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ΑΠΟΛΟΓΙΑ ΣΩΚΡΑΤΟΥΣ

ΠΛΑΤΩΝΟΣ

[17a] ὅτι μὲν ὑμεῖς, ὦ ἄνδρες Ἀθηναῖοι, πεπόνθατε ὑπὸ τῶν ἐμῶν κατηγόρων, οὐκ οἶδα· ἐγὼ δ' οὖν καὶ αὐτὸς ὑπ' αὐτῶν ὀλίγου ἑμαυτοῦ ἐπελαθόμην, οὕτω πιθανῶς ἔλεγον. καίτοι ἀληθές γε ὡς ἔπος εἰπεῖν οὐδὲν εἰρήκασιν. μάλιστα δὲ αὐτῶν ἐν ἐθαύμασα τῶν πολλῶν ὧν ἐψεύσαντο, τοῦτο ἐν ᾧ ἔλεγον ὡς χρῆν ὑμᾶς εὐλαβεῖσθαι μὴ ὑπ' ἐμοῦ ἐξαπατηθῆτε [17b] ὡς δεινοῦ ὄντος λέγειν. τὸ γὰρ μὴ αἰσχυνθῆναι ὅτι αὐτίκα ὑπ' ἐμοῦ ἐξελεγχθήσονται ἔργῳ, ἐπειδὰν μηδ' ὅπωςτιοῦν φαίνωμαι δεινὸς λέγειν, τοῦτό μοι ἔδοξεν αὐτῶν ἀναισχυντότατον εἶναι, εἰ μὴ ἄρα δεινὸν καλοῦσιν οὗτοι λέγειν τὸν τάληθῃ λέγοντα· εἰ μὲν γὰρ τοῦτο λέγουσιν, ὁμολογοίην ἂν ἔγωγε οὐ κατὰ τούτους εἶναι ῥήτωρ.

οὗτοι μὲν οὖν, ὥσπερ ἐγὼ λέγω, ἢ τι ἢ οὐδὲν ἀληθὲς εἰρήκασιν, ὑμεῖς δέ μου ἀκούσεσθε πᾶσαν τὴν ἀλήθειαν—οὐ μέντοι μὰ Δία, ὦ ἄνδρες Ἀθηναῖοι, κεκαλλιεπημένους γε λόγους, [17c] ὥσπερ οἱ τούτων,

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[17a] I don't know what impression my accusers made on you, men of Athens, but I for one got so carried away that I almost forgot who I am! They really were that good. And yet almost nothing they said was true. Out of all the lies they told, though, one stood out the most—when they warned you to watch out and not let me fool you [17b] because I'm some “dangerously clever” speaker. The audacity of that one amazed me, because once I explain the facts and it emerges that I'm not even close to being a dangerously clever speaker, their claim will look shameless to the core. Unless, of course, that expression “dangerously clever” just means someone who speaks the truth—because if that's the case, then I agree: I *am* an orator, just not in the sense that they'd define that word.

Anyway, as I was saying, while they barely said a word that's true, I'm going to tell you the whole truth. But I certainly won't do it in some fancy-dancy speech [17c] like theirs, gentlemen of Athens,

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ρήμασί τε καὶ ὀνόμασιν οὐδὲ κεκοσμημένους, ἀλλ' ἀκούσεσθε εἰκῇ λεγόμενα τοῖς ἐπιτυχοῦσιν ὀνόμασιν—πιστεύω γὰρ δίκαια εἶναι ἃ λέγω—καὶ μηδεὶς ὑμῶν προσδοκησάτω ἄλλως· οὐδὲ γὰρ ἂν δήπου πρέποι, ὧ ἄνδρες, τῇδε τῇ ἡλικίᾳ ὥσπερ μαιρακίῳ πλάττοντι λόγους εἰς ὑμᾶς εἰσιέναι.

καὶ μέντοι καὶ πάνυ, ὧ ἄνδρες Ἀθηναῖοι, τοῦτο ὑμῶν δέομαι καὶ παρίεμαι· ἐὰν διὰ τῶν αὐτῶν λόγων ἀκούητέ μου ἀπολογουμένου δι' ὧνπερ εἴωθα λέγειν καὶ ἐν ἀγορᾷ ἐπὶ τῶν τραπεζῶν, ἵνα ὑμῶν πολλοὶ ἀκηκόασι, καὶ ἄλλοθι, μήτε θαυμάζειν μήτε θορυβεῖν τούτου ἔνεκα. ἔχει γὰρ οὕτωςί. [17d] νῦν ἐγὼ πρῶτον ἐπὶ δικαστήριον ἀναβέβηκα, ἔτη γεγονῶς ἑβδομήκοντα· ἀτεχνῶς οὖν ξένως ἔχω τῆς ἐνθάδε λέξεως. ὥσπερ οὖν ἂν, εἰ τῷ ὄντι ξένος ἐτύγχανον ὢν, συνεγιγνώσκετε δήπου ἂν μοι εἰ ἐν ἐκείνῃ τῇ φωνῇ τε καὶ τῷ τρόπῳ ἔλεγον ἐν οἷσπερ ἐτεθράμμην, [18a] καὶ δὴ καὶ νῦν τοῦτο ὑμῶν δέομαι δίκαιον, ὥς γέ μοι δοκῶ, τὸν μὲν τρόπον τῆς λέξεως εἶναι—ἴσως μὲν γὰρ χείρων, ἴσως δὲ βελτίων ἂν εἴη—αὐτὸ δὲ τοῦτο σκοπεῖν καὶ τούτῳ τὸν νοῦν προσέχειν, εἰ δίκαια λέγω ἢ μή· δικαστοῦ μὲν γὰρ αὕτη ἀρετή, ῥήτορος δὲ τάληθῃ λέγειν.

πρῶτον μὲν οὖν δίκαιός εἰμι ἀπολογήσασθαι, ὧ ἄνδρες Ἀθηναῖοι, πρὸς τὰ πρῶτά μου ψευδῇ

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all full of artful flourishes and catchy wordplay. No, you'll hear me speaking in plain old Greek, off the cuff, with whatever words come to mind, because I trust in the justice of what I'm saying. And honestly, not a one of you should expect anything else, because at my age it'd be completely absurd to show up here like some young hotshot with a pat production.

That's right, gentlemen of Athens, and in fact, I have a favor to ask: if you do hear me defending myself with the same normal words I'm always using in the marketplace out near the bankers' tables—where many of you have heard me before—or anywhere else, then don't be surprised or start jeering at me. [17d] You see, in my seventy years this is the first time I've ever appeared in court, and the language here feels completely foreign to me.¹ Now, if I really were a foreigner, I'm sure you'd bear with me if I spoke in the dialect or with the tics I grew up with. [18a] By the same reasoning, then, I ask that you disregard how I speak here—whether it's worse or better than what you're accustomed to—and focus on one thing alone: whether what I'm saying is just or not. After all, that's your job as jurors, the same way it's my job as an orator to tell the truth.

Since first things are first, gentlemen of Athens, it's only fair that I begin by defending myself

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κατηγορημένα καὶ τοὺς πρώτους κατηγοροὺς, ἔπειτα δὲ πρὸς τὰ ὕστερον καὶ τοὺς ὑστέρους. [18b] ἐμοῦ γὰρ πολλοὶ κατήγοροι γεγόνασι πρὸς ὑμᾶς καὶ πάλαι πολλὰ ἤδη ἔτη καὶ οὐδὲν ἀληθὲς λέγοντες, οὓς ἐγὼ μᾶλλον φοβοῦμαι ἢ τοὺς ἀμφὶ Ἄνυτον, καίπερ ὄντας καὶ τούτους δεινούς· ἀλλ' ἐκεῖνοι δεινότεροι, ὧ ἄνδρες, οἳ ὑμῶν τοὺς πολλοὺς ἐκ παίδων παραλαμβάνοντες ἔπειθόν τε καὶ κατηγοροῦν ἐμοῦ μᾶλλον οὐδὲν ἀληθές, ὥς

ἔστιν τις Σωκράτης σοφὸς ἀνὴρ, τά τε μετέωρα φροντιστὴς καὶ τὰ ὑπὸ γῆς πάντα ἀνεζητηκὼς καὶ τὸν [18c] ἥττω λόγον κρείττω ποιῶν.

οὗτοι, ὧ ἄνδρες Ἀθηναῖοι, <οἱ> ταύτην τὴν φήμην κατασκεδάσαντες, οἱ δεινοὶ εἰσὶν μου κατήγοροι· οἱ γὰρ ἀκούοντες ἡγοῦνται τοὺς ταῦτα ζητοῦντας οὐδὲ θεοὺς νομίζειν. ἔπειτὰ εἰσιν οὗτοι οἱ κατήγοροι πολλοὶ καὶ πολὺν χρόνον ἤδη κατηγορηκότες, ἔτι δὲ καὶ ἐν ταύτῃ τῇ ἡλικίᾳ λέγοντες πρὸς ὑμᾶς ἐν ἧ ἂν μάλιστα ἐπιστεύσατε, παῖδες ὄντες ἔνιοι ὑμῶν καὶ μεράκια, ἀτεχνῶς ἐρήμην κατηγοροῦντες ἀπολογουμένου

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against my first accusers and their allegations, and then come to the more recent ones later. [18b] You see, accusers have been circulating allegations about me among you for years—many accusers, and long before this trial. None of their whispers are true, but I’m actually more afraid of them than I am of Anytus and his crew. Oh, he’s certainly dangerous too, but those earlier accusers frighten me more, gentlemen, because they got to you with their false ideas about me when you were still children. They’ve been spreading stories like this:

“There’s this man named Socrates—a ‘free-thinker.’ He’s a theorist of things beyond the heavens, an expert in everything beneath the earth, and he makes the weaker argument into [18c] the stronger one.”

The ones who have smeared my reputation like this, gentlemen of Athens, are the truly dangerous accusers, because people hear them and assume that anyone who studies such things doesn’t believe in gods. These accusers are legion, and they’ve been at it a long time. Worse, they got to you at your most impressionable—when some of you were still kids or teenagers—and they basically convicted me in absentia, with nobody there to defend me. And the

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οὐδενός. ὁ δὲ πάντων ἀλογώτατον, ὅτι οὐδὲ τὰ ὀνόματα οἷόν τε [18d] αὐτῶν εἰδέναι καὶ εἰπεῖν, πλὴν εἴ τις κωμωδοποιὸς τυγχάνει ὦν.

ὅσοι δὲ φθόνῳ καὶ διαβολῇ χρώμενοι ὑμᾶς ἀνέπειθον, οἱ δὲ καὶ αὐτοὶ πεπεισμένοι ἄλλους πείθοντες, οὗτοι πάντες ἀπορώτατοί εἰσιν· οὐδὲ γὰρ ἀναβιβάσασθαι οἷόν τ' ἐστὶν αὐτῶν ἐνταυθοῖ οὐδ' ἐλέγξει οὐδένα, ἀλλ' ἀνάγκη ἀτεχνῶς ὥσπερ σκιαμαχεῖν ἀπολογούμενόν τε καὶ ἐλέγχειν μηδενὸς ἀποκρινομένου.

ἀξιῶσατε οὖν καὶ ὑμεῖς, ὥσπερ ἐγὼ λέγω, διττούς μου τοὺς κατηγοροὺς γεγονέναι, ἑτέρους μὲν τοὺς ἄρτι κατηγορήσαντας, ἑτέρους δὲ [18e] τοὺς πάλαι οὓς ἐγὼ λέγω, καὶ οἰήθητε δεῖν πρὸς ἐκείνους πρῶτόν με ἀπολογήσασθαι· καὶ γὰρ ὑμεῖς ἐκείνων πρότερον ἠκούσατε κατηγορούντων καὶ πολὺ μᾶλλον ἢ τῶνδε τῶν ὕστερον.

εἶεν· ἀπολογητέον δὴ, ὦ ἄνδρες Ἀθηναῖοι, [19a] καὶ ἐπιχειρητέον ὑμῶν ἐξελέσθαι τὴν διαβολὴν ἣν ὑμεῖς ἐν πολλῷ χρόνῳ ἔσχετε ταύτην ἐν οὕτως ὀλίγῳ χρόνῳ. βουλοίμην μὲν οὖν ἂν τοῦτο οὕτως γενέσθαι, εἴ τι ἄμεινον καὶ ὑμῖν καὶ ἐμοί, καὶ πλέον τί με ποιῆσαι ἀπολογούμενον·

οἶμαι δὲ αὐτὸ χαλεπὸν εἶναι, καὶ οὐ πάνυ με λανθάνει οἷόν ἐστιν. ὅμως τοῦτο μὲν ἴτω ὅπη τῷ θεῷ φίλον, τῷ δὲ νόμῳ πειστέον καὶ ἀπολογητέον.

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craziest part is that I can't even tell you most of their names [18d], except for a few comic playwrights.²

All who prejudiced you against me with these malicious smears—and then got others to buy into them once they'd bought into them themselves—have left me in an impossible bind. There's no way to subpoena or cross-examine any of them here. I'm stuck fighting shadows—trying to defend myself by cross-examining accusers that aren't even here to answer!

So let's agree—as I've been saying—that my accusers fall into two groups: those who have accused me here in court today, and those [18e] from long ago, as I've described. And let's also agree that I must first defend myself against the earlier group, since you heard from them before you heard from the newer crowd—and moreover, you heard them far more often.

All right then—gentlemen of Athens, a defense is now in order. [19a] In the brief time we have, I'll do my utmost to challenge the biases you've accumulated over the years. Nothing would please me more than to succeed in that—both for your sake and mine—and, above all, to prevail in my defense.

But I won't pretend that this is easy. I know full well the challenge that lies before me, and I'm under no illusions about it. I leave the outcome to the god;

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ἀναλάβωμεν οὖν ἐξ ἀρχῆς τίς ἡ κατηγορία ἐστὶν ἐξ ἧς [19b] ἡ ἐμὴ διαβολὴ γέγονεν, ἣ δὲ καὶ πιστεύων Μέλητος με ἐγράψατο τὴν γραφὴν ταύτην. εἶεν· τί δὴ λέγοντες διέβαλλον οἱ διαβάλλοντες; ὥσπερ οὖν κατηγορῶν τὴν ἀντωμοσίαν δεῖ ἀναγνῶναι αὐτῶν·

“Σωκράτης ἀδικεῖ καὶ περιεργάζεται ζητῶν τὰ τε ὑπὸ γῆς καὶ οὐράνια καὶ τὸν [19c] ἥττω λόγον κρείττω ποιῶν καὶ ἄλλους ταῦτά ταῦτα διδάσκων.”

τοιαύτη τίς ἐστίν· ταῦτα γὰρ ἑωρᾶτε καὶ αὐτοὶ ἐν τῇ Ἀριστοφάνους κωμῳδίᾳ, Σωκράτη τινὰ ἐκεῖ περιφερόμενον, φάσκοντά τε ἀεροβατεῖν καὶ ἄλλην

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in the meantime, the law demands a defense—and defend myself I shall.*

Let us begin with the accusation that ignited all this prejudice against me [19b]—the same prejudice upon which Meletus relies in bringing this case. What exactly did the gossipmongers say to turn people against me? As with my accusers present today, we must “read” (so to speak) their “complaint” too:

“Socrates is guilty—and a troublemaker—of investigating things beneath the earth and beyond the heavens, of making [19c] the weaker argument into the stronger one, and of teaching these things to others.”

That’s essentially how it goes, because it’s what you saw for yourselves in Aristophanes’s *Clouds*. In that comedy there’s a “Socrates” swinging around on some contraption, proclaiming that he’s walking

* Here and elsewhere Socrates refers simply to “the god,” without specification. The phrase is as odd and vague in Greek as in English, suggesting anything from Apollo or Zeus to something closer to “God” or “the deity”—an ambiguity that appears calculated.

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πολλήν φλυαρίαν φλυαροῦντα, ὧν ἐγὼ οὐδὲν οὔτε μέγα οὔτε μικρὸν ἐρίεπαίω. καὶ οὐχ ὥς ἀτιμάζων λέγω τὴν τοιαύτην ἐπιστήμην, εἴ τις περὶ τῶν τοιούτων σοφός ἐστιν—μή πως ἐγὼ ὑπὸ Μελήτου τοσαύτας δίκας φεύγοιμι.

ἀλλὰ γὰρ ἐμοὶ τούτων, ὧ ἄνδρες Ἀθηναῖοι, [19d] οὐδὲν μέτεστιν. μάρτυρας δὲ αὖ ὑμῶν τοὺς πολλοὺς παρέχομαι, καὶ ἀξιῶ ὑμᾶς ἀλλήλους διδάσκειν τε καὶ φράζειν, ὅσοι ἐμοῦ πώποτε ἀκηκόατε διαλεγομένου—πολλοὶ δὲ ὑμῶν οἱ τοιοῦτοὶ εἰσιν—φράζετε οὖν ἀλλήλοις εἰ πώποτε ἢ μικρὸν ἢ μέγα ἤκουσέ τις ὑμῶν ἐμοῦ περὶ τῶν τοιούτων διαλεγομένου, καὶ ἐκ τούτου γνώσεσθε ὅτι τοιαῦτ' ἐστὶ καὶ τᾶλλα περὶ ἐμοῦ ἃ οἱ πολλοὶ λέγουσιν.

ἀλλὰ γὰρ οὔτε τούτων οὐδὲν ἐστιν, οὐδέ γ' εἴ τις ἀκηκόατε ὥς ἐγὼ παιδεύειν ἐπιχειρῶ ἀνθρώπους καὶ χρήματα πράττομαι, [19e] οὐδὲ τοῦτο ἀληθές. ἐπεὶ καὶ τοῦτό γέ μοι δοκεῖ καλὸν εἶναι, εἴ τις οἴός τ' εἴη παιδεύειν ἀνθρώπους ὥσπερ Γοργίας τε ὁ Λεοντῖνος καὶ Πρόδικος ὁ Κεῖος καὶ Ἰππίας ὁ Ἡλεῖος. τούτων γὰρ ἕκαστος, ὧ ἄνδρες, οἴός τ' ἐστὶν ἰὼν εἰς ἐκάστην τῶν πόλεων τοὺς νέους, οἷς ἔξεστι τῶν ἑαυτῶν πολιτῶν προῖκα συνεῖναι ὧ ἂν βούλωνται, [20a] τούτους

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on air and spouting all kinds of nonsense—topics I don't have the faintest idea about. And when I say I have no such knowledge, I mean no offense to anyone who may genuinely understand those things. And I hope I never have to face Meletus on endless charges for *that*!

No, gentlemen, I have nothing to do [19d] with any of that. And again, I call upon the majority of you to serve as my witnesses. Talk among yourselves—all of you who have ever heard me in conversation, and there are many such of you. Go on, ask each other: has anyone ever heard me discoursing on such subjects—briefly or at length, at any time? If you do, then you'll see for yourselves how entirely baseless this gossip really is.

Socrates pauses to give the jurors time to chat.

As you can see, there's no truth to any of that. And the same goes for another rumor you may have heard—that I teach and charge for it. [19e] That isn't true either—though I must admit, if anyone *can* teach as skillfully as Gorgias of Leontini, Prodicus of Ceos, and Hippias of Elis, it really is impressive. I mean, these men arrive in city after city and persuade young people—who could associate with any citizen they like for free [20a]—to leave their old

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πείθουσι τὰς ἐκείνων συνουσίας ἀπολιπόντας σφίσιν
συνεῖναι χρήματα διδόντας καὶ χάριν προσειδέναι.

ἐπεὶ καὶ ἄλλος ἀνὴρ ἐστὶ Πάριος ἐνθάδε σοφὸς ὃν
ἐγὼ ἡσθόμην ἐπιδημοῦντα· ἔτυχον γὰρ προσελθὼν
ἀνδρὶ ὃς τετέλεκε χρήματα σοφισταῖς πλείω ἢ
σύμπαντες οἱ ἄλλοι, Καλλία τῷ Ἰππονίκου· τοῦτον οὖν
ἀνηρόμην—ἐστὸν γὰρ αὐτῷ δύο ὑεῖ—“ὦ Καλλία,” ἦν
δ’ ἐγώ,

“εἰ μὲν σου τὸ ὑεῖ πῶλω ἢ μόσχῳ ἐγενέσθην,
εἵχομεν ἂν αὐτοῖν ἐπιστάτην λαβεῖν καὶ
μισθώσασθαι ὃς ἔμελλεν αὐτῷ καλῶ τε [20b]
κάγαθῶ ποιήσῃν τὴν προσήκουσαν ἀρετὴν· ἦν
δ’ ἂν οὗτος ἢ τῶν ἱππικῶν τις ἢ τῶν γεωργικῶν·
νῦν δ’ ἐπειδὴ ἀνθρώπῳ ἐστὸν, τίνα αὐτοῖν ἐν νῶ
ἔχεις ἐπιστάτην λαβεῖν; τίς τῆς τοιαύτης ἀρετῆς,
τῆς ἀνθρωπίνης τε καὶ πολιτικῆς, ἐπιστήμων
ἐστίν; οἶμαι γάρ σε ἐσκέφθαι διὰ τὴν τῶν ὑέων
κτῆσιν. ἔστιν τις,” ἔφην ἐγώ, “ἢ οὐ;”

“πάνυ γε,” ἦ δ’ ὅς.

“τίς,” ἦν δ’ ἐγώ, “καὶ ποδαπός, καὶ πόσου
διδάσκει;”

“Εὐήνος,” ἔφη, “ὦ Σώκρατες, Πάριος, πέντε
μυῶν.”

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companions and flock to them instead. And they pay for that privilege. What irony, they even count themselves *fortunate* for the chance!³

Speaking of which, I hear there's another knowledgeable fellow here in town, a man from Paros. You see, I happened to bump into a man who has spent more money on "intellectuals" than everyone else put together.⁴ His name is Callias son of Hipponicus, and since he has two sons, I asked him about it. "Callias," I said,

"If your sons had been born horses or cattle, we could easily find a trainer—a cowboy or rancher, someone [20b] who could turn them into fine, gentlemanly animals. But they're people. So what kind of trainer are you planning to get them? What expert—what 'mentor,' if you will—can develop *mental* potential, and shape them into good people and responsible citizens? I'm sure you've thought about it, seeing that you have the sons. Is there someone like that, or not?"⁵

"There is," he replied.

"Who?" I asked. "Where's he from? And what's his fee?"

"Evenus of Paros," he replied, "and he charges five minas of silver."⁶

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καὶ ἐγὼ τὸν Εὐήνων ἐμακάρισα εἰ ὥς ἀληθῶς ἔχοι ταύτην τὴν [20c] τέχνην καὶ οὕτως ἐμμελῶς διδάσκει. ἐγὼ γοῦν καὶ αὐτὸς ἐκαλλυνόμην τε καὶ ἡβρυνόμην ἂν εἰ ἡπιστάμην ταῦτα· ἀλλ' οὐ γὰρ ἐπίσταμαι, ὦ ἄνδρες Ἀθηναῖοι.

ὑπολάβοι ἂν οὖν τις ὑμῶν ἴσως·

“ἀλλ', ὦ Σώκρατες, τὸ σὸν τί ἐστὶ πρᾶγμα; πόθεν αἱ διαβολαὶ σοι αὖται γεγόνασιν; οὐ γὰρ δήπου σοῦ γε οὐδὲν τῶν ἄλλων περιττότερον πραγματευομένου ἔπειτα τοσαύτη φήμη τε καὶ λόγος γέγονεν, εἰ μὴ τι ἔπραττες ἀλλοῖον ἢ οἱ πολλοί. [20d] λέγε οὖν ἡμῖν τί ἐστίν, ἵνα μὴ ἡμεῖς περὶ σοῦ αὐτοσχεδιάζωμεν.”

ταυτί μοι δοκεῖ δίκαια λέγειν ὁ λέγων, καὶ γὰρ ὑμῖν πειράσομαι ἀποδείξαι τί ποτ' ἐστὶν τοῦτο ὃ ἐμοὶ πεποίηκεν τό τε ὄνομα καὶ τὴν διαβολήν. ἀκούετε δὴ. καὶ ἴσως μὲν δόξω τισὶν ὑμῶν παίζειν· εὖ μέντοι ἴστε, πᾶσαν ὑμῖν τὴν ἀλήθειαν ἐρῶ.

ἐγὼ γάρ, ὦ ἄνδρες Ἀθηναῖοι, δι' οὐδὲν ἄλλ' ἢ διὰ σοφίαν τινὰ τοῦτο τὸ ὄνομα ἔσχηκα. ποίαν δὲ σοφίαν ταύτην; ἥπερ ἐστὶν ἴσως ἀνθρωπίνη σοφία· τῷ ὄντι

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“Happy is Evenus,” I thought, if he truly possesses this [20c] expertise, and he’s selling lessons in it for such a modest price. I must say I’d be rather full of myself if I knew those things, gentlemen of Athens. But the truth is, I don’t.

Now, one of you might perhaps object:

“Very well, Socrates, what *do* you do? If you’re not doing anything unusual, then where did all these smears come from? Because if you *haven’t* been doing something other people don’t, it’s hard to believe all these rumors just came out of nowhere—unless you’ve been doing something most people don’t. [20d] So tell us what it is, and that way we won’t go jumping to conclusions about you.”

That’s fair—you’ve got a point, and I’ll do my utmost to set the record straight—so listen closely: I’ll explain what’s behind this reputation and the prejudice against me. Now, some of you may suspect I’m joking, but let me assure you: I’ll be telling you the whole truth.

You see, men of Athens, the reputation I’ve earned comes down to one thing—and one thing only: this notion of “wisdom.” What kind of wisdom? Perhaps it’s simply human wisdom, because it

PLATO

γὰρ κινδυνεύω ταύτην εἶναι σοφός. οὗτοι δὲ τάχ' ἄν, οὐς ἄρτι ἔλεγον, [20e] μείζω τινὰ ἢ κατ' ἄνθρωπον σοφίαν σοφοὶ εἶεν, ἢ οὐκ ἔχω τί λέγω· οὐ γὰρ δὴ ἔγωγε αὐτὴν ἐπίσταμαι, ἀλλ' ὅστις φησὶ ψεύδεται τε καὶ ἐπὶ διαβολῇ τῇ ἐμῇ λέγει.

καὶ μοι, ὦ ἄνδρες Ἀθηναῖοι, μὴ θορυβήσητε, μηδ' ἐὰν δόξω τι ὑμῖν μέγα λέγειν· οὐ γὰρ ἐμὸν ἐρῶ τὸν λόγον ὃν ἄν λέγω, ἀλλ' εἰς ἀξιόχρεων ὑμῖν τὸν λέγοντα ἀνοίσω. τῆς γὰρ ἐμῆς, εἰ δὴ τίς ἐστιν σοφία καὶ οἷα, μάρτυρα ὑμῖν παρέξομαι τὸν θεὸν τὸν ἐν Δελφοῖς.

Χαιρεφῶντα γὰρ ἴστε που. [21a] οὗτος ἐμός τε ἐταῖρος ἦν ἐκ νέου καὶ ὑμῶν τῷ πλήθει ἐταῖρός τε καὶ συνέφυγε τὴν φυγὴν ταύτην καὶ μεθ' ὑμῶν κατῆλθε. καὶ ἴστε δὴ οἷος ἦν Χαιρεφῶν, ὡς σφοδρὸς ἐφ' ὅτι ὀρμήσειεν. καὶ δὴ ποτε καὶ εἰς Δελφοὺς ἐλθὼν ἐτόλμησε τοῦτο μαντεύσασθαι—καί, ὅπερ λέγω, μὴ θορυβεῖτε, ὦ ἄνδρες—ἤρετο γὰρ δὴ εἴ τις ἐμοῦ εἴη σοφώτερος. ἀνείλεν οὖν ἡ Πυθία μηδένα σοφώτερον εἶναι. καὶ τούτων πέρι ὁ ἀδελφὸς ὑμῖν αὐτοῦ οὐτοσὶ μαρτυρήσει, ἐπειδὴ ἐκεῖνος τετελεύτηκεν.

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may well be that I'm wise in that sense. Maybe those others I spoke of [20e] possess a type of wisdom far beyond human ken. I'm just not sure, since I don't understand it myself, and anyone who says I do is lying and damaging my name.

And please, gentlemen of Athens—don't shout me down, even if what I say does sound a bit bold. The story I'm about to tell isn't my own, but I'm going to point you to a very reliable source for it. If there's any truth to this notion of my supposed "wisdom"—if it *is* wisdom—then I will call upon the god of Delphi, Apollo, as my witness.

You all knew Chaerephon, I believe—[21a] a friend of mine since childhood, and a friend to your own democratic cause. He endured your exile and shared in your return to power.⁷ You also know how he was—always getting carried away by some enthusiasm or another. So, he had the nerve to go off to Delphi one day—and please, don't interrupt—and ask the oracle: "Is anyone wiser than Socrates?" The priestess answered simply, "No one is wiser." Chaerephon is no longer with us, but his brother here will testify to these events.

Chaerephon's brother, Chaerecrates, steps forward to verify Socrates's statement.

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[21b] σκέψασθε δὴ ὧν ἔνεκα ταῦτα λέγω· μέλλω γὰρ ὑμᾶς διδάξειν ὅθεν μοι ἡ διαβολὴ γέγονεν. ταῦτα γὰρ ἐγὼ ἀκούσας ἐνεθυμούμην οὕτως· “τί ποτε λέγει ὁ θεός, καὶ τί ποτε αἰνίττεται; ἐγὼ γὰρ δὴ οὔτε μέγα οὔτε σμικρὸν σύννοια ἐμαυτῷ σοφὸς ὢν· τί οὖν ποτε λέγει φάσκων ἐμὲ σοφώτατον εἶναι; οὐ γὰρ δήπου ψεύδεται γέ· οὐ γὰρ θέμις αὐτῷ.”

καὶ πολὺν μὲν χρόνον ἠπόρουν τί ποτε λέγει· ἔπειτα μόγις πάνυ ἐπὶ ζήτησιν αὐτοῦ τοιαύτην τινὰ ἐτραπόμην. ἦλθον ἐπὶ τινὰ τῶν δοκούντων σοφῶν εἶναι, [21c] ὡς ἐνταῦθα εἶπερ που ἐλέγξων τὸ μαντεῖον καὶ ἀποφανῶν τῷ χρησμῷ ὅτι “οὕτοσί ἐμοῦ σοφώτερός ἐστι, σὺ δ’ ἐμὲ ἔφησθα.” διασκοπῶν οὖν τοῦτον—ὀνόματι γὰρ οὐδὲν δέομαι λέγειν, ἦν δέ τις τῶν πολιτικῶν πρὸς ὃν ἐγὼ σκοπῶν τοιοῦτόν τι ἔπαθον, ὃ ἄνδρες Ἀθηναῖοι, καὶ διαλεγόμενος αὐτῷ—ἔδοξέ μοι οὗτος ὁ ἀνὴρ δοκεῖν μὲν εἶναι σοφὸς ἄλλοις τε πολλοῖς ἀνθρώποις καὶ μάλιστα ἑαυτῷ, εἶναι δ’ οὐ· κἄπειτα ἐπειρώμην αὐτῷ δεικνύναι ὅτι οἷοιτο

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[21b] Now, think carefully about why I'm relating this story, because I'm about to explain the origin of the rumors about me. When I first heard it, see, I couldn't stop wondering: *What on earth does the god mean? What is this mystery?* I mean, I certainly don't feel especially—or even somewhat—wise. So what could he possibly mean in declaring me the *wisest*? He can't be lying, because that's not something gods can do.

For a long time, I couldn't grasp what the oracle was getting at. Then, quite reluctantly, I resolved to investigate. I decided the surest way to challenge the oracle's enigmatic claim was to visit someone reputed to be wise—because if [21c] it could be disproven, it would be there. I thought: *Now I can say: here is someone wiser than me, yet the oracle said I was.**

So, I went to a certain man—no need to name him, but he was a politician. And gentlemen, as I conversed with him, I couldn't shake the thought that although many believed him wise—and he believed it himself—he wasn't wise in the true sense at all. I tried to show him that while he thought

* Presumably meaning "... the oracle said *I* was the wisest," although the oracle did not quite say that, and Socrates does not quite say it here either.

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μὲν εἶναι σοφός, [21d] εἴη δ' οὐ. ἐντεῦθεν οὖν τούτῳ τε ἀπηχθόμην καὶ πολλοῖς τῶν παρόντων· πρὸς ἑμαυτὸν δ' οὖν ἀπιὼν ἐλογιζόμην ὅτι

τούτου μὲν τοῦ ἀνθρώπου ἐγὼ σοφώτερός εἰμι· κινδυνεύει μὲν γὰρ ἡμῶν οὐδέτερος οὐδὲν καλὸν κάγαθὸν εἰδέναι, ἀλλ' οὗτος μὲν οἶεται τι εἰδέναι οὐκ εἰδώς, ἐγὼ δέ, ὥσπερ οὖν οὐκ οἶδα, οὐδὲ οἶομαι· ἔοικα γοῦν τούτου γε σμικρῷ τινι αὐτῷ τούτῳ σοφώτερος εἶναι, ὅτι ἂ μὴ οἶδα οὐδὲ οἶομαι εἰδέναι.

ἐντεῦθεν ἐπ' ἄλλον ἦα τῶν ἐκείνου δοκούντων σοφωτέρων εἶναι καὶ μοι ταῦτα ταῦτα ἔδοξε· [21e] καὶ ἐνταῦθα κάκείνῳ καὶ ἄλλοις πολλοῖς ἀπηχθόμην.

μετὰ ταῦτ' οὖν ἤδη ἐφεξῆς ἦα, αἰσθανόμενος μὲν καὶ λυπούμενος καὶ δεδιὼς ὅτι ἀπηχθανόμην, ὅμως δὲ ἀναγκαῖον ἐδόκει εἶναι τὸ τοῦ θεοῦ περὶ πλείστου ποιεῖσθαι· ἰτέον οὖν, σκοποῦντι τὸν χρησμὸν τί λέγει, [22a] ἐπὶ ἅπαντας τοὺς τι δοκοῦντας εἰδέναι. καὶ νῆ τὸν κύνα, ὃ ἄνδρες Ἀθηναῖοι—δεῖ γὰρ πρὸς ὑμᾶς τάληθῇ λέγειν—ἦ μὴν ἐγὼ ἔπαθόν τι τοιοῦτον· οἱ μὲν

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himself wise, [21d] he wasn't. Consequently, he and many others who were present took offense at me. As I left, I thought:

Well, compared to him, I must be wiser. Neither of us likely knows anything truly worthwhile, but this guy believes he does, though he doesn't. I, on the other hand, don't believe I know anything—and that, perhaps, does make me wiser by that modest measure: I don't know what I don't know, and I don't believe that I do.

Next I went to another man—a man reputed to be wiser than the first—and it felt like the same story all over again. [21e] He too, along with many others, took offense and began to hate me.

After that I kept going, moving from one person to the next. I could see I was making enemies. I didn't like it, and it frightened me. Yet I felt I had no choice; I had to take the god's word seriously. I had to keep seeking the meaning of the oracle, [22a] visiting anyone who seemed likely to know something. And to be completely candid, I swear—because I must be truthful with you—that this was the result: as far as wisdom is concerned, those who

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μάλιστα εὐδοκιμοῦντες ἔδοξάν μοι ὀλίγου δεῖν τοῦ πλείστου ἐνδεεῖς εἶναι ζητοῦντι κατὰ τὸν θεόν, ἄλλοι δὲ δοκοῦντες φαυλότεροι ἐπιεικέστεροι εἶναι ἄνδρες πρὸς τὸ φρονίμως ἔχειν.

δεῖ δὴ ὑμῖν τὴν ἐμὴν πλάνην ἐπιδεῖξαι ὥσπερ πόνους τινὰς πονοῦντος ἵνα μοι καὶ ἀνέλεγκτος ἡ μαντεία γένοιτο.

μετὰ γὰρ τοὺς πολιτικοὺς ἦα ἐπὶ τοὺς ποιητὰς τοὺς τε τῶν τραγωδιῶν καὶ [22b] τοὺς τῶν διθυράμβων καὶ τοὺς ἄλλους, ὥς ἐνταῦθα ἐπ’ αὐτοφώρῳ καταληψόμενος ἐμαυτὸν ἀμαθέστερον ἐκείνων ὄντα. ἀναλαμβάνων οὖν αὐτῶν τὰ ποιήματα ἃ μοι ἐδόκει μάλιστα πεπραγματοῦσθαι αὐτοῖς, διηρώτων ἂν αὐτοὺς τί λέγοιεν, ἵν’ ἅμα τι καὶ μανθάνοιμι παρ’ αὐτῶν. αἰσχύνομαι οὖν ὑμῖν εἰπεῖν, ὦ ἄνδρες, τάληθῇ· ὅμως δὲ ῥητέον. ὥς ἔπος γὰρ εἰπεῖν ὀλίγου αὐτῶν ἅπαντες οἱ παρόντες ἂν βέλτιον ἔλεγον περὶ ὧν αὐτοὶ ἐπεποιήκεσαν.

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were the most highly regarded proved to be almost entirely lacking in it when I questioned them as the god commanded. Conversely, those regarded as less wise proved to be far more grounded in reality.

So, I must impress upon you how far I ventured and the herculean efforts I put into my quest—all to discover that the oracle’s pronouncement was utterly irrefutable.*

After interviewing the politicians, see, I turned to the bards—the tragedians, [22b] choral lyricists, and so on—hoping I might prove that I’m less wise than they are. I studied the works they’d clearly poured their greatest effort into, and then questioned them about the meanings behind their texts. I hoped that by exposing my own ignorance, I might also learn something from them. And gentlemen, I must admit—it’s embarrassing, but the truth must be told: virtually anybody there could have explained the meaning of those poems better than the bards themselves.

* Up until now, the translation “wise” for *sophia* has served well. To understand what follows, however, modern readers must know that the Greek word refers not only to deep understanding and moral insight, but also to skilled know-how in some practical domain, from writing songs to carving stone. Unfortunately, there is no single English word that captures both senses.

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ἐγνων οὖν αὖ καὶ περὶ τῶν ποιητῶν ἐν ὀλίγῳ
τούτῳ, ὅτι οὐ σοφία ποιοῖεν ἃ ποιοῖεν, [22c] ἀλλὰ
φύσει τινὶ καὶ ἐνθουσιάζοντες ὥσπερ οἱ θεομάντεις
καὶ οἱ χρησμοδοί· καὶ γὰρ οὗτοι λέγουσι μὲν πολλὰ
καὶ καλά, ἴσασιν δὲ οὐδὲν ὧν λέγουσι. τοιοῦτόν τί μοι
ἐφάνησαν πάθος καὶ οἱ ποιηταὶ πεπονθότες, καὶ ἅμα
ἡσθόμην αὐτῶν διὰ τὴν ποιήσιν οἰομένων καὶ τᾶλλα
σοφωτάτων εἶναι ἀνθρώπων ἃ οὐκ ἦσαν. ἀπῆα οὖν
καὶ ἐντεῦθεν τῷ αὐτῷ οἰόμενος περιγεγονέναι ὥπερ
καὶ τῶν πολιτικῶν.

τελευτῶν οὖν ἐπὶ τοὺς χειροτέχνους ἦα· [22d] ἐμαυτῷ
γὰρ συνήδη οὐδὲν ἐπισταμένῳ ὥς ἔπος εἰπεῖν, τούτους
δέ γ' ἤδη ὅτι εὐρήσοιμι πολλὰ καὶ καλά ἐπισταμένους.
καὶ τούτου μὲν οὐκ ἐψεύσθην, ἀλλ' ἠπίσταντο ἃ ἐγὼ
οὐκ ἠπιστάμην καὶ μου ταύτῃ σοφώτεροι ἦσαν. ἀλλ', ὦ
ἄνδρες Ἀθηναῖοι, ταυτόν μοι ἔδοξαν ἔχειν ἀμάρτημα
ὅπερ καὶ οἱ ποιηταὶ καὶ οἱ ἀγαθοὶ δημιουργοί—διὰ τὸ
τὴν τέχνην καλῶς ἐξεργάζεσθαι ἕκαστος ἡξίου καὶ
τᾶλλα τὰ μέγιστα σοφώτατος εἶναι—καὶ αὐτῶν αὕτη
ἡ πλημμέλεια ἐκείνην [22e] τὴν σοφίαν ἀποκρύπτειν·

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So once again, in dealing with the bards, I learned a lesson. Their creations do not result from the application of wisdom or refined technique, [22c] but from some raw talent and a kind of divine inspiration or possession.⁸ They resemble seers and soothsayers—uttering many impressive words without comprehending their own meaning. In my experience, the bards were in much that same position. At the same time, I noticed that because of their poetry, they fancied themselves the wisest about everything else as well—when, in reality, they were not. So I moved on again, believing that I was superior to them in precisely the same respect as I was to the politicians.

Finally, I went to those who work with their hands. [22d] I was well aware that I don't know much myself, but I was sure I'd find that at least these people knew many impressive things. And I wasn't wrong—they really did know things I didn't, and in that regard, they really were wiser than me. But, men of Athens, I noticed that our craftsmen shared the same fault as the bards: because each was so skilled in his one trade, he assumed he was the wisest about everything else, even really important issues. And that presumption overshadowed whatever wisdom he actually did have.⁹ [22e] So I asked

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ὥστε με ἑμαυτὸν ἀνερωτᾶν ὑπὲρ τοῦ χρησιμοῦ πότερα δεξαίμην ἂν οὕτως ὥσπερ ἔχω ἔχειν, μήτε τι σοφὸς ὢν τὴν ἐκείνων σοφίαν μήτε ἀμαθὴς τὴν ἀμαθίαν, ἢ ἀμφοτέρα ἃ ἐκεῖνοι ἔχουσιν ἔχειν. ἀπεκρινάμην οὖν ἑμαυτῷ καὶ τῷ χρησμῷ ὅτι μοι λυσιτελοῖ ὥσπερ ἔχω ἔχειν.

ἐκ ταυτησὶ δὴ τῆς ἐξετάσεως, ὧ ἄνδρες Ἀθηναῖοι, [23a] πολλὰ μὲν ἀπέχθεται μοι γεγόνασι καὶ οἷα χαλεπώταται καὶ βαρύταται, ὥστε πολλὰς διαβολὰς ἀπ’ αὐτῶν γεγονέναι, ὄνομα δὲ τοῦτο λέγεσθαι, σοφὸς εἶναι· οἷονται γάρ με ἐκάστοτε οἱ παρόντες ταῦτα αὐτὸν εἶναι σοφὸν ἢ ἂν ἄλλον ἐξελέγξω. τὸ δὲ κινδυνεύει, ὧ ἄνδρες, τῷ ὄντι ὁ θεὸς σοφὸς εἶναι, καὶ ἐν τῷ χρησμῷ τούτῳ τοῦτο λέγειν, ὅτι ἡ ἀνθρωπίνη σοφία ὀλίγου τινὸς ἀξία ἐστὶν καὶ οὐδενός. καὶ φαίνεται τοῦτον λέγειν τὸν Σωκράτη, προσκεχρῆσθαι δὲ τῷ ἑμῷ ὀνόματι, ἐμὲ παράδειγμα ποιούμενος, [23b] ὥσπερ ἂν <εἰ> εἴποι ὅτι “οὗτος ὑμῶν, ὧ ἄνθρωποι, σοφώτατός ἐστιν, ὅστις ὥσπερ Σωκράτης ἔγνωκεν ὅτι οὐδενὸς ἀξίός ἐστι τῇ ἀληθείᾳ πρὸς σοφίαν.”

ταῦτ’ οὖν ἐγὼ μὲν ἔτι καὶ νῦν περιῶν ζητῶ καὶ ἐρευνῶ κατὰ τὸν θεὸν καὶ τῶν ἀστῶν καὶ ξένων ἂν τινα οἶμαι σοφὸν εἶναι· καὶ ἐπειδάν μοι μὴ δοκῇ, τῷ θεῷ βοηθῶν ἐνδείκνυμαι ὅτι οὐκ ἔστι σοφός. καὶ ὑπὸ ταύτης τῆς ἀσχολίας οὔτε τι τῶν τῆς πόλεως πρᾶξαι μοι σχολὴ γέγονεν ἀξίον λόγου οὔτε τῶν οἰκείων, ἀλλ’ ἐν πενίᾳ μυρία εἰμι διὰ τὴν τοῦ θεοῦ λατρείαν.

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myself, as the oracle would have me, whether I'd rather be the way I am—not wise by their wisdom, and not foolish by their folly—or like them: knowledgeable in one field, but presumptuous enough to think I know it all. And I concluded—for both myself and the oracle—that I'm better off the way I am.

As a result of this inquiry, men of Athens, [23a] a great deal of resentment has grown up against me—resentment of the most bitter and difficult kind. With it have come many falsehoods, including this strange label, “wise.” You see, whenever I ask a question about any topic, bystanders assume I must already be wise about it. But the truth is, gentlemen, it's the god who is truly wise. His oracle probably means that human wisdom is negligible, if it exists at all. And apparently, he's making an example of me—speaking through my name, and [23b] in effect declaring: “Humans, the wisest among you is he who, like Socrates, understands that when it comes to wisdom, he is nothing.”

So that is why—even now—I traverse the city, searching and questioning anyone I have reason to believe is wise, whether citizen or foreigner, exactly as the god commands. And when these people appear unwise to me, I help the god out by showing them that they aren't. And because of this mission, I have no time for important matters, either of state

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[23c] πρὸς δὲ τούτοις οἱ νέοι μοι <οἱ> ἐπακολουθοῦντες, οἷς μάλιστα σχολή ἐστίν, οἱ τῶν πλουσιωτάτων, αὐτόματοι, χαίρουσιν ἀκούοντες ἐξεταζομένων τῶν ἀνθρώπων, καὶ αὐτοὶ πολλάκις ἐμὲ μιμοῦνται, εἴτα ἐπιχειροῦσιν ἄλλους ἐξετάζειν· κᾶπειτα οἶμαι εὗρίσκουσι πολλὴν ἀφθονίαν οἰομένων μὲν εἰδέναι τι ἀνθρώπων, εἰδότες δὲ ὀλίγα ἢ οὐδέν.

ἐντεῦθεν οὖν οἱ ὑπ’ αὐτῶν ἐξεταζόμενοι ἐμοὶ ὀργίζονται, [23d] οὐχ αὐτοῖς, καὶ λέγουσιν ὥς Σωκράτης τίς ἐστι μιαιώτατος καὶ διαφθείρει τοὺς νέους· καὶ ἐπειδὴν τις αὐτοὺς ἐρωτᾷ ὅτι ποιῶν καὶ ὅτι διδάσκων, ἔχουσι μὲν οὐδὲν εἰπεῖν ἀλλ’ ἀγνοοῦσιν, ἵνα δὲ μὴ δοκῶσιν ἀπορεῖν, τὰ κατὰ πάντων τῶν φιλοσοφούντων πρόχειρα ταῦτα λέγουσιν, ὅτι “τὰ μετέωρα καὶ τὰ ὑπὸ γῆς” καὶ “θεοὺς μὴ νομίζειν” καὶ “τὸν ἥττω λόγον κρείττω ποιεῖν.” τὰ γὰρ ἀληθῆ οἶομαι οὐκ ἂν ἐθέλοιεν λέγειν, ὅτι κατάδηλοι γίνονται προσποιούμενοι μὲν εἰδέναι, εἰδότες δὲ οὐδέν.

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or in my personal affairs. As a result, I live in utter poverty—entirely by reason of my service to the god.

[23c] Add to all this that the young people who have taken to following me around—those with the most free time, the sons of the wealthiest—love listening to people being questioned. They often imitate me and start questioning others themselves. And I imagine they find plenty of people who think they know something, but in reality, know very little or nothing at all.

As a result, the people these young men examine get angry at *me*, [23d] not themselves, and start claiming that some man named Socrates is “poisoning their minds,” that I’m “brainwashing the youth.” When asked what I actually teach or do, they fall silent, because they have no answer. But instead of admitting they have no idea, they revert to the usual accusations leveled at freethinkers: that I speak about “things in the heavens and beneath the earth,” that I “don’t believe in the gods,” and that I “make the weaker argument into the stronger one.”¹⁰ I doubt they’d ever admit the truth, because if they did they’d be exposed for what they really are: people pretending to know something, when in fact they know nothing.

(continued_{3.1})