

CHAPTER Three

Socrates: Morals, Ethics and God

As the *Preface* stated, Aristotle notes that ethics begins with knowledge and this raises the traditional, nagging question about human behavior: does knowledge effect, or even affect human behavior? This question raises a second: what change, if any, can formal education have on human behavior? Plato is the first to confront this nagging question, indirectly through Socrates, his teacher in the *Apology*, but formally within his dialogue, *The Meno*.

If knowledge is power, then self-knowledge is the source of power.

The knowledge and possession of wealth, honor and reputation certainly affected the actions of Socrates' fellow Athenians. Indeed, they sought the kind of knowledge which resulted in the acquisition of honor, wealth and reputation what today we call *applied knowledge*. The demand for such knowledge is what occasioned his fellow Athenians to hold the Sophists in high esteem as teachers because they taught the kind of rhetorical kind of applied knowledge which won the one arguing the argument regardless of the argument's truth or falsity. That demand also resulted in the Athenians' guilty verdict for Socrates and their decision that he drink hemlock. The same emphasis upon and trust in such "practical" knowledge (today labeled technology) is the same demand echoed within the Community College weighted requirement that A.A. and A.S. graduates have forty (40) units in a major and only twenty (20) units in what is a "dumbed down" general education (or literacy) requirement whose purpose is ostensibly to render the recipient able to read and write - the requirement results from the contemporary emphasis upon materialism and "making a living" (which realistically means having the wherewithal to pay taxes), paying no attention to the quality of that living.

As we shall see, Aristotle recognized that the knowledge which affected ethics is factual knowledge acquired by experience coupled with the free choice to perform a virtuous action; such experience results from sensible perceptions. Socrates observed the practical power of winning an argument vis á vis losing one's life in a law court as he experienced the rejection of his peers to his simple search for the meaning of being wise.

To believe in the truth compels reason to search for understanding.

Traditionally, as per Francis Bacon's *Novum Organon* (1620) "knowledge is power". But, if knowledge is power, then self-knowledge is the root or source of

that power. The root or source of any knowledge has to be self-knowledge for the simple reason that each person begins with the knowledge of self as the basis of the decision to perform a specific action. The occidental problem is that few westerners know *who they are* as human beings since they define themselves by **what they have** or **whom they know**. This identification problem intensifies with two facts: American occidentals lack knowledge of their history and of planet earth's geography. Consequently, few Americans can find themselves and they do not know where to look so they are more influenced by people who claim to know and who back up that claim by "success" gained by money, honor and reputation. These Americans become sheep led by shearers - or contemporaneously, advertisers!

Occidentals increasingly obtain their meaning from material possessions or personal reputation; an indication of this is the fact that American's way of deciding the "truth" is to conduct a "pole". Americans do not ask whether an action is right or wrong; rather, Americans currently ask what the consensus is and then determine what is right or wrong - since the common perception is that the Truth of being exists in the way humans think rather than in the way things are! Yet, the resulting perception and experience of self and the self-knowledge are the only things which provide us humans the perspective necessary to use any and all other acquired knowledge in a human way. Given the fact that our occidental tradition begins with Socrates, we must ask how did Socrates define "self-knowledge" and how did we arrive at our current state of mind toward material possessions, our increasing boredom, our search for "what life owes us" and consequent tendency to suicide?

**To be truthful is to remember,
but to lie is to forget.**

Socrates taught that self-knowledge is the basis of human wisdom and that wisdom is the highest virtue which human beings can achieve, so, in this sense, self-knowledge is human excellence or virtue. The occidental drama pitting self-knowledge and human wisdom against other kinds of knowledge, opinion poles and social morals begins in the fifth century B.C. with the *Apology* of Plato.

Does human empowerment derive from knowledge others have of us, or from knowledge we have of ourselves?

Plato wrote his seventeen year old reflections of his seventy year old teacher's responses to the Athenian accusations of impiety, corruption of youth and treason in the *Apology* some 2,500 years ago. The *Apology*, therefore, is a good place to start an ethics course because Socrates was accused of being vicious for moral reasons as witnessed by the charges of being an atheist and a corruptor of Athenian youth. These charges were the equivalent to committing treason by Athenian standards so the majority of his Athenian peers considered him an evil person within their society, one worthy of exile or death. But, the question is: can a human being's worth be determined by other people's opinions?

The Athenian society accepted the viewpoint that politicians, poets and crafts-people were wise precisely because they all used their *logos*, or *speech* to organize their respective worlds: politicians organized the city-state through *nomos*, or *law*, poets the Greek language through *poein*, *making words sing*, crafts-people materials, such as clay and marble through *techne*, or *skill* in sculpting, painting and so forth. Indeed, the itinerant teachers of that part of Greece were called *sophists*, or *wise-men* because they taught lawyers how to win the cases they pleaded and politicians how to be popular and be called *wise* merely by teaching them to organize their speech and perfecting their speaking abilities.

To be wise within Athens meant *to organize your words* in a manner *such that you would win an argument or law suit by verbal power*, whether one took the affirmative or negative side of the issue. Indeed, to organize meant to empower because it showed the ability to control; to be rational, after all, shows the ability to control. So, truth was not the goal, rather, to manipulate answers in such a manner that one won the argument was the purpose. This was the Athenian custom, the moral thing to do and this was the approved activity of Athenian teachers. Sophists

were the morally acceptable teachers. Has human behavior or society changed much in the ensuing 2,500 years?

To know oneself is to be empowered.

Socrates, however, refused to accept money for asking questions after his manner of instruction. He claimed that he could not give students anything, since he possessed no knowledge, or answers so he did not deserve a fee. Ethically, however, it was wrong to take money for doing nothing and it was unethical to claim that he taught them knowledge when he lacked any such knowledge to teach. Socrates only questioned other people about the meaning and truth of their answers, and he only did this because he sought self-knowledge. This self-knowledge was a practical knowledge which each individual person could give to him or herself and this self-knowledge was an obligation Socrates was convinced that all human beings had first, toward themselves, secondly, toward society.. Self-knowledge, therefore, equaled self-empowerment. This self-knowledge meant knowing that you did not know; but, since knowing that you did not know is wisdom for a human being, such self-knowledge was the equivalent of human virtue, the perfection of being human. Thus, Socratically, having self-knowledge was equivalent to possessing human virtue and, therefore, had no necessary relationship to being wealthy, being respected or having a reputation.

The Apology describes the public trial of Socrates charged with three crimes against the state of Athens: corrupting the youth, questioning things above and under the earth, or atheism and taking money for instruction. Being found guilty of the first two charges was the equivalent of committing treason against the state and three penalties were possible: to cease these actions and pay a fine, to accept exile from Athens or, if found guilty after claiming innocence, to die by drinking hemlock.

**To be true to oneself is to be truthful
and to be truthful is to be ethical.**

The moral thing to do was to admit guilt, beg forgiveness and accept the fine. But, Socrates refused to plead guilty, rather he chose to invoke Athenian law and to defend himself against these charges. This meant, however, that he was obliged to accept the decision of 501 Athenian jurors. (19a-b) But, if they found him guilty, the law required him to drink hemlock. Thus, their decision meant that he did or did not offend public morals and the penalty for such an offense then as today is death. The significance of this decision affected the manner in which defendants pleaded their cases before the Athenian court. However, Socrates would not plead as was the custom; he chose to be ethical and die rather than to be moral and live:

I have been defeated because I was wanting, not in arguments, but in overboldness and effrontery because I would not plead before you as you would have liked to hear me plead, or appeal to you with weeping and wailing, or say and do many other things, which I maintain are unworthy of me, but which you have been accustomed to from other men. But when I was defending myself, I thought that I ought not to do anything unmanly because of the danger which I ran, and I have not changed my mind now. I would very much rather defend myself as I did, and die, than as you would have wanted me do, and live.

If the accused pleaded innocent, then, Athenian law permitted the Greek citizen to defend himself against the charges in a public trial to be judged by his peers. Socrates defended his personal actions before a jury of 501 peers. Ethics went on trial before morals.

To self-reflect is to be truthful and to live; to think what others think about you is to lie and to die.

Socrates argued that his actions had justice and truth as their basis, whereas the moral actions of the Athenians were

based on wealth, honor and reputation. Indeed, Socrates made three claims: first, that his actions originated in a proclamation by the Delphic Oracle, the Athenian Prophetess (20e-21c), secondly, were guided by an inner voice (perhaps, conscience) (31d-e) and finally, were performed out of obedience to the God (23a-d, 28e-29c, 29e-30b). Socrates even contends that God sent him to Athens as a horsefly to a horse (30e-31a), his mission being to sting Athens into the awareness that Athenians should "make your first and chief concern not for your bodies nor for your possessions, but for the highest welfare of your souls..." (30a-c) His mission was to sting the Athenian horse into self-knowledge.

Socrates calls attention to the basic problem confronting human behavior in the very first sentence of the *Apology*. The basic problem is to discover the truth, so "truth" itself is on trial, since he saw truth to be the difference between the **way things are** and the **way men say** things are:

I do not know what impression my accusers have made upon you, Athenians. But I do know that they nearly made me forget who I was, so persuasive were they. And yet they have scarcely spoken one single word of truth. (19A)

"Truth" is the English translation of the Greek word *aletheia*, meaning literally *a*, not, and *letheia*, *to forget, to hide, to bury and to cover up*. Socrates tells his accusers, therefore, that they have used words to describe his actions in such a way that even he, Socrates, almost "forgot" who he is. His self-knowledge was almost covered up by the words others used to describe him. Yet, he "does not forget", rather he remembers and proceeds to use words to remind his peers of what they have hidden, to uncover the truth which they have buried and covered up with their words. Socrates shows history the true purpose of rationality, what it means to be a rational animal, namely, to set the truth free by uncovering the obstacles hiding truth.

Questions require a belief in Truth, but answers do not.

Socrates begins his defense by asking: "...what did my critics say in attacking my character" (literally, **ethos**, *ethics*, the way I have myself, 19b)? Now, we come to realize that the basic problem between the **way men speak** and the **way things are** comes down to the fundamental issue of Confucian **honesty** as the condition of being alive humanly:

I must read their affidavit, so to speak, as though they were my legal accusers: Socrates is guilty of criminal meddling, 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. (19b-c)

The charges are of two kinds: an old set referred to by the playwright, Aristophanes; and a recent set filed with the court by the three state prosecutors, Meletus, Lycon and Anytus. The charges are three: corrupting the youth of Athens, atheism and sedition, all treasonous offenses, that is, a capital offense. But, in a few words, Socrates is accused of nothing more than asking questions, of being honest, of seeking to understand how the Delphic Oracle could have said that Socrates was the wisest of men.

To be ethical is to live and to grow but to be moral is to stagnate, perhaps to die.

They accuse him of "making the weaker argument the stronger" because the only acceptable form of education and, consequently, the only morally acceptable manner of teaching was the sophistic way of providing students "canned" answers to hypothetical cases, regardless of guilt or innocence, error or truth. Socrates' manner of questioning his peers rendered "canned" answers useless. But, since the "canned" answer approach was the morally stronger argument, then Socrates was guilty of using a weaker argument, the question to overcome the stronger argument, the answer. The Socratic manner of instruction was, therefore, immoral and, in fact, undermined the very social fabric of Athenian society by corrupting the youth since they followed his example.

What, however, started Socrates' reflective habit of questioning? Here we see the relation of myth and religion to this Western birth of philosophic method and its relevance to an individual's ethics and a society's morals. Socrates' boyhood friend, Chaerephon went to the Delphic Oracle, the human mediator between Athens and the Goddess Athena and the God Zeus. This was the social custom in Athens. No important activity was undertaken until and unless the Athenian Oracle was consulted; this was true both for Greek and Roman societies. Socrates recounts the scene: "he asked whether there was anyone wiser than myself. The priestess replied that there was no one". Socrates continues:

When I heard about the oracle's answer, I said to myself, What does the god mean? Why does he not use plain language? 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. (21B-c)

Questions unmask the weakness which answers claim as strength.

Seven centuries later, Aurelius Augustine explained his purpose for discussing philosophy at Cassiciacum by saying that his *faith sought understanding, fides querens intellectum*. Socrates believed in divinity and believed that the gods could not lie; Socrates' belief sent him seeking to understand what the Oracle stated, namely, that he was the wisest of men. Greek myth and Socrates' "religious duty" (21e-22) originates his search for self-knowledge and the meaning of human wisdom. So, a contemporary question is: whether or not the legal claim that religion can not occur in public occasions undermines its citizens' ethical actions - perhaps American law is more the cause of declining ethical values than anything else! Even Joseph Campbell and Mercea Eliade overlook this simple historical fact. Socrates himself characterizes his quest within the tradition of Odysseus for home and, much later of Jason for the golden fleece:

I want you to think of my adventures as a sort of pilgrimage undertaken to establish the truth of the oracle once for all. (22a-b)

Indeed, Socrates specifies that his religious belief is the driving force for his continued practice of questioning and pursuing the love of wisdom:

The law is what men say so to obey the law is to be moral.

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 think that any person is not wise, I try to help the cause of God by proving that he is not. This occupation has kept me too busy to do much either in politics or in my private affairs. In fact, my service to God has reduced me to extreme poverty. (23b-c)

But, what has been the effect of Socrates' search for the meaning of wisdom through his philosophical method of questioning?

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, including the description of me as a professor of wisdom. 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. But the truth of the matter, gentlemen, is pretty certainly this, that real wisdom is the property of God, and this oracle is his way of telling us that human wisdom has little or no value. 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. (22e-23b)

What men say is not always the way things are!

The reason for such hostility is simple. Neither in fifth century B.C. Athens, nor in twentieth century A.D. America do citizens, whether as

individuals or as groups want to face up to their lack of knowledge, but particularly to their lack of self-knowledge and its consequent effect upon their behavior. This author thinks that a curious phenomenon occasions this lack of interest human beings show to face up to a lack of self-knowledge. We tend to become habituated to defining ourselves by **what we possess** and **by whom we are known**. Yet, whether those possessions be our knowledge or material goods, or whether these people whom we know know us is immaterial. However, we define ourselves through the power of what people think is valuable, literally, by **what men say** rather than by **the way things are**. This process distances us from ourselves with which we lose contact and consequently, lose perspective about the world.

If and when someone asks us questions, our self-definition is threatened. We feel de-stabilized, off-balance and get frightened. The question(s)

momentarily forces us to disassociate ourselves from the "truth" and "happiness" we have, and we now must make a personal choice (which we might not have done as yet) as to the truth or falsehood of the issue questioned and, therefore, of who we are **versus** who we think or others say we are. We are not prepared for making such a choice because we are not that balanced and secure about the truth of who we are. We lack the basic

To die frequently means to be alive,

foundation which self-knowledge provides. So we strike out: first, with a reassertion that what we "know" is true; then, we follow with the denial about the validity or relevance of the question; finally, we end with rejection of the person asking the question(s). Old Testament prophets and the New Testament Christ were rejected, persecuted and even killed because of the message they announced. This rejection can run the gamut from excusing ourselves from the conversation; from disassociating ourselves from the person who asks the question(s); to killing the person asking the question -- as in this case with the Athenians and as has been the case so many times in human history, that is, kill the messenger rather than accept the truth of the message!

Socrates, as each human being was raised within the family, both his private one and the public one, called the community. All humans are raised within the rules or law of the home and the community so, in this sense, all humans are raised to be moral, that is, to obey the rules of the household and of the community. Socrates alludes to this many places within the Apology (19-III, p.23;). Yet, he also states that "...I have a certain divine guide...from childhood. It is a kind of voice which, whenever I hear it, always turns me back from something which I was going to do but never urges me to act" (p. 33). So, given this "voice", Socrates states unequivocally, not only "...no man who could make me consent to commit an unjust act from the fear of death...", but:

The government with all its power did not terrify me into doing anything unjust. (p.34)

Thus, Socrates decides whether or not his action is right or wrong, that is just or unjust. This decision is the decision to be ethical and to live, versus the decision to be moral and to die. Socrates' demeanor highlights the truth of the Oriental thinker, Confucius on the other side of Socrates' world:

The Master said, "the ways of the true gentleman are three. I myself have met with success in none of them. For he who is really Good is never unhappy; he who is really wise is never perplexed; he who is really brave is never afraid. Tzu-king said, 'That, Master, is your own Way!'" (Analects, Bk. XIV, 30)

Plato's putting his memory of himself in writing as the Apology, as the seventeen year old student of Socrates listening and seeing the Athenian court of his 501

peers trying him for sedition, treason and the corruption of youth , did not document any unhappiness on the part of Socrates. Indeed, Plato characterizes Socrates as relieved with the trial and the court's decision, commenting that he was seventy and was looking forward to whatever afterlife might await him. Nor does Plato ever characterize Socrates as "perplexed". On the contrary, Plato characterizes Socrates as very matter of fact and comfortable in his conclusion about the meaning of the Delphic Oracle's statement that Socrates is the wisest citizen of Athens:

But, gentlemen, I believe that the god is really wise and that by this oracle he meant that human wisdom is worth little or nothing. I do not think that he meant that Socrates

To believe in the truth compels

was wise. He only made use of my name and took me as an example, as though he would say to men, 'He among you is the wisest who, like Socrates, knows that his wisdom is really worth nothing at all'. (*Apology IX, 23*)

Indeed, Socrates chides his fellow Athenians on their fear of death because such a fear is based on a lack of knowledge and, thus, a presumption that those who fear death know something that no human can know. Finally, Socrates states unequivocally: "I would very much rather defend myself as I did and die, than as you would have had me do and live". Socrates, therefore, pagan that he is certainly qualifies for the happiness, bravery and wisdom which Confucius laments that he lacks.

Socrates has come full circle. His philosophic search began with the statement by the Delphic Oracle and ends with his conclusion about the meaning of wisdom for humans and for God. The oracle's statement drove Socrates within, to search for the meaning of wisdom as predicated of himself, and led him to the truth about himself, about his fellow Athenian citizens and about God. Again, Plato emphasizes through the example of Socrates the purpose of human discourse and such is the reason he wrote his dialogues. Self-reflection and thus, self-knowledge (*metanoia*) provides simultaneously knowledge about other human beings and God. Socrates found that the most important knowledge a human being can have is self-knowledge, interior self-reflective knowledge where he also found that "voice" which warned him in the event he was going to do something wrong. Socrates concluded that he and other human beings have wisdom when they are aware that they do not know and God alone is wisdom.

Socrates proclaims his loyalty to the state of Athens and his support of the expulsion of the prior Athenian government administration as well as the restoration of the democracy now in power (21a). Furthermore, Socrates specifies his loyalty to the state of Athens as an obedient soldier "assigned to my position at Potidaea and Amphipolis and Delium...". (28e-29) So, this testimony proves that his ethical convictions do not result in illegal actions. Yet, despite his obedience

to the state in the face of death, he will not obey the state's demand that he cease questioning citizens about the meaning of wisdom. Here Socrates draws a line between public law and natural law: ethics obeys a higher law:

...I am your very grateful and devoted servant, but I owe a greater obedience to God than to you, and so long as I draw breath and have my faculties, I shall never stop practicing philosophy and exhorting you and elucidating the truth (literally, "uncovering what is covered up") for everyone that I meet. I shall go on saying, in my usual way...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 honor, and give no attention or thought to truth and understanding and the perfection of your soul? (29d-e)

Here we have the answer to a nagging question: given the fact that this pagan Athenian Socrates showed such courage, wisdom and peace in the face of his trial and condemnation for treason and sedition, what could be the source of such virtues for a stone cutting pagan in the sixth century B.C.? Of course, a simple answer is the strength of his conviction originated with his self-knowledge, guided by "...a certain divine guide which is what Meletus has caricatured in his indictment...(which)...I have had...from childhood". But, no, the simple answer is that Socrates' courage, wisdom and peace roots in his obedience to God, his religious center. Nineteen centuries later, Thomas Aquinas, the Dominican teacher at the University of Paris calls attention to this same phenomena, namely, that given the fact that humans, such as the Athenians, can only judge external actions apparent to them, human law can make mistakes, so the divine law guides interior human actions to perform good actions. (*S.T. I-II*, 91, 4 and 95, 1) Thus, independent of human law, God, guides the conscience of humans to perform good actions, yet, this guidance permits them to choose such actions, as in Socrates' case, or to refuse such actions, as in the majority of Socrates' Athenian judges!

Aquinas also echoes Socrates' description of the "voice" as the "divine guide...I have had...from childhood" within his *Questiones Disputatae, De Veritate*, q. 17, a. 1 *De Conscientia*, or *Concerning the Conscience*. Aquinas calls the operation of conscience that by which humans inspect through knowledge any action to be taken, as, for example, taking counsel about something to be done. But, what is the characteristic of this "knowledge" through which conscience works. Aquinas provides a threefold characteristic, all three of which come from God: natural (indirectly from God, that is through one's self-knowledge of being human, acquired (that is, learned by education or by experience of living) or infused (directly by God). (*De Veritate*, q.17, a.5, ad 4) So, as Socrates describes this "voice", conscience signifies the application of knowledge to some act to be performed and the knowledge here results from self-examination and is Socrates'

self-knowledge. This is why Socrates states unequivocally, an “unexamined life is not worth living”, since such a life would not be a humanly lived life because such a life would lack self-examination and thus, conscience.

Questioning the statement by the Delphic Oracle has brought Socrates to the awareness of the importance of self-knowledge. (Later,

To be ethical is to be who I am; to be moral is to be whoever neers. societv. or some other

the thirteenth century A.D. Thomas Aquinas would echo the primary importance of the human soul in relation to wealth, honor and reputation as secondary when he observes: “According to the natural order, the body of the human being finds its purpose to be the soul and inferior powers of the soul, such as appetite and passions find their purpose to be reason”. *Summa Contra Gentiles*, CXXIX). This consequent self-knowledge has provided him perspective upon the world, his fellow citizens and God(s). He will not give up such an important discovery, the truth about human life and the perfection of human living.

Socrates himself compares his obedience to the state as a soldier facing death in war and of himself to God as a philosopher seeking truth, but facing death by hemlock. In so doing, Socrates dramatizes his preference for love of wisdom over love of material goods, honor and reputation and thus, over his own life within the city state:

...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, I remained at my post like anyone else and faced death, and yet afterward, when God appointed me, as I supposed and believed, to the duty of leading the philosophical 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 into court for not believing in the gods, and disobeying the oracle, and being afraid of death, and thinking that I am wise when I am not. (28e-29b)

Plato's *Apology* clearly portrays Socrates as being ethical because he is religious. Furthermore, the *Apology* carefully describes Socratic philosophic method to be born from Socrates' belief in the myth of the Delphic Oracle and in the truthfulness of God. (Here originates Augustine's *fides quaerens intellectum*, literally, *faith seeking understanding*.) Thus, we observe a pagan from the sixth century B.C. crediting his love of wisdom, that is, the search for Truth Protagoras and Plato after him called philosophy with his belief in the existence of and truthfulness of what he termed God. Yet, this is only half of the story, that is, the description of how Socrates' search began. A fascinating fact is how this search ended.

Once Socrates understands what the Delphic Oracle meant by telling Chaerephon that “Socrates is the wisest in Athens”, this story ends with a conclusion truly amazing for a pagan:

But,
gentlemen, I

The Philosopher uncovers the truth

believe that the god is really wise and that by this oracle he meant that human wisdom is worth little or nothing. I do not think that he meant that Socrates was wise. He only made use of my name and took me as an example, as though he would say to men, ‘He among you is the wisest who, like Socrates, knows that his wisdom is really worth nothing at all’. Therefore, I still go about testing and examining every man whom I think wise, whether he be a citizen or a stranger, as the god has commanded me. Whenever I find that he is not wise, I point out to him, on the god’s behalf, that he is not wise. I am so busy in this pursuit that I have never had leisure to take any part worth mentioning in public matters or to look after my private affairs. I am in great poverty as the result of my service to the God. (*Apology*, IX, 23)

So, a philosophic search for Truth which began with a belief in the existence and truthfulness of God, literally, with a *faith seeking understanding* of what the God meant by saying that Socrates was the wisest in Athens, now ends with a new, special purpose for living his philosophic life! Socrates understanding that human wisdom means to live knowing that humans do not know, thus, knowing that one does not know brings him to a declaration of a belief in the purpose of living humanly, that is, an *understanding seeking the practice of that faith!*

The *Apology* presents a "democratic" state's first prosecution of the Western world's first teacher for treason and records the first use of ethics to defend the truth against the state's moral demand to stop questioning authority's

To find the Truth

definition of truth, the approved way of discovering the truth and public manner of finding fulfillment. (Can we have any wonder

why Plato thought democracy to be the most corrupt form of government! Democracy rules according to **what men say** -- government of, by and for the people -- rather than according to **the way things are.**) The Western world lives with the fact that the philosopher, Socrates was found guilty by the state and condemned to take hemlock because he pursued a philosophic method which uncovered the truth which the moral majority covered up.

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 of 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 favor. 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, both I myself and my children.

To live honestly for a human

Now it is time that we were going, I to die and you to live, but which of us has the happier prospect is unknown to anyone but God. (41d-42)

One of the lessons Socrates teaches us social human beings about our unity, or individuality within the multiplicity, or society of family, friends and citizens is that in the face of death we have control over only one thing: ourselves. Indeed, any given human has control over only one thing in this mortal world: how we react to what comes into us. Whatever the kind of knowledge we have, the possessions we have acquired, the family we were born into, the society or state in which we were or are citizens, the reputation we enjoy, the powerful friends we can name, the simple fact is who we are and how we live. But, who we are and how we live roots and grows from our self-knowledge. So, if we have self-knowledge, then whatever manner of death and whatever occurs after death, we are at peace, balanced and centered. The

If to be human includes being social,

only control, therefore, available to any human being within this human condition is the control of oneself which is the result of self-knowledge; self-knowledge is the human virtue of honesty, the result of being ethical. The one obligation of any human being is, therefore, to be true to self - later, in the Middle Ages, Thomas Aquinas emphasizes the paramount importance of an individual's conscience and the consequent necessity of an informed conscience. (*Summa Contra Gentiles CXXIX*)

But, what relation do ethics and this virtue of honesty have to truth which all human beings seek? The Greek word which we translate as truth was and is: *aletheia*. The relevance of this word to the Greek idea of human virtue and perfection is clear when we analyze its meanings. This Greek word comes from the prefix *a*, meaning, "not" and the verb *lethein*, meaning, to forget, to hide, to bury and to cover-up. So, the Greeks in general and Socrates in particular defined truth as what it is-not, rather than what it is. Indeed, to seek truth as it is manifests the vice of *hubris*, or pride - perhaps a natural awareness of what the *Old Testament* describes in Adam and Eve's decision to seek the tree of knowledge of good and evil.

Socratic and Greek *truth*, as we previously noted, is not forgetting, not hiding, not burying, not covering up. *Truth*, therefore, for a human being is being open to the way things are, in the face of what people say; thus, an *honest* person manifests an openness to being since *truth is*. The *(h)onest* human being, therefore, is the person who is (*onein, to be*). Socrates, therefore, was at peace in the face of death because he was (is); he "is or has himself" because he is ethical. The difference between Socrates within the *Apology* and Ivan Ilych in *The Death of Ivan Ilych* is the difference between an ethical human being and a completely social animal. The price of being *moral*, rather than *ethical* is high, as we shall see in *Chapter Two*, "Ivan Ilych: Ethics and Morals". The cost is the difference between being *who I am* and *who I am not* and the thought of suicide intrudes into my consciousness to bargain about the option we call **death**.

The *Apology*¹

Socrates: I do not know what impression my accusers (Meletus, Lytus and Anytus, the three Athenian State prosecutors) have made upon you, Athenians, but I do know they nearly made me forget who I was so persuasive were they. Yet, they have scarcely spoken one single word of truth. Of all their many falsehoods, the one which astonished me most was their saying I was a clever speaker and you must be careful not to let me deceive you. I thought it was most shameless of them not to be ashamed to talk in that way. For as soon as I open my mouth, they will be refuted and I shall prove I am not a clever speaker in any way at all – unless, indeed, by a clever speaker they mean someone who speaks the truth. Certainly you will not hear a speech, Athenians, dressed up, like theirs, with fancy words and phrases.

I will say to you what I have to say, without artifice and I shall use the first words which come to mind, for I believe what I have to say is just; so let none of you expect anything else. Indeed, my friends, it would hardly be right for me, at my age, to come before you like a schoolboy with his concocted phrases. But there is one thing, Athenians, which I do most earnestly beg and entreat of you. Do not be surprised and do not interrupt me with shouts if in my defense I speak in the same way I am accustomed to speak in the market place, at the table of the money-changers, where many of you have heard me, and elsewhere. The truth is this: I am more than seventy and this is the first time I have ever come before a law court; thus, your manner of speech here is quite strange to me. If I had really been a stranger, you would have forgiven me for speaking in the language and the manner of my native country. So now I ask you to grant me what I think I have a right to claim. Never mind the manner of my speech – it may be superior or it may be inferior to the usual manner. Give your whole attention to the question, whether what I say is just or not? That is what is required of a good judge, as speaking the truth is required of a good orator.

I have to defend myself, Athenians, first against the older false accusations of my old accusers and then against the more recent ones of my present accusers. For many men have been accusing me to you and for very many years who have not spoken a word of truth; I fear them more than I fear Anytus and his associates, formidable as they are. But, my friends, the others are still more formidable, since they got hold of you when you were children and have been more persistent in accusing me untruthfully, persuading you that there is a certain Socrates, a wise man, who speculates about the heavens, who investigates things beneath the earth and who can make the worse argument appear the stronger². These men Athenians, who spread abroad this report are the accusers whom I

¹ The following originally thoroughly edited version by me, ©Robert Buckenmeyer, Ph.D. appeared in The Library of Liberal Arts, Bobbs Merrell, Company, Inc, © 1956 translated by F.J. Church. Note the first biography in writing in the occidental world is the historical documentation of Greece, a “democratic” state putting to death a teacher for asking questions while practicing Philosophy!

² This has been a continuous complaint of those who teach by using answers rather than questions; who seek to convey knowledge rather than seek to have students understand. The difference is as dramatic as it is different: a question by its very nature opens the mind to wonder; whereas an answer closes the mind to any further effort! Answers focus the mind on one point whereas questions open the mind to search outside the answers provided.

fear; for their hearers think that persons who pursue such inquiries never believe in the gods.

Besides, they are many and their attacks have been going on for a long time; they spoke to you when you were most ready to believe them, since you were all young and some of you were children. There was no one to answer them when they attacked me. The most preposterous thing of all is I do not even know their names; I cannot tell you who they are except when one happens to be a comic poet. But, all the rest who have persuaded you, from motives of resentment and prejudice and sometimes it may be, from conviction are hardest to cope with. For I cannot call any one of them forward in court to cross-examine him. I have, as it were, simply to spar with shadows in my defense and to put questions which there is no one to answer. I ask you, therefore, to believe, as I say, I have been attacked by two kinds of accusers – first by Meletus and his associates and then, by those older ones of whom I have spoken. With your leave, I will defend myself first against my old accusers, since you heard their accusations first and they were much more compelling than my present accusers are.

Well, I must make my defense, Athenians and try in the short time allowed me to remove the prejudice which you have been so long a time acquiring. I hope I may manage to do this, if it be best for you and for me and that my defense may be successful; but I am quite aware of the nature of my task and I know it is a difficult one. Be the outcome, however, as is pleasing to God, I must obey the law and make my defense.³

Let us begin from the beginning, then, and ask what is the accusation which has given rise to the prejudice against me on which Meletus relied when he brought his indictment. What is the prejudice which my enemies have been spreading about me? I must assume that they are formally accusing me and read their indictment. It would run somewhat in this fashion: “Socrates is guilty of engaging in inquiries into things beneath the earth and in the heavens, of making the weaker argument appear the stronger and of teaching others these same things”. That is what they say. In the comedy of Aristophanes⁴, you saw a man called Socrates swinging around in a basket and saying that he walked on air and sputtering a great deal of nonsense about matters of which I understand nothing at all. I do not mean to disparage that kind of knowledge if there is anyone who is wise about these matters. I trust Meletus may never be able to prosecute me for that. But the truth is, Athenians I have nothing to do with these matters and almost all of you are yourselves my witnesses of this. I beg all of you who have ever heard me discussing, and they are many, to inform your neighbors and tell them if any of you have ever heard me discussing such matters at all. That will show you the other common statements about me are as false as this one.

³ Athenian law required an innocent person accused of a crime to defend his innocence, or accept a guilty decision, so, given the fact that Socrates claimed he was innocent of the three charges, by law Socrates was compelled to defend his innocent claim before the court.

⁴ The comedy is *The Clouds*. The basket was sarcastically assumed to facilitate Socrates' inquiries into things in the heavens.

But the fact is not one of these is true. If you have heard I undertake to educate men and make money by so doing⁵, that is not true either, though I think that it would be a fine thing to be able to educate men, as Gorgias of Leontini, Prodicus of Ceos and Hippias of Elis do. For each of them, my friends, can go into any city and persuade the young men to leave the society of their fellow citizens, with any of whom they might associate for nothing and to be only too glad to be allowed to pay money for the privilege of associating with themselves. I believe there is another wise man from Paros residing in Athens at this moment. I happened to meet Callias, the son of Hippoonicus, a man who has spent more money on sophists than anyone else put together. So, I said to him (he has two sons), “Callias, if your two sons had been foals or calves, we could have hired a trainer for them who would have trained them to excel in doing what they are naturally capable of doing. He would have been either a groom or a farmer. But, whom do you intend to take to train them, seeing that they are men? Who understands the virtuous excellence which a man and citizen is capable of attaining? I suppose that you must have thought of this because you have sons. Is there such a person or not?” “Certainly there is,” he replied. “Who is he,” said I, “and where does he come from and what is his fee?” “Evenus, Socrates,” he replied, “from Paros, five minae.” Then I thought that Evenus was a fortunate person if he really understood this art and could teach so cleverly. If I had possessed knowledge of that kind, I should have been conceited and disdainful. But, Athenians, the truth is I do not possess it.

Perhaps some of you may reply: “But, Socrates, what is the trouble with you? What has given rise to these prejudices against you? You must have been doing something out of the ordinary⁶. All these rumors and reports of you would never have arisen if you had not been doing something different from other men. So tell us what it is that we may not give our verdict arbitrarily.” I think that a fair question and I will try to explain to you what it is that has raised these prejudices against me and given me this reputation. Listen then. Some of you, perhaps will think I am joking, but I assure you I will tell you the whole truth. I have gained this reputation, Athenians, simply by reason of a certain wisdom. But by what kind of wisdom? It is by just that wisdom which is perhaps human wisdom. In that, it may be, I am really wise. But the men of whom I was speaking just now must be wise in a wisdom which is greater than human wisdom, or else I cannot describe it, for certainly I know nothing of it myself and if any man says I do, he lies and speaks to arouse prejudice against me. Do not interrupt me with shouts, Athenians, even if you think I am boasting. What I am going to say is not my own statement. I will tell you who says it and he is worthy of your respect. I will bring the god of Delphi to be the witness of my wisdom, if it is wisdom at all and of its nature. You remember Chaerephon. From youth upwards he was my comrade as well as a partisan of

⁵ The “Sophists”, literally, “the wise ones” were the teachers in Athens and elsewhere in Greece; they resembled today’s teachers who convey knowledge from their mind vaults to students’ mind vaults and test for its transfer via scantrons! Students paid these sophists for this knowledge transfer and made a good living doing so; though unlike today, the Greek sophists did not belong to unions!

⁶ Here is the typical question, actually an implicit accusation of any ethical person since by doing what is just is not what is “out of the ordinary” that is, what moral people do.

your democracy, sharing your recent exile⁷. And returning with you. You remember, too, Chaerephon's character⁸ - how impulsive he was in carrying through whatever he took in hand. Once he went to Delphi and ventured to put this question to the oracle - I entreat you again, my friends, do not interrupt me with your shouts - he asked if there was anyone who was wiser than I. The priestess answered there was no one. Chaerephon himself is dead, but his brother here will witness what I say.

Now see why I tell you this. I am going to explain to you how the prejudice against me has arisen. When I heard of the oracle, I began to reflect: what can the god mean by this riddle? I know very well I am not wise, even in the smallest degree. Then what can the oracle mean by saying I am the wisest of men? It cannot be the oracle is speaking falsely, for he is a god and cannot lie. For a long time I was at a loss to understand the meaning. Then, very reluctantly, I turned to investigate it in this manner: I went to a man who was reputed to be wise,⁹ thinking there, if anywhere, I should prove the answer wrong and meaning to point out to the oracle its mistake and to say: "You said I was the wisest of men, but this man is wiser than I am". So I examined the man - I need not tell you his name, he was a politician - but this was the result, Athenians. When I conversed with him, I came to see, though a great many persons, most of all he himself, thought he was wise, yet he was not wise. Then, I tried to prove to him he was not wise, though he fancied he was. By so doing, I made him indignant and many of the bystanders. So, when I went away, I thought to myself, "I am wiser than this man; neither of us knows anything really worth knowing, but he thinks he has knowledge when he has not, while I, having no knowledge, do not think that I have. I seem, at any rate, to be a littler wiser than he is on this point: I do not think I know what I do not know." Next, I went to another man who was reputed to be still wiser than the last, with exactly the same result. There again I made him and many other men indignant.

Then I went on to one man after another, realizing I was arousing indignation every day, which caused me much pain and anxiety. Still, I thought I must set the god's command above everything. So, I had to go to every man who seemed to possess any knowledge and investigate the meaning of the oracle. Athenians, I must tell you the truth; I swear, this was the result of the investigation I made at the god's command: I found the men whose reputation for wisdom stood highest were nearly the most lacking it, while others who were looked down on as common people were much more intelligent. Now, I must describe to you the wanderings I undertook, like Herculean labors, to prove the oracle irrefutable.¹⁰ After the politicians, I went to the poets, tragic, dithyrambic and

⁷ Five years before Athens put Socrates on trial, 404 B.C., a totalitarian regime called The Thirty achieved power and remained in power for eight months.

⁸ This is a direct translation of the Greek word *ethos*, so what we call *ethical* means *having character*, that is, *the way one has oneself*.

⁹ *Sophia* or *wisdom* to the Greeks meant the *ability to order* so those people who could put order into things such as clay, granite and such, craftspeople, and put order into ordinary words, such as poets, and politicians who ordered a society through laws were deemed "wise".

¹⁰ Here Plato, Socrates' teacher who wrote this biographical work chronicling his teacher's defense against the threefold Athenian allegations of his crimes against Athens, compares Socrates to Hercules whom the God Zeus condemned to perform twelve labors in order to expiate his sin of killing his own wife and children as a result of being made temporarily insane by the jealous goddess Hera.

others, thinking there I should find myself manifestly more ignorant than they. So, I took up the poems on which I thought they had spent most pains and asked them what they meant, hoping at the same time to learn something. I am ashamed to tell you the truth, my friends, but I must say it. Almost anyone of the bystanders could have talked about the works of these poets better than the poets themselves. So I soon found it is not by wisdom poets create their works, but by a certain instinctive inspiration, like soothsayers and prophets, who say many fine things, but understand nothing of what they say. The poets seemed to me to be in a similar situation. At the same time, I perceived that, because of their poetry, they thought they were the wisest of men in other matters too which they were not. So, I went away again thinking I had the same advantage over the poets I had over the politicians.

Finally, I went to the artisans, for I knew very well I possessed no knowledge at all worth speaking of and I was sure I should find they knew many fine things. In that, I was not mistaken. They knew what I did not know and so far they were wiser than I. But, Athenians, it seemed to me the skilled artisans had the same failing as the poets. Each of them believed himself to be extremely wise in matters of the greatest importance because he was skilled in his own art; this presumption of theirs obscured their real wisdom. So, I asked myself, on behalf of the Oracle, whether I would choose to remain as I was, without either their wisdom or their ignorance, or to possess both, as they did. I answered to myself and to the Oracle it was better for me to remain as I was.

From this examination, Athenians, has arisen much fierce and bitter indignation and, as a result, a great many prejudices about me. People say I am a “wise man”. For the bystanders always think I am wise myself in any matter wherein I refute another. But, gentlemen, I believe the god is really wise and by the Oracle he meant that human wisdom is worth little or nothing. I do not think that he meant Socrates was wise. He only made use of my name and took me as an example, as though he would say to men, “He among you is the wisest who, like Socrates, knows his wisdom is really worth nothing at all”. Therefore, I still go about testing and examining every man whom I think wise, whether he be a citizen or a stranger, as the god has commanded me. Whenever I find he is not wise, I point out to him, on the god’s behalf, he is not wise. I am so busy in this pursuit I have never had leisure to take any part worth mentioning in public matters or to look after my private affairs. I am in great poverty as a result of my service to the god.

Besides this, the young men who follow me about, who are the sons of wealthy persons and have most leisure, take pleasure in hearing men cross-examined. They often imitate me among themselves; then, they try their hands at cross-examining other people. I imagine they find plenty of men who think they know a great deal when in fact they know little or nothing. Then, the persons who are cross-examined get angry with me instead of with themselves, and say that Socrates is an abomination and corrupts the young. When they are asked, “Why, what does he do? What does he teach?” they do not know what to say. Not to seem at a loss, they repeat the stock charges against all philosophers and allege he investigates things in the air and under the earth; he teaches people to disbelieve in the gods and, to make the weaker argument the stronger. For, I suppose, they would not like to confess the truth, which is they are shown up as ignorant pretenders to knowledge they do not possess. So, they have been filling your ears with

their bitter prejudices for a long time, for they are ambitious, energetic and numerous; they speak vigorously and persuasively against me. Relying on this, Meletus, Anytus and Lycon have attacked me.¹¹ Meletus is indignant with me on behalf of the poets; Anytus on behalf of the artisans and politicians; Lycon on behalf of the orators. So, as I said at the beginning. I shall be surprised if I am able, in the short time allowed me for my defense, to remove from your minds this prejudice which has grown so strong.¹² What I have told you, Athenians, is the truth.; I neither conceal, nor do I suppress anything, trivial or important. Yes, I know it is just this outspokenness which rouses indignation. But, that is only a proof my words are true and the prejudice against me and the causes of it are what I have said. Whether you investigate them now or hereafter, you will find they are so.

What I have said must suffice as my defense against the charges of my first accusers. I will try next to defend myself against Meletus, that “good patriot,” as he calls himself and my later accusers. Let us assume they are a new set of accusers and read their indictment, as we did in the case of the others. It runs thus: Socrates is guilty of corrupting the youth and of believing not in the gods whom the state believes in, but in other new divinities. Such is the accusation. Let us examine each point in it separately. Meletus says I am guilty of corrupting the youth. But I say, Athenians, he is guilty of playing a solemn joke by casually bringing men to trial and pretending to have a solemn interest in matters to which he has never given a moment’s thought. Now, I will try to prove to you that this is so.

Socrates: Come here, Meletus. Is it not a fact that you think it very important that the young should be as good as possible?

Meletus: “It is.”

Socrates: “Come, then, tell the judges who improves them. You care so much, you must know. You are accusing me and bringing me to trial because, as you say, you have discovered I am a corrupter of youth. Come now, reveal to the gentlemen who improves them. You see, Meletus, you have nothing to say; you are silent. But, do not you think that this is shameful? Is not your silence a conclusive proof of what I say – that you have never cared? Come, tell us, my good man, who makes the young better?

Miletus: “The law”.

Socrates: That, my friend, is not the question. What man improves the young, who begins by knowing the laws?

Meletus: “The judges here, Socrates.”

Socrates: What do you mean, Meletus? Can they educate the young and improve them?

Meletus: “Certainly”.

Socrates: All of them? Or, only some of them?

¹¹ We do not know the names of any of the judges, Socrates’ fellow Athenians who condemned him to drink hemlock, having found him guilty; however, Socrates name echoes down the halls of history for over 2,000 years. The only reason we know the names of the three Athenian State prosecutors of Socrates is Plato records them in Socrates’ statement! Each of these three argued the “truth” of one of the accusations against Socrates: Meletus argued the case for the poets; Anytus argued the case of the craftspeople and politicians and Lycon argued the case of the “Sophists”, here called “orators”.

¹² “Prejudice” is two Latin words: a prefix, *pre*, meaning *before* and a verb, *judicare*, meaning *to judge*; so a prejudice literally is a judgment which has been made in advance of the actual situation experienced.

Meletus: "All of them".

Socrates: By Hera, that is good news! Such a large supply of benefactors! And do the members of the audience here improve them, or not?

Meletus: "They do".

Socrates: And do the councilors?

Meletus: "Yes".

Socrates: Then all the Athenians, apparently, make the young into good men except me and I alone corrupt them. Is that Your meaning?

Meletus: "Certainly, that is my meaning".

Socrates: You have discovered me to be most unfortunate. Now, tell me: do you think that the same holds good in the case of horses? Does one man do them harm and everyone else improves them? On the contrary, is it not one man only, or a very few – namely, those who are skilled with horses – who can improve them, while the majority of men harm them if they use them and have anything to do with them? Is that not so, Meletus, both with horses and with every other animal? Of course it is, whether you and Anytus say "yes" or "no". The young would certainly be very fortunate if only one man corrupted them and everyone else did them good. The truth is, Meletus, you prove conclusively you have never thought about the young in your life. You exhibit your carelessness in not caring for the very matters about which you are prosecuting me.

Now, be so good as to tell us, Meletus, is it better to live among good citizens or bad ones? Answer, my friend. I am not asking you a difficult question. Do not the bad harm their associates and the good do them good?

Meletus, "Yes".

Socrates: Is there anyone who would rather be injured than benefited by his companions? Answer, my good man; you are obliged by the law to answer. Does anyone like to be injured?

Meletus: "Certainly not".

Socrates: Well, then are you prosecuting me for corrupting the young and making them worse, voluntarily or involuntarily?

Meletus: "Voluntarily".

Socrates: What, Meletus? Do you mean to say you, who are so much younger than I, are yet so much wiser than I that you know bad citizens always do evil and good citizens do good to those with whom they come in contact, while I am so extraordinarily ignorant as not to know; if I make any of my companions evil, he will probably injure me in some way? And you allege I do this voluntarily? You will not make me believe that, nor anyone else either, I should think. Either I do not corrupt the young at all, or, if I do, I do so involuntarily, so you are lying in either case. If I corrupt them involuntarily, the law does not call upon you to prosecute me for an error which is involuntary, but to take me aside privately and reprove and educate me. For, of course, I shall cease from doing wrong involuntarily, as soon as I know I have been doing wrong. But you avoided associating with me and educating me; instead, you bring me up before the court, where the law sends persons, not for education, but for punishment.

The truth is, Athenians, as I said, it is quite clear Meletus has never cared at all about these matters. However, now tell us, Meletus, how do you say I corrupt the young? Clearly, according to your indictment, by teaching them not to believe in the gods the

state believes in, but other new divinities instead. You mean I corrupt the young by that teaching, do you not?

Meletus: "Yes, most certainly I mean that.

Socrates: Then in the name of those gods of whom we are speaking, explain yourself a little more clearly to me and to these gentlemen here. I cannot understand what you mean. Do you mean I teach the young to believe in some gods, but not in the gods of the state? Do you accuse me of teaching them to believe in strange gods? If that is your meaning, I myself believe in some gods and my crime is not that of complete atheism. Or, do you mean I do not believe in the gods at all myself and I teach other people not to believe in them either?

Meletus: "I mean you do not believe in the gods in any way whatever."

Socrates: You amaze me, Meletus! Why do you say that? Do you mean I believe neither the sun nor the moon to be gods, like other men.

Meletus: "I swear he does not, judges. He says that the sun is a stone and the moon earth.

Socrates: My dear Meletus, do you think you are prosecuting Anaxagoras? You must have a very poor opinion of these men and think them illiterate, if you imagine they do not know the works of Anaxagoras of Clazomenae are full of these doctrines. So young men learn these things from me when they can often buy them in the theater for a drachma at most and laugh at Socrates were he to pretend these doctrines which are very peculiar doctrines, too, were his own? But, please tell me, do you really think I do not believe in the gods at all?

Meletus: "Most certainly I do; you are a complete atheist."

Socrates: No one believes that, Meletus, not even you; it seems to me, Athenians, Meletus is very insolent and reckless. He is prosecuting me simply out of insolence, recklessness and youthful bravado for he seems to be testing me, by asking me a riddle which has no answer. 'Will this wise Socrates,' he says to himself, 'see I am joking and contradicting myself? Or, shall I deceive him and everyone else who hears me?' Meletus seems to me to contradict himself in his indictment: it is as if he were to say, 'Socrates is guilty of not believing in the gods, but believes in the gods'. This is joking.

Now, my friends, let us see why I think that this is his meaning. You must answer me, Meletus, and you, Athenians must remember the request I made to you at the start and not interrupt me with shouts if I talk in my usual manner.

Is there any man, Meletus, who believes in the existence of things pertaining to men and not in the existence of men? Make him answer the question, gentlemen, without these interruptions. Is there any man who believes in the existence of horsemanship and not in the existence of horses? Or, in flute playing and not in flute players? There is not, my friend. If you will not answer, I will tell both you and the judges. But you must answer my next question. Is there any man who believes in the existence of divine things and not in the existence of divinities?

Meletus: There is not.

Socrates: I am very glad these gentlemen have managed to extract an answer from you. Well then, you say I believe in divine things, whether they be old or new and I teach others to believe in them. At any rate, according to your statement, I believe in divine things. You have sworn that in your indictment of me. But, if I believe in divine things, I suppose it follows necessarily I believe in divinities. Is it not so? It is. I assume you grant

that, as you do not answer. But do we not believe divinities are either gods themselves or the children of the gods? Do you admit that?

Meletus: I do.

Socrates: Then you admit I believe in divinities. Now, if these divinities are gods, then, as I say, you are joking and asking a riddle, asserting I do not believe in the gods and, as the same time, that I do, since I believe in divinities. But, if these divinities are the illegitimate children of the gods, either by the nymphs or by other mothers, as they are said to be, then, I ask what man could believe in the existence of the children of the gods and not in the existence of the gods? That would be as absurd as believing in the existence of the offspring of horses and asses and not in the existence of horses and asses. You must have indicted me in this manner, Meletus, either to test me or because you could not find any act of injustice of which you could accuse me with truth. But you will never contrive to persuade any man with any sense at all that a belief in divine things and things of the gods does not necessarily involve a belief in divinities and in the gods.

But in truth, Athenians, I do not think I need say very much to prove I have not committed the act of injustice for which Meletus is prosecuting me. What I have said is enough to prove that. But be assured it is certainly true, as I have already told you, that I have aroused much indignation. That is what will cause my condemnation if I am condemned; not Meletus nor Anytus either, but that prejudice and resentment of the multitude which have been the destruction of many good men before me and I think will be so again.¹³ There is no prospect I shall be the last victim.

Perhaps someone will say: "Are you not ashamed, Socrates, of leading a life which is very likely now to cause your death?" I should answer him with justice and say: "My friend, if you think that a man of any worth at all ought to reckon the chances of life and death when he acts, or that he ought to think of anything but whether he is acting justly or unjustly, as a good or a bad man would act, you are mistaken. According to you, the demigods who died at Troy would be foolish and among them Achilles, who thought nothing of danger when the alternative was disgrace. For when his mother¹⁴ – and she was a goddess – addressed him, when he was resolved to slay Hector, in this fashion, 'My son, if you avenge the death of your comrade Patroclus and slay Hector.' When he heard this, he scorned danger and death; he feared much more to live a coward and not to avenge his friend. 'Let me punish the evildoer and afterwards die,' he said, 'so I may not remain here by the beaked ships jeered at, encumbering the earth.'" Do you suppose he thought of danger or of death? For this, Athenians, I believe to be the truth: wherever a man's station is, whether he has chosen it of his own will, or whether he has been placed at it by his commander, there it is his duty to remain and face the danger without thinking of death or, if of any other thing, except disgrace.

When the generals whom you chose to command me, Athenians, assigned me my station during the battles of Potidaea, Amphipolis and Delium, I remained where they stationed me and ran the risk of death like other men. It would be very strange conduct on

¹³ Given this statement of Socrates, it would seem that Socrates himself, perhaps even Plato his biographer through this Apology recognize the difference between morals and ethics; obviously, "the multitude" corresponds to the "peers" of Ivan Ilych, namely, that comfortable couch which so many people lean back and live in rather than seek to act in such a way that one decides to do the right thing, rather than that which others do.

¹⁴ The mother of Achilles was Nereid [Thetis](#).

my part if I were to desert my station now from fear of death or of any other thing when the god has commanded me – as I am persuaded he has done – to spend my life in searching for wisdom and in examining myself and others. That would indeed be a very strange thing. Then certainly I might with justice be brought to trial for not believing in the gods, for I should be disobeying the Oracle and fearing death and thinking myself wise when I was not wise. For to fear death, my friends, is only to think ourselves wise without really being wise, for it is to *think we know what we do not know*. For no one knows whether death may not be the greatest good that can happen to man. But, men fear it as if they knew quite well it was the greatest of evils. What is this but that shameful ignorance of thinking we know what we do not know? In this matter, too, my friends, perhaps I am different from the multitude. If I were to claim to be at all wiser than others, it would be because, not knowing very much about the other world, I do not think I know. But I do know very well it is evil and disgraceful to do an unjust act and to disobey my superior, whether man or god. I will never do what I know to be evil and shrink in fear from what I do not know to be good or evil. Even if you acquit me now, and do not listen to Anytus' argument that, if I am to be acquitted, I ought never to have been brought to trial at all and that, as it is, you are bound to put me to death because, as he said, if I escape, all your sons will be utterly corrupted by practicing what Socrates teaches.

If you were, therefore, to say to me, "Socrates, this time we will not listen to Anytus. We will let you go, but on the condition you give up this investigation of yours and philosophy. If you are found following these pursuits again, you shall die." I say, if you offered to let me go on these terms, I should reply: "Athenians, I hold you in the highest regard and affection, but I will be persuaded by the god rather than you. As long as I have breath and strength, I will not give up philosophy and exhorting you and declaring the truth to every one of you whom I meet, saying, as I am accustomed, 'My good friend, you are a citizen of Athens, a city which is very great and very famous for its wisdom and power – are you not ashamed of caring so much for the making of money and for fame and prestige, when you neither think nor care about wisdom and truth and the improvement of your soul?'" If he disputes my words and says he does care about these things, I shall not at once release him and go away; I shall question him and cross-examine him and test him. If I think he has not attained virtuous excellence, though he says he has, I shall reproach him for undervaluing the most valuable things and overvaluing those which are less valuable. This I shall do to everyone whom I meet, young or old, citizen or stranger, but especially to citizens, since they are more closely related to me.

This, you must recognize, the god has commanded me to do. I think no greater good has ever befallen you in the state than my service to the god. For I spend my whole life in going about and persuading you all to give your first and greatest care to the improvement to your souls and not till you have done that to think of your bodies or your wealth¹⁵. I tell you wealth does not bring virtuous excellence (*arete*'), but wealth and

¹⁵ I must remind you again: this is a pure pagan, unbaptized. So, I ask you who lay claim to the adjective "Christian"; would you, could you make this statement as a human being, as Socrates was? If you would or could not, I then ask: "what the hell does your "Christian" mean?" You are not yet "human" as Socrates was! Thomas Aquinas states unequivocally that "grace builds on nature". Now, Socrates is a natural human being, so, unless you can meaningfully state and live as Socrates lived, you are not yet "natural" and, if that is the case, your "Christian" has no meaning except the echo of your claim!

every other good thing which men have, whether in public or in private comes from virtuous excellence. If then I corrupt the youth by this teaching, these things must be harmful. But, if any man says I teach anything else, there is nothing in what he says. Therefore, Athenians, I say, whether you are persuaded by Anytus or not, whether you acquit me or not, I shall not change my way of life; no, not if I have to die for it many times.

Do not interrupt me, Athenians, with your shouts. Remember the request which I made to you and do not interrupt my words. I think that it will profit you to hear them. I am going to say something more to you, at which you may be inclined to protest, but do not do that. Be sure, if you put me to death, I who am what I have told you I am, you will do yourselves more harm than me. Meletus and Anytus can do me no harm: that is impossible, for I am sure it is not allowed that a good man be injured by a worse. He may indeed kill me, or drive me into exile, or deprive me of my civil rights. Perhaps Meletus and others think those things great evils to do what he is doing now and to try to put a man to death unjustly. Now, Athenians, I am not arguing in my own defense at all, as you might expect me to do, but rather in yours in order you may not make a mistake about the gift of the god to you by condemning me. For, if you put me to death, you will not easily find another who, if I may use a ludicrous comparison, clings to the state as a sort of gadfly to a horse, large and well bred, but rather sluggish because of its size, so it needs to be aroused. It seems to me the god has attached me like that to the state for I am constantly alighting upon you at every point to arouse, persuade and reproach each of you all day long.

You will not easily find anyone else, my friends, to fill my place; if you are persuaded by me, you will spare my life. You are indignant, as drowsy persons are, when they are awakened and, of course, if you are persuaded by Anytus, you could easily kill me with a single blow and then sleep on undisturbed for the rest of your lives, unless the god in his care for you sends another to arouse you. You may easily see it is the god who has given me to your city; for it is not human, the way in which I have neglected all my own interests and allowed my private affairs to be neglected for so many years, while occupying myself unceasingly in your interests, going to each of you privately, like a father or an elder brother, trying to persuade him to care for human excellence. There would have been a reason for it, if I had gained any advantage by this, or if I had been paid for my exhortations; but you see yourselves my accusers, though they accuse me of everything else without shame, have not had the shamelessness to say I ever either exacted or demanded payment. To that they have no witness; I think I have sufficient witness to the truth of what I say – my poverty.

Perhaps it may seem strange to you that, though I go about giving this advice privately and meddling in others' affairs, yet, I do not venture to come forward in the assembly and advise the state. You have often heard me speak of my reason for this and in many places; it is that I have a certain divine guide which is what Meletus has caricatured in his indictment. I have had it from childhood; it is the kind of a voice which, whenever I hear it, always turns me back from something which I was going to do, but never urges me to act.¹⁶ This forbids me to take part in Politics and I think it does well to forbid me;

¹⁶ Given the two facts that the date is in the fourth century BC and Socrates (also Plato, his student and biographer) is a pagan, this statement is amazing for two reasons: first, as a statement of the working presence of conscience; secondly, as a description of conscience warning against a possible commitment of

for, Athenians, were I to have taken part in Politics, I should have perished at once and long ago without doing any good either to you or to myself. Do not be indignant with me for telling the truth. No man will preserve his life for long, either in Athens or elsewhere, if he firmly opposes the multitude and tries to prevent the commission of much injustice and illegality in the state¹⁷. He who would really fight for justice must do so as a private citizen, nor as a political figure, if he is to preserve his life, even for a short time.

I will prove to you this is so by very strong evidence, not by mere words, but by what you value more – actions. Listen then to what has happened to me, so you may know no man could make me consent to commit an unjust act from the fear of death, but I would perish at once rather than give way. What I am going to tell you may be common place in the law court; nevertheless, it is true. The only office I ever held in the state, Athenians, was that of councilor. When you wished to try the ten admirals who did not rescue their men after the battle of Arginusae as a group, which was illegal, as you all came to think afterwards, the executive committee was composed of members of the tribe Antiochis, to which I belong.¹⁸ On that occasion, I alone opposed your illegal action and gave my vote against the committed decision. The orators were ready to impeach me and arrest me; you were clamoring and urging them on with your shouts. I, however, thought I ought to face the danger with law and justice on my side, rather than join with you in your unjust proposal from fear of imprisonment or death. That was when the state was democratic.

When the oligarchy came in, The Thirty sent for me with four others to the council-chamber and ordered us to bring Leon and Salaminian from Salamis so they might put him to death. There were in the habit of frequently giving similar orders to many others, wishing to implicate as many as possible in their crimes¹⁹. But then, I again proved, not by mere words, but by my actions, that, if I may speak bluntly, I do not care a straw for death; but I do care very much indeed about not doing anything unjust or impious. That government with all its power did not terrify me into doing anything unjust²⁰. When we left the council-chamber, the other four went over to Salamis and brought Leon across to Athens; I went home and, if the rule of The Thirty had not been

a “bad” act”. The implication of this description is that naturally, humans seek to do good actions; thus, furthermore, nature, as good-seeking warns against committing a bad act! Aurelius Augustine, the Catholic Christian Bishop of Hippo implies such in his fourth century AD *Soliloquies*, however, this is not even investigated until Thomas Aquinas in his St. Thomas (I-II:109:3) detailed its characteristics as a natural process of mother nature.

¹⁷ Given my experience as being a twice Whistle-blower as a Consultant within the State Department of Education during my state employment tenure from 1972 to 1990, I can attest to the truth of this statement of Socrates!

¹⁸ The Council was the administrative body in Athens; the executive committee of the Council performed actual administrative functions, members of this executive committee being recruited from each tribe in turn. Socrates alludes to a case in which admirals were accused of having failed to rescue the crews of ships which sank during the battle; the committee members, with the exception of Socrates, found the six admirals guilty and ordered their execution.

¹⁹ Note such a thing is typical of a moral group, namely, get as many as possible to agree with the moral, or, indeed, legal action and then act: a cover one’s ass procedure!

²⁰ *Dexe* is the Greek word we translate as *justice*. The Greek word actually means *balance*, a balance which results from three Greek virtues, wisdom (for the mind), courage (for the appetites of the heart) and temperance (for the bodily passions). If a human attains these three virtues, then that person is balanced, that is just in all human actions.

overthrown soon afterwards, I should very likely have been put to death for what I did then. Many of you may be my witnesses in this matter.

Now, do you think I could have remained alive all these years, if I had taken part in public affairs and had always maintained the cause of justice, as a good man would, and had held it a paramount duty, as it is, to do so? Throughout my whole life, both in private and in public, whenever I have had to take part in public affairs, you will find I have always been the same and have never yielded unjustly to anyone; no, not to those whom my enemies falsely assert to have been my pupils. But, I was never anybody's teacher.²¹ I have never withheld myself from anyone, young or old, nor was anxious to hear me converse while I was making my investigation. Neither do I converse for payment and refuse to converse without payment. I am ready to ask questions of rich and poor alike and if any man wishes to answer me, then listen to what I have to say, he may. I cannot justly be charged with causing these men to turn out good or bad, for I never either taught or professed to each any of them any knowledge whatever. If any man asserts he ever learned or heard anything from me in private which everyone else did not hear as well as he, be sure he does not speak the truth.

Why is it, then that people delight in spending so much time in my company? You have heard why, Athenians. I told you the whole truth when I said they delight in hearing me examine persons who think they are wise when they are not wise. It is certainly amusing to listen to. As I have said, the god has commanded me to examine men, in oracles and in dreams and in every way in which the divine will was ever declared to man. This is the truth, Athenians, and if it were not the truth, it would easily be refuted. For, if it were really the case I have already corrupted some of the young men and am now corrupting others, surely some of them, finding as they grew older that I had given them bad advice in their youth, would have come forward today to accuse me and take their revenge. Or, if they were unwilling to do so themselves, surely their relatives, their fathers or brothers, or others, would, if I had done them any harm, have remembered it and taken their revenge. Certainly I see many of them in court.

Here is Crito, of my own district and of my own age, the father of Critobulus; here is Lysanias of Sphettus, the father of Aechines; here is also Antiphon of Cephissus, the father of Epigenes. Then, here are others whose brothers have spent their time in my company – Nicostratus, the son of Theozotides and brother of Theodotus – and Theodotus is dead, so he at least cannot entreat his brother to be silent; here is Paralus, the son of Demodocus and the brother of Theages; here is Adeimantus, the son of Ariston, whose brother is Plato here; and Aeantodorus, whose brother is Aristodorus. I can name many others to you, some of whom Meletus ought to have called as witnesses in the course of his own speech; but if he forgot to call them, then let him call them now – I will yield the floor to him – so they can tell us if he has any evidence. No, on the

²¹ What is interesting about this statement of Socrates(applying presumably also to Plato, his student who wrote this biography of his "teacher") is that this stands as the Catholic Christian tradition, as documented within the *De Magistro* of Aurelius Augustine and the *De Magistro* of Thomas Aquinas and continuing throughout the Renaissance, even in the Encyclical Letter, the *Christian Education of Youth*, by Pope Pius XI issued in 1929 wherein he concludes: "The true Christian does not renounce the activities of this life, he does not stunt his natural faculties, but he develops and perfects them, by coordinating them with the supernatural" (p.37) to the present day. In other words, learning is the direct responsibility of the student and is occasioned by and exists within said student; the most a "teacher", as an instrument of nature can do is occasion the student's self-questioning and learning.

contrary, my friends, you will find all these men ready to support me, the corrupter who has injured their relatives, as Meletus and Anytus call me. Those of them who have been already corrupted might perhaps have some reason for supporting me, but what reason can their relatives have who are grown up and who are uncorrupted, except the reason of truth and justice – who know very well that Meletus is lying and I am speaking the truth?

Well, my friends, this and perhaps more like this is pretty much all I have to offer in my defense. Someone among you might be indignant when he remembers how, even in a less important trial than this, those who begged and entreated the judges, with many tears, to acquit him and brought forward his children and many of his friends and relatives in court in order to appeal to your feelings; then you find that I shall do none of these things, though I am in what he would think the supreme danger. Perhaps, he will harden himself against me when he notices this; it may make him angry and he may cast his vote in anger against me. If it is so with any of you – I do not suppose that it is, but in case it should be so – I think I should answer him reasonably if I said: “My friend, I have relatives too, for, in the words of Homer, I am “not born of an oak or a rock”²² but of flesh and blood.” So, Athenians, I have relatives and three sons, one of them nearly grown up and the other two still children. Yet I will not bring any of them forward before you and implore you to acquit me. Why will I do none of these things? It is not from arrogance, Athenians, nor because I lack respect for you – whether or not I can face death bravely is another question – but for my own good name, for your good name and for the good name of the whole state. I do not think it right, as my age (70+) and with my reputation, to do anything of that kind. Rightly, or wrongly, men have made up their minds that in some way Socrates is different from the multitude of men²³. It will be shameful if those of you who are thought to excel in wisdom, or in bravery, or in any other virtuous excellence are going to act in this fashion. I have often seen men of reputation behaving in an extraordinary way at their trial, as if they thought it a terrible fate to be killed as though they expected to live forever if you did not put them to death.²⁴ Such men seem to me to bring shame upon the state, for any stranger would suppose the best and eminent Athenians who are selected by their fellow citizens to hold office and for other honors are no better than women.²⁵ Those of you, Athenians, who have any reputation at all ought not to do these things and you ought not to allow us to do them. You should show you will be much more ready to condemn men who make the state ridiculous by these pathetic performances than men who remain quiet.

²² Homer, *Odyssey*, xix, 163.

²³ Again, here is Plato’s awareness that being ethical is different than being moral.!

²⁴ I find Socrates extraordinary, considering the fear of death of the majority (at last study, some seventy percent of what calls itself a Christian citizenry) of Americans. This is a pure, unadulterated pagan, yet, he shows no fear of dying – personally, I maintain that living is what we do while we are dying, so the important thing is not *that* we are dying, which is a fact of birth as we progress to death, but *HOW* we are living; perhaps, the self-reflection of that some seventy percent of Americans who fear dying is the *FACT* of how they are living which occasions their fear of dying – after all, if one is living a life immersed in materialism, of seeking wealth, honor and reputation, then I too would fear dying!

²⁵ I cannot defend this apparent statement of Socrates, unless I attribute it to his teacher, Plato who wrote this biography; since given the fact that the Athenians named their city after Athena, the goddess and chose a female to be their Oracle to mediate between them and Athena and Zeus, I do not find such an attitude embedded in the Athenian tradition.

But, apart from the question of reputation, my friends, I do not think it is right to entreat the judge to acquit me, or to escape condemnation in that way. It is our duty to teach and persuade him. The judge does not sit to give away justice as a favor, but to pronounce judgment. He has sworn not to favor any man whom he would like to favor, but to judge according to law. Therefore, we ought not to encourage you in the habit of breaking your oaths; you ought not to allow yourselves to fall into this habit, for then neither you nor we would be acting piously. Therefore, Athenians, do not require me to do these things, for I believe them to be neither good nor just nor pious; especially, do not ask me to do them today when Meletus is prosecuting me for impiety. For were I to be successful and persuade you by my entreaties to break your oaths, I should be clearly teaching you to believe there are no gods and I should be simply accusing myself by my defense of not believing in them. But, Athenians, such is very far from the truth. I do believe in the gods as no one of my accusers believes in them; to you and to the god I commit my cause to be decided as it best for you and for me.²⁶

(Athenian court finds Socrates guilty, 281 votes to 220 who found him innocent of the state's threefold charges, so only 61 votes constituted the majority out of 501 total votes; thus, only a thirty vote difference actually convicted him.)

I am not indignant at the verdict which you have given, Athenians, for many reasons. I expected you would find me guilty; I am not so much surprised at that as at the numbers of the votes. I certainly never thought the majority of only thirty votes had changed sides, I should have escaped. So, I think I have escaped Meletus, as it is; not only have I escaped him, for it is perfectly clear if Anytus and Lycon had not come forward to accuse me too, he would not have obtained the fifth part of the votes and would have had to pay a fine of a thousand drachmae.²⁷

So Meletus proposes death as the penalty. Be it so. What alternative penalty shall I propose to you, Athenians? What I deserve, of course, must I not? What then do I deserve to pay or to suffer for having determined not to spend my life in ease? I neglected the things which most men value, such as wealth, family interests, military commands, public oratory, civic appointments, social clubs and political factions which are here in Athens; for I thought I was really too honest a man to preserve my life if I engaged in these affairs. So, I did not go where I should have done no good either to you or to myself. I went, instead, to each one of you privately to do him, as I say, the greatest of benefits and tried to persuade him not to think of his affairs until he had thought of himself and tried to make himself as good and wise as possible, nor to think of the affairs of Athens until he had thought of Athens herself; to care for other things in the same manner. Then what do I deserve for such a life? Something good, Athenians, if I am really to propose what I deserve and something good which it would be suitable for me to

²⁶ When, as it were, push comes to shove, this last statement of Socrates in his defense is brilliant because it implicates his own Athenian audience in an act of injustice, if he is found guilty, since it sets his ethical decision to defend himself as innocent, as the law requires (if he is innocent) off from a guilty decision which would implicate the judges in acting morally rather than ethically, that is, on judging him guilty because he did not defend himself in a moral way of crying and such emotional ways.

²⁷ The Greek law not only required the citizen who claimed innocence to defend himself before the tribunal, similar to our U.S. Supreme Court, but fined the prosecution who lost the case.

receive²⁸. Then what is a suitable reward to be given to a poor benefactor who requires leisure to exhort you? There is no reward, Athenians, so suitable for him as receiving free meals at the prytaneum. It is a much more suitable reward for him than for any of you who has won a victory at the Olympic games with his horse or his chariots. Such a man only makes you seem happy, but I make you really happy; he is not in want and I am. So, if I am to propose the penalty which I really deserve, I propose this – free meals at the prytaneum²⁹.

Perhaps you think me stubborn and arrogant in what I am saying now, as in what I said about the entreaties and tears which I chose not to use in my defense. It is not so, Athenians. It is rather I am convinced I never wronged any man voluntarily, though I cannot persuade you of that, since we have conversed together only a little time. If there were a law at Athens, as there is elsewhere, not to finish a trial of life and death in a single day, I think that I could have persuaded you; but now, such is not easy in so short a time to clear myself of such prejudices. But when I am persuaded I have never wronged any man, I shall certainly not wrong myself, or admit I deserve to suffer any evil, or propose any evil for myself as a penalty. Why should I? Lest I should suffer the penalty which Meletus proposes when I say I do not know whether it is a good or an evil? Shall I choose instead something which I know to be an evil and propose that as a penalty? Shall I propose imprisonment? Why should I pass the rest of my days in prison, the slave of successive officials? Or, shall I propose a fine with imprisonment until it is paid? I have told you why I will not do that. I should have to remain in prison for I have no money to pay a fine. Shall I then propose exile? Perhaps you would agree to that. Life would indeed be very dear to me if I were unreasonable enough to expect strangers would cheerfully tolerate my discussions and arguments when you who are my fellow citizens cannot endure them and have found them so irksome and odious to you that you are seeking now to be relieved of them. No, indeed, Athenians, that is not likely. A fine life I should lead for an old man if I were to withdraw from Athens and pass the rest of my days in wandering from city to city and continually being expelled. For I know very well young men will listen to me wherever I go, as they do here. If I drive them away, they will persuade their elders to expel me; if I do not drive them away, their fathers and other relatives will expel me for their sakes!

Perhaps someone will say, “Why cannot you withdraw from Athens, Socrates and hold your peace?” It is the most difficult thing in the world to make you understand why I cannot do that. If I say I cannot hold my peace because that would be to disobey the god, you will think I am not in earnest and will not believe me. If I tell you no greater good can happen to a man than to discuss human virtuous excellence every day and the other matters about which you have heard me arguing and examining myself and others and

²⁸ Having rendered a guilty verdict, the Athenian court now had the option of deciding what penalty to inflict upon the guilty person; the court had two choices, the call for the death penalty by the prosecution, or the penalty proposed by the defendant, in this case, Socrates – given the option offered by Socrates of free meals, he would seem to be speaking with a great irony, particularly because of the place and its function, as the following footnote observes and given the fact that two dialogues of Plato, the *Crito* and the *Phaedrus* document the state’s effort to use his friends to avoid the trial by having him plead guilty and either pay a fine or go into exile, both of which he rejected because either choice would declare his guilt which, as in the *Apology* he declares his complete innocence of any of the three charges.

²⁹ This was the Athenian state “town-hall” where those who had done special service to the state were entertained and dined at the public expense.

that an unexamined life is not worth living, then you will believe me still less. But, this is so, my friends, though it is not easy to persuade you. What is more, I am not accustomed to think that I deserve anything evil. If I had been rich, I would have proposed as large a fine as I could pay: that would have done me no harm. But, I am not rich enough to pay a fine unless you are willing to fix it at a sum within my means. Perhaps I could pay you a mina, so I propose that. Plato here, Athenians, Crito, Critobulus and Apollodorus bid me propose thirty minae and they guarantee its payment. So I propose thirty minae. Their security will be sufficient to guarantee payment.

(The Athenian court decides to levy the death penalty, that is, ingesting hemlock which they prepare and he drinks in the sight of the Athenian Court)

You have not gained much time, Athenians and at the price of the slurs of those who wish to revile the state. They will say you put Socrates, a wise man, to death, for they will certainly call me wise, whether I am wise or not when they want to reproach you. If you had waited for a little while, your wishes would have been fulfilled in the course of nature; for you see I am an old man, far advanced in years and near death. I am saying this not to all of you, only to those who have voted for my death. To them I have something else to say. Perhaps, my friends, you think I have been convicted because I was wanting in arguments by which I could persuade you to acquit me, if I had thought it right to do or to say anything to escape punishment. It is not so. I have been convicted because I was wanting, not in arguments, but in impudence and shamelessness because I would not plead before you as you would have liked to hear me plead, or appeal to you with weeping and wailing, or say and do many other things which I maintain are unworthy of me, but which you have been accustomed to from other men.³⁰ But, when I was defending myself, I thought I ought not to do anything unworthy of a free man because of the danger which I ran and I have not changed my mind now. I would very much rather defend myself as I did and die than as you would have had me do and live.

Both in a lawsuit and in war, there are some things which neither I nor any other man may do in order to escape from death. In battle, a man often sees he may at least escape from death by throwing down his arms and falling on his knees before the pursuer to beg for his life. There are many other ways of avoiding death in every danger, if a man is willing to say and to do anything. But, my friends, I think it is a much harder thing to escape from wickedness than from death, for wickedness is swifter than death. Now, I, who am old and slow, have been overtaken by the slower pursuer; my accusers who are swift, clever and wicked have overtaken me. Now, I shall go away, sentenced by you to death; they will go away, sentenced by truth to wickedness and injustice. I abide by this award as well as they. Perhaps it was right for these things to be so. I think they are fairly balanced.

Now, I wish to prophesy to you, Athenians, who have condemned me. I am going to die and that is the time when men have most prophetic power. I prophesy to you who have sentenced me to death that a far more severe punishment than you have inflicted on

³⁰ Perhaps, no place in this dialogue more specific than here is the distinction between being ethical, that is, pleading in a right and virtuously honest manner, rather than in a moral and pleasing but dishonest manner is clearer than in Socrates' final statements to the Athenian court.

me will surely overtake you as soon as I am dead. You have done this thing, thinking you will be relieved from having to give an account of your lives. But, I say the result will be very different. There will be more men who will call you to account, when I am held back, though you did not recognize it. They will be harsher toward you than I have been, for they will be younger and you will be more indignant with them. For if you think that you will restrain men from reproaching you for not living as you should, by putting them to death, you are very much mistaken. That was of escape is neither possible nor honorable. It is much more honorable and much easier not to suppress others, but to make yourselves as good as you can. This is my parting prophecy to you who have condemned me.

With you who have acquitted me, I should like to discuss this thing which has happened, while the authorities are busy³¹ and before I go to the place where I have to die. So, remain with me until I go; there is no reason why we should not talk with each other while it is possible.³² I wish to explain to you, as my friends, the meaning of what has happened to me. An amazing thing has happened to me, judges – for I am right in calling you judges. The prophetic guide has been constantly with me throughout my life till now, opposing me even in trivial matters if I were not going to act rightly. Now you yourselves see what has happened to me – a thing which might be thought and is actually sometimes reckoned the supreme evil. But the divine guide did not oppose me when I was leaving my house this morning, nor when I was coming up here to the court, nor at any point in my speech when I was going to say anything; though, at other times, it has often stopped me in the very act of speaking³³. But, now, in this matter, it has never once opposed me, either in my words or my actions. I will tell you what I believe to be the reason. This thing which has come upon me must be a good; and those of us who think that death is an evil must needs be mistaken. I have a clear proof that is so, for my accustomed guide would certainly have opposed me if I had not been going to meet with something good.

If we reflect in another way, we shall see we may well hope death is a good, for the state of death is one of two things: either the dead man wholly ceases to be and loses all consciousness or, as we are told, it is a change and a migration of the soul to another place. If death is the absence of all consciousness and, like the sleep of one whose slumbers are unbroken by any dreams, it will be a wonderful gain. For, if a man had to select the night in which he slept so soundly that he did not even dream, and had to compare with it all the other nights and days of his life, and then had to say how many days and nights in his life he had spent better and more pleasantly than this night, I think a private person, nay, even the great King of Persia himself, would find them easy to

³¹ The authorities are busy pulverizing the hemlock leaves from the tree in a pestle and preparing the mashed up result for drinking.

³² Consider the fact that this pagan, having been condemned to death and waiting for the “authorities” to prepare the hemlock which under law he is mandated to drink, is so calm while he waits to drink the hemlock. The question is: would any of us possess such composure? Obviously Socrates’ HOW of living, honestly and thus virtuously results in the peaceful HOW of his dying! Might we be (or become) so virtuous so we might die so peacefully!

³³ See footnote 16.

count, compared with the others. If that is the nature of death, I for one count it a gain. For then it appears all time is nothing more than a single night.

But if death is a journey to another place and what we are told is true – that all who have died are there – what good could be greater than this, judges? Would not a journey be worth taking, at the end of which, in the other world, we should be delivered from the pretend judges here and should find true judges who are said to sit in judgment below, such as Minos, Rhadamanthus, Aeacus, Triptolemus and the other demigods who were just in their own lives? Or, what would you not give to converse with Orpheus, Musaeus, Hesiod and Homer? I am willing to die many times if this be true. For my own part, I should find it wonderful to meet there Palamedes, Ajax, the son of Telamon and the other men of old who have died through an unjust judgment and to compare my experiences with theirs. That, I think, would be no small pleasure. Above all, I could spend my time in examining those who are there, as I examine men here and in finding out which of them is wise and which of them thinks himself wise when he is not wise. What would we not give, judges, to be able to examine the leader of the great expedition against Troy, or Odysseus or Sisyphus, or countless other men and women whom we could name? It would be an inexpressible happiness to converse with them and to live with them and to examine them. Assuredly there they do not put men to death for doing that. For besides the other ways in which they are happier than we are, is they are immortal, at least if what we are told is true.

You too, judges, must face death hopefully and believe this one truth, that no evil can happen to a good man, either in life or after death. His affairs are not neglected by the gods; and what has happened to me today has not happened by chance³⁴. I am persuaded it was better for me to die now and to be released from trouble; that was the reason why the guide never turned me back. So, I am not at all angry with my accusers or with those who have condemned me to die³⁵. Yet, it was not with this in mind that they accused me and condemned me, but meaning to do me an injury. So far I may blame them.

Yet, I have one request to make of them. When my sons grow up, punish them, my friends, and harass them in the same way I have harassed you, if they seem to you to care for riches or for any other thing more than virtuous excellence; if they think they are something when they are really nothing, reproach them, as I reproached you for not caring for what they should and for thinking that they are something when really they are nothing. If you will do this, I myself and my sons will have received justice from you.

³⁴ Notwithstanding the fact that Socrates, indeed, Plato were pagans, consider not only Socrates strong belief in god, but his strong belief in what came to be called Divine Providence by Augustine and Aquinas and others, around which Christian Catholics wove a belief in God's personal care and love.

³⁵ Consider again, Socrates is a pagan, yet, he states that he is not angry with those who have treated him unjustly and condemned him to death; as a matter of fact, he, a pagan, a virtuous human being forgives them. Consider also, one of those last sets of Christ's words from the cross: "Father, forgive them; they do not know what they are doing." (*New Testament: Luke: 23:34*) Reflect also that the very foundation of being a *New Testament* Christian is forgiveness of others who intend to and do injure us! (*Matt 5:39-40: Luke: 6:27-35*).

But now, the time has come and we must go away – I to die and you to live.
Which is better is known to the