

have been suspected of undermining people's much-needed confidence during a critical period of reconstruction.

Socrates can be accused of convicting himself; likewise the jury can be accused of convicting an innocent man on false charges. Looked at from Socrates' point of view, there was little he could do without surrendering his principles, and there was no reason why they should be surrendered. He thought himself called by God in a given direction, and nothing would persuade him to change. But if one did not accept the God of Socrates, only the gods of the city, then Socrates had produced no reason whatever why he should not submit to the good judgement of the court. Neither side was in any position to budge. We have the classic situation of a Greek tragedy, where a person of high moral principle is confronted step by step with a situation from which there is no escape, often through conflict with some other person or persons whose principles are no less understandable, and may frequently – as in Sophocles' *Antigone* – represent the perceived interests of the State. The tragic potential of the situation is unlikely to have been lost on Plato, a man of great dramatic capabilities.

Notes

1. See Gerard Ledger, *Recounting*, p. 223.
2. An important exception is now Thomas C. Brickhouse and Nicholas D. Smith, *Socrates on Trial* (Oxford, 1989), pp. 48ff.

APOLOGY

Socrates starts in rhetorical fashion, answering his opponent's claim that he will try to mislead the jury. He promises the truth, and begs to be allowed to speak in his own conversational style, into which he now slips.

What effect my accusers have had upon you, gentlemen, I do not know, but for my own part I was almost carried away by them; their arguments were so convincing. On the other hand, scarcely a word of what they said was true. I was especially astonished at one of their many misrepresentations: the point where they told you that you must be careful not to let me deceive you, implying that I am a skilful speaker. I thought that it was peculiarly brazen of them to have the nerve to tell you this, only just before events must prove them wrong, when it becomes obvious that I have not the slightest skill as a speaker – unless, of course, by a skilful speaker they mean one who speaks the truth. If that is what they mean, I would agree that I am an orator, and quite out of their class.

My accusers, then, as I maintain, have said little or nothing that is true, but from me you shall hear the whole truth; not, I can assure you, gentlemen, in flowery language like theirs, decked out with fine words and phrases; no, what you will hear will be improvised thoughts in the first words that occur to me, confident as I am in the justice of my cause; and I do not want any of you to expect anything different. It would hardly be suitable, gentlemen, for a man of my age to address you in the artificial language of a student exercise. One thing, however, I do most earnestly beg and entreat of you: if you hear me defending

myself in the same language which it has been my habit to use, both around the trading stalls of the market-place (where many of you have heard me) and elsewhere, do not be surprised, and do not make a fuss because of it. My situation, you see, is as follows: this is my first appearance in a court of law, at the age of seventy; and so I am a complete stranger to the language of this place. Now if I were really from another country, you would assuredly excuse me if I spoke in the manner and dialect in which I had been brought up; and so in the present case I make this request of you, which I think is only reasonable: to disregard the manner of my speech – it doesn't matter how it compares – and to consider and concentrate your attention upon this one question, whether my claims are just or not. That is the first duty of the jurymen, and it is the pleader's duty to speak the truth.

Ignoring the court charges for the moment, Socrates talks of the origins of his unpopularity in people's belief (i) that he is one of those who seek physical explanation rather than divine ones for everyday phenomena (i.e. a typical Presocratic philosopher), and (ii) that he is adept at pleading the poorer case more powerfully than the better one (i.e. a typical sophist).

The proper course for me, gentlemen of the jury, is to deal first with the earliest charges that have been falsely brought against me, and with my earliest accusers; and then with the later ones. I make this distinction because I have already been accused in your hearing by a great many people for a great many years, though without a word of truth; and I am more afraid of those people than I am of Anytus and his colleagues,¹ although they are formidable enough. But the others are still more formidable; I mean the people who took hold of so many of you when you were children² and tried to fill your minds with untrue accusations against me, saying, 'There is a clever man called Socrates who has theories about the heavens and has investigated everything below the earth, and can make the weaker argument defeat the stronger.'³ It is these people, gentlemen, the disseminators of these rumours, who are my dangerous accusers; because those who hear them suppose that anyone

who inquires into such matters does not also believe in gods.⁴ Besides, there are a great many of these accusers, and they have been accusing me now for a great many years; and what is more, they approached you at the most impressionable age, when some of you were children or adolescents; and they literally won their case by default, because there was no one to defend me. And the most problematic thing of all is that it is impossible for me even to know and tell you their names, unless one of them happens to be a playwright.⁵ All these people, who have tried to stir up convictions against me out of envy and love of slander – and some too merely passing on what they have been told by others – all these are very difficult to deal with. It is impossible to bring them here for cross-examination; one simply has to conduct one's defence and argue one's case against an invisible opponent, because there is no one to answer. So I ask you to accept my statement that my critics fall into two classes: on the one hand my immediate accusers, and on the other those earlier ones whom I have mentioned; and you must suppose that I have first to defend myself against the latter. After all, you heard them accusing me at an earlier date and much more vehemently than these more recent accusers.

Very well, then; I must begin my defence, gentlemen, and I must try, in the short time that I have,⁶ to rid your minds of a false impression which is the work of many years. I should like this to be the result, gentlemen, assuming it to be for your advantage and my own; and I should like to be successful in my defence; but I think that it will be difficult, and I am quite aware of the nature of my task. However, let that turn out as God wills; I must obey the law and make my defence.⁷

Let us go back to the beginning and consider what the charge is that has made people so critical of me, and has encouraged Meletus to draw up this indictment. Very well; what did my critics say in attacking my character? I must read out their affidavit, so to speak, as though they were my legal accusers. 'Socrates is committing an injustice, in that he inquires into things below the earth and in the sky, and makes the weaker argument defeat the stronger, and teaches others to follow his example.'⁸ It runs something like that. You have seen it for

yourselves in the play by Aristophanes, where Socrates is lifted around, proclaiming that he is walking on air, and uttering a great deal of other nonsense about things of which I know nothing whatsoever.⁹ I mean no disrespect for such knowledge, if anyone really is versed in it – I do not want any more lawsuits
 d brought against me by Meletus¹⁰ – but the fact is, gentlemen, that I take no interest in these things. What is more, I call upon the greater part of you as witnesses to my statement, and I appeal to all of you who have ever listened to me talking (and there are a great many to whom this applies) to reassure one another on this point. Tell one another whether any one of you has ever heard me discuss such questions briefly or at length; and then you will realize that the other popular reports about me are equally unreliable.¹¹

Socrates denies that he is a professional teacher.

The fact is that there is nothing in any of these charges; and if you have heard anyone say that I try to educate people and charge a fee,¹² there is no truth in that either – though I think that it is a fine thing if a man has the ability to teach, as in the case of Gorgias of Leontini, Prodicus of Ceos and Hippias of Elis.¹³ Each one of these is perfectly capable of going into any city and actually persuading the young men to leave the company of
 e their fellow-citizens, with any of whom they can associate for nothing, attach themselves to him, pay money for the privilege, and be grateful into the bargain. There is another expert too from Paros who I discovered was here on a visit. I happened to meet a man who has paid more in sophists' fees than all the rest put together – I mean Callias, the son of Hipponicus;¹⁴ so I asked him (he has two sons, you see): 'Callias,' I said, 'if your sons had been colts or calves, we should have had no difficulty
 20a in finding and engaging a trainer to make them excel in the appropriate qualities; and this trainer would have been some sort of horse-dealer or agriculturalist. But seeing that they are human beings, whom do you intend to get as their instructor? Who is the expert in perfecting the virtues of people in a society? I assume from the fact of your having sons that you must have considered the question. Is there such a person or not?'
 b

'Certainly', said he. 'Who is he, and where does he come from?' said I, 'and what does he charge?' 'Evenus of Paros,¹⁵ Socrates,' said he, 'and his fee is 500 drachmae.' I felt that Evenus was to be congratulated if he really was a master of this art and taught it at such a moderate fee.¹⁶ I should certainly become a proud and gentlemanly figure if I understood these things; but in fact, gentlemen, I do not.

Socrates explains what his own activity has been. The oracle of Apollo has declared that he is the wisest of men, and he has been trying to find men wiser than he is as part of his search for the god's meaning. The section begins in Socrates' conversational manner, but the narrative which follows is stylistically very like that of other Athenian speeches for the lawcourts.

Here perhaps one of you might interrupt me and say, 'But what is it that you do, Socrates? How is it that you have been misrepresented like this? Surely all this talk and gossip about you would never have arisen if you had confined yourself to ordinary activities, but only if your behaviour was abnormal. Give us the explanation, if you do not want us to draw our own
 d conclusions.' This seems to me to be a reasonable request, and I will try to explain to you what it is that has given me this false notoriety; so please give me your attention. Perhaps some of you will think that I am not being serious; but I assure you that I am going to tell you the whole truth.

I have gained this reputation, gentlemen, from nothing more or less than a kind of wisdom. What kind of wisdom do I mean? Human wisdom, I suppose. It seems that I really am wise in this limited sense. Presumably the geniuses whom I mentioned just
 e now are wise in a wisdom that is more than human – I do not know how else to account for it, because I certainly do not have this knowledge, and anyone who says that I have is lying and just saying it to slander me. Now, gentlemen, please do not interrupt me even if I seem to make an extravagant claim; for what I am going to tell you is not a tale of my own; I am going to refer you to an unimpeachable authority. I shall call as witness to my wisdom (such as it is) the god at Delphi.¹⁷

You know Chaerephon,¹⁸ I presume. He was a friend of mine

21a from boyhood, and a good democrat who played his part with the rest of you in the recent expulsion and restoration.¹⁹ And you know what he was like; how enthusiastic he was over anything that he had once undertaken. Well, one day he actually went to Delphi and asked this question of the god – as I said before, gentlemen, please do not interrupt – what he asked was whether there was anyone wiser than myself. The Pythian priestess replied that there was no one. As Chaerephon is dead, the evidence for my statement will be supplied by his brother²⁰ here.

b Please consider my object in telling you this. I want to explain to you how the attack on my reputation first started.²¹ When I heard about the oracle's answer, I said to myself, 'What is the god saying, and what is his hidden meaning? I am only too conscious that I have no claim to wisdom, great or small; so what can he mean by asserting that I am the wisest man in the world? He cannot be telling a lie; that would not be right for him.'²²

c After puzzling about it for some time, I set myself at last with considerable reluctance to check the truth of it in the following way. I went to interview a man with a high reputation for wisdom, because I felt that here if anywhere I should succeed in disproving the oracle and pointing out to my divine authority, 'You said that I was the wisest of men, but here is a man who is wiser than I am.'

d Well, I gave a thorough examination to this person – I need not mention his name, but it was one of our politicians that I was studying when I had this experience – and in conversation with him I formed the impression that although in many people's opinion, and especially in his own, he appeared to be wise, in fact he was not. Then when I began to try to show him that he only thought he was wise and was not really so, my efforts were resented both by him and by many of the other people present. However, I reflected as I walked away: 'Well, I am certainly wiser than this man. It is only too likely that neither of us has any knowledge to boast of; but he thinks that he knows something which he does not know, whereas I am quite conscious of my ignorance. At any rate it seems that I am wiser than

he is to this small extent, that I do not think that I know what I do not know.'

After this I went on to interview a man with an even greater reputation for wisdom, and I formed the same impression again; and here too I incurred the resentment of the man himself and a number of others.

From that time on I interviewed one person after another. I realized with distress and alarm that I was making myself unpopular, but I felt compelled to put the god's business first; since I was trying to find out the meaning of the oracle, I was bound to interview everyone who had a reputation for knowledge. And by Dog,²³ gentlemen (for I must be frank with you), my honest impression was thus: it seemed to me, as I pursued my investigation at the god's command, that the people with the greatest reputations were almost entirely deficient, while others who were supposed to be their inferiors were much more noteworthy for their general good sense.

I want you to think of my adventures as a cycle of labours²⁴ undertaken to establish the truth of the oracle once for all. After I had finished with the politicians I turned to the poets,²⁵ dramatic, lyric, and all the rest, in the belief that here I should expose myself as a comparative ignoramus. I used to pick up what I thought were some of their most polished works and question them closely about the meaning of what they had written, in the hope of incidentally enlarging my own knowledge. Well, gentlemen, I hesitate to tell you the truth, but it must be told. It is hardly an exaggeration to say that any of the bystanders could have explained those poems better than their actual authors. So I soon made up my mind about the poets too: I decided that it was not wisdom that enabled them to write their poetry, but a kind of instinct or inspiration,²⁶ such as you find in seers and prophets who deliver all their sublime messages without knowing in the least what they mean. It seemed clear to me that the poets were in much the same case; and I also observed that the very fact that they were poets made them think that they had a perfect understanding of all other subjects, of which they were totally ignorant. So I left that line of inquiry

too with the same sense of advantage that I had felt in the case of the politicians.

d Last of all I turned to the skilled craftsmen.²⁷ I knew quite well that I had practically no understanding myself, and I was sure that I should find them full of impressive knowledge. In this I was not disappointed; they understood things which I did not, and to that extent they were wiser than I was. However, gentlemen, these professional experts seemed to share the same failing which I had noticed in the poets; I mean that on the strength of their technical proficiency they claimed a perfect understanding of every other subject, however important; and I e felt that this error eclipsed their positive wisdom. So I made myself spokesman for the oracle, and asked myself whether I would rather be as I was – neither wise with their wisdom nor ignorant with their ignorance – or possess both qualities as they did. I replied through myself to the oracle that it was best for me to be as I was.

The results of Socrates' interrogations: odium, poverty, wealthy youths who enjoy imitating him, and charges that he is responsible for corrupting them.

23a The effect of these investigations of mine, gentlemen, has been to arouse against me a great deal of hostility, and hostility of a particularly bitter and persistent kind, which has resulted in various malicious suggestions, and in having that term 'wise' applied to me. This is due to the fact that whenever I succeed in disproving another person's claim to wisdom in a given subject, the bystanders assume that I know everything about that subject myself.²⁸ But the truth of the matter, gentlemen, is likely to be this: that real wisdom is the property of the god, and this oracle is his way of telling us that human wisdom has little or no value. b It seems to me that he is not referring literally to Socrates, but has merely taken my name as an example, as if he would say to us, 'The wisest of you men is he who has realized, like Socrates, that in respect of wisdom he is really worthless.'

That is why I still go about seeking and searching in obedience to the divine command, if I think that anyone is wise, whether citizen or stranger; and when I decide that he is not wise, I try

to assist the god²⁹ by proving that he is not. This occupation has kept me too busy to do much either in politics or in my own affairs; in fact, my service to God has reduced me to extreme poverty. c

Furthermore the young men – those with wealthy fathers and plenty of leisure – have of their own accord³⁰ attached themselves to me because they enjoy hearing other people cross-questioned. These often take me as their model, and go on to try to question other persons; whereupon, I suppose, they find an unlimited number of people who think that they know something, but really know little or nothing. Consequently their victims become annoyed, not with themselves but with me; d and they complain that there is a pestilential busybody called Socrates who fills young people's heads with wrong ideas. If you ask them what he does, and what he teaches that has this effect, they have no answer, not knowing what to say; but as they do not want to admit their confusion, they fall back on the stock charges against any seeker after wisdom: that he teaches his pupils about things in the heavens and below the earth, and to disbelieve in gods, and to make the weaker argument defeat the stronger. They would be very loath, I fancy, to admit the truth: which is that they are being convicted of pretending to knowledge when they are entirely ignorant. They were so jealous, I suppose, for their own reputation, and also energetic and e numerically strong, and spoke about me with such vigour and persuasiveness, that their harsh criticisms have for a long time now been monopolizing your ears.

Conclusion of the narrative concerned with Socrates' activities and of Socrates' reply to the 'Old Accusers'.

There you have the causes which led to the attack upon me by Meletus³¹ and Anytus³² and Lycon, Meletus being aggrieved on behalf of the poets, Anytus on behalf of the professional men and politicians, and Lycon on behalf of the orators.³³ So, as I 24a said at the beginning, I should be surprised if I were able, in the short time that I have,³⁴ to rid your minds of a misconception so deeply implanted.

There, gentlemen, you have the true facts, which I present to

you without any concealment or suppression, great or small. I am fairly certain that this plain speaking of mine is the cause of my unpopularity; and this really goes to prove that my statements are true, and that I have described correctly the nature and the grounds of the calumny which has been brought against me. Whether you inquire into them now or later, you will find the facts as I have just described them.

The cross-examination, part I. Socrates here proceeds to lose any sympathy which he may have gained in describing his activity by giving the jury a demonstration of how it works. Meletus's lack of thought for the upbringing of young men is exposed.

So much for my defence against the charges brought by the first group of my accusers. I shall now try to defend myself against Meletus – high-principled and patriotic as he claims to be – and after that against the rest.

Let us first consider their affidavit again, as though it represented a fresh prosecution. It runs something like this: 'Socrates is guilty of corrupting the minds of the young, and of believing in supernatural things of his own invention instead of the gods recognized by the State.'³⁵ Such is the charge; let us examine its points one by one.

Now it claims that I am guilty of corrupting the young. But I say, gentlemen, that Meletus is guilty of treating a serious matter with levity, since he summons people to stand their trial on frivolous grounds, and professes concern and keen anxiety in matters to which he has never given the slightest attention.³⁶ I will try to prove this to your satisfaction.

Come now, Meletus, tell me this. You regard it as supremely important, do you not, that our young people should be exposed to the best possible influence?

'I do.'

Very well, then; tell these gentlemen who it is that influences the young for the better. Obviously you must know, if you pay it so much attention. You have discovered the vicious influence, as you say, in myself, and you are now prosecuting me before these gentlemen; speak up and inform them who it is that has a

good influence upon the young – you see, Meletus, that you are tongue-tied and cannot answer. Do you not feel that this is discreditable, and a sufficient proof in itself of what I said, that you have not paid attention to the subject? Tell me, my friend, who is it that makes the young good?

'The laws.'

That is not what I mean, my dear sir; I am asking you to name the person whose first business it is to know the laws.

'These gentlemen here, Socrates, the members of the jury.'

Do you mean, Meletus, that they have the ability to educate the young, and to make them better?

'Certainly.'

Does this apply to all jurymen, or only to some?

'To all of them.'

Excellent! A generous supply of benefactors. Well, then, do these spectators who are present in court have an improving influence, or not?

'Yes, they do.'

And what about the members of the Council?

'Yes, the Councillors too.'

But surely, Meletus, the members of the Assembly³⁷ do not corrupt the young? Or do all of them too exert an improving influence?

'Yes, they do.'

Then it would seem that the whole population of Athens has a refining effect upon the young, except myself; and I alone corrupt them. Is that your meaning?

'Most emphatically, yes.'

A great misfortune, indeed, you've damned me for! Well, let me put another question to you. Take the case of horses; do you believe that those who improve them make up the whole of mankind, and that there is only one person who has a bad effect on them? Or is the truth just the opposite, that the ability to improve them belongs to one person or to very few persons, who are horse-trainers, whereas most people, if they have to do with horses and make use of them, do them harm? Is not this the case, Meletus, both with horses and with all other animals? Of course it is, whether you and Anytus deny it or not. It would

be a singular dispensation of fortune for our young people if there were only one person who corrupted them, while all the rest had a beneficial effect. Well then, Meletus, you've given ample proof that you have never bothered your head about the young; and you make it perfectly clear that you have never paid the slightest attention to the matters over which you are now indicting me.

Here is another point. Tell me seriously, Meletus, is it better to live in a good or in a bad community? Answer my question, like a good fellow; there is nothing difficult about it. Is it not true that wicked people do harm to those with whom they are in the closest contact, and that good people have a good effect?

'Quite true.'

Is there anyone who prefers to be harmed rather than benefited by his associates? Answer me, please; the law commands you to answer. Is there anyone who prefers to be harmed?

'Of course not.'

Well, then, when you summon me before this court for corrupting the young and making their characters worse, do you mean that I do so intentionally or unintentionally?³⁸

'I mean intentionally.'

Why, Meletus, are you at your age so much wiser than I at mine? You have discovered that bad people always have a bad effect, and good people a good effect, upon their nearest neighbours; am I so hopelessly ignorant as not even to realize that by spoiling the character of one of my companions I shall run the risk of getting some harm from him? So ignorant as to commit this grave offence intentionally, as you claim? No, I do not believe it, Meletus, and I do not suppose that anyone else does. Either I have not a bad influence, or it is unintentional; so in either case what you claim is false. And if I unintentionally have a bad influence, the correct procedure in cases of such involuntary misdemeanours is not to summon the culprit before this court, but to take him aside privately for instruction and reproof; because obviously if my eyes are opened, I shall stop doing what I do not intend to do. But you deliberately avoided my company in the past³⁹ and refused to enlighten me, and now you bring me before this court, which is the place

appointed for those who need punishment, not for those who need enlightenment.

The cross-examination, part II. With a suspicious-sounding argument Socrates tries to show that Meletus's formal charge contradicts itself. Meletus is made to claim that Socrates believes in no gods whatever, and, after confusing Socrates with Anaxagoras, is finally made to assent to the notion that the 'supernatural things' referred to in the charge could only be believed in by one who believed in gods.

It is quite clear by now, gentlemen, that Meletus, as I said before, has never paid the slightest attention to this subject. However, I invite you to tell us, Meletus, in what sense you make out that I corrupt the minds of the young. Surely the terms of your indictment make it clear that you accuse me of teaching them to believe in new deities instead of the gods recognized by the State; isn't that the teaching of mine which you say has this demoralizing effect?

'That is precisely what I maintain.'

Then I appeal to you, Meletus, in the name of these same gods about whom we are speaking, to explain yourself a little more clearly to myself and to the jury, because I cannot make out what your point is. Is it that I teach people to believe in some gods (which implies that I myself believe in gods, and am not a complete atheist, and so not guilty on that score), but in different gods from those recognized by the State, so that your accusation rests upon the fact that they are different? Or do you assert that I believe in no gods at all, and teach others to do the same?

'Yes; I say that you disbelieve in gods altogether.'⁴⁰

You surprise me, Meletus; what is your object in saying that? Do you suggest that I do not believe that the sun and moon are gods,⁴¹ like other men do?

'He certainly does not, gentlemen of the jury, since he says that the sun is a stone and the moon a mass of earth.'

Do you imagine that you are prosecuting Anaxagoras, my dear Meletus? Have you so poor an opinion of these gentlemen, and do you assume them to be so illiterate as not to know that

e the writings of Anaxagoras of Clazomenae⁴² are full of theories like these? And do you seriously suggest that it is from me that the young get these ideas, when they can buy them on occasion in the orchestra⁴³ for a drachma at most, and so have the laugh on Socrates if he claims them for his own, especially when they are so peculiar? Tell me honestly, Meletus, is that your opinion of me? Do I believe in no god?

'No, none at all; not in the slightest degree.'

27a You are not at all convincing, Meletus; not even to yourself, I suspect. In my opinion, gentlemen, this man is quite unable to restrain his insolence, and it is simply this which makes him bring this action against me – a kind of insolence or lack of restraint or youthful aggression. He seems to be devising a sort of riddle for me, saying to himself, 'Will the infallible Socrates realize that I am contradicting myself for my own amusement, or shall I succeed in deceiving him and the rest of my audience?' It certainly seems to me that he is contradicting himself in this indictment, which might just as well run: 'Socrates is guilty of not believing in the gods, but believing in the gods.' And this is pure flippancy.

b I ask you to examine with me, gentlemen, the line of reasoning which leads me to this conclusion. You, Meletus, will please answer my questions. And will the rest of you all please remember, as I requested at the beginning, not to interrupt if I conduct the discussion in my customary way?

c Is there anyone in the world, Meletus, who believes in human matters, and not in human beings? Make him answer, gentlemen, and don't let him keep on making these continual objections. Is there anyone who does not believe in horses, but believes in equine matters? Or who does not believe in musicians, but believes in musical matters? No, there is not, my worthy friend. If you do not want to answer, I will supply it for you and for these gentlemen too. But the next question you must answer: Is there anyone who believes in supernatural matters and not in supernatural beings?⁴⁴

'No.'

How good of you to give a bare answer under compulsion by the court! Well, do you assert that I believe and teach others to

d believe in supernatural matters? It does not matter whether they are new or old; the fact remains that I believe in them according to your statement; indeed you solemnly swore as much in your affidavit. But if I believe in supernatural matters, it follows inevitably that I also believe in supernatural beings. Is not that so? It is; I assume your assent, since you do not answer. Do we not hold that supernatural beings are either gods or the children of gods?⁴⁵ Do you agree or not?

'Certainly.'

e Then if I believe in supernatural beings, as you assert, if these supernatural beings are gods in any sense, we shall reach the conclusion which I mentioned just now when I said that you were testing me with riddles for your own amusement, by stating first that I do not believe in gods, and then again that I do, since I believe in supernatural beings. If on the other hand these supernatural beings are bastard children of the gods by nymphs or other mothers, as they are reputed to be, who in the world would believe in the children of gods and not in the gods themselves? It would be as ridiculous as to believe in the young of horses or donkeys and not in horses and donkeys themselves. No, Meletus; there is no avoiding the conclusion that you brought this charge against me to try me out, or else in despair of finding a genuine offence of which to accuse me. As for your prospect of convincing any living person with even a smattering of intelligence that belief in the supernatural does not imply belief in the divine, and again that non-belief in gods does not imply non-belief in supernatural beings and heroes, it is outside all the bounds of possibility.⁴⁶

Socrates is committed to his activities as if to his position in battle; he will not be prevailed upon to give them up. This section is important, in that Socrates puts his obligation to Apollo (based on a dubious personal interpretation of the oracle) ahead of a hypothetical command from the city that he should stop philosophizing. This section is more rhetorical at first,⁴⁷ becoming chatty later.

As a matter of fact, gentlemen, I do not feel that it requires much defence to clear myself of Meletus's accusation; what I

have said already is enough. But you know very well the truth of what I said in an earlier part of my speech, that I have incurred a great deal of bitter hostility; and this is what will bring about my destruction, if anything does; not Meletus or Anytus, but the slander and jealousy of a very large section of the people.

b They have been fatal to a great many other innocent men, and I suppose will continue to be so; there is no likelihood that they will stop at me. But perhaps someone will say, 'Do you feel no compunction, Socrates, at having pursued an activity which puts you in danger of the death penalty?' I might fairly reply to him, 'You are mistaken, my friend, if you think that a man who is worth anything ought to spend his time weighing up the prospects of life and death. He has only one thing to consider c in performing any action; that is, whether he is acting justly or unjustly, like a good man or a bad one. On your view the heroes who died at Troy would be poor creatures, especially the son of Thetis.⁴⁸ He, if you remember, made so light of danger in comparison with incurring dishonour that when his goddess mother warned him, eager as he was to kill Hector, in some such words as these, I fancy, "My son, if you avenge your comrade Patroclus's death and kill Hector, you will die yourself; 'Next after Hector is thy fate prepared';"⁴⁹ – when he heard this d warning, he made light of his death and danger, being much more afraid of an ignoble life and of failing to avenge his friends. "Let me die forthwith," said he, "when I have requited the villain, rather than remain here by the beaked ships to be mocked, a burden on the ground." Do you suppose that he gave a thought to death and danger?'

The truth of the matter is this, gentlemen. Where a man has once taken up his stand, either because it seems best to him or in obedience to his orders, there I believe he is bound to remain and face the danger, taking no account of death or anything else before dishonour.

e This being so, it would be shocking inconsistency on my part, gentlemen, if when the officers whom you chose to command me assigned me my position at Potidaea and Amphipolis and Delium,⁵⁰ I remained at my post like anyone else and faced death, and yet afterwards, when God appointed me, as I supposed and

believed, to the duty of leading the philosophic life, examining myself and others, I were then through fear of death or of any other danger to desert my post. That would indeed be shocking, and then I might really with justice be summoned to court for 29a not believing in the gods, and disobeying the oracle, and being afraid of death, and thinking that I am wise when I am not. For let me tell you, gentlemen, that to be afraid of death is only another form of thinking that one is wise when one is not; it is to think that one knows what one does not know. No one knows with regard to death whether it is not really the greatest blessing that can happen to a man; but people dread it as though they were certain that it is the greatest evil; and this ignorance, b which thinks that it knows what it does not, must surely be ignorance most culpable. This, I take it, gentlemen, is the extent, and this the nature of my superiority over the rest of mankind; and if I were to claim to be wiser than my neighbour in any respect, it would be in this: that not possessing any real knowledge of what awaits us in Hades, I am also conscious that I do not possess it. But I do know that to do wrong and to disobey my superior, whether god or man, is bad and dishonourable; and so I shall never feel more fear or aversion for something which, for all I know, may really be a blessing than for those evils which I know to be evils.

Suppose, then, that you acquit me, and pay no attention to Anytus, who has said that either I should not have appeared c before this court at all, or, since I have appeared here, I must be put to death, because if I once escaped your sons would all immediately become utterly corrupted by putting the teaching of Socrates into practice. Suppose that, in view of this, you said to me, 'Socrates, on this occasion we shall disregard Anytus and acquit you, but only on one condition: that you give up spending your time on this quest and stop philosophizing.⁵¹ If we catch you going on in the same way, you shall be put to death.' Well, supposing, as I said, that you should offer to acquit me on these d terms, I should reply, 'Gentlemen, I am your very grateful and devoted servant, but I owe a greater obedience to God than to e you; and so long as I draw breath and have my faculties, I shall never stop practising philosophy and exhorting you and

indicating the truth for everyone that I meet. I shall go on saying, in my usual way, "My very good friend, you are an Athenian and belong to a city which is the greatest and most famous in the world for its wisdom and strength. Are you not ashamed that you give your attention to acquiring as much money as possible, and similarly with reputation and honour, and give no attention or thought to truth and understanding and the perfection of your soul?" And if any of you disputes this and professes to care about these things, I shall not at once let him go or leave him; no, I shall question him and examine him and put him to the test; and if it appears that in spite of his profession he has made no real progress towards goodness, I shall reprove him for neglecting what is of supreme importance, and giving his attention to trivialities. I shall do this to everyone that I meet, young or old, foreigner or fellow-citizen; but especially to you my fellow-citizens, inasmuch as you are closer to me in kinship. This, I do assure you, is what my god commands; and it is my belief that no greater good has ever befallen you in this city than my service to my god; for I spend all my time going about trying to persuade you, young and old, to make your first and chief concern not for your bodies or for your possessions, but for the highest welfare of your souls, proclaiming as I go, "Wealth does not bring goodness, but goodness brings wealth and every other blessing, both to the individual and to the State." Now if I corrupt the young by this message, the message would seem to be harmful; but if anyone says that my message is different from this he is talking nonsense. And so, gentlemen, I would say, 'You can please yourselves whether you listen to Anytus or not, and whether you acquit me or not; you know that I am not going to alter my conduct, not even if I have to die a hundred deaths.'

Socrates represents his activity as a benefaction to the city. This is presented more like an old man's story than as a piece of court oratory.

Order, please, gentlemen! Abide by my request to give me a hearing without interruption; besides, I believe that it will be to your advantage to listen. I am going to tell you something else

which may provoke a clamour; but please restrain yourselves. I assure you that if I am what I claim to be, and you put me to death, you will harm yourselves more than me. Neither Meletus nor Anytus can do me any harm at all; they would not have the power, because I do not believe that the law of God permits a better man to be harmed by a worse.⁵² No doubt my accuser might put me to death or have me banished or deprived of civic rights; but even if he thinks, as he probably does (and others too, I dare say), that these are great calamities, I do not think so; I believe that it is far worse to do what he is doing now, trying to put a man to death unjustly. For this reason, gentlemen, far from pleading on my own behalf, as might be supposed, I am really pleading on yours, to save you from misusing the gift of God by condemning me. If you put me to death, you will not easily find anyone to take my place. To put it bluntly (even if it sounds rather comical) God has assigned me to this city, as if to a large thoroughbred horse which because of its great size is inclined to be lazy and needs the stimulation of some stinging fly. It seems to me that God has attached me to this city to perform the office of such a fly; and all day long I never cease to settle here, there, and everywhere, rousing, persuading, reproving every one of you. You will not easily find another like me, gentlemen, and if you take my advice you will spare my life. But perhaps before long you may awake from your drowsing, and in your annoyance take Anytus's advice and finish me off thoughtlessly with a single slap; and then you could go on sleeping till the end of your days, unless God in his care for you sends someone to take my place.

If you doubt whether I am really the sort of person who would have been sent to this city as a gift from God, you can convince yourselves by looking at it in this way. Does it seem human that I should have neglected my own affairs and endured the humiliation of allowing my family to be neglected for all these years, while I busied myself all the time on your behalf, going like a father or an elder brother to see each one of you privately, and urging you to set your thoughts on goodness? If I had got any enjoyment from it, or if I had been paid for my good advice, there would have been some explanation for my conduct; but

as it is you can see for yourselves that although my accusers unblushingly charge me with all sorts of other crimes, there is one thing that they have not had the impudence to pretend on any testimony, and that is that I have ever exacted or asked a fee from anyone. The witness that I can offer to prove the truth of my statement is good enough, I think – my poverty.

Socrates' failure to participate in public affairs is attributed to the timely intervention of his supernatural sign. Euthyphro (3b) shows how the very existence of such a sign could have been held against Socrates, and he might have been better advised not to introduce it. Similarly he would have been better advised not to suggest in a fiercely democratic court that any person committed to justice could not survive if he played a full part in the political life of his city. He also reprovingly draws attention to the time when he opposed unconstitutional action favoured by the people, and recalls a similar incident when he was given orders by the notorious Thirty Tyrants. Neither story could have improved his standing with the jurors very much.

It may seem curious that I should go round giving advice like this and busying myself in people's private affairs, and yet never venture publicly to address you as a whole and advise on matters of state. The reason for this is what you have often heard me say before on many other occasions: that I am subject to a divine or supernatural experience, which Meletus saw fit to travesty in his indictment. It began in my early childhood – a sort of voice which comes to me; and when it comes it always dissuades me from what I am proposing to do, and never urges me on. It is this that debars me from entering public life, and a very good thing too, in my opinion; because you may be quite sure, gentlemen, that if I had tried long ago to engage in politics, I should long ago have lost my life, without doing any good either to you or to myself. Please do not be offended if I tell you the truth. No man on earth who conscientiously opposes either you or any other organized democracy, and flatly prevents a great many wrongs and illegalities from taking place in the state to which he belongs, can possibly escape with his life. The true champion of justice, if he intends to survive even for a short time, must

necessarily confine himself to private life and leave politics alone.

I will offer you substantial proofs of what I have said; not theories, but what you better appreciate – facts. Listen while I describe my actual experiences, so that you may know that I would never submit wrongly to any authority through fear of death, but would refuse at any cost – even that of my life. It will be a commonplace story, such as you often hear in the courts;⁵³ but it is true.

The only office which I have ever held in our city, gentlemen, was when I served on the Council. It so happened that our tribe Antiochis was presiding⁵⁴ when you decided that the ten commanders who had failed to rescue the men who were lost in the naval engagement⁵⁵ should be tried *en bloc*; which was illegal, as you all recognized later. On this occasion I was the only member of the executive who opposed your acting in any way unconstitutionally, and voted against the proposal; and although the public speakers were all ready to denounce and arrest me, and you were all urging them on at the top of your voices, I thought that it was my duty to face it out on the side of law and justice rather than support you, through fear of prison or death, in your wrong decision.

This happened while we were still under a democracy. When the oligarchy came into power, the Thirty Commissioners in their turn summoned me and four others to the Round Chamber⁵⁶ and instructed us to go and fetch Leon of Salamis from his home for execution. This was of course only one of many instances in which they issued such instructions, their object being to implicate as many people as possible in their crimes. On this occasion, however, I again made it clear, not by my words but by my actions, that the attention⁵⁷ I paid to death was zero (if that is not too unrefined a claim); but that I gave all my attention to avoiding doing anything unjust or unholy. Powerful as it was, that government did not terrify me into doing a wrong action; when we came out of the Round Chamber the other four went off to Salamis and arrested Leon,⁵⁸ and I went home. I should probably have been put to death for this, if the government had not fallen soon afterwards. There are plenty of people who will testify to these statements.

A transitional passage (somewhat dogmatic and rhetorical) leads into further consideration of the effect that Socrates has had upon young men. Socrates explains why he has always made himself freely available to them, and observes that Meletus has failed to call any of his followers – or their relatives – as witnesses to the corruption charge.

Do you suppose that I should have lived as long as I have if I had moved in the sphere of public life, and conducting myself in that sphere like an honourable man, had always upheld the cause of right, and conscientiously set this end above all other things? Not by a very long way, gentlemen; neither would any other man. You will find that throughout my life I have been consistent in any public duties that I have performed, and the same also in my personal dealings: I have never countenanced any action that was incompatible with justice on the part of any person, including those whom some people maliciously call my pupils. I have never set up as any man's teacher; but if anyone, young or old, is eager to hear me conversing and carrying out my private mission, I never grudge him the opportunity; nor do I charge a fee for talking to him, and refuse to talk without one; I am ready to answer questions for rich and poor alike, and I am equally ready if anyone prefers to listen to what I have to say and answer my questions. If any given one of these people becomes a good citizen or a bad one, I cannot with justice be held responsible, since I have never promised or imparted any teaching to anybody; and if anyone asserts that he has ever learned or heard from me privately anything which was not open to everyone else, you may be quite sure that he is not telling the truth.

But how is it that some people enjoy spending a great deal of time in my company? You have heard the reason, gentlemen; I told you quite frankly. It is because they enjoy hearing me examine those who think that they are wise when they are not; an experience which has its amusing side. This duty I have accepted, as I said, in obedience to God's commands given in oracles and dreams and in every way that any other divine dispensation has ever impressed a duty upon man.⁵⁹ This is a true statement, gentlemen, and easy to verify.

If it is a fact that I am in the process of corrupting some of the young, and have succeeded already in corrupting others; and if it were a fact that some of the latter, being now grown up, had discovered that I had ever given them bad advice when they were young, surely they ought now to be coming forward to denounce and punish me; and if they did not like to do it themselves, you would expect some of their families – their fathers and brothers and other near relations – to remember it now, if their own flesh and blood had suffered any harm from me. Certainly a great many of them have found their way into this court, as I can see for myself: first Crito⁶⁰ over there, my contemporary and near neighbour, the father of this young man Critobulus; and then Lysanias of Sphettus, the father of Aeschines⁶¹ here; and next Antiphon of Cephisia, over there, the father of Epigenes. Then besides there are all those whose brothers have been members of our circle: Nicostratus the son of Theozotides, the brother of Theodotus – but Theodotus is dead, so he cannot appeal to his brother – and Paralius here, the son of Demodocus; his brother was Theages.⁶² And here is Adimantus⁶³ the son of Ariston, whose brother Plato is over there; and Aeantodorus, whose brother Apollodorus⁶⁴ is here on this side. I can name many more besides, some of whom Meletus most certainly ought to have produced as witnesses in the course of his speech. If he forgot to do so then, let him do it now – I'll make a concession; let him state whether he has any such evidence to offer. On the contrary, gentlemen, you will find that they are all prepared to help me – the corrupter and evil genius of their nearest and dearest relatives, as Meletus and Anytus say. The actual victims of my corrupting influence might perhaps be excused for helping me; but as for the uncorrupted, their relations of mature age, what other reason can they have for helping me except the just and proper one, that they know Meletus is lying and I am telling the truth?

Socrates excuses himself from the common practice of making pitiful appeals to the jurors. He does so on three grounds: that it would be dishonourable, that it would be inviting injustice, and that in inviting an unjust decision contrary to the jurymen's

oath, it would be impious. Being impious, he observes, it would be the way of one who does not believe in the gods. Socrates' tone has become that of a moral campaigner, lecturing the Athenians about their discreditable court practices. Socrates, on trial for his life, is virtually condemning the de facto procedures of the Athenian courts!

There, gentlemen: that, and perhaps a little more to the same effect, is the substance of what I can say in my defence. It may be that some one of you, remembering his own case, will be annoyed that whereas he, in standing his trial upon a less serious charge than this, made pitiful appeals to the jury with floods of tears, and had his infant children produced in court to excite the maximum of sympathy, and many of his relatives and friends as well, I on the contrary intend to do nothing of the sort, and that although I am facing (as it might appear) the utmost danger. It may be that one of you, reflecting on these facts, will harden himself against me, and being irritated by his reflections, will give his vote in anger. If one of you is so disposed – I do not expect it of you, but there is the possibility – I think that I should be quite justified in saying to him, 'My dear sir, of course I have some relatives. To quote the very words of Homer, even I am not sprung "from an oak or from a rock",⁶⁵ but from human parents, and consequently I have relatives; yes, and sons too, gentlemen, three of them,⁶⁶ one almost grown up and the other two only children; but all the same I am not going to produce them here and beseech you to acquit me.'

Why do I not intend to do anything of this kind? Not out of perversity, gentlemen, nor out of contempt for you; whether I am brave or not in the face of death has nothing to do with it; the point is that for my own credit and yours and for the credit of the state as a whole, I do not think that it is honourable for me to use any of these methods at my age and with my reputation – which may be true or it may be false, but at any rate the view is established that Socrates is different from the common run of mankind. Now if those of you who are supposed to be distinguished for wisdom or courage or any other virtue were to behave in this way, it would be a disgrace. I have often noticed

that some people of this type, for all their high standing, go to extraordinary lengths when they come up for trial, which shows that they think it will be a dreadful thing to lose their lives; as though they would be immortal if you did not put them to death! In my opinion these people bring disgrace upon our city. Any of our visitors might be excused for thinking that the finest specimens of Athenian manhood, whom their fellow-citizens choose in preference to themselves for archonships and other high positions,⁶⁷ are no better than women. If you have even the smallest reputation, gentlemen, you ought not to descend to these methods; and if we do so, you must not give us licence. On the contrary, you must make it clear that anyone who stages these pathetic scenes and so brings ridicule upon our city is far more likely to be condemned than if he kept perfectly quiet.

But apart from all question of appearances, gentlemen, I do not think that it is *just* for a man to appeal to the jury or to get himself acquitted by doing so; he ought to inform them of the facts and convince them by argument. The jury does not sit to dispense justice as a favour, but to decide where justice lies; and the oath which they have sworn is not to show favour at their own discretion, but to return a just and lawful verdict. It follows that we must not develop in you, nor you allow to grow in yourselves, the habit of perjury; that would be impious⁶⁸ for us both. Therefore you must not expect me, gentlemen, to behave towards you in a way which I consider neither reputable nor just nor consistent with my religious duty; and above all you must not expect it when I stand charged with impiety by Meletus here. Surely it is obvious that if I tried to persuade you and prevail upon you by my entreaties to go against your solemn oath, I should be teaching you contempt for religion; and by my very defence I should be virtually accusing myself of having no religious belief. But that is very far from the truth. I have a more sincere belief, gentlemen, than any of my accusers; and I leave it to you and to God to judge me in whatever way shall be best for me and for yourselves.

The verdict is 'Guilty'. Socrates, having now been convicted by a comparatively narrow margin of sixty votes, has to propose a

penalty as an alternative to the death penalty claimed by the prosecution. He still adheres to some of the bolder theses of his defence speech, something which Plato is able to use to draw the threads of his picture of Socrates together. But the jurors would probably have been dismayed to see how little his attitude has changed. Socrates argues that he deserves to be sentenced to dining at public expense like victors at the Games. After firmly rejecting prison or exile, he offers a fine, firstly one within his means, and secondly thirty times that after his friends offer to help.

^e There are a great many reasons, gentlemen, why I am not
^{36a} distressed by this result – I mean your condemnation of me – but the chief reason is that the result was not unexpected. What does surprise me is the number of votes cast on the two sides. I should never have believed that it would be such a close thing; but now it seems that if a mere thirty votes⁶⁹ had gone the other way, I should have been acquitted. Even as it is, I feel that so far as Meletus's part is concerned I have been acquitted; and not only that, but anyone can see that if Anytus and Lycon had
^b not come forward to accuse me, Meletus would actually have lost a thousand drachmae for not having obtained one fifth of the votes.⁷⁰

However, we must face the fact that he demands the death penalty. Very good. What alternative penalty shall I propose to you, gentlemen? Obviously it must be what's deserved. Well, what penalty do I deserve to pay or suffer, in view of what I have done?

^c I have never lived an ordinary quiet life. I did not care for the things that most people care about: making money, having a comfortable home, high military or civil rank, and all the other activities – political appointments, secret societies, party organizations – which go on in our city; I thought that I was really too fair-minded to survive if I went in for this sort of thing. So instead of taking a course which would have done no good either to you or to me, I set myself to do you individually in private what I hold to be the greatest possible service: I tried to persuade each one of you not to think more of practical

advantages than of his mental and moral well-being, or in general to think more of advantage than of well-being, in the case of the State or of anything else. What do I deserve for behaving in this way? Some reward, gentlemen, if I am bound to suggest what I really deserve; and what is more, a reward which would be appropriate for myself. Well, what is appropriate for a poor man who is a public benefactor and who requires leisure for the purpose of giving you moral encouragement? Nothing could be more appropriate for such a person than free dining in the Prytaneum.⁷¹ He deserves it much more than any victor in the races at Olympia, whether he wins with a single horse or a pair or a team of four. These people give you the semblance of success, but I give you the reality; they do not need maintenance, but I do. So if I am to suggest an appropriate penalty which is strictly in accordance with justice, I suggest free maintenance by the State. ^{37a}

Perhaps when I say this I may give you the impression, as I did in my remarks about exciting sympathy and making passionate appeals, that I am showing a stubborn perversity. That is not so, gentlemen; the real position is this. I am convinced that I never wrong anyone intentionally, but I cannot convince you of this, because we have had so little time for discussion. If it was your practice, as it is with other nations, to give not one day but several to the hearing of capital trials, I believe that you might have been convinced; but under present conditions it is not easy to dispose of grave allegations in a short space of time. So being convinced that I do no wrong to anybody, I can hardly be expected to wrong myself by asserting that I deserve something bad, or by proposing a corresponding penalty.⁷² Why should I? For fear of suffering this penalty proposed by Meletus, when, as I said, I do not know whether it is a good thing or a bad? Do you expect me to choose something which I know very well is bad by making my counter-proposal? Imprisonment? Why should I spend my days in prison, in subjection to whichever Eleven hold office?⁷³ A fine, with imprisonment until it is paid? In my case the effect would be just the same, because I have no money to pay a fine. Or shall I suggest banishment? You would very likely accept the suggestion.⁷⁴

I should have to be desperately in love with life to do that, gentlemen. I am not so blind that I cannot see that you, my fellow-citizens, have come to the end of your patience with my discussions and conversations; you have found them too
 d irksome and irritating, and now you are trying to get rid of them. Will any other people find them easy to put up with? That is most unlikely, gentlemen. A fine life I should have if I left this country at my age and spent the rest of my days trying one city after another and being turned out every time! I know very well that wherever I go the young people will listen to my conversation just as they do here; and if I try to keep them off,
 e they themselves will prevail upon their elders and have me thrown out, while if I do not, the fathers and other relatives will drive me out of their own accord for the sake of the young.

Perhaps someone may say, 'But surely, Socrates, after you have left us you can spend the rest of your life in quietly minding your own business.' This is the hardest thing of all to make some of you understand. If I say that this would be disobedience to God, and that is why I cannot 'mind my own business', you will
 38a not believe me – you'll think I'm pulling your leg.⁷⁵ If on the other hand I tell you that to let no day pass without discussing goodness and all the other subjects about which you hear me talking and examining both myself and others is really the very best thing that a man can do, and that life without this sort of examination is not worth living, you will be even less inclined to believe me. Nevertheless that is how it is, gentlemen, as I
 b maintain; though it is not easy to convince you of it. Besides, I am not accustomed to think of myself as deserving punishment. If I had money, I would have suggested a fine that I could afford, because that would not have done me any harm. As it is, I cannot, because I have none; unless of course you like to fix the penalty at what I could pay. I suppose I could probably afford a hundred drachmae⁷⁶ and I suggest a fine of that amount.

One moment, gentlemen. Plato here, and Crito and Critobulus and Apollodorus, want me to propose three thousand drachmae on their security. Very well, I agree to this sum, and you can rely upon these gentlemen for its payment.⁷⁷

The penalty is death. Socrates converses with the jurymen after being sentenced by an increased majority of jurors (over two-thirds) to death rather than a fine.

Well, gentlemen, for the sake of a very small gain in time you are going to earn the reputation – and the blame from those who wish to disparage our city – of having put Socrates to death, 'that wise man', because they will say I am wise even if I am not, these people who want to find fault with you. If you had waited just a little while, you would have had your way in the course of nature. You can see that I am well on in life and near to death. I am saying this not to all of you but to those who voted for my execution, and I have something else to say to them as well.

No doubt you think, gentlemen, that I have been condemned for lack of the arguments which I could have used if I had thought it right to leave nothing unsaid or undone to secure my acquittal. But that is very far from the truth. It is not a lack of arguments that has caused my condemnation, but a lack of effrontery and impudence,⁷⁸ and the fact that I have refused to address you in the way which would give you most pleasure. You would have liked to hear me weep and wail, doing and saying all sorts of things which I declare to be unworthy of myself, but which you are used to hearing from other people. But I did not think then that I ought to stoop to servility because I was in danger, and I do not regret now the way in which I pleaded my case; I would much rather die as the result of this defence than live as the result of the other sort. In a court of law, just as in warfare, neither I nor any other ought to use his wits to escape death by any means. In battle it is often obvious that you could escape being killed by giving up your arms and throwing yourself upon the mercy of your pursuers; and in every kind of danger there are plenty of devices for avoiding death if you are unscrupulous enough to stop at nothing. But I suggest, gentlemen, that the difficulty is not so much to escape death; the real difficulty is to escape from wickedness, which is far more fleet of foot. In this present instance I, the slow old man, have been overtaken by the slower of the two, but my accusers, who are clever and quick, have been overtaken by the faster: by

iniquity. When I leave this court I shall go away condemned by you to death, but they will go away convicted by Truth herself of depravity and injustice. And they accept their sentence even as I accept mine. No doubt it was bound to be so, and I think that the result is fair enough.

c Having said so much, I feel moved to prophesy to you who have given your vote against me; for I am now at that point where the gift of prophecy comes most readily to men: at the point of death. I tell you, my executioners, that as soon as I am dead, vengeance shall fall upon you with a punishment far more painful than your killing of me. You have brought about my death in the belief that through it you will be delivered from submitting the conduct of your lives to criticism; but I say that the result will be just the opposite. You will have more critics, whom up till now I have restrained without your knowing it; and being younger they will be harsher to you and will cause you more annoyance.

d If you expect to stop denunciation of your wrong way of life by putting people to death, there is something amiss with your reasoning. This way of escape is neither possible nor creditable; the best and easiest way is not to stop the mouths of others, but to make yourselves as well behaved as possible. This is my last message to you who voted for my condemnation.

e As for you who voted for my acquittal, I should very much like to say a few words to reconcile you to this result, while the officials are busy and I am not yet on my way to the place where I must die. I ask you, gentlemen, to spare me these few moments; there is no reason why we should not exchange a few words while the law permits. I look upon you as my friends, and I want to show you the meaning of what has now happened to me.

40a Gentlemen of the jury⁷⁹ – for you deserve to be so called – I have had a remarkable experience. In the past the prophetic voice to which I have become accustomed has always been my constant companion, opposing me even in quite trivial things if I was going to take the wrong course. Now something has happened to me, as you can see, which might be thought and is commonly considered to be a supreme calamity; yet neither when I left home this morning, nor when I was taking my place

here in the court, nor at any point in any part of my speech, did the divine sign oppose me. In other discussions it has often checked me in the middle of a sentence; but this time it has never opposed me in any part of this business in anything that I have said or done. What do I suppose to be the explanation? I will tell you. I suspect that this thing that has happened to me is a blessing, and we are quite mistaken in supposing death to be an evil. I have good grounds for thinking this, because my accustomed sign could not have failed to oppose me if what I was doing had not been sure to bring some good result.

We should reflect that there is much reason to hope for a good result on other grounds as well. Death is one of two things. Either it is annihilation, and the dead have no consciousness of anything; or, as we are told,⁸⁰ it is really a change: a migration of the soul from this place to another. Now if there is no consciousness but only a dreamless sleep, death must be a marvellous gain. I suppose that if anyone were told to pick out the night on which he slept so soundly as not even to dream, and then to compare it with all the other nights and days of his life, and then were told to say, after due consideration, how many better and happier days and nights than this he had spent in the course of his life – well, I think that the Great King himself,⁸¹ to say nothing of any private person, would find these days and nights easy to count in comparison with the rest. If death is like this, then, I call it gain; because the whole of time, if you look at it in this way, can be regarded as no more than one single night. If on the other hand death is a removal from here to some other place, and if what we are told is true, that all the dead are there, what greater blessing could there be than this, gentlemen of the jury? If on arrival in the other world, beyond the reach of these so-called jurors here, one will find there the true jurors who are said to preside in those courts, Minos and Rhadamanthys and Aeacus⁸² and Triptolemus⁸³ and all those other demigods who were upright in their earthly life, would that be an unrewarding place to settle? Put it in this way: how much would one of you give to meet Orpheus and Musaeus, Hesiod and Homer?⁸⁴ I am willing to die ten times over if this account is true. For me at least it would be a wonderful personal experience

to join them there, to meet Palamedes and Ajax the son of Telamon⁸⁵ and any other heroes of the old days who met their death through an unjust trial, and to compare my fortunes with theirs – it would be rather amusing, I think – and above all I should like to spend my time there, as here, in examining and searching people's minds, to find out who is really wise among them, and who only thinks that he is. What would one not give, gentlemen, to be able to scrutinize the leader of that great host against Troy, or Odysseus, or Sisyphus,⁸⁶ or the thousands of other men and women whom one could mention? Their company and conversation – like the chance to examine them – would be unimaginable happiness. At any rate I presume that they do not put one to death there for such conduct; because apart from the other happiness in which their world surpasses ours, they are now immortal for the rest of time, if what we are told is true.

You too, gentlemen of the jury, must look forward to death with confidence, and fix your minds on this one belief, which is certain: that nothing can harm a good man either in life or after death, and his fortunes are not a matter of indifference to the gods. This present experience of mine does not result from mere earthly causes; I am quite clear that the time had come when it was better for me to die and be released from my distractions. That is why my sign never turned me back. For my own part I bear no grudge at all against those who condemned me and accused me, although it was not with this kind intention that they did so, but because they thought that they were hurting me; and that is culpable of them. However, I ask them to grant me one favour. When my sons grow up, gentlemen, if you think that they are putting money or anything else before goodness, take your revenge by plaguing them as I plagued you; and if they fancy themselves for no reason, you must scold them just as I scolded you, for neglecting the important things and thinking that they are good for something when they are good for nothing. If you do this, I shall have had justice at your hands – I *and* my children.

Well, now it is time to be off, I to die and you to live; but which of us has the happier prospect is unknown to anyone but God.

Crito – Justice and Duty (ii)

Socrates in Prison