

But enough, fellow Athenians. It needs no long defence, I think, to show that I am not guilty of the charges in Meletus' indictment; the foregoing will suffice. You may be sure, though, that what I was saying earlier is true: I have earned great hostility among many people. And that is what will convict me, if I am convicted: not Meletus or Anytus, but the slander and malice of the crowd. They have certainly convicted many other good men as well, and I imagine they will do so again; there is no risk of their stopping with me.

Now someone may perhaps say: 'Well then, are you not ashamed, Socrates, to have pursued a way of life which has now put you at risk of death?'

But it may be fair for me to answer him as follows: 'You are sadly mistaken, fellow, if you suppose that a man with even a grain of self-respect should reckon up the risks of living or dying, rather than simply consider, whenever he does something, whether his actions are just or unjust, the deeds of a good man or a bad one. By your principles, presumably, all those demigods who died in the plain of Troy\* were inferior creatures—yes, even the son of Thetis,\* who showed so much scorn for danger, when the alternative was to endure dishonour. Thus, when he was eager to slay Hector, his mother, goddess that she was, spoke to him—something like this, I fancy:

My child, if thou dost avenge the murder of thy friend, Patroclus, And dost slay Hector, then straightway [so runs the poem] Shalt thou die thyself, since doom is prepared for thee Next after Hector's.

10 But though he heard that, he made light of death and danger, since he feared far more to live as a base man, and d to fail to avenge his dear ones. The poem goes on:

Then straightway let me die, once I have given the wrongdoer His deserts, lest I remain here by the beak-prowed ships, An object of derision, and a burden upon the earth.

Can you suppose that he gave any thought to death or danger?

5 You see, here is the truth of the matter, fellow Athenians. Wherever a man has taken up a position because he considers it best, or has been posted there by his commander, that is where I believe he should remain, steadfast in danger, taking no account at all of death or of anything else rather than dishonour. I would therefore have been acting absurdly, fellow Athenians, if when assigned to a post at Potidaea, Amphipolis, or Delium\* by the superiors you had elected to command me, I remained where I was posted on those occasions at the risk of death, if ever any man did; whereas now that the god assigns me, as I became completely convinced, to the duty of leading the philosophical life by examining myself and others, I 5 desert that post from fear of death or anything else. Yes, that would be unthinkable; and then I truly should deserve to be brought to court for failing to acknowledge the gods' existence, in that I was disobedient to the oracle, was afraid of death, and thought I was wise when I was not.

5 After all, gentlemen, the fear of death amounts simply to thinking one is wise when one is not: it is thinking one knows something one does not know. No one knows, you see, whether death may not in fact prove the greatest of all blessings for mankind; but people fear it as if they knew it for certain to be the greatest of evils. And yet<sup>1</sup> to think that one knows what one does not know must surely be the kind of folly which is reprehensible.

On this matter especially, gentlemen, that may be the nature of my own advantage over most people. If I really were to claim to be wiser than anyone in any respect, it would consist simply in this: just as I do not possess adequate knowledge of life in Hades,\* so I also realize that I do not possess it; whereas acting unjustly in disobedience to one's betters, whether god or human being, is something I *know* to be evil and shameful. Hence I shall never fear or flee from something which may indeed be a good for all I know, rather than from things I know to be evils.

Suppose, therefore, that you pay no heed to Anytus, but are prepared to let me go. He said I need never have been brought to court in the first place; but that once I had been, your only option was to put me to death.\* He declared before you that, if I got away from you this time, your sons would all be utterly corrupted by practising Socrates' teachings. Suppose, in the face of that, you were to say to me:

'Socrates, we will not listen to Anytus this time. We are prepared to let you go—but only on this condition: you are to pursue that quest of yours and practise philosophy no longer; and if you are caught doing it any more, you shall be put to death.'

Well, as I just said, if you were prepared to let me go on those terms, I should reply to you as follows:

'I have the greatest fondness and affection for you, fellow Athenians, but I will obey my god rather than you; and so long as I draw breath and am able, I shall never give up practising philosophy, or exhorting and showing the way to any of you whom I ever encounter, by giving my usual sort of message. "Excellent friend," I shall say; "You are an Athenian. Your city is the most important and renowned for its wisdom and power; so are you not ashamed that, while you take care to acquire as much wealth as possible, with honour and glory as well, yet you take no care or thought for understanding or truth, or for the best possible state of your soul?"

'And should any of you dispute that, and claim that he



does take such care, I will not let him go straight away  
 5 nor leave him, but I will question and examine and put  
 30a him to the test; and if I do not think he has acquired  
 goodness, though he says he has, I shall say, "Shame on  
 you, for setting the lowest value upon the most precious  
 things, and for rating inferior ones more highly!" That I  
 shall do for anyone I encounter, young or old, alien or  
 fellow citizen; but all the more for the latter, since your  
 5 kinship with me is closer.'

Those are my orders from my god, I do assure you.  
 Indeed, I believe that no greater good has ever befallen you  
 in our city than my service to my god; because all I do is  
 to go about persuading you, young and old alike, not to  
 b care for your bodies or for your wealth so intensely as for  
 the greatest possible well-being of your souls. 'It is not  
 wealth', I tell you, 'that produces goodness; rather, it is  
 from goodness that wealth, and all other benefits for human  
 beings, accrue to them in their private and public life.'\*

5 If, in fact, I am corrupting the young by those asser-  
 tions, you may call them harmful. But if anyone claims  
 that I say anything different, he is talking nonsense. In the  
 face of that I should like to say: 'Fellow Athenians, you  
 may listen to Anytus or not, as you please; and you may  
 c let me go or not, as you please, because there is no chance  
 of my acting otherwise, even if I have to die many times  
 over—'

Stop protesting, fellow Athenians! Please abide by my  
 request\* that you not protest against what I say, but hear  
 me out; in fact, it will be in your interest, so I believe, to  
 5 do so. You see, I am going to say some further things to  
 you which may make you shout out—although I beg you  
 not to.

You may be assured that if you put to death the sort of  
 man I just said I was, you will not harm me more than  
 10 you harm yourselves. Meletus or Anytus would not harm  
 me at all; nor, in fact, could they do so, since I believe it is  
 out of the question for a better man to be harmed by his  
 d inferior. The latter may, of course, inflict death or banish-  
 ment or disenfranchisement; and my accuser here, along

with others no doubt, believes those to be great evils. But  
 I do not. Rather, I believe it a far greater evil to try to kill  
 5 a man unjustly, as he does now.

At this point, therefore, fellow Athenians, so far from  
 pleading on my own behalf, as might be supposed, I am  
 pleading on yours, in case by condemning me you should  
 mistreat the gift which God has bestowed upon you—  
 e because if you put me to death, you will not easily find  
 another like me. The fact is, if I may put the point in a  
 somewhat comical way, that I have been literally attached  
 by God to our city, as if to a horse—a large thorough-  
 bred, which is a bit sluggish because of its size, and needs  
 5 to be aroused by some sort of gadfly. Yes, in me, I believe,  
 God has attached to our city just such a creature—the  
 kind which is constantly alighting everywhere on you,  
 31a all day long, arousing, cajoling, or reproaching each and  
 every one of you. You will not easily acquire another such  
 gadfly, gentlemen; rather, if you take my advice, you will  
 spare my life. I dare say, though, that you will get angry,  
 like people who are awakened from their doze. Perhaps  
 you will heed Anytus, and give me a swat: you could hap-  
 5 pily finish me off, and then spend the rest of your life  
 asleep—unless God, in his compassion for you, were to  
 send you someone else.

That I am, in fact, just the sort of gift that God would  
 send to our city, you may recognize from this: it would  
 not seem to be in human nature\* for me to have neglected  
 b all my own affairs, and put up with the neglect of my  
 family for all these years, but constantly minded your  
 interests, by visiting each of you in private like a father or  
 an elder brother, urging you to be concerned about good-  
 5 ness. Of course, if I were gaining anything from that, or  
 were being paid to urge that course upon you, my actions  
 could be explained. But in fact you can see for yourselves  
 that my accusers, who so shamelessly level all those other  
 charges against me, could not muster the impudence to  
 call evidence that I ever once obtained payment, or asked  
 c for any. It is I who can call evidence sufficient, I think, to  
 show that I am speaking the truth—namely, my poverty.



Now it may perhaps seem peculiar that, as some say, I give this counsel by going around and dealing with others' concerns in private, yet do not venture to appear before the Assembly, and counsel the city about your business in public. But the reason for that is one you have frequently heard me give in many places: it is a certain divine or spiritual sign\* which comes to me, the very thing to which Meletus made mocking allusion in his indictment. It has been happening to me ever since childhood: a voice of some sort which comes, and which always—whenever it does come—restrains me from what I am about to do, yet never gives positive direction. That is what opposes my engaging in politics—and its opposition is an excellent thing, to my mind; because you may be quite sure, fellow Athenians, that if I had tried to engage in politics,† I should have perished long since, and should have been of no use either to you or to myself.

And please do not get angry if I tell you the truth. The fact is that there is no person on earth whose life will be spared by you or by any other majority, if he is genuinely opposed to many injustices and unlawful acts, and tries to prevent their occurrence in our city. Rather, anyone who truly fights for what is just, if he is going to survive for even a short time, must act in a private capacity rather than a public one.

I will offer you conclusive evidence of that—not just words, but the sort of evidence that you respect, namely, actions. Just hear me tell my experiences, so that you may know that I would not submit to a single person for fear of death, contrary to what is just; nor would I do so, even if I were to lose my life on the spot. I shall mention things to you which are vulgar commonplaces of the courts; yet they are true.

Although I have never held any other public office in our city, fellow Athenians, I have served on its Council. My own tribe, Antiochis, happened to be the presiding commission\* on the occasion when you wanted† a collective trial for the ten generals who had failed to rescue the survivors from the naval battle.\* That was illegal, as you

all later recognized. At the time I was the only commissioner opposed to your acting illegally, and I voted against the motion. And though its advocates were prepared to lay information against me and have me arrested, while you were urging them on by shouting, I believed that I should face danger in siding with law and justice, rather than take your side for fear of imprisonment or death, when your proposals were contrary to justice.

Those events took place while our city was still under democratic rule. But on a subsequent occasion, after the oligarchy had come to power, the Thirty\* summoned me and four others to the round chamber,\* with orders to arrest Leon the Salaminian, and fetch him from Salamis\* for execution; they were constantly issuing such orders, of course, to many others, in their wish to implicate as many as possible in their crimes. On that occasion, however, I showed, once again not just by words, but by my actions, that I couldn't care less about death—if that would not be putting it rather crudely—but that my one and only care was to avoid doing anything sinful or unjust. Thus, powerful as it was, that regime did not frighten me into unjust action: when we emerged from the round chamber, the other four went off to Salamis and arrested Leon, whereas I left them and went off home. For that I might easily have been put to death, had the regime not collapsed shortly afterwards. There are many witnesses who will testify before you about those events.

Do you imagine, then, that I would have survived all these years if I had been regularly active in public life, and had championed what was right in a manner worthy of a brave man, and valued that above all else, as was my duty? Far from it, fellow Athenians: I would not, and nor would any other man. But in any public undertaking, that is the sort of person that I, for my part, shall prove to have been throughout my life; and likewise in my private life, because I have never been guilty of unjust association with anyone, including those whom my slanderers allege to have been my students.\*

I never, in fact, was anyone's instructor\* at any time.



But if a person wanted to hear me talking, while I was engaging in my own business, I never grudged that to anyone, young or old; nor do I hold conversation only when I receive payment, and not otherwise. Rather, I offer myself for questioning to wealthy and poor alike, and to anyone who may wish to answer in response to questions from me. Whether any of those people acquires a good character or not, I cannot fairly be held responsible, when I never at any time promised any of them that they would learn anything from me, nor gave them instruction. And if anyone claims that he ever learnt anything from me, or has heard privately something that everyone else did not hear as well, you may be sure that what he says is untrue.

Why then, you may ask, do some people enjoy spending so much time in my company? You have already heard, fellow Athenians: I have told you the whole truth—which is that my listeners enjoy the examination of those who think themselves wise but are not, since the process is not unamusing. But for me, I must tell you, it is a mission which I have been bidden to undertake by the god, through oracles and dreams,\* and through every means whereby a divine injunction to perform any task has ever been laid upon a human being.\*

That is not only true, fellow Athenians, but is easily verified—because if I do corrupt any of our young people, or have corrupted others in the past, then presumably, when they grew older, should any of them have realized that I had at any time given them bad advice in their youth, they ought now to have appeared here themselves to accuse me and obtain redress. Or else, if they were unwilling to come in person, members of their families—fathers, brothers, or other relations—had their relatives suffered any harm at my hands, ought now to put it on record and obtain redress.

In any case, many of those people are present, whom I can see: first there is Crito, my contemporary and fellow demesman, father of Critobulus here; then Lysanias of Sphettus, father of Aeschines here; next, Epigenes' father, Antiphon from Cephisia, is present; then again, there are

others here whose brothers have spent time with me in these studies: Nicostratus, son of Theozotides, brother of Theodotus—Theodotus himself, incidentally, is deceased, so Nicostratus could not have come at his brother's urging; and Paralius here, son of Demodocus, whose brother was Theages; also present is Ariston's son, Adimantus, whose brother is Plato here;\* and Aeantodorus, whose brother is Apollodorus here.

There are many others I could mention to you, from whom Meletus should surely have called some testimony during his own speech. However, if he forgot to do so then, let him call it now—I yield the floor to him—and if he has any such evidence, let him produce it. But quite the opposite is true, gentlemen: you will find that they are all prepared to support me, their corruptor, the one who is, according to Meletus and Anytus, doing their relatives mischief. Support for me from the actual victims of corruption might perhaps be explained; but what of the uncorrupted—older men by now, and relatives of my victims? What reason would they have to support me, apart from the right and proper one, which is that they know very well that Meletus is lying, whereas I am telling the truth?