

Plato, Donald J. Zeyl, translator. "Gorgias." In *Plato on Rhetoric and Language: Four Key Dialogues*, Jean Nienkamp, editor. Mahwah: Erlbaum, 1999.

b utter words against them in public or private. I won't be able to say, that
is, "Yes, I say and do all these things in the interest of justice, my 'honored judges'" — to use that expression you people use — nor anything else. So presumably I'll get whatever comes my way.

CALLICLES: Do you think, Socrates, that a man in such a position in his city, a man who's unable to protect himself, is to be admired?

SOCRATES: Yes, Callicles, as long as he has that one thing that you've often agreed he should have: as long as he has protected himself against having spoken or done anything unjust relating to either men or gods.
d For this is the self-protection that you and I often have agreed avails the most. Now if someone were to refute me and prove that I am unable to provide *this* protection for myself or for anyone else, I would feel shame at being refuted, whether this happened in the presence of many or of a few, or just between the two of us; and if I were to be put to death for lack of this ability, I really would be upset. But if I came to my end because of a deficiency in flattering oratory, I know that you'd see me bear my
e death with ease. For no one who isn't totally bereft of reason and courage is afraid to die; doing what's unjust is what he's afraid of. For to arrive in Hades with one's soul stuffed full of unjust actions is the ultimate of all bad things. If you like, I'm willing to give you an account showing that this is so.

CALLICLES: All right, since you've gone through the other things, go through this, too.

523 SOCRATES: Give ear then — as they put it — to a very fine account. You'll think that it's a mere tale, I believe, although I think it's an account, for what I'm about to say I will tell you as true. As Homer tells it, after Zeus, Posidon, and Pluto took over the sovereignty from their father, they divided it among themselves. Now there was a law concerning human beings during Cronus' time, one that gods even now continue to observe, that when a man who has lived a just and pious life comes to his end, he goes
b to the Isles of the Blessed, to make his abode in complete happiness, beyond the reach of evils, but when one who has lived in an unjust and godless way dies, he goes to the prison of payment and retribution, the one they call Tartarus. In Cronus' time, and even more recently during Zeus' tenure of sovereignty, these men faced living judges while they were still alive, who judged them on the day they were going to die. Now the cases were badly decided, so Pluto and the keepers from the Isles of the Blessed came to Zeus and told him that people were undeservingly making their
c way in both directions. So Zeus said, "All right, I'll put a stop to that. The cases are being badly decided at this time because those being judged are judged fully dressed. They're being judged while they're still alive. Many," he said, "whose souls are wicked are dressed in handsome bodies, good stock and wealth, and when the judgment takes place they have many

witnesses appear to testify that they have lived just lives. Now the judges are awestruck by these things and pass judgment at a time when they themselves are fully dressed, too, having put their eyes and ears and their whole bodies up as screens in front of their souls. All these things, their own clothing and that of those being judged, have proved to be obstructive to them. What we must do first," he said, "is to stop them from knowing their death ahead of time. Now they do have that knowledge. This is something that Prometheus has already been told to put a stop to. Next, they must be judged when they're stripped naked of all these things, for they should be judged when they're dead. The judge, too, should be naked, and dead, and with only his soul he should study only the soul of each person immediately upon his death, when he's isolated from all his kinsmen and has left behind on earth all that adornment, so that the judgment may be a just one. Now I, realizing this before you did, have already appointed my sons as judges, two from Asia, Minos and Rhadamanthus, and one from Europe, Aeacus. After they've died, they'll serve as judges in the meadow, at the three-way crossing from which the two roads go on, the one to the Isles of the Blessed and the other to Tartarus. Rhadamanthus will judge the people from Asia and Aeacus those from Europe. I'll give seniority to Minos to render final judgment if the other two are at all perplexed, so that the judgment concerning the passage of humankind may be as just as possible."

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This, Callicles, is what I've heard, and I believe that it's true. And on the basis of these accounts I conclude that something like this takes place: Death, I think, is actually nothing but the separation of two things from each other, the soul and the body. So, after they're separated, each of them stays in a condition not much worse than what it was in when the person was alive. The body retains its nature, and the care it had received as well as the things that have happened to it are all evident. If a man had a body, for instance, which was large (either by nature or through nurture, or both) while he was alive, his corpse after he has died is large, too. And if it was fat, so is the corpse of the dead man, and so on. And if a man took care to grow his hair long, his corpse will have long hair, too. And again, if a man had been a criminal whipped for his crime and showed scars, traces of beatings on his body inflicted by whips or other blows while he was alive, his body can be seen to have these marks, too, when he is dead. And if a man's limbs were broken or twisted while he was alive, these very things will be evident, too, when he is dead. In a word, however a man treated his body while he was alive, all the marks of that treatment, or most of them, are evident for some time even after he is dead. And I think that the same thing, therefore, holds true also for the soul, Callicles. All that's in the soul is evident after it has been stripped naked of the body, both things that are natural to it and things that have happened to it, things that the person came to have in his soul as a result of his pursuit of each objective. So when they arrive before their judge — the people from Asia before Rhadamanthus — Rhadamanthus brings them to a halt and

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studies each person's soul without knowing whose it is. He's often gotten hold of the Great King, or some other king or potentate, and noticed that there's nothing sound in his soul but that it's been thoroughly whipped and covered with scars, the results of acts of perjury and of injustice, things that each of his actions has stamped upon his soul. Everything was warped as a result of deception and pretense, and nothing was straight, all because the soul had been nurtured without truth. And he saw that the soul was full of distortion and ugliness due to license and luxury, arrogance and incontinence in its actions. And when he had seen it, he dismissed this soul in dishonor straight to the guardhouse, where it went to await suffering its appropriate fate.

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It is appropriate for everyone who is subject to punishment rightly inflicted by another either to become better and profit from it, or else to be made an example for others, so that when they see him suffering whatever it is he suffers, they may be afraid and become better. Those who are benefited, who are made to pay their due by gods and men, are the ones whose errors are curable; even so, their benefit comes to them, both here and in Hades, by way of pain and suffering, for there is no other possible way to get rid of injustice. From among those who have committed the ultimate wrongs and who because of such crimes have become incurable come the ones who are made examples of. These persons themselves no longer derive any profit from their punishment, because they're incurable.

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Others, however, do profit from it when they see them undergoing for all time the most grievous, intensely painful and frightening sufferings for their errors, simply strung up there in the prison in Hades as examples, visible warnings to unjust men who are ever arriving. I claim that Archelaus, too, will be one of their number, if what Polus says is true, and anyone else who's a tyrant like him. I suppose that in fact the majority of these examples have come from the ranks of tyrants, kings, potentates, and those active in the affairs of cities, for these people commit the most grievous and impious errors because they're in a position to do so. Homer, too, is a witness on these matters, for he has depicted those undergoing eternal punishment in Hades as kings and potentates: Tantalus, Sisyphus and Tityus. As for Thersites and any other private citizen who was wicked, no one has depicted him as surrounded by the most grievous punishments, as though he were incurable; he wasn't in that position, I suppose, and for that reason he's also happier than those who did. The fact is, Callicles,

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that those persons who become extremely wicked do come from the ranks of the powerful, although there's certainly nothing to stop good men from turning up even among the powerful, and those who do turn up there deserve to be enthusiastically admired. For it's a difficult thing, Callicles, and one that merits much praise, to live your whole life justly when you've found yourself having ample freedom to do what's unjust. Few are those who prove to be like that. But since there *have* proved to be such people, both here and elsewhere, I suppose that there'll be others, too, men admirable and good in that excellence of justly carrying out whatever is entrusted

to them. One of these, Aristides the son of Lysimachus, has proved to be very illustrious indeed, even among the rest of the Greeks. But the majority of our potentates, my good man, prove to be bad.

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So as I was saying, when Rhadamanthus the judge gets hold of someone like that, he doesn't know a thing about him, neither who he is nor who his people are, except that he's somebody wicked. And once he's noticed that, he brands the man as either curable or incurable, as he sees fit, and dismisses the man to Tartarus, and once the man has arrived there, he undergoes the appropriate sufferings. Once in a while he inspects another soul, one who has lived a pious life, one devoted to truth, the soul of a private citizen or someone else, especially — and I at any rate say this, Callicles — that of a philosopher who has minded his own affairs and hasn't been meddlesome in the course of his life. He admires the man and sends him off to the Isles of the Blessed. And Aeacus, too, does the very same things. Each of them with staff in hand renders judgments. And Minos is seated to oversee them. He alone holds the golden scepter the way Homer's Odysseus claims to have seen him,

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*holding his golden scepter, decreeing right among the dead.*²⁷

For my part, Callicles, I'm convinced by these accounts, and I think about how I'll reveal to the judge a soul that's as healthy as it can be. So I disregard the things held in honor by the majority of people, and by practicing truth I really try, to the best of my ability, to be and to live as a very good man, and when I die, to die like that. And I call on all other people as well, as far as I can — and you especially I call on in response to your call — to this way of life, this contest, that I hold to be worth all the other contests in this life. And I take you to task, because you won't be able to come to protect yourself when you appear at the trial and judgment I was talking about just now. When you come before that judge, the son of Aegina, and he takes hold of you and brings you to trial, your mouth will hang open and you'll get dizzy there just as much as I will here, and maybe somebody'll give you a demeaning knock on the jaw and throw all sorts of dirt at you.

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Maybe you think this account is told as an old wives' tale, and you feel contempt for it. And it certainly wouldn't be a surprising thing to feel contempt for it if we could look for and somehow find one better and truer than it. As it is, you see that there are three of you, the wisest of the Greeks of today — you, Polus, and Gorgias — and you're not able to prove that there's any other life one should live than the one which will clearly turn out to be advantageous in that world, too. But among so many arguments this one alone survives refutation and remains steady: that doing what's unjust is more to be guarded against than suffering it, and

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²⁷ *Odyssey* xi.569.

c that it's not *seeming* to be good but *being* good that a man should take care of more than anything, both in his public and his private life; and that if a person proves to be bad in some respect, he's to be disciplined, and that the second best thing after being just is to become just by paying one's due, by being disciplined; and that every form of flattery, both the form concerned with oneself and that concerned with others, whether they're few or many, is to be avoided, and that oratory and every other activity is always to be used in support of what's just.

d So, listen to me and follow me to where I am, and when you've come here you'll be happy both during life and at its end, as the account indicates. Let someone despise you as a fool and throw dirt on you, if he likes. And, yes, by Zeus, confidently let him deal you that demeaning blow. Nothing terrible will happen to you if you really are an admirable and good man, one who practices excellence. And then, after we've practiced it together, then at last, if we think we should, we'll turn to politics, or then we'll deliberate about whatever subject we please, when we're better at deliberating than we are now. For it's a shameful thing for us, being in the condition we appear to be in at present — when we never think the same about the same subjects, the most important ones at that — to sound off as though we're somebodies. That's how far behind in education we've fallen. So e let's use the account that has now been disclosed to us as our guide, one that indicates to us that this way of life is the best, to practice justice and the rest of excellence both in life and in death. Let us follow it, then, and call on others to do so, too, and let's not follow the one that you believe in and call on me to follow. For that one is worthless, Callicles.