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THE APOLOGY

PREFACE

The human and intellectual situation of the *Apology* cannot be rightly understood without considering the historical and political situation. The trial of Socrates took place in 339 B.C. The years from 431 till 404 had been taken up with the Peloponnesian War, waged between Athens and Sparta for supremacy in Greece, and ending with the defeat of Athens. The war was really decided in 413 by the collapse of the Sicilian expedition. It is true that Athens won the naval battle of Arginusae as late as 406; but the commanders had been prevented by storm from burying the bodies that were drifting in the sea, and the people, overheated by religious excitement, adjudged this a crime on their part and condemned them to death. This incident reveals the inward confusion of minds. In 405 followed the final defeat at Aegospotami, and Athens was invested. In 404 the city, exhausted and torn by party strife, was compelled to surrender. The democratic constitution was abolished and authority transferred to the "Thirty Tyrants", Athenians with Spartan leanings. These men governed with moderation at first, then, supported by Spartan troops, ever more arbitrarily, and finally with violence and terror. From the frontier fortress of Phyle began a resistance movement against them which ended with the fall of the Thirty, and Sparta allowed the old form of government to be restored. The city began to recover; but the political situation was tense, as the ruling democracy felt itself threatened. So it was easy for a trend of thought which was in itself of purely intellectual purport to be misunderstood politically and felt as dangerous.

The moral and religious situation too was difficult. The endless wars with their dreadful defeats had brought in their train a deep seated disorder. The extremely rapid and intensive development of intellectual life had shaken the traditional religious ideas. The old faith in myth and cult had, as we have already seen, been critically

undermined by the versatile Athenian intellect; but equally so by a frame of mind which after all the late calamities clung only to tangible things and admitted nothing beyond success and enjoyment. Sophistry and the cult of success thus conspired to produce a religious disorder along with the ethical. And as religious life was bound up in the closest way with the life of the state, as indeed the institutions of state and society had their roots in religion, it was necessarily the interest of a democracy of conservative tendency — democracy in a different sense, therefore, from that which the modern age associates with the word — to preserve as far as possible the traditional piety. Thus, according as the situation actually stood, an attack on religious tradition could appear as an attack on the state.

Socrates had a peculiar position in relation to all this. He was only partially adjusted to the social and political mentality of the time; to the relation of man with men and things, life and work; to the prevailing piety and morality. The institutions themselves, especially those of the state, he upheld from insight and conviction as well as from solidarity of feeling — the *Crito* speaks of this with an unaffected pathos. He fulfilled his duties as a citizen, in office as in arms, in the most conscientious manner; of this too the *Crito*, as well as the *Apology*, speaks. Religious usages were sacred to him; see the end of the *Phaedo*. He certainly took part in everything that went on in the city. Countless people knew him and, according to their several characters, respected, feared, hated or laughed at him. But in that which was his very own, his mission and his inner compulsion, he was still quite alone. What he was and did in that regard had no place in the existing order of things. In fact he bore within him a power which must disrupt this whole beautiful life that rested on the forces of nature-religion and expressed itself in tradition, prophecy, myth, poetry, symbol and cult. In face of everything which claimed validity he raised the testing question: "What is this? What does it amount to? Is it fundamentally in order?" He thereby loosened just what was the strongest hold of tradition, its rootedness in involuntary feeling, judgment and action. The import of his attack was: "You claim to be acting rightly. But one can only act rightly from insight. Therefore you claim to have insight, or at any rate you act as if you had it. Give an account of it then! "But the result in every case is: "You have no real insight after all, but only opinions which derive from impulse and custom, and your action has neither sense nor justification." In all this there appears a new standard of validity and a new ethos determined by it. Instinct, the authenticity of the established order of things, the authority of tradition, the power of irrational religious experiences

and the wisdom of symbols lose their reassuring and binding force. They are opposed by the capacity for personal responsibility, resting on insight into the nature of things and the duty of objectivity — an attitude, therefore, which is based on a mind become aware of itself and master of itself.

Because Socrates did this, the Athenians indicted him the contemporary Athenians that is, combined democrats and conservatives, enemies of all despotism, but also of everything that would then have been called “modern”, namely rational criticism and the shaping of life by insight and responsible planning. And according to the values on which the judgment is based, these men appear either as narrow-minded opponents of what history demanded, bent on arresting it, and even in this serving its purpose by raising the object of their attack to the position of a shining example — or as the protectors, limited perhaps, but guided by instinctive knowledge, of a splendid, threatened world, and justified by the fact that the progress of history would reveal Socrates as the man who introduced the age of rationalism and “decadence”.

This is what was meant by saying that Socrates was alone in what was specially characteristic of him, a lonely man who did not fit into the institutions of his time. He was formally indicted by three men, who are mentioned in the *Apology* itself. The first was Meletus, a poet by profession, but without further significance; the second was Anytus, a rich master-tanner, a politically influential democrat and inexorable opponent of all new movements; the third was Lycon, an orator, and representative of the politicians and intellectuals. But these three men really stood for all those whose concern it was that tradition should be upheld.

One further remark on the course of the trial, the order of which stands out clearly in the action of the *Apology*.

The court is the supreme court of the state, consisting of five hundred jurors appointed by lot. First the indictment is read to it, by the prosecutor if there is only one, by a spokesman if several persons have made the accusation. In Socrates's trial there are three, and Meletus speaks for them. The accused is then given the word to begin his defense. He may set forth his view of the case, and try to refute the speaker for the prosecution by cross-questioning. When he has finished, the jurors decide whether he is guilty or not guilty in the sense of the accusation. If he is pronounced guilty, the accused has leave to speak again. The indictment has also proposed a certain penalty; the accused on his side may now name an alternative penalty which seems reasonable to him, and thus has the opportunity of a second,

limited defense. The court then passes the second judgment. If it rejects the accused's proposal, the latter is allowed a final word.

Plato's work consists of the three speeches which Socrates made at the prescribed stages in the trial. To what extent these speeches correspond to Socrates's actual words cannot be determined. In any case it can be assumed that they reproduce the sense and spirit of his defense. The first speech is long, about eight times as long as the second, and interspersed with questions to the speaker for the prosecution and his answers; the second is very short; the third again about twice as long as the second.

THE FIRST SPEECH

The Spiritual Perspective

The whole is a drama of the most powerful kind. More than two thousand years have elapsed since the trial was enacted, but Plato's account of it still grips the reader with unspent force. Certain sentences, certain gestures of Socrates and certain episodes may be accurately reproduced in the text; but Plato's real concern is to render visible the forces which strove for the mastery and the decisions which were involved.

It is a strange defense that Socrates makes. Involuntarily one thinks of Euthyphro as present. One seems to see him moving invisibly through the speeches. Often it is as if Socrates — the Socrates of Plato, who is also of course that of the first dialogue — is himself thinking of him; for instance, when he says what line he would have to take in order to win his case before these judges. Beside this latent contrast the manner in which he pleads his case stands out clear and perilous.

If one looks more closely, one notices how the action shifts its perspective from the immediate circumstances to that which is humanly and spiritually more vital. In the actual foreground stands the accused, Socrates, son of Sophroniscus, a native of Alopece and a stonemason — or sculptor — by trade, who has to answer before the supreme court to charges of religious impiety and leading young men astray. But in fact he does something quite different. He presents himself before a spiritual court: before Apollo, to whom he is conscious of a special obligation, and gives him an account of how he has carried out the god's mission; he appears before his own conscience, and examines himself as to whether he has done what was right. Through

these two transactions there runs yet another, a third. In this Socrates himself is the accuser and demands an account from his judges before the tribunal of Truth. And they too have seen this, for he has more than once "to admonish the gentlemen not to make an uproar and shout interruptions".

The Introduction

The prosecution has read its indictment and argued for it, and Socrates begins his defense:

I cannot tell what Impression my accusers have made upon you, Athenians: for my own part, I know that they nearly made me forget who I was, so plausible were they; and yet they have scarcely uttered one single word of truth.

Cutting irony, which at once receives further emphasis:

But of all their many falsehoods, the one which astonished me most was when they said that I was a clever speaker, and that you must be careful not to let me mislead you. I thought that it was most impudent of them not to be ashamed to talk in that way; for as soon as I open my mouth the lie will be exposed, and I shall prove that I am not a clever speaker in any way at all: unless, indeed, by a clever speaker they mean a man who speaks the truth. If that is their meaning, I agree with them that I am a much greater orator than they. My accusers, then I repeat, have said little or nothing that is true; but from me you shall hear the whole truth. Certainly you will not hear an elaborate speech, Athenians, dressed up, like theirs, with words and phrases. I will say to you what I have to say, without preparation, and in the words which come first.

And again:

The truth is this. I am more than seventy years old, and this is the first time that I have ever come before a Court of Law; so your manner of speech here is quite strange to me. If I had been really a stranger, you would have forgiven me for speaking in the language and the fashion of my native country: and so now I ask you to grant me what I think I have a right to claim. Never mind the style of my speech it may be better or it may be worse

give your whole attention to the question, Is what I say just, or is it not? That is what makes a good judge, as speaking the truth makes a good advocate.

This defines his standpoint and that of his judges too.

The accusers with whom he has to deal fall into two groups. On one side are the movers of the formal indictment; on the other, the many everywhere with their talk, who have always been against him and now find their sentiments expressed by Meletus. They too say

that there is one Socrates, a wise man, who speculates about the heavens, and who examines into all things that are beneath the earth, and who can "make the worse appear the better reason".

These latter are the more dangerous, because there is no getting at them. They see in Socrates an innovator; a sophist, who confuses good and evil, true and false; a man without reverence, who breaks through what is secret, directs impious criticism at what is holy, and so imperils the foundations of human existence:

And the most unreasonable thing of all is that commonly I do not even know their names: I cannot tell you who they are, except in the case of the comic poets.¹ But all the rest who have been trying to prejudice you against me, from motives of spite and jealousy, and sometimes, it may be, from conviction, are the enemies whom it is hardest to meet. For I cannot call any one of them forward in Court, to cross-examine him: I have, as it were, simply to fight with shadows in my defense, and to put questions which there is no one to answer.

Socrates has soon disposed of the tangible part of the accusation, which was as follows:

"Socrates is an evil-doer, who meddles with inquiries into things beneath the earth, and in heaven, and who 'makes the worse appear the better reason,' and who teaches others these same things."

¹ Like Aristophanes, who in his comedy *The Clouds* ridiculed the eccentric and disquieting philosopher.

To this he replies:

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 converse, and they are many, to inform your neighbours and tell them if any of you have ever heard me conversing about such matters, either more or less. That will show you that the other common stories about me are as false as this one.

Nor has he the slightest ambition to be a teacher of youth and even to take money for this, as the Sophists do — large sums too, to judge from a conversation he has had with the wealthy Callias, who had to pay five minae to Evenus of Paros for the education of his sons:

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 given myself airs and prided myself on it. But, Athenians, the truth is that I do not possess it.

All this would be of no importance in itself; but it is a limited and inadequate expression for something deeper. So he now seeks to bring out this, the real point, and does it with such penetration that what began as a harmless matter rapidly takes on an air of ineluctability:

Perhaps some of you may reply: But, Socrates, what is this pursuit of yours? Whence come these calumnies against you? You must have been engaged in some pursuit out of the common. All these stories and reports of you would never have gone about, if you had not been in some way different from other men. So tell us what your pursuits are, that we may not give our verdict in the dark. I think that that is a fair question, and I will try to explain to you what it is that has raised these calumnies against me, and given me this name. Listen, then: some of you perhaps will think that I am jesting; but I assure you that I will tell you the whole truth. I have gained this name, Athenians, simply by reason of a certain wisdom. But by what kind of wisdom?

Now he has to say something big; so he takes precautions against the indignation that he sees coming:

Do not interrupt me, Athenians, even if you think that I am speaking arrogantly. What I am going to say is not my own: I will tell you who says it, and he is worthy of your credit. I will bring the god of Delphi to be the witness of the fact of my wisdom and of its nature. You remember Chaerephon. From youth upwards he was my comrade; and he went into exile with the people, and with the people he returned. And you remember, too, Chaerephon's character; how vehement 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, not to cry out, — he asked, if there was any man who was wiser than I: and the priestess answered that there was no man. Chaerephon himself is dead, but his brother here will confirm what I say.

As for himself, Socrates has not understood the oracle:

When I heard of the oracle I began to reflect: What can God mean by this dark saying? I know very well that I am not wise, even in the smallest degree. Then what can he mean by saying that I am the wisest of men? It cannot be that he is speaking falsely, for he is a god and cannot lie.

Socrates cannot understand how he, who has so few illusions about himself, can be called the wisest of men, and that by a god who “cannot lie”. Then he hits on a way out. One is not quite sure whether Plato's story is an apotheosis of his master's peculiar character, or a disguised irony aimed at the oracle — if one cannot make up one's mind to take it as simply true. Socrates, then, goes to the various people who have a reputation for wisdom, and talks to them,

thinking that there, if anywhere, I should prove the answer wrong, and meaning to point out to the oracle its mistake, and to say, “You said that I was the wisest of men, but this man is wiser than I am.”

And what is the result?

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 that, though a great many persons, and most of all he himself, thought that he was wise, yet

he was not wise. And then I tried to prove to him that he was not wise, though he fancied that he was: and by so doing I made him, and many of the bystanders, my enemies. So when I went away, I thought to myself, "I am wiser than this man: neither of us probably knows anything that is really good, but he thinks that 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 little wiser than he is on this point: I do not think that I know what I do not know."

As with this man, so is his subsequent experience with many others. Socrates goes the round, and wherever he sees that someone feels sure of himself, pretends to knowledge, or claims authority, he knocks at his door. He has to conclude that very little real, demonstrable insight exists — and strangely enough the less of it, the more brilliant the reputation for knowledge of the persons examined, while the less esteemed can show something more substantial. At the same time he notices with alarm that no one thanks him for his service to truth, but that on the contrary he is making himself disliked everywhere. Thus he tells in detail of this curious voyage of discovery to different kinds of men: politicians, poets, artisans — one notes the allusion to the three accusers — and it is a discouraging report. Socrates appears to be describing only the singular position in which the oracle has placed him, and most resolutely disclaims any personal competence. Yet the claim is there, arising in fact from the words of the Pythian priestess, which appear to be a divine approval of the Socratic way. In the last resort Socrates must raise this claim. He knows that he is indeed different from other men. He knows that something speaks out of him which finds utterance nowhere else. But if that is so, the contradiction which shows itself everywhere means that men, views and institutions, in a word the existing order of things, are refusing obedience to the divine behest.

The old men — most of them, we should say, for not a few of the older generation are attached to Socrates — most of the old men have turned a deaf ear to his message. So the young men come to him. The man "touched by the god, not merely a bearer of the thyrsus, but a true initiate", as it is said in the *Phaedo*, is understood by the young. They get great fun out of the examination conducted by Socrates, and take a hand in it themselves and we need no very lively fancy to imagine how much clumsy handling there must have been here, how much precious heritage shattered and how much honourable susceptibility affronted; for in the rough and tumble of everyday life intel-

lectual motives work out differently than in the purity of the idea or the atmosphere of an inspired circle. The rift between the generations widens. For those who feel themselves threatened in their very being Socrates is the corruptor. Their accusation has long been circulating in handy slogans: he holds forth on “heavenly phenomena and the things under the earth”, that is, he arrogates to himself a knowledge about that which must remain hidden from man. He teaches people “to worship the gods in a way contrary to the common usage” — we remember the conversation with Euthyphro, which the latter, if he had been evilly disposed to Socrates, could have reported in a manner quite in the tenor of this accusation. He imparts to young people the pernicious “art of making the unjust cause appear just” and of disturbing hallowed convictions by irreverent criticism.

On these grounds Meletus and Anytus and Lycon have attacked me. Meletus is indignant with me on the part of the poets, and Anytus on the part of the artisans and politicians, and Lycon on the part of the orators.

He might, however, have added that there was yet another accuser: the rightful anxiety of all those who see danger to costly values of human, political and religious life, and cannot bring themselves to sacrifice these for the sake of a new will which has not yet proved itself.

The Accusation of the Three

Socrates now turns more specifically to the formal indictment:

He says that Socrates is an evildoer who corrupts the youth, and who does not believe in the gods whom the city believes in, but in other new divinities. Such is the charge. Let us examine each point in it separately.

But he answers in such a way as to continue the very activity with which the prosecution has charged him : he treats the speaker Meletus as one of the long line of those who pretend to know without really knowing, and carry out responsible undertakings without proving themselves fit for them by adequate insight and formation of character; and he applies to him the test imposed by the oracle.

Meletus says that I do wrong by corrupting the youth: but I say, Athenians, that he is doing wrong; for he is playing off a solemn

jest by bringing men lightly to trial, and pretending to have a great zeal and interest in matters to which he has never given a moment's thought.

And now begins a real Socratic dialogue very unconventional and yet in most deadly earnest, for the immediate issue, as in all those discussions in the gymnasium and in friends' houses and later in the market-place, is concerned with truth; but there is a further issue, for this once, of life and death.

SOCRATES. Come here, Meletus. Is it not a fact that you think it very important that the younger men should be as excellent as possible?

MELETUS. It is.

SOCR. Come then: tell the judges, who is it who improves them? You take so much interest in the matter that of course you know that. You are accusing me, and bringing me to trial, because, as you say, you have discovered that I am the corrupter of the youth. Come now, reveal to the judges who improves them. You see, Meletus, you have nothing to say; you are silent. But don't you think that this is a scandalous thing? Is not your silence a conclusive proof of what I say, that you have never given a moment's thought to the matter?

It must be a strange experience for Meletus. He is quite ready for an argument, but one which would turn on concrete cases, discuss alleged statements, seek to weaken the impression produced by the prosecution — in a word, he is prepared for the arts of advocate. Instead of which — such questions! So he remains silent; but Socrates does not loose his hold:

SOCR. Come, tell us, my good sir, who makes the young men better citizens?

MEL. The laws.

SOCR. My excellent sir, that is not my question. What man improves the young, who starts with a knowledge of the laws ?

It is obvious that the laws, the norms of the community's life, regulate activity for good; the question is, which men, in practice and by their influence, act in the spirit of the laws. So Meletus answers more precisely — and like an opportunist too, with a bow to the powers of the moment, the jurors. But this very answer gives the adept of irony

his cue :

MEL. The judges here, Socrates.

SOCR. What do you mean, Meletus? Can they educate the young and improve them?

MEL. Certainly.

SOCR. All of them? or only some of them?

MEL. All of them.

SOCR. By Here that is good news! There is a great abundance of benefactors. And do the listeners here improve them, or not ?

MEL. They do.

SOCR. And do the senators?

MEL. Yes.

SOCR. Well then, Meletus; do the members of the Assembly corrupt the younger men? or do they again all improve them ?

MEL. They too improve them.

SOCR. Then all the Athenians, apparently, make the young into fine fellows, except me, and I alone corrupt them. Is that your meaning?

MEL. Most certainly; that is my meaning.

SOCR. You have discovered me to be a most unfortunate man.

And here another trait in Socrates's character comes out. From opposition, presumably, to all that is academic, pompous and high-flown, he keeps referring us, even in the most serious questions, to the simplest facts of everyday life:

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 improve them? On the contrary, is it not one man only, or a very few — namely, those who are skilled in horses who can improve them; while the majority of men harm them, if they use them, and have to do with them?

High quality is always the privilege of the few. That which is common to all cannot rank high in the scale. But if the improvement of youth is really an art so universally practiced, it will hardly be Socrates who lacks it. Rather he will probably be one of those very few who understand the art of forming men by truth and love. But if — the next section points out — he really does harm to the young, that can only be from ignorance. For no one will knowingly do something which is harmful to the general wellbeing, since such harm invariably recoils

on its author a form of argument, one must admit, which presupposes an advanced maturity of mind. The multitude will hardly feel it to be a proof, and in Socrates's case it was not in fact felt to be such:

And if I corrupt them unintentionally, the law does not call upon you to prosecute me for a fault like that, which is an involuntary one; you should take me aside and admonish and instruct me; for of course I shall cease from doing wrong involuntarily, as soon as I know that I have been doing wrong.

The last sentence expresses a great integrity of moral disposition, which seeks what is right under all circumstances, and to which therefore, the moment an action is recognized as wrong, the motive for doing it ceases. It also shows the principle from which a pregnant thesis would be evolved in Plato's future works: that the essence of virtue lies in knowledge. This thesis asserts more than the general significance which knowledge has for moral action, particularly when it is a question of a cognitive experience so important as that of Socratic and Platonic theory. "Knowledge" here means rather the special knowledge which consists in the contemplation of the Idea. To contemplate the Idea means to enter into the region and condition of mental receptivity; not merely to see what is true and to see it truly, but also — at the actual moment and in the actual cognitive relation — to take on the mold of truth oneself. But as the Idea, as will be shown more explicitly, is rooted in the ultimate "Being" as such, that is, in the Good, reference to it brings the Good into the sphere of existence.

Resuming the argument, Socrates now comes to the point by which the Athenians, concerned for their piety, were most affected.

SOCR. However, now tell us, Meletus, how do you say that I corrupt the younger men? Clearly, according to your indictment, by teaching them not to believe in the gods of the city, but in other new divinities instead. You mean that I corrupt young men by that teaching, do you not?

MEL. Yes: most certainly; I mean that.

SOCR. Then in the name of these gods of whom we are speaking, explain yourself a little more clearly to me and to the judges here. I cannot understand what you mean. Do you mean that I teach young men to believe in some gods, but not in the gods of the city? 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 absolute atheism. Or do you mean that

I do not believe in the gods at all myself, and that I teach other people not to believe in them either?

MEL. I mean that you do not believe in the gods in any way whatever.

SOCR. Wonderful Meletus! Why do you say that? Do you mean that I believe neither the sun nor the moon to be gods, like other men?

Meletus thinks he can hook his opponent here:

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

But he has little success with this point, for so much is already a commonplace among the educated: that the heavenly bodies are not as such, physically so to speak, deities.

SOCR. My dear Meletus, do you think that you are prosecuting Anaxagoras? You must have a poor opinion of the judges, and think them very unlettered men, if you imagine that they do not know that the works of Anaxagoras of Clazomenae are full of these doctrines. And so young men learn these things from me, when they can often buy places in the theatre for a drachma at most, and laugh Socrates to scorn, were he to pretend that these doctrines, which are very peculiar doctrines too, were his.

So not to believe in the divinity of the solar body is not godlessness — especially when at the same time one insists so earnestly that one is in the service of Apollo, as Socrates does. What, then, is the prosecution aiming at?

SOCR. But please tell me, do you really think that I do not believe in the gods at all?

MEL. Most certainly I do. You are a complete atheist.

SOCR, No one believes that, Meletus, and I think that you know it to be a lie yourself. It seems to me, Athenians, that Meletus is a very insolent and wanton man, and that he is prosecuting me simply in the insolence and wantonness of youth. He is like a man trying an experiment on me, by asking me a riddle that has no answer. "Will this wise Socrates," he says to himself, "see that I am jesting and contradicting myself? or shall I outwit 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 a wicked man who does not believe in the gods, but who believes in the gods." But that is mere trifling.

Now, my friends, let us see why I think that this is his meaning. Do you answer me, Meletus: and do you, Athenians, remember the request which I made to you at starting, and do not interrupt me if I talk in my usual way.

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, my friends, without these absurd 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 excellent sir. If you will not answer, I will tell both you and the judges that. 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?¹

MEL. There is not.

SOCR. I am very glad that the judges have managed to extract an answer from you. Well then, you say that I believe in divine beings, whether they be old or new ones, and that I teach others to believe in them; at any rate, according to your statement, I believe in divine beings. That you have sworn in your deposition. But if I believe in divine beings, I suppose it follows necessarily that I believe in divinities. Is it not so? It is. I assume that you grant that, as you do not answer. But do we not believe that divinities are either gods themselves or the children of the gods? Do you admit that?

MEL. I do.

SOCR. Then you admit that I believe in divinities: now, if these divinities are gods, then, as I say, you are jesting and asking a riddle, and asserting that I do not believe in the gods, and at 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 strange as believing in the existence of the offspring of horses and asses, and not in the existence of horses and asses.

¹ The word *daimones* has not the meaning it conveys in our usage, but means divine beings of inferior rank; see the passage immediately following.

It is hardly to be assumed that Socrates believed seriously in illegitimate children of the gods, either by the nymphs or by other mothers"; at any rate he did not regard the *Daimonion*, of which he was so often heard to speak, as such a hybrid creature. It is evident from the whole manner in which he refers to it in the course of the first and third speeches, that he experienced it as a power intimately related to the core of his own existence and of a very pure numinous character. His argument, then, is to be understood as entirely *ad hominem*, directed at the man he is talking to. He wants to make the following point clear to Meletus: "You say that I believe in daemons, though you imagine by them beings which are incompatible with the dignity of real gods. That is absurd; but even in your absurd thoughts there is the law of cause and effect. Therefore you must not assert that I deny the gods, when in accordance with your use of the word daemon I believe in their bastards."

The proof is in itself valid, but it does not answer the real question raised by Meletus and those who share his views. They are concerned, not about the question whether Socrates believes in spiritually active divine powers and, behind these, in a sublimely conceived Divinity, but whether he believes in the ancient gods of the state, and that in the direct and concrete sense supposed by the traditional religious mentality. That, however, they perceive accurately, is not the case. When Socrates talks of Apollo, it is something different from the Apollo meant by anyone else, anyone who lives by tradition; and the mythically minded Athenians can make nothing of the *Daimonion* of whose protection Socrates is conscious. It is their Apollo and their *Daimonion* that they are concerned about, for with these the whole existing order of things hangs together. And as they do not recognize the new values which are emerging in Socrates's conception of religion, they feel him to be a danger to religion in general, and express this danger in the sort of ideas which they have at their command.

Socrates's fate is tragic. The true nature of tragedy, however, lies in the fact that good is ruined, not by what is evil and senseless, but by another good which also has its rights; and that this hostile good is too narrow and selfish to see the superior right or the destined hour of the other, but has power enough to trample down the other's claim. The events of the dialogues we are engaged on would be robbed of their peculiar seriousness if we were to see in Socrates only the great and innocent man misunderstood, and in his accusers only the narrow-minded mob clinging to what is old. The truth, which must be emphasized again and again, is that here an epoch — a declining one,

it is true, but one still full of values — confronts a man who, great as he is and called to be a bringer of new things, disrupts by his spirit all that has hitherto held sway. In the incompatibility of these two opposing sets of values and forces lies the real tragedy of the situation.

Socrates now resumes the story of the oracle:

But, I repeat, it is certainly true, as I have already told you, that I have incurred much unpopularity and made many enemies. And that is what will cause my condemnation, if I am condemned; not Meletus, nor Anytus either, but the prejudice and suspicion of the multitude. They have been the destruction of many good men before me, and I think that they will be so again. There is no fear that I shall be their last victim.

But he now hears a reproach from another side, that of practical commonsense, which sees foolishness in his whole manner of acting.

Perhaps someone will say: "Are you not ashamed, Socrates, of following pursuits which are very likely now to cause your death?"

Here comes to light the inmost pathos of the man bound by duty to the spirit:

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 rightly or wrongly, and as a good or a bad man would act, you are grievously mistaken."

For this obligation he appeals to the warriors before Troy, Achilles especially; and then follow the grand words:

For this, Athenians, I believe to be the truth. Wherever a man's post 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 of any other thing, except dishonor.

From height to height the mind of this heroic philosopher unfolds itself one who is well called heroic in the deepest sense, though he himself would probably have repudiated this designation with scorn:

When the generals whom you choose to command me, Athenians, placed me at my post at Potidaea, and at Amphipolis, and at Delium, I remained where they placed me, and ran the risk of death, like other men: and it would be very strange conduct on my part if I were to desert my post now from fear of death or of any other thing, when God has commanded me, as I am persuaded that he has done, to spend my life in searching for wisdom, and in examining myself and others.

This is not merely a simple sense of duty in itself grand enough but the purest spiritual and religious consciousness of a mission. And the courage which inspires the words is in close relation with the experience of truth:

That would indeed be a very strange thing: and 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 being wise: for it is to think that we know what we do not know.

And not only philosophy, but wisdom and a wonderful maturity of soul are heard in the next sentences :

For anything that men can tell, death may be the greatest good that can happen to them: but they fear it as if they knew quite well that it was the greatest of evils. And what is this but that shameful ignorance of thinking that we know what we do not know? In this matter too, my friends, perhaps I am different from the mass of mankind: and if I were to claim to be at all wiser than others, it would be because I do not think that I have any clear knowledge about the other world, when, in fact, I have none. But I do know very well that it is evil and base to do wrong, and to disobey my superior, whether he be man or god.

The pathos mounts. What he has done does not need to be defended against accusation, but he is right in upholding it to the utmost.

And so, 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 children

will forthwith be utterly corrupted by practising 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 this condition, that you cease from carrying on this search of yours, and from philosophy; if you are found following those 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 love; but I will obey God rather than you: and as long as I have breath and strength I will not cease from philosophy, and from exhorting you, and declaring the truth to every one of you whom I meet, saying, as I am wont, 'My excellent friend, you are a citizen of Athens, a city which is very great and very famous for wisdom and power of mind; are you not ashamed of caring so much for the making of money, and for reputation, and for honor? Will you not think or care about wisdom, and truth, and the perfection of your soul?' And if he disputes my words, and says that he does care about these things, I shall not forthwith release him and go away: I shall question him and cross-examine him and test him: and if I think that he has not virtue, though he says that he has, I shall reproach him for setting the lower value on the most important things, and a higher value on those that are of less account."

The emotion becomes still more powerful:

For, know well, God has commanded me to do so. And I think that no better piece of fortune has ever befallen you in Athens than my service to God. For I spend my whole life in going about and persuading you all to give your first and chiefest care to the perfection of your souls, and not till you have done that to think of your bodies, or your wealth; and telling you that virtue does not come from wealth, but that wealth, and every other good thing which men have, whether in public, or in private, comes from virtue. If then I corrupt the youth by this teaching, the mischief is great: but if any man says that I teach anything else, he speaks falsely. And therefore, Athenians, I say, either listen to Anytus, or do not listen to him: either acquit me, or do not acquit me: but be sure that I shall not alter my way of life; no, not if I have to die for it many times.

Once more the marvelous pathos of this speech rises higher though it is so far from pathetic in the ordinary sense, since it comes straight

from reality:

Be sure that if you put me to death, who am what I have told you that 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 that God will not allow a good man to be injured by a bad one. They may indeed kill me, or drive me into exile, or deprive me of my civil rights; and perhaps Meletus and others think those things great evils. But I do not think so: I think that it is a much greater evil to do what he is doing now, and to try to put a man to death unjustly.

And then a very earnest warning :

And now, Athenians, I am not arguing in my own defense at all, as you might expect me to do: I am trying to persuade you not to sin against God, by condemning me, and rejecting his gift to you. For if you put me to death, you will not easily find another man to fill my place. God has sent me to attack the city, as if it were a great and noble horse, to use a quaint simile, which was rather sluggish from its size, and which needed to be aroused by a gadfly: and I think that I am the gadfly that God has sent to the city to attack it; for I never cease from settling upon you, as it were, at every point, and rousing, and exhorting, and reproaching each man of you all day long. You will not easily find anyone else, my friends, to fill my place: and if you take my advice, you will spare my life. You are vexed, as drowsy persons are, when they are awakened, and of course, if you listened to Anytus, you could easily kill me with a single blow, and then sleep on undisturbed for the rest of your lives, unless God were to care for you enough to send another man to arouse you.

Before such a conviction the accusations of impiety lose all their substance. Yet one feels that this conviction is not understood, indeed that its very sincerity causes it to be felt by the accusers as a fresh proof for their point of view. For it is just the unprecedented human, spiritual and religious force of this conviction that makes it a danger to the established order.

So even the proof that Socrates adduces for the purity of his motives — namely, that he has renounced riches and power for the sake of his service — will make no difference to the state of his case; on the contrary, it will only underline the dangerousness of the man:

And you may easily see that it is God who has given me to your city: a mere human impulse would never have led me to neglect all my own interests, or to endure seeing my private affairs neglected now for so many years, while it made me busy myself unceasingly in your interests, and go to each man of you by himself, like a father, or an elder brother, trying to persuade him to care for virtue. There would have been a reason for it, if I had gained any advantage by this conduct, or if I had been paid for my exhortations; but you see yourselves that my accusers, though they accuse me of everything else without blushing, have not had the effrontery to say that I ever either exacted or demanded payment. They could bring no evidence of that. And I think that I have sufficient evidence of the truth of what I say in my poverty.

For the same reason he has also held aloof from public affairs:

Perhaps it may seem strange to you that, though I am so busy in going about in private with my counsel, yet I do not venture to come forward in the assembly, and take part in the public councils. You have often heard me speak of my reason for this, and in many places: it is that I have a certain divine sign from God, which is the divinity that Meletus has caricatured in his indictment.

This passage is important, because Socrates here explicitly professes his faith in the mysterious voice:

I have had it 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.

The description indicates that in this “kind of divine and daemonic voice” we are not dealing with reason; for this the call has too much of the objectively encountered as well as of the mysterious. We might think rather of the admonition of conscience; but the “voice” cannot be identified with this either, since it never does more than say what must not be done, while the admonition of conscience can convey a “thou shalt” as well as a “thou shalt not”. It is a question rather of a primarily religious experience. This becomes quite clear when we take into consideration what Socrates, now condemned to death, says in his third speech to those of the judges who had voted for his ac-

quittal (40a-b). He tells them how the interior warning has opposed itself "even on the most trivial occasions," when he was "about to do something in the wrong way". That, of course, could equally well be the prohibition of conscience expressing itself; but what follows, according to which it has often stopped him in the middle of what he was saying, shows that the "voice" has the character of something instantaneous and coming from elsewhere, which places it rather in the vicinity of prophecy. The result is the same when he calls it "the familiar soothsaying, that of the *Dai-monion*", "the sign of the god" appellations which obviously belong to the sphere of religion, or more specifically that of prophecy.

The figure of Socrates has a many-sidedness which is at first sight confusing. He is ugly, and yet Alcibiades in his Symposium speech associates the golden images of the gods with him; he has a relentlessly penetrating intellect and is yet ruled by Eros; he is full of criticism and irony, always ready to oppose a questionable emotion with the most workaday reality, and yet led by a mysterious guidance. That this guidance never commands, but only forbids, increases the credibility of the account. A certain arbitrariness attaches to it on this score, which harmonizes with the irrationality of the religious element as well as with the man's personality. It would certainly be far-fetched to call Socrates a seer; his center of gravity lies too much in the philosophical. But when we consider, on the one hand, how reverent his nature is, and on the other hand, how relentlessly he puts people into a position of new and dangerous responsibility, we have to ask ourselves whence he gets the authority and power to do this. Socrates is no absolutist; rather he is suspicious of any over-positive assertion, skeptical towards himself, and deeply conscious of his responsibility towards men, over whom he has such power. What makes him, as a living and feeling man, equal to his own task? His attitude has something ambiguous about it. He shakes the stability of old institutions, but puts no new construction in their place, only a seeking, enquiring, doubting. He is one of those men who exercise an inexplicable influence without actually being leaders or proposing definite aims. What keeps him in this suspense and enables him to produce the effect he does from it? In the last resort the only possible answer seems to be that it is something religious. Even if he did not really make the three speeches of the *Apology* before the court, at any rate they represent the justification of his master's activity given by Plato. Even if the oracle story should not be taken as simple fact, it would still express some ultimate reality which the great disciple perceived behind the figure of his master. The existence and activity of Socrates are rooted

in the consciousness of a divine mission. This is expressed in a certain belief or trust, but stands also in relation with an original religious experience which accompanies his whole activity, namely the “familiar soothsaying of the *Daimonion*.”

It is this which forbids me to take part in politics. And I think that it does well to forbid me.

In order to be able to speak of spiritual and divine things with complete freedom — in such a way that the words come from the heart of the subject and pierce to the vital center of the hearer — the speaker must have separated himself from the ties of money and the struggle for power. The doctrine that the true philosopher’s freedom is to be won by renunciation, a doctrine to be so powerfully developed in the *Phaedo*, is announced here.

And do not be vexed with me for telling the truth. There is no man who will preserve his life for long, either in Athens or elsewhere, if he firmly opposes the wishes of the people, and tries to prevent the commission of much injustice and illegality in the State. He who would really fight for justice, must do so as a private man, not in public, if he means to preserve his life, even for a short time.

As a proof that such abstention did not spring from cowardice, but simply from the nature of his task, Socrates recalls his conduct in times of crisis :

Listen then to what has happened to me, that you may know that there is no man who could make me consent to do wrong from the fear of death; but that I would perish at once rather than give way. What I am going to tell you may be a commonplace in the Courts of Law; nevertheless it is true. The only office that I ever held in the State, Athenians, was that of Senator. When you wished to try the ten generals, who did not rescue their men after the battle of Arginusae, in a body, which was illegal, as you all came to think afterwards, the tribe Antiochis, to which I belong, held the presidency. On that occasion I alone of all the presidents opposed your illegal action, and gave my vote against your illegal action, and gave my vote against you. The speakers were ready to suspend me and arrest me; and you were clamoring against me, and crying out to me to submit. But I thought that I ought to face

the danger out in the cause of law and justice, rather than join with you in your unjust proposal, from fear of imprisonment or death. That was before the destruction of the democracy. When the oligarchy came, the Thirty sent for me, with four others, to the Council-Chamber, and ordered us to bring over Leon the Salaminian from Salamis, that they might put him to death. They were in the habit of frequently giving similar orders to many others, wishing to implicate as many men as possible in their crimes.

So he can say :

But then again I proved, not by mere words, but by my actions, that, if I may use a vulgar expression, I do not care a straw for death; but that I do care very much indeed about not doing anything against the laws of God or man.

Another key-phrase is heard in this passage: "I have never been any man's teacher." The nature of his intellectual activity is connected with the nature and ethos of his knowledge. The man who is always reiterating that he knows nothing cannot exercise any activity based on the supposition that he has certain and communicable items of knowledge at his command. He can but give what he has: the knowledge of what true insight must be; the acknowledgment that one does not yet possess it; the will to attain it at any cost. He can arouse the conscience with regard to truth and bring the desire for truth to the region of actuality. That, however, is something quite different from the idea of teaching made current by the Sophists.

I have never withheld myself from any one, young or old, who was anxious to hear me converse while I was about my mission; 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, and then listen to what I have to say, he may.

And I cannot justly be charged with causing these men to turn out good or bad citizens: for I never either taught, or professed to teach any of them any knowledge whatever.

But, it might be objected here, whence then comes his power of attracting the young? Must there not be some other appeal — something exciting, seductive, destructive? To this Socrates gives the answer: I am an old man. I have been at work among you for a long time. Many who listened to me as young men have now reached mature

years, and have had time to test by experience what they learnt with me. Ask them!

And he mentions a number of such, who listened to his discourses and are now present in this assembly. The author of the *Apology* indirectly secures for himself a place among these by including in their number "Adimantus, son of Aristo and brother of Plato here" (33d-34a).

Socrates is perfectly aware how much his method of defense is opposed to all usual procedure:

There may be some one among you who will be vexed when he remembers how, even in a less important trial than this, he prayed and entreated the judges to acquit him with many tears, and brought forward his children and many of his friends and relatives in Court, in order to appeal to your feelings; and then finds 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 give his vote in anger.

The danger is great but he can make no concession.

It is not from arrogance, Athenians, nor because I hold you cheap: whether or no I can face death bravely is another question: but for my own credit, and for your credit, and for the credit of our city, I do not think it well, at my age, and with my name, to do anything of that kind. Rightly or wrongly, men have made up their minds that in some way Socrates is different from the mass of mankind.

Not only his self-respect forbids him to plead his cause in such a way, but also — and again the thought takes the philosophical step into the essential — the idea of the just and of justice itself:

He (the judge) does not sit to give away justice to his friends, but to pronounce judgment: and he has sworn not to favor any man whom he would like to favor, but to decide questions according to law.

True piety is to see that right and law are rooted in the divine, and to act accordingly :

For were I to be successful, and to prevail on you by my prayers to break your oaths, I should be clearly teaching you to believe that there are no gods; and I should be simply accusing myself by my defense of not believing in them. But, Athenians, that is very far from the truth. I do believe in the gods as no one of my accusers believes in them: and to you and to God I commit my cause to be decided as is best for you and for me.

The question as to the essence of piety remained without a proper answer in the *Euthyphro*. Socrates could not elicit the answer from his interlocutor, and did not give it himself. Nevertheless some elements of the idea emerged in the course of the dialogue and are more fully worked out in the *Apology*. These — like the definitions of Plato's early works in general — have a special value because the impress of Socrates's personality is particularly vivid in them.

According to these indications piety means above all things an effort to apprehend the divine. It means not sticking fast in traditional ideas, but inquiring after the essence, and thinking this essence as purely and worthily as the best powers of the mind are able. In this process contradictions of tradition and environment may appear; the divine may raise itself to heights far above the familiar, natural ideas, and thus there may occur a kind of religious emptying-out of immediate existence. But all this must then be endured for truth's sake, for the truth of the divine itself.

If the divine soars so high that to use the expression of the *Euthyphro* it can no longer be brought into any kind of "commercial transaction", it is still not without its effect and demand on ordinary life. On the contrary, man must understand his life's truest task as a manifestation of the divine will. Socrates's statement that he deduced from the oracle at Delphi his mission to test men, is represented primarily as a biographical fact. But as such it contains the more profound claim that what he does is done in the service of Apollo, who is the god of brightness and creative inspiration. To do this is piety: obedience to the divine command in the activity of one's life. And this piety is put to the proof as soon as the divine commission comes into conflict with the demands of one's environment and has to be carried out with loss and danger. The relation of obedience comes out in an even more concrete form where Socrates alludes to the voice of the *Daimonion*. It speaks suddenly, without being prepared for by personal intuitions on the part of the one addressed; and piety means obeying it, even when its admonition is not perceived to be right, or when it speaks so suddenly that a sentence must be broken off in the middle. This expe-

rience too is primarily a biographical peculiarity of Socrates ; behind it however, as something deeper and more universal, is that watchfulness for the numinous command which is evinced not by rational considerations, but only by its specifically religious validity.

A further element in the definition of piety will appear in the *Crito*, and may be anticipated here for the sake of the context. Socrates there tells his friend, who is trying to induce him to escape from prison, that it is not lawful to do so. Once the court's verdict has been formally given, it is binding on the condemned, and this obligation persists through all human contingencies. In the progress of the conversation the moral claim is given a figurative expression: the laws of the state appear as the powers who order and protect it, and they present their claims to Socrates. The nature of these claims surpasses the merely ethical and assumes a religious, nay ultimately a sheer dionysiac character. Piety, then, means understanding the validity of the morally good as something divine, and living up to it even at the cost of any temporal loss. From here there is a line of connection to the profound discussions of the *Phaedo*, in which the idea of the true is similarly treated. Truth is there experienced in such a manner that it appears as a self-revelation of the divine. To seek this truth without regard to anything else but its own validity, and thereby to be inwardly at one with the divinity which shines through the truth, is piety. This view subsequently finds its ultimate expression in the Republic, where behind the objective forms of truth, namely the Ideas, the mystery of the Good is discerned and associated with the image of the Sun.

THE SECOND SPEECH

The Introduction

The judges have now to decide on guilt or innocence in the sense of the accusation, and their verdict goes against Socrates. It is only by a narrow majority; of the five hundred members of the court only two hundred and eighty have pronounced "guilty". Thirty votes more in his favor would have given an even verdict, and Socrates would have been acquitted.

For many offenses the penalty was provided by the law, for others it had to be fixed by the judges. In this case the condemned man had the option either of agreeing to the penalty proposed by the prosecution, or of himself making an alternative proposal. It was then for the court to decide between the two proposals. Socrates has therefore an-

other chance of pleading his case and averting the death penalty. But once again his speech takes quite a different line from what prudence would have counseled:

I am not vexed at the verdict which you have given, Athenians, for many reasons. I expected that you would find me guilty; and I am not so much surprised at that, as at the numbers of the votes. I, certainly, never thought that the majority against me would have been so narrow. But now it seems that if only thirty votes had changed sides, I should have escaped.

This has a curious sound — as though the speaker, with his experience of life, were surprised that so much perception should have been found among the number of his judges; or again, as though the philosopher were struck by the reflection on what trifles fate hangs.

The Alternative Proposal

He now brings forward his own proposal:

So he proposes death as the penalty. Be it so. And what counter-penalty shall I propose to you, Athenians? What I deserve, of course, must I not?

The phrase “what I deserve” is ambiguous. Prudence would have suggested saying: “If I am guilty, then no greater penalty than is really adequate to my guilt.” That would have afforded an opportunity to disarm the judges’ vengeance by a show of moderation. But Socrates puts the statement in a form of renewed aggressiveness: “I shall propose that I be given what I have a right to.” The thought gathers itself up in a great effort:

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, and family interests, and military commands, and popular oratory, and all the political appointments, and clubs, and factions, that there are in Athens; for I thought that I was really too conscientious a man to preserve my life if I engaged in these matters. 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 by himself, to do him, as I say, the greatest of services, and strove to persuade him not to think of his affairs,

until he had thought of himself, and tried to make himself as perfect and wise as possible; not to think of the affairs of Athens until he had thought of Athens herself; and in all cases to bestow his thoughts on 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.

Then a fresh onset:

and something good which it would be suitable to me to receive. 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 a public maintenance in 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; and he is not in want, and I am. So if I am to propose the penalty which I really deserve, I propose this, a public maintenance in the Prytaneum.

The Prytaneum was a public building in which the executive committee of the supreme council of state, honored guests of the city, specially distinguished citizens and the victors in the Olympic games took their meals at the expense of the state. What a claim then! And the reason given for it contains in addition a side-thrust at the people's favorites, the Olympic victors.

The hearers are doubtless beside themselves perhaps also they are mute with astonishment, for Socrates does not have to repeat his admonition not to "make an uproar". The reader, however, is conscious of a misgiving. Not that Socrates should plead "not guilty"; he has a perfect right to do so. Yet in a tragic sense he is "guilty" — guilty of the downfall of all the great and beautiful things which can no longer exist if the mentality which he stands for prevails. In history, however, one value must always give way for another to emerge, and only those who are happily — or wantonly — prejudiced believe in absolute progress. But Socrates is one of the happily prejudiced, like everyone who is engaged body and soul in a genuine mission. Nor is our misgiving concerned with his belief that he is a benefactor of the state and deserves, instead of punishment, the highest recognition. He is convinced of his task and has staked everything on it, therefore he may advance the claim. And the somewhat violent logic with which he maintains this claim is the peculiar style of the heroic philosopher, even though

impaired by a little pedantry — and perhaps also by a little presumption, which lies however not so much in the man's personal will as in the fact that "philosophy" becomes the type of existence. For this is a highly problematical point, and much could be said about it, in spite of Plato and Nietzsche. No, the real misgiving lies in the manner in which Socrates challenges the judges — especially when one reflects that he is speaking, not as a young and impetuous swayer of minds, but as an old man and a teacher of the strictest conscientiousness.

The court is not a department of officials, but represents the general public of Athens, and the indictment expresses, not merely the malice of a few evil-wishers, but the concern of the people as attached to what is old and established. Socrates however does not behave as an accused man in presence of the highest authority of the law; he drops this character — in his bearing constantly, at critical moments even expressly — and becomes a teacher, admonisher, nay even a judge. Even that could be accounted for by the consciousness of his mission — quite apart from the fact that the office of judge was an essential part of full citizen rights, so that each citizen was potentially a judge and therefore had to watch over the laws. But Socrates does more, he provokes the court. The demand to be fed in the Prytaneum would necessarily produce the effect either of mockery or of such an underlining of all that the indictment attacked, that those members of the court who are not wholly on his side could hardly reply otherwise than with the severest verdict. And it would be a false affectation to say that Socrates could not speak otherwise. He could very well, and without compromising himself in the least. And the case would then go differently, for the first verdict has shown that a large proportion of the judges are in his favour. So the death-sentence can be averted, if the defendant keeps within bounds and spares the susceptibilities of his hearers. But there seems to be something in Socrates that makes for the extreme realization of his own pattern of mind, an impulse to set the seal of deed and destiny on the standpoint advanced in theory. He has been in opposition to the established order. This opposition has indeed brought him suspicion, enmity and ridicule ; but he has been richly compensated by the adhesion and affection of so many of the best minds. But there seems to be in Socrates a conviction that a mission such as his ought not to be fulfilled peacefully, but must work itself out through ruin. That is why he provokes his own death. The motives at work here cannot be rationally accounted for. They are even assailable from a purely moral point of view. The sentence that Socrates provokes is according to his own conviction a crime, and will bring evil consequences on people and state. How can he act so — he

who claims to speak with the deepest moral earnestness and to be wholly answerable to the truth? Motives of a religious nature seem to be at work here: a consciousness that irruptions which touch the ultimate determination of existence must be paid for, not merely with labor or conflict, but with death.

The sentences which follow show in fact that Socrates knows well that he has said something monstrous:

Perhaps you think me stubborn and arrogant in what I am saying now, as in what I said about the entreaties and tears.

He would be able to make his thoughts clear to them if he were allowed to conduct the dialogue of the case at greater length:

It is not so, Athenians; it is rather that I am convinced that I never wronged any man intentionally, though I cannot persuade you of that, for 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 convinced you of it: but now it is not easy in so short a time to clear myself of the gross calumnies of my enemies.

He must therefore let the appearance of presumption remain. Then once more there emerges a wonderful philosophical and religious superiority:

Why should I? Lest I should suffer the penalty which Meletus proposes, when I say that I do not know whether it is a good or an evil? Shall I choose instead of it something which I know to be an evil, and propose that as a penalty?

Whether death is an evil thing remains an open question ; perhaps it is even a very good thing. But whatever might come into consideration as a milder penalty, would certainly be formidable:

Shall I propose imprisonment? And 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 why I will not do that. I should have to remain in prison for I have no money to pay a fine with. 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 that strangers would cheer-

fully tolerate my discussions and reasonings, when you who are my fellow-citizens cannot endure them, and have found them so burdensome and odious to you, that you are seeking now to be released from 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 that the young men will listen to me, wherever I go, as they do here; and if I drive them away, they will persuade their elders to expel me: and if I do not drive them away, their fathers and kinsmen will expel me for their sakes.

But since an alternative proposal must be made, he makes it ; and it sounds like a concession that a grown-up makes to children although there is no sense in it:

Perhaps I could pay you a mina: so I propose that. Plato here, Athenians, and Crito, and Critobulus, and Apollodorus bid me propose thirty nine, and they will be sureties for me. So I propose thirty nine. They will be sufficient sureties to you for the money.

After such a speech the outcome can scarcely be any longer in doubt. Plato's mention of his own name at this point sounds like an assurance that the *Apology* is a true report.

THE THIRD SPEECH

The Reply to the Sentence

Again the judges confer, and the sentence ratifies the penalty proposed by the prosecution: death by the cup of hemlock.

The condemned man has now once more the opportunity to speak. He replies first to the sentence itself:

You have not gained very much time, Athenians, and, as the price of it, you will have an evil name from all who wish to revile the city, and they will cast in your teeth that 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 would have waited for a little while, your wishes would have been fulfilled in the course of nature; for you see that I am an old man,

far advanced in years, and near to death. I am speaking not to all of you, only to those who have voted for my death.

And again:

I have been defeated because I was wanting, not in arguments, but in over boldness 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 had me do, and live.

And once again:

But, my friends, I think that it is a much harder thing to escape from wickedness than from death; for wickedness is swifter than death. And now I, who am old and slow, have been overtaken by the slower pursuer: and my accusers, who are clever and swift, have been overtaken by the swifter pursuer, which is wickedness. And now I shall go hence, sentenced by you to death; and they will go hence, sentenced by truth to receive the penalty of wickedness and evil. And I abide by this award as well as they. Perhaps it was right for these things to be so: and I think that they are fairly measured.

A great climax. First the strange defendant sets forth in a calm, almost reflective manner, what has actually taken place. Next he maintains once more his standpoint. But then there appears suddenly in his words the judgment on the judgment, the judgment of truth and right on that of fortuitous power, and passes its final sentence.

What the judges have done will profit them nothing. They wanted to disarm the spirit by force, but they will not succeed. The spiritual struggle which Socrates has begun — with the object of ensuring that a deeper sense of responsibility shall prevail, that the things of everyday life shall be measured by truer standards, and that piety shall acquire new foundations in truth — will pursue its course. His disciples will continue his work.

For if you think that you will restrain men from reproaching you for your evil lives by putting them to death, you are very much mistaken. That way of escape is hardly possible, and it is not a good one. It is much better, and much easier, not to silence reproaches, but to make yourselves as perfect as you can. This is my parting prophecy to you who have condemned me.

The Reply to the True Judges

He then turns to those who have voted for his acquittal, and it is like the closing of an intimate circle in which he, the aged master, now going to his death, is alone with the men who have by their verdict entered into an understanding not only with him, but with truth and justice too.

With you who have acquitted me I should like to converse touching this thing that has come to pass, while the authorities are busy, and before I go to the place where I have to die. So, I pray you, remain with me until I go hence: there is no reason why we should not converse with each other while it is possible. I wish to explain to you, as my friends, the meaning of what has befallen me.

He wishes to interpret the moment — truly a “moment” in the pregnant sense of the word — a short hour, passing by in the stream of time, but one in which a decision of eternal import has been taken. He interprets it by speaking, from out of his personal life, words of which it is impossible to exaggerate the calmness, the nearness to those addressed, the remoteness from the others.

A wonderful thing has happened to me, judges for you I am right in calling judges. The prophetic sign, which I am wont to receive from the divine voice, has been constantly with me all through my life till now, opposing me in quite small matters if I were not going to act rightly. And now you yourselves see what has happened to me; a thing which might be thought, and which is sometimes actually reckoned, the supreme evil. But the sign of God did not withstand me when I was leaving my house in the morning, nor when I was coming up hither 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 speaking. But now, in this matter, it has never once withstood

me, either in my words or my actions. I will tell you what I believe to be the reason of that. This thing that 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 that is so; for my accustomed sign would certainly have opposed me, if I had not been going to fare well.

It is wonderful how the religious, philosophical and human elements coalesce here into a perfect unity. He goes on to put the question concerning the nature of death more precisely, carefully distinguishing, just as he would do if he were sitting in the company of his disciples. First the alternative:

And if we reflect in another way we shall see that we may well hope that 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 sensation; or, according to the common belief, it is a change and a migration of the soul into another place.

The first possibility:

And if death is the absence of all sensation, 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 that night in which he slept so soundly that he did not even see any dreams, 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 that a private person, nay, even the great King himself, would find them easy to count, compared with the others. If that is the nature of death, I for one count it a gain. For then it appears that eternity is nothing more than a single night.

One seems almost to perceive weariness breaking out in the old man who has striven indefatigably all through his life : it would be wonderful to be able to sleep so soundly! But the matter is not left there, for the other possibility remains:

But if death is a journey to another place, and the common belief be true, that there are all "who have died, what good could be greater than this, my judges? Would a journey not be worth taking, at the end of which, in the other world, we should be re-

leased from the self-styled judges who are here, and should find the true judges, who are said to sit in judgment below, such as Minos, and Rhadamanthus, and Aeacus, and Triptolemus, and the other demi-gods who were just in their lives? Or what would you not give to converse with Orpheus and Musaeus and Hesiod and Homer? I am willing to die many times, if this be true. And for my own part I should have a wonderful interest in meeting there Palamedes, and Ajax the son of Telamon, and the other men of old who have died through an unjust judgment, and in comparing my experiences with theirs. That I think would be no small pleasure.

Here appears plainly that other court which was mentioned where Socrates stands before the Eternal in order that his person and work may be measured by eternal standards. He feels that he passes the test of these. No, this consciousness is even stronger. He says not only that he will find his purposes and work ratified in eternity, but that he will there continue the work he has been doing:

And, 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, my 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 infinite 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, they are immortal, at least if the common belief be true.

We may note in passing what a vast self-assurance is expressed in these words. One day Socrates will be able to converse with the great ones of the past on that which is important, and only this intercourse will be truly adequate. Adequate to the importance of the subject, since only these partners have the requisite purity and power of insight ; but adequate too to the claims of Socrates himself, who here on earth has always had to content himself with the inadequate. Socrates does not indeed mention this latter point expressly, but it is implied in the thought. One is reminded of the grand passage of the *Divine Comedy* where Dante meets the great men of antiquity in Limbo, is received by the five greatest poets into their circle, and is honored

with secret discourses “concerning which it is well to be silent” (*Inf.* iv. 82-105).

Socrates here transfers the cause of his condemnation into its idea. The court which has condemned him is, so to speak, metaphysically dissolved. Its work has come to nothing. In the form of mythological ideas Socrates becomes aware of his own work, and unites himself with its eternal pattern.

Then he comes back to the present:

And you too, judges, must face death with a good courage, and believe this as a truth, that no evil can happen to a good man, either in life, or after death. His fortunes are not neglected by the gods; and what has come to me to-day has not come by chance. I am persuaded that it was better for me to die now, and to be released from trouble: and that was the reason why the sign never turned me back. And so I am hardly angry with my accusers, or with those who have condemned me to die.

He does not mean by this to relieve his accusers of their responsibility. Their intentions were evil:

Yet it was not with this mind that they accused me and condemned me, but meaning to do me an injury. So far I may find fault with them.

What Socrates says about his accusers must not be overestimated. The question of true forgiveness does not arise. He is in fact not yet concerned with the problem of forgiveness at all. He achieves the very great merit of “not bearing his accusers any malice”, because he is of the opinion that death is better than life. He overcomes, then, the hatred which springs from the immediate will to live against the enemy who threatens it with death — not, however, from the motive of a freedom which is able to see even this enemy as a man and to receive him into an ultimate relationship, but by virtue of an insight into the relation of life and death. It is a philosophical conquest; as such truly great, but no more than this.

Then comes a strange testament, full of irony:

Yet I have one request to make of them. When my sons grow up, visit them with punishment, my friends, and vex them in the same way that I have vexed you, if they seem to you to care for riches, or for any other thing, before virtue: and if they think that

they are something, when they are nothing at all, reproach them, as I have reproached you, for not caring for what they should, and for thinking that they are great men when in fact they are worth- less. And if you will do this, I myself and my sons will have received our deserts at your hands.

Finally the close, the last sentence, in which the character of Socrates emerges great and calm — and involuntarily one thinks with what feelings Plato's friends must have read this sentence:

But now the time has come, and we must go hence; I to die, and you to live. Whether life or death is better is known to God, and to God only.

Our inquiry seeks to discover how death is represented in the four dialogues with which we are concerned. To this question the *Apology* gives an important answer — particularly important because the personality of Socrates comes out so characteristically in it. What Socrates says in the first speech stands out against the background of the common view that death is the greatest evil. Socrates does not take death lightly, yet he does not fear it either. He knows values that are absolute and acknowledges claims of peremptory binding force; before these death becomes immaterial. Supreme among these is the divine commission as expressed in the oracle; but there is also the precept of fidelity to himself and the obligation imposed by his own honor. All this forbids him to make concessions to his judges' lust for power.

But the first speech already does more than merely maintain his own standpoint. No one knows, it says, whether death is really something evil and not rather perhaps something good. But the fact that the *Daimonion* has given no warning when Socrates was entering the court; that it has not interrupted him when he was about to say things in the course of his defense which made his situation worse: these are signs that death must be something good; for from the region whence the *Daimonion* speaks only what is ultimately good can come. It has already been remarked that there is at work in the manner of Socrates's defense a motive which is set on death. In a character of such a strong vitality and such positive intellectual clarity there can be no question of any morbid craving for death. Socrates does not wish for annihilation as such, but he knows that the final completion of his mission and of his existence can only be brought about through death. So this appears as a transition to the real. This is expressed

quite clearly in the third speech, when he explains to the judges who have voted in his favor what has taken place in the events just concluded. Death there appears as a step to the true life. The mental picture of this does not derive merely from external faith, but is built on the inmost consciousness of his being and his mission. That which Socrates has done on earth, and because of which he must die, he will go on doing in the next life in a perfect and final manner. Not in the sense of primitive notions according to which the future life is a continuation of the present life freed from all defects, but in a spiritually purified sense: that which has taken place on earth in the venture of personal decision, beset with the contradictions of environment and jeopardized by the resistance of the temporal order, acquires in the next life its final significance. That Socrates is to converse with the heroes of old, compare his fate with theirs and interrogate them about theirs, means that his temporal activity is eternally ratified. This, then, is for his concrete existence something similar to what happens when in the process of cognition a thing enters into the light of the Idea: his earthly being and work is raised into the light of ultimate truth and allowed to rest there. Death appears as the transition thereto, and is recognized and accepted as such.