consider and say how many days and nights in his life he had lived better and more pleasantly than that night. I think that not just some private person but the Great King himself would find them easy to count 40e compared with all the other days and nights. So if death is like that, I call it a gain; for then all of time appears to be no longer than a single night.[1] If, on the other hand, death is like a journey from here to another place, and what we are told is true—that all the dead are there—what greater good could there be than this, judges? If someone 41a arrives in Hades, rid of these people here who claim to be judges, and finds the true judges, who are said to give judgment there—Minos and Rhadamanthys and Aeacus and Triptolemus, and all the other demigods who were just in their own lives—would that be a poor journey? Or again, what would any of you give to be with Orpheus and Musaeus and Hesiod and Homer? I am willing to die many times over, if these things are true.[2] For 41b I myself would find it a wonderful way to spend my time there, when I met Palamedes and Ajax son of Telamon, and any other of the ancients who died because of an unjust verdict, and compared my experiences with theirs—which would not be unpleasant, I think. And, greatest of all, I could spend my time examining and searching out the people there, as I do those here, to find which of them is wise and which thinks he is but isn't. What would one give, judges, to examine the man who led 41c the great army against Troy, or Odysseus, or Sisyphus, or countless others one could name, men and women? To talk with them there, and be with them, and examine them, would be happiness beyond measure.[3] In any case, surely the people there don't put anyone to death for that. For they are happier than

1 The Great King was the king of Persia, the proverbial example of wealth and good fortune.
2 Minos, Rhadamanthys, Aeacus, and Triptolemus were legendary figures said to judge the dead; Orpheus and Musaeus were legendary poets and seers.
3 Palamedes, executed on a false charge of treason, and Ajax, who killed himself after Achilles' armor was awarded to Odysseus, were legendary victims of unjust judgments; the leader of the army against Troy is Agamemnon.

people here in other respects, and they are also immortal from then on, for the rest of time—if what we are told is true.

But you too, judges, should be hopeful about death, and keep in mind this one thing as true: that [41d] no evil can come to a good man, either in life or after death, and that his affairs are not neglected by the gods. Nor has what has happened to me now come about of its own accord; it is clear to me that it was better for me to die now and be released from my troubles. That is why the sign never turned me back, and why I am not at all angry with those who voted to condemn me or with my accusers. And yet it was not with this in mind that they condemned and accused me; they thought they were harming me, [41e] and for that they deserve blame. This much, though, I ask of them. When my sons grow up, punish them, gentlemen, by giving them the same pain I gave you, if they seem to you to care about money or anything else before excellence. And if they think they are something when they are nothing, reproach them as I reproached you, for not caring about what they should, and for thinking they are something when they are worth nothing. If [42a] you do this, I will have been treated justly by you—both I myself and my sons. But now it is time to go—I to die, and you to live. Which of us is going to the better thing is unclear to everyone except the god.