



Laws

— BOOK X —

884 a ATHENIAN: Now that assaults have been dealt with, a single universal regulation concerning the use of force should be stated as follows. No one is to take or remove what belongs to others, nor should he make use of what belongs to a neighbour without the owner's consent, for all the evils we have described, past, present and to come, derive from such behaviour. Of the remaining causes, the most grievous is unrestrained and outrageous behaviour in the young, and this is most serious when it affects the sacred, and is especially serious in the case of whatever is sacred to the community, or partly so, being common to clans or similar groupings. Second in rank and severity are outrages against private shrines and tombs. Third are outrages against parents, apart from those described earlier. A fourth kind of outrage occurs when someone has so little regard for those in authority that he removes or takes away or makes use of something that belongs to them without their consent. Fifth would be any outrage against the civic entitlement of any individual citizens, calling for legal remedy. A common law applicable to each case should be provided.

885 a In the case of temple plundering, by force or subterfuge, we have already stated briefly what should happen to the offenders. We should now say what is to happen in any cases where someone acts outrageously towards the gods, in word or in deed, by what is said or what is done, beginning with a preamble as follows. No one who believes in the gods, as the laws prescribe, has ever deliberately done an impious deed or let loose an unlawful word. If anyone does so it is because one of three things befalls him. Either, as I was saying, he does not really believe in them, or secondly he believes that they exist but do not care about us humans, or thirdly he believes that they are easily appeased under the influence of sacrifices and prayers.

885 c CLINIAS: So, what should we do or even say to these people?

ATHENIAN: Good man, let's listen first to what I suspect they would say, mocking us contemptuously.

CLINIAS: In what way?

ATHENIAN: To tease us they would probably say this. "Athenian stranger, Spartan and Cnossian, what you are saying is the truth. Some of us indeed do not believe in any gods at all, while others believe in gods of the kind you are describing. We then deserve the very same treatment that you deserved from the laws, that before issuing harsh threats, you first attempt to persuade us and teach us by providing adequate proofs that the gods exist, and that they are too good to be diverted from the path of justice when beguiled by some gifts of ours. For as matters stand, we hear all this and other ideas of this sort from poets, orators, prophets and priests, of the highest reputation, and from countless others too. And so most of us, rather than following a path where we do nothing unjust, act unjustly and attempt to make amends. From legislators like yourselves then, who claim to be gentle rather than aggressive, we expect to be dealt with first through persuasion. And if you don't do much better than

the others in speaking about the existence of the gods, but do better in terms of truth, you may perhaps persuade us. So, if what we are saying sounds reasonable, try to rise to our challenge.”

CLINIAS: It seems easy enough, stranger, to speak truthfully when saying that the gods exist, does it not?

ATHENIAN: How so?

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CLINIAS: First there is the evidence of the earth, sun and stars, and the entire universe, and the beautiful ordering of the seasons, divided into months and years. And then there is the fact that Greeks and non-Greeks alike believe in the existence of gods.

ATHENIAN: Bless you. But I do have a fear of the degenerate folk – although I would never say that I am in awe of them – a fear that they may somehow despise us. Indeed, you don’t understand the cause of their disagreement with us, and you believe that lack of control over pleasures and desires is the only thing that impels their souls to a life of impiety.

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CLINIAS: What other cause could there be, stranger, besides this?

ATHENIAN: One which you scarcely understand at all, because you live outside its realm and are unaware of it.

CLINIAS: What cause are you referring to now?

ATHENIAN: A grievous ignorance that seems to be the height of wisdom.

CLINIAS: How do you mean?

ATHENIAN: In my country, we have accounts in writing which, as I understand it, are not in existence among yourselves because your civic arrangement is so excellent. These speak of the gods, some in verse, some in prose. The most ancient of them describe how the primal nature of heaven and all else came into being, and, moving on a little from this starting point, describe the birth of the gods and how they treat one another once they have been born. Regardless of whether these accounts are somehow beneficial or detrimental to those who hear them, it is not easy to censure these ancient authorities, and yet I could never bring myself to praise their stories of respect and care for parents, or say that these are beneficial or entirely true. So we should let go of these ancient tales, bid them farewell, and let them be told in the manner that pleases the gods, while we blame the views of our young folk, and the wise, as the cause of the evils. The arguments of such people proceed as follows. Whenever you and I present proofs for the existence of gods, proposing this very point – that sun, moon, stars and the earth are gods and divinities – the young folk, having been convinced by the wise, are inclined to say that these all consist of earth and stone, and are therefore unable to think about human affairs, and that these proofs of ours have been nicely dressed up in reasoned arguments to make them sound persuasive.

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CLINIAS: The argument you are referring to would be troublesome enough, stranger, even if it was the only one, but nowadays, when there are so very many of them, the difficulty is even greater.

ATHENIAN: What of it? What are we to say? What should we do? Are we to defend ourselves against the impious folk who, when they fall foul of our legislation, accuse us of doing something terrible by enshrining the existence of gods in law? Or should we bid farewell to the issue, in case our preamble becomes longer than the actual laws it is introducing? For our argument would run to considerable length if we were to defer the enactment of suitable laws until we had first presented these people, who are so inclined to impiety, with the reasoned arguments which they say are needed, frightened our accuser away, and made the impious folk detest their impiety.

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CLINIAS: But, stranger, one point has been made many times in the short interval at our disposal: that there is no need at the moment to prefer a short argument over a lengthy one, since as

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they say no one is chasing after us. So, to be seen choosing the brief in preference to the best would be comical and undignified. But it is of the utmost importance that our arguments, somehow or other, have a degree of persuasiveness when they maintain that the gods exist, that they are good, and that they revere justice more than any of us humans. Indeed, this formulation would constitute the best and most beautiful preamble for any of our laws. So, without reluctance or impatience, let's deploy any power of persuasion we possess on such issues unstintingly, to expound the arguments adequately as best we can.

ATHENIAN: What you have just said was expressed with such depth of feeling that it seemed to me like a call to prayer. No further delay is allowed then. We must speak. Come on then, how could anyone discourse on the existence of gods without depth of feeling? In fact, it is inevitable that we bear ill-feeling and hatred towards these people who have been, and still are, responsible for our involvement in these arguments, people who don't believe the stories they hear as young children, still at the breast, from their nurses and mothers, tales told in songs of a sort, in a playful or serious spirit, which they also hear directly in prayers during the sacrifices, accompanied by the delightful sights that the young person sees and hears enacted at the sacrifices, beholding their own parents, with the utmost seriousness, offering earnest prayers and supplications on behalf of themselves and their offspring to gods whose existence is undeniable. At the rising of the moon and the sun, and at their setting too, they see and hear the prostrations and adorations of all Greeks and non-Greeks when faced with various misfortunes and successes, not as if there are no gods, but as if they really do exist beyond any grounds for suspicion.

But people who view all of this with contempt, without a single adequate argument – as anyone with a modicum of intelligence would agree – are now compelling us to say what we are saying. So, how might anyone, in mild language, be able to chasten these people and, at the same time, instruct them about the gods, teaching them first and foremost that they exist? But we should take on the task, for there is no use in some among us being maddened by a greed for pleasure, while others are equally maddened by their ill-feeling towards such people. Let our dispassionate preliminary address to those who corrupt their minds in this way proceed, and let's speak to them in mild language with any ill-feeling extinguished, as though we were addressing one person of this sort as follows. "Child, you are young, but as you get older time will transform many of the opinions you now hold into their direct opposites. Wait until then before you sit in judgement on matters of the utmost importance, and the most important is the one that you set at naught – thinking aright about the gods, and so, living, or not living, a good life.

"Now, there is one thing I should mention to you at the outset which will never prove false. Neither yourself alone, nor your friends, are the first thinkers to lead the way in holding this opinion about the gods. There are always people, sometimes more, sometimes fewer, who are afflicted with this disease. So I, who have made the acquaintance of lots of them, should inform you that no one who adopts this opinion about the gods when young, the opinion that they don't exist, ever persists into old age still holding to the same belief. But the other two misconceptions about the gods do persist in some cases, although not many: that the gods exist but have no concern for human affairs, or, alternatively, they are indeed concerned, but are easily appeased by sacrifices and prayers. So, if you heed me you will wait until your opinion concerning the gods has become as clear as possible, deliberating as to what the truth of the matter actually is, seeking guidance from people in general, but especially from the lawgiver. And in the meanwhile, do not dare to show any impiety towards the gods. For whoever is instituting laws for you, now or hereafter, should endeavour to teach you the truth about these matters."

CLINIAS: What we have said so far, stranger, sounds excellent to us.

ATHENIAN: Entirely so, Megillus and Clinias, but we have unwittingly stumbled upon a wondrous argument.

CLINIAS: What are you referring to?

ATHENIAN: An argument regarded by most people as the very pinnacle of wisdom.

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CLINIAS: Please clarify.

ATHENIAN: Some people presumably maintain that everything that is coming into being, has come into being or will come into being does so by nature in some cases, by artifice in others, or, again, by chance.

CLINIAS: Aren't they right to say so?

ATHENIAN: Well, the wise men are likely to be right in what they say, I presume, but let's pursue the matter with them at any rate, and find out what people from that camp actually have in mind.

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CLINIAS: Absolutely.

ATHENIAN: Evidently, they say, the most important and beautiful things are produced by nature and chance, while artifice produces those of lesser importance. Artifice takes the important primary products from nature already created, and then forms and fashions the lesser items, which we all refer to as artificial.

CLINIAS: What do you mean?

ATHENIAN: I'll explain this more clearly. Fire, water, earth and air all exist by nature and chance, they say, and none of these exist by artifice. And the bodies that then come after these, those of the earth, sun, moon and stars, have come into being through these four entirely soulless entities. They move by chance, each according to its particular power, in such a way that they come together, combining somehow with their own – hot with cold, dry with moist, soft with hard, and so on – for any mixture of opposites that is produced, of necessity, according to chance. In this way, based upon these processes, the whole heaven has come into existence, and everything under heaven, including animals and, indeed, all the plants too. And from these all the seasons have arisen, neither through reason, they say, nor through the agency of some god, nor through artifice, but according to them through nature and chance. Artifice comes afterwards, a later production of these two, itself mortal, born of mortal antecedents. Artifice goes on to generate some playthings, which have not the slightest share in truth, being mere images, just like artifice itself, images that painting generates, music too, and any artifice that assists these. Those artifices that actually give rise to something worthwhile are the ones that lend their own power to collaborate with nature, as happens in the case of medicine, farming and gymnastics. Statesmanship in particular, according to them, involves nature to a small extent, but mostly involves artifice, and so all legislation involves artifice rather than nature, and its propositions are not true.

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CLINIAS: In what way?

ATHENIAN: The first point these people make, my friend, is that the gods exist by human artifice, by some legal conventions, and not by nature. They are different in different places, depending upon what the various peoples agreed among themselves when making their laws. Furthermore, what's good by nature is one thing, and what's good by convention is something else. And what's just is not absolutely just by nature; rather, people are persistently arguing over this and changing their positions, and any changes they make are then authoritative, although they arise from artifice and legal conventions, and not from anything natural. All these, my friends, are the views of men who are wise in the eyes of the young people – prose writers and poets who maintain that supreme justice consists in attaining anything by force. Consequently, various impieties have afflicted our young people, as if gods, like those the law tells us to believe in, don't exist. And so, there are factions because

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of these, as the clever folk set about attracting people to the life that is correct by nature, the life of ruling over others in truth, and not being in servitude to others by legal convention.

890 b CLINIAS: What a dreadful argument, stranger, so damaging to young people as citizens of our cities and as individuals in private households.

ATHENIAN: True indeed, Clinias. So what do you think the lawgiver ought to do when such beliefs have been in place for so long? Should he simply stand up in public and issue threats to all and sundry who don't accept the existence of the gods, and don't believe that they are such as the law proclaims that they are, and who adopt the same attitude in relation to what's noble, what's just, and all matters of importance that relate to virtue and vice? Is he to declare that everything must be done in accordance with the beliefs prescribed by the lawgiver in his writings, and whoever does not accept the laws readily should, in some cases, be put to death, in other cases be beaten, imprisoned or dishonoured, or alternatively suffer poverty or exile? What about persuading the people at the same time as he imposes laws upon them? Is he to avoid adding persuasion to his pronouncements and doing his best to make them gentle?

890 d CLINIAS: Not at all, stranger. If there happens to be the slightest possibility of any persuasion in relation to such matters, no lawgiver who is worth anything should relent in any way, but he should, as they say, be an out-and-out advocate, supporting the ancient, traditional argument that the gods exist, and any other arguments you have just recounted. And, indeed, he must also defend law itself, and artifice, as being natural or not inferior to nature, since they are products of reason, according to the correct argument which you now seem to me to be propounding, and with which I agree.

890 e ATHENIAN: How eager you are, Clinias! But when addressing lots of people in this way, isn't it difficult to pursue arguments? And don't they take on an inordinate length?

CLINIAS: What's this, stranger? We were patient with one another when discoursing at such length about drunkenness and about music. Are we to be impatient now on the subject of gods and the like? And, indeed, this argument is surely of great assistance to wise legislation, because legal injunctions, once written down, are completely unalterable, ready to meet any challenge forever. Nor need we worry if they are hard to appreciate at first, since even the slowest learner can come back and consider them over and over. Neither should we be concerned about their length, provided they are beneficial. So, it seems to me that it is both unreasonable and impious for any man not to do his best to support these arguments.

MEGILLUS: I think, stranger, that Clinias has made an excellent point.

891 b ATHENIAN: I couldn't agree more, Megillus, and we should do as he says. Indeed, if such fallacious arguments were not so widely sown in more or less every human heart, there would be no need for counterarguments defending the existence of the gods. But we need them now, so who better than the lawgiver to come to the aid of our most important laws when they are being subverted by evil folk?

MEGILLUS: There's no one better.

891 c ATHENIAN: Well then, speak to me again, Clinias, and you too, for you need to join in the arguments. It is likely that someone who says all this is of the view that fire, water, earth and air, all of which he refers to as 'nature', come first, before everything else, and from these afterwards comes soul. But, in fact, this seems more than just likely, since this is being indicated to us directly by the argument.

CLINIAS: Very much so.

ATHENIAN: Well, by Zeus, have we discovered a sort of fountain of irrational opinion on the part of all the people who have ever turned a hand to investigations into nature? Let's look at

this, scrutinising each argument, for it will make an enormous difference if it can be shown that those who engage in impious arguments, and give the lead to others, are not only employing the arguments badly, but are wide of the mark too. I, for one, think that this is how matters stand. 891 d

CLINIAS: Well said. But where does the error lie? Try to explain this.

ATHENIAN: Well, I shall, it seems, have to deal with unfamiliar arguments.

CLINIAS: Don't be reluctant, stranger. I do understand that you think we will be straying outside the bounds of legislation if we deal with such arguments, but if it is impossible to agree on the correctness of the descriptions of the gods in our laws, in any other way apart from this, then this, my friend, is the course we must adopt. 891 e

ATHENIAN: I should, it seems at this stage, recount a somewhat unusual argument, as follows. According to the arguments that fashion the soul of the impious folk, the first cause of the generation and destruction of all things is said not to come first, but to arise subsequently, and what's subsequent is said to be prior. That's how they fall into error about the actual being of the gods.

CLINIAS: I do not yet understand you. 892 a

ATHENIAN: Soul, my friend – what it's like, and the power it possesses – is a matter about which all but a few are inclined to be in ignorance generally, and especially in relation to its origin. They don't know that soul is among the things that come first, having come into existence before all of the bodies, and more than anything else controls all their changes and transformations. And if this is indeed the case, mustn't anything akin to soul, of necessity, be prior in origin to anything associated with bodies, since soul is older than body? 892 b

CLINIAS: Necessarily.

ATHENIAN: Then opinion, attention, reason, artifice and law would be prior to anything hard or soft, heavy or light. And, indeed, the important primary works and activities would be those born of artifice because they are among the first, while those that are natural, and nature itself, incorrectly so called, come later and come from artifice and reason.

CLINIAS: Incorrectly in what sense? 892 c

ATHENIAN: By the word 'nature' they intend to describe the generation of things that come first. But if it turns out that soul comes first, rather than fire or air, then soul, having arisen with the things that come first, may be described most correctly as pre-eminently natural. This is how matters stand, provided it can be demonstrated that soul is older than body, but not otherwise.

CLINIAS: Very true.

ATHENIAN: Shouldn't we set about this very proof next?

CLINIAS: Indeed. 892 d

ATHENIAN: Let's be on our guard, then, against an utterly deceitful argument lest we somehow, in our old age, beguiled by its youthfulness, let it get away from us and turn us into figures of fun, who seem to aim for great things but miss the little ones. So, think about this. Suppose we three needed to cross a river with intense currents, and I happened to be the youngest of us, with a lot of experience of such currents. What if I suggested that I attempt the crossing first by myself, leaving you two behind in safety, so as to test whether the river can be crossed by you two older men or not? And if it turned out to be crossable, I could then, based on my experience, call upon the two of you to make the crossing too, and if it was too deep for you, the danger would be all mine. This would sound like a reasonable suggestion. And, indeed, in this case, the argument we are facing is most intense, and perhaps a little too deep for the strength you possess. So, in case it makes you dizzy and puts you in a spin, with its onslaught of questions you are not accustomed to answering, and begets 892 e 893 a

a distasteful lack of dignity and decorum, I think I should follow the same procedure myself now. I'll put the questions to myself first, while you two are listening in safety, and then I shall, in turn, answer the questions myself and conduct the entire argument in this way until it has dealt with the subject of soul, and shown that soul is prior to body.

CLINIAS: We think, stranger, that your suggestion is excellent. Please do as you suggest.

893 b ATHENIAN: Come on, then. If ever there was a time to call for a god's help, now is the time to do so. Let's take it, then, that the gods have been invoked, in all seriousness, to demonstrate their own existence, while we plunge into the argument before us, holding on to this rope for safety. Now, when I am being challenged on such matters with questions of this sort, it seems safest to respond as follows. For instance, when someone asks me, "Stranger, is everything stationary and does nothing move? Or is the situation the exact opposite? Or do
893 c some things move while others stay still?", I shall reply that some presumably move, while others stay still.

"Now, don't the stationary things stand still, and the moving things move, in a certain place?"

"Of course."

"And some, presumably, will do this in a single location, others in several."

"Do you mean," we shall say, "that objects which can be stationary at their centre are moving in a single location, as happens to circular objects which are said to be stationary, although their circumference is revolving?"

"Yes."

893 d "And we do understand that in this revolution, carrying around the greatest circle and the smallest one simultaneously, such motion distributes itself to the greater and the lesser, in proportion, being itself both lesser and greater, in proportion. And so it has become a fount of all wonders as it provides both large and small circles at the same time, with harmonised slowness and swiftness, an outcome which might be regarded as impossible."

"Very true."

893 e "And when you refer to things moving in several locations, I presume you mean those which move by being borne, constantly changing from one location to another, sometimes having a single centre of support, sometimes more than one, in which case they roll about. Any time they collide with each other, a moving body is disintegrated by a stationary one, whereas moving bodies coming from opposite directions coalesce into a single combination that is midway between the two."

"Yes, I agree. This is how matters stand, just as you say."

894 a "And, indeed, when combining, they increase in bulk, and when they disintegrate they decrease, provided the established condition of each persists, but if this does not remain, they are dissolved by both processes. So, under what set of circumstances does generation occur in all cases? Obviously it is when a beginning, having taken increase, has arrived at its second stage, and from this arrives at the next, and having reached the third stage becomes perceptible to observers. Everything comes into being by changing and moving in this way. It is really existing only for as long as it persists, and it is completely destroyed whenever it changes to another state."

894 b So have we mentioned all movements that can be classified numerically, apart, my friends, from two?

CLINIAS: Which two?

ATHENIAN: The two for whose sake, good man, almost all of our present enquiry is being conducted.

CLINIAS: Please clarify.

ATHENIAN: Presumably, it is for the sake of soul?

CLINIAS: Very much so.

ATHENIAN: Well, let one of the two be the motion that is always able to move other things but is unable to move itself. And of all the various motions, let the other one be the motion that is always able to move itself and other things by combination, disintegration, by increase and its opposite, and by generation and destruction. 894 c

CLINIAS: Let's do so.

ATHENIAN: In that case, we shall place the motion that always moves another and is moved by another ninth. And we shall say that the tenth motion is what moves itself and another, being included in all actions performed or suffered, and is actually called the change and motion of everything that exists.

CLINIAS: Entirely so.

ATHENIAN: Of the ten motions, then, which should we adjudge most correctly to be the most powerful of all, and most exceptionally effective? 894 d

CLINIAS: We must insist, I presume, that the motion that can move itself is enormously superior, and that all the others come after it.

ATHENIAN: Well said. In that case, must we rectify one or two of the incorrect statements we have made?

CLINIAS: What are you referring to?

ATHENIAN: What was said about the tenth wasn't really correct.

CLINIAS: In what way?

ATHENIAN: According to the argument, it is first in origin and in potency, and the one after it we hold is second, although we have just referred to it, oddly, as ninth. 894 e

CLINIAS: What do you mean?

ATHENIAN: Whenever we find something changing something else, and that in turn another and so on, will there ever be a first source of change in such a sequence? How indeed, when this is moved by something else, can this ever be the first of the things that are altered? It is impossible. But when this, having moved itself, changes something else, and that changes another, and thousands and thousands of things are moved in this way, would the source of all the movement of all these be anything other than change in the motion that moved itself? 895 a

CLINIAS: That's very well argued. These points must be conceded.

ATHENIAN: Then let's continue our discussion in this way, and let's reply to ourselves again. Suppose all things had come to a standstill together, as most thinkers of this sort have ventured to suggest, which of the motions we have mentioned would necessarily be the first to arise among them? It would of course be the motion that moves itself, for they will never undergo previous change by something else when there is no previous change among them. So, as the source of all motions, the first to arise among stationary things, and first in rank among things that are in motion, we shall necessarily declare the motion that moves itself to be the oldest and most powerful change of all, while the motion that is altered by something else, and then in turn moves others, comes second. 895 b

CLINIAS: Very true.

ATHENIAN: Well, now that we are at this point in the argument we should answer the following question. 895 c

CLINIAS: Which is?

ATHENIAN: If we were to see this motion in operation in something made of earth or water or fire, either separately or in combination, what condition would we say something of that sort was in?

CLINIAS: Aren't you asking me whether we should describe something as being alive whenever it moves itself?

ATHENIAN: Yes.

CLINIAS: Alive, yes of course.

ATHENIAN: What if we see soul in something? Is the situation any different? Mustn't we accept that it is alive?

CLINIAS: It's no different.

895 d ATHENIAN: Hold there, by Zeus. Wouldn't you be prepared to think of each thing as having three aspects?

CLINIAS: In what way?

ATHENIAN: One is the essence, one is the account of the essence, and one is a name. And, indeed, there are two questions you can ask about everything that exists.

CLINIAS: What are the two?

ATHENIAN: Sometimes when proffering the name itself we ask for the account, sometimes when presenting the account itself we ask in turn for the name. Anyway, don't we, for our part, wish to convey something like the following?

CLINIAS: Which is?

895 e ATHENIAN: Among numbers, and everything else too, there is, I presume, something that is divisible into two. The name of this in the case of number is 'even', and the account is 'number, divisible into two equal parts'.

CLINIAS: Yes.

ATHENIAN: That's the sort of thing I am referring to. Aren't we speaking of the same thing in either case, whether being asked for the account we respond with the name, or being asked for the name we give the account? By the name 'even' and by the account 'a number that can be divided by two', aren't we describing the same thing?

CLINIAS: Entirely so.

896 a ATHENIAN: What is the account, then, of that which is designated by the name 'soul'? Have we any other account apart from the one just stated: 'the motion that is able to move itself'?

CLINIAS: So the same essence, which everyone refers to by the name 'soul', has as its account 'that which moves itself'. Is that your point?

ATHENIAN: Well, that's what I'm saying. So, if this is how matters stand, do we still feel that it has not been satisfactorily proved that soul is the same thing as the first becoming and motion of anything that is, or has been, or will be, and, indeed, of the opposites of all these, since 896 b it has been shown to be the cause of change and motion in everything?

CLINIAS: No, it has been quite adequately proved that soul is the oldest of all, since it has turned out to be the source of motion.

ATHENIAN: Now, mustn't the motion arising in one thing because of another – motion that never gives anything the ability to move itself – come second, or, indeed, as far down the list as you wish to count it, since it is the change in a body that is in reality devoid of soul?

CLINIAS: Correct.

896 c ATHENIAN: So, our statement would be correct, authoritative, true and certain if we were to assert, as we have done, that soul is prior to body, while body is second and subsequent; that soul is ruling, while body is naturally being ruled.

CLINIAS: Yes, very true.

ATHENIAN: Now, we agreed in our earlier discussion, as I'm sure you recall, that if soul proved to be older than body, whatever belongs to soul would also be older than whatever belongs to body.

CLINIAS: Very much so.

896 d ATHENIAN: Then, tendencies, habits, intentions, reasoning, true opinions, attention and memories would have arisen prior to the height, breadth and depth of bodies, if soul is indeed prior to body.

CLINIAS: Necessarily.

ATHENIAN: Mustn't we necessarily agree next that the cause of whatever is good is soul, and also of whatever is evil, noble, shameful, just, unjust and all their opposites, if we are to insist that soul is indeed the cause of everything?

CLINIAS: There is no alternative.

ATHENIAN: Then, since soul controls and resides in everything that is moving anywhere, mustn't it also, necessarily, be said to control the heaven? 896 e

CLINIAS: Indeed.

ATHENIAN: Is there one soul, or more than one? More than one, I shall reply on behalf of both of you. We should propose at least two – one beneficent, the other capable of producing the opposite effect.

CLINIAS: Absolutely correct.

ATHENIAN: So be it. Soul impels everything in heaven and earth and ocean, by the motions of itself whose names are intention, consideration, attention, deliberation, opinion both correct and false, delight and tribulation, confidence and fear, hatred and affection. It impels them by these, and by any motions that are akin to these or are primary in their operation. And bringing in their train the motions that are secondary in their operation, and those of bodies, they impel everything to increase or decrease, disperse or combine, and to adopt the related qualities of hot and cold, heavy and light, hard and soft, white and black, bitter and sweet, and all those to which soul has recourse, when with reason – which is ever, rightly, a god to gods – as its helper, it leads everything happily and in the right way, or when it consorts with unreason and produces the very opposite effect in every case. Should we propose that this is how matters stand, or do we still suspect it might be otherwise? 897 a
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CLINIAS: Not at all.

ATHENIAN: What kind of soul should we say is in control of heaven and earth and their entire cycle? One that is wise and full of excellence, or one that is possessed of neither? Would you like us to respond as follows? 897 c

CLINIAS: How?

ATHENIAN: If, my friend, we are to state that the entire course and motion of heaven, and of everything it contains, resembles the natural motion, circuit and calculations of reason, and proceeds in a kindred manner, we must of course maintain that the very best soul cares for the entire universe and leads it along that course.

CLINIAS: Correct.

ATHENIAN: But if it proceeds in madness and disorder, then the bad soul is in control. 897 d

CLINIAS: That's also correct.

ATHENIAN: What, then, is the nature of this motion of reason? This, my friends, is a difficult question to answer already, with any degree of cogency. And so, it is only right that I take a hand in answering the question, along with you.

CLINIAS: A good suggestion.

ATHENIAN: Well, in giving our answer let's not, so to speak, look directly at the sun and turn our midday to dark night, acting as though reason could ever be adequately seen and discerned with mortal eyes. Looking at an image of our quest would be a safer way to view it. 897 e

CLINIAS: In what way?

ATHENIAN: Of those ten motions, let's adopt the motion which reason resembles as our image. I'll recall this along with you, and then give the answer.

CLINIAS: An excellent suggestion.

ATHENIAN: Well, of what was said at the time, do we still at least recall that we proposed, in general, that some things are in motion, while others are at rest?

CLINIAS: Yes.

898 a ATHENIAN: Again, of those that are in motion, some move in one location while others traverse several.

CLINIAS: So they do.

ATHENIAN: Of these two, the one that moves in one place must always move about some centre, being an imitation of a wheel fashioned on a lathe, and must as far as possible be akin to and resemble the circuit of reason in every respect.

CLINIAS: What do you mean?

898 b ATHENIAN: If we were to say that reason, and the motion that occurs in one place – both resembling the motions of a fashioned sphere – move of course regularly, in the same way, in the same place, concerned with the same things, in accord with the same things, and a single principle and arrangement, we would never prove ourselves to be inferior craftsmen of noble, verbal images.

CLINIAS: Quite right.

ATHENIAN: Then again, motion that never occurs in the same way, nor regularly, nor in the same place, that is not concerned with nor in accord with the same things, that does not move with a single motion, order or arrangement, nor on a single principle, would be akin to total unreason.

CLINIAS: Very true. It would, indeed.

898 c ATHENIAN: At this stage there is no further difficulty in stating categorically that since soul, for us, is what drives everything about, we must declare that the circuit of heaven is necessarily driven about, whilst being cared for and ordered by either the best soul or its opposite.

CLINIAS: No, stranger. From what has been said just now, it would be unholy to deviate from the statement that what drives these about is one soul, or more than one, possessed of total excellence.

898 d ATHENIAN: You have followed the argument exceedingly well, Clinias. But please attend to the following additional point.

CLINIAS: Which is?

ATHENIAN: Consider the sun, moon and other stars. If soul does indeed impel everything, would it not also impel each one individually?

CLINIAS: Indeed.

ATHENIAN: Then, let's construct arguments concerning one star, and these will prove for us to be applicable to them all.

CLINIAS: Which one?

898 e ATHENIAN: Although everyone sees the sun's body, no one sees its soul, nor indeed the soul of any other creature's body, alive or dead. But there is great hope that this kind of thing, which cannot be perceived at all by our bodily senses, envelops us, and can be known by reason. By reason alone then, and by thinking, we should understand the following point about this.

CLINIAS: Which is?

ATHENIAN: Since soul impels the sun, we wouldn't go too far awry in saying that it does so in one of three ways.

CLINIAS: Which are?

899 a ATHENIAN: Either it resides within this apparent spherical body and conveys this sort of thing everywhere, just as the soul in us carries us everywhere. Or, as some argue, soul, having procured for itself an external body of fire or air, forcibly pushes body with body. Or thirdly, soul itself, devoid of body, exercises its guidance, possessed of other exceedingly wondrous powers.

CLINIAS: Yes, this must necessarily be so. Soul must impel everything by acting in one of these ways.

ATHENIAN: Better than this, this soul brings light to us all, and whether it does so by having the sun in a chariot, or acts from outside or by some other means, everyone should regard it as a god. Is this so?

CLINIAS: Yes, unless they had reached an extreme of unreasonableness. 899 b

ATHENIAN: Concerning all the stars then, the moon too and the years, months and all the seasons, have we any alternative than to give the very same account? Since soul or souls have turned out to be the causes of all these, being good in respect of every excellence, we shall say that souls are gods, whether they order the entire heaven while present in bodies as living beings, or in some other way. Now, is there anyone, agreeing with all this, who will tolerate the assertion that ‘all things are not full of gods’?¹

CLINIAS: No, stranger, there is no one so disordered in his thinking as that. 899 c

ATHENIAN: Then, Megillus and Clinias, by stating our terms to the person who until now does not believe in gods, let’s have done with the matter.

CLINIAS: What terms?

ATHENIAN: He should either teach us that we are wrong in proposing that soul is the first origin of everything, and in the various conclusions we drew from this, or if he is unable to improve upon our account, he should adopt it and spend the rest of his life believing in the gods. So, let’s decide at this stage whether we have done a good job of explaining to those who don’t believe in gods that there are gods, or whether we have fallen short. 899 d

CLINIAS: We have not fallen short in the slightest, stranger.

ATHENIAN: Well, let that be the end of our argument with these people. But we should now admonish those who believe that, although the gods exist, they have no concern for the affairs of us humans. “Good man,” we shall say, “as for your belief in gods, it is perhaps some divine kinship that draws you to your common stock, in honour and belief. Now, the fortunes of evil and unjust people in private and in public, are, in truth, unhappy, although they are acclaimed as happy, insistently but erroneously, by public opinion, and so you are led into impiety by their improper celebration in poetry and stories of all sorts. Or again, when you see old men coming to the end of their lives, leaving children and children’s children behind, who are held in the highest regard, perhaps you are troubled when you find out, either from others or from personal experience, that amongst their number lots of awful, impious deeds have taken place, and through these very acts they have risen from lowly status to tyrannical power and the highest office. Then, faced with all this, you are obviously reluctant to hold the gods responsible for this sort of thing, because they are your kindred. So, driven by poor reasoning and your inability to criticise the gods, you have ended up in your present predicament where you believe that, although the gods exist, they despise us humans, and don’t care about our affairs. Now, so that your current belief does not land you in a worse predicament in terms of impiety, and so that you may be able somehow to banish it by arguments, as it draws nigh, let’s attempt to attach the related argument, the one we expounded initially to the total unbelievers, and use this for our present purposes too.” You, Clinias and Megillus, should accept the role of answering on the young man’s behalf, as you did before. And I, if any difficulty comes up in the argument, will take over from you, as I did just now, and get you across the river. 899 e
900 a
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CLINIAS: You are right to say all this. So, do as you suggest, and as best we can we’ll do as you bid us.

ATHENIAN: Well, perhaps it would not be too difficult to demonstrate this much at least, that the gods are careful about minor matters, more so, indeed, than about matters of great importance. 900 d

¹ This statement has been attributed to Thales, who was one of the first of the early Greek philosophers.

Indeed, the young man was presumably present at our discussions recently and heard it said that the gods, being good in respect of every excellence, have care for all things, as something that is most appropriate to themselves.

CLINIAS: Yes, he certainly heard that.

ATHENIAN: Well, next, let us join together and enquire into what is meant by this excellence of theirs, by which we agree that the gods are good. Come on then, to be sound-minded and possessed of reason belongs to excellence, while their opposites belong to evil. Is this what we maintain?

CLINIAS: We do.

900 e ATHENIAN: And, indeed, that courage belongs to excellence, while cowardice belongs to evil?

CLINIAS: Very much so.

ATHENIAN: And of these, shall we maintain that the latter are shameful, while the former are noble?

CLINIAS: We must.

ATHENIAN: And shall we say that the base qualities, if they belong to anyone, belong to ourselves, while the gods have no share, great or small, in anything of this sort?

CLINIAS: Everyone would agree with this too.

ATHENIAN: What about this? Shall we insist that carelessness, idleness and indulgence constitute excellence of soul? What do you say?

CLINIAS: No, how could we?

ATHENIAN: So the opposite is the case?

CLINIAS: Yes.

901 a ATHENIAN: So, do their opposites constitute the opposite condition of soul?

CLINIAS: Yes, the opposite.

ATHENIAN: In that case, for us, won't any person who is indulgent, careless and idle be someone whom the poet described as "most like a stingless drone"?²

CLINIAS: And he was quite right to say so.

ATHENIAN: Therefore, it must never be said that God has such a disposition as this, a disposition He Himself detests, nor must we allow anyone to attempt to utter such an opinion.

CLINIAS: No, indeed. How could we?

901 b ATHENIAN: Consider someone who is responsible for acting and really caring for something, but whose mind cares for major issues while neglecting small ones. What grounds could we have for praising such a person without going completely awry? Think of the matter as follows. Doesn't the behaviour of such a person, be he god or man, who acts like this take one of two forms?

CLINIAS: What are they?

901 c ATHENIAN: Either he is of the view that neglect of the minor matters makes no difference to the whole, or, in spite of the difference it makes, he neglects them out of indifference and indulgence. Or does carelessness arise in any other way? For, presumably, when it is actually impossible to care for all of them, it will not in that case constitute carelessness for things small or great, when someone, be he a god or an ordinary person, neglects what he is unable to care for because it is impossible for him to do so.

CLINIAS: No, how could that be carelessness?

901 d ATHENIAN: At this stage, then, let the two parties respond to the three of us. They both accept that gods exist, but one says they can be appeased by entreaty, the other that they don't care about little things. You first assert, both of you, that the gods know and see and hear everything, and in any cases where there is knowledge or perception, nothing can escape their notice. Is this what you maintain, or something else?

CLINIAS: This.

ATHENIAN: Don't they also agree that gods are capable of anything that mortals and immortals are capable of?

CLINIAS: How could they fail to accept that this is also the case?

ATHENIAN: And the five of us have already agreed that gods are good and excellent.

901 e

CLINIAS: Very much so.

ATHENIAN: In that case, is it not completely impossible for us to accept that they do anything at all out of indifference and indulgence, given that they are as we agree that they are? Indeed, among ourselves at any rate, idleness is born of cowardice, and indifference of idleness and indulgence.

CLINIAS: Very true.

ATHENIAN: None of the gods, then, show a lack of care out of idleness and indifference, since they are not possessed of cowardice.

CLINIAS: Correct, indeed.

ATHENIAN: Therefore, we conclude that if they do indeed neglect the small and insignificant details of the All, they would do so either thinking that nothing of this sort should be cared for at all, or, alternatively, we can only conclude that they think the direct opposite.

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CLINIAS: There is no alternative.

ATHENIAN: So, my good and excellent man, what shall we presume your position to be? Are the gods ignorant? And although care is necessary, are they careless out of ignorance of this fact? Or do they know full well that care is necessary, but behave as the basest of us humans are said to behave? They know that another course of action is better, but don't act accordingly because they are somehow overpowered by pleasures or pains.

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CLINIAS: Impossible.

ATHENIAN: Now, don't human affairs have a share in the ensouled nature, and at the same time isn't a human being the most god-fearing of all creatures?

CLINIAS: So it seems.

ATHENIAN: And we maintain, indeed, that all beings that are mortal are possessions of the gods, and that the whole heaven belongs to them too.

CLINIAS: Of course.

ATHENIAN: At this stage, then, anyone may assert that these issues are small or large in the eyes of the gods. But that doesn't matter, since in neither case would it be proper for those who own us to show a lack of care, when they are supremely caring and good. Yes, and there is something else we should consider besides these.

902 c

CLINIAS: Which is?

ATHENIAN: When it comes to perception and power, aren't these two, by nature, direct opposites of one another in respect of ease and difficulty?

CLINIAS: In what way?

ATHENIAN: It is more difficult, I presume, to see and hear small things than large things, while on the other hand it is easier for everyone to move, control and care for the small and the few, than for their opposites.

CLINIAS: Very much so.

902 d

ATHENIAN: Consider a physician, given the task of treating a body as a whole. If he is willing and able to care for whatever is large, yet neglects the parts and anything small, will he ever have the entire body in good condition?

CLINIAS: Not at all.

ATHENIAN: No. Nor indeed will steersmen, generals, household managers, nor indeed certain

² Hesiod, *Works and Days* 304.

902 e statesmen, nor anyone else of this sort, succeed with the many and great, without the few and the small. In fact, even stonemasons say that without the small stones, the large ones don't sit well.

CLINIAS: No, how could they?

ATHENIAN: Let us never accuse God then of being inferior to mortal craftsmen, who the better they are at their own proper tasks, great or small, the more precisely and perfectly do they execute them in virtue of a single skill. No. Let us never presume that God, being perfectly wise, 903 a willing to care, and able to do so, does not care at all for small things that are easy to care for – just like some idle coward who shirks the work – but does care for the large things.

CLINIAS: We should never adopt an opinion of this sort about the gods, stranger, for the very notion would be unholy and untrue.

ATHENIAN: I think we have now, already, done very well in arguing against the person who likes to accuse the gods of not demonstrating care.

CLINIAS: Yes.

903 b ATHENIAN: Well, he has at least accepted, in virtue of the force of our arguments, that what he is saying is incorrect. And yet it seems to me that something further needs to be said to charm him.

CLINIAS: What sort of thing, my friend?

ATHENIAN: We should persuade the young man, with our arguments, that the one who cares for the All has organised everything with a view to the safety and excellence of the whole, and so each part of the entire, as best it can, experiences and enacts whatever is appropriate. And there are rulers of what's experienced or enacted allocated to these various parts, in each case down to the very smallest, who have attained perfection down to the last detail. Your 903 c own part too, tiny as it is, my stubborn friend, is one of these, ever intent upon the All, ever looking thereto. But you have overlooked this very point: that all generation is for the sake of the All, so that a blissful existence may be secured for the life of the world, which is not created for your sake. No, you are created for its sake. For every physician and skilled craftsman does all his work for the sake of the entire, fashioning the part to serve an overall purpose, the part being for the sake of the whole, rather than the whole for the sake of the part. But you are troubled because you don't recognise that in your own affairs what is best for the All turns out also to be best for you, based on the power of your common origin. And since soul is continually being united with body after body, undergoing multifarious changes of itself or because of another soul, no other role is left for the player of the game except to relocate the character that is becoming better to a better place, and the worse, to 903 d a worse place, based on what is appropriate in each case, so that each may be allotted its own proper destiny.

CLINIAS: In what way?

ATHENIAN: In the way that gods may exercise easy care of all things. I think I can describe it in this way. If someone with a constant eye upon the whole, whilst changing the forms of all things, were to fashion fire, for example, into ensouled water, rather than making lots of 904 a things from one or one from many, then once they had undergone their first, second or third generation, the variations in the changing arrangement would be unlimited in multiplicity. But as matters stand, the one who cares for the All has a wonderfully easy task.

CLINIAS: Again, in what way?

ATHENIAN: As follows. Our king has observed that all our actions involve soul, and that among these many are excellent while many too are evil, and that body and soul, once they have 904 b come into being, are indestructible but not eternal, just like the gods ordained by law. For there would never be any generation of living beings if either of these two were destroyed. He realised, too, that any soul that is good is always naturally beneficial, while the evil does

harm. So, being aware of all this, He devised a location where each of the parts might lie, to ensure the triumph of excellence and the defeat of evil in the All, in the best and easiest way. In fact, He has devised, in furtherance of this overall purpose, what sort of character, as it develops, should always occupy what sort of position, and in what precise regions it should dwell. The causes of generation of any particular sort he left to the will of each of us. For, in general, the manner of someone's desires in each case, and the nature of his soul, largely determines the sort of person every one of us becomes. 904 c

CLINIAS: Quite likely.

ATHENIAN: So, all things that partake of soul undergo change, having acquired within themselves the cause of change, and as they change they move in accordance with law and the ordinance of fate. The smaller the change of the characters, the less do they proceed on the surface of the region, while with the greater and the more unjust change, they descend into the depths and the so-called 'regions below', which go by the name Hades, and the like, filling people with fears and imaginings whilst alive, or when the body falls. Whenever the soul partakes of evil or excellence to a greater extent, of its own free will or because of the strength of the company it keeps, then, if it has had communion with divine excellence, it becomes pre-eminently divine, and moves to a special, completely holy region, borne to another better place. Under the opposite circumstances, it is transported to the opposite region to live out its life. 904 d 904 e

This is the just decree of the gods who inhabit Olympus.³ Take note, my impetuous child who believes that the gods care not, that the one who becomes more evil proceeds to the more evil souls, while the one who becomes better goes to the better, to experience and to enact there, in life and in various deaths, whatever it is appropriate for like to do to like. From this decree of the gods, neither you nor anyone else who has fallen into misfortune shall ever boast of having escaped. For gods who issue decrees have prescribed this one especially above all others, and it should be heeded without reservation. For you will never evade its care, neither by being so small as to dive beneath the depths of the earth, nor by becoming so exalted as to ascend to the very heaven. And you will pay them the proper price, either whilst remaining here, or, indeed, when you have proceeded to Hades, or even when you have been transported to a still more fearsome region than these. You will find that the same argument also applies to those people whom you have seen becoming great from insignificant beginnings, through unholy deeds or the like. You thought they had come out of misery into a blessed life, and that you had discerned in their actions, as though in a mirror, total neglect on the part of the gods, not realising how precisely their contribution fits into the entire. So, my most vigorous friend, this decree must be understood. How could you think otherwise? Someone who does not understand this would never have even an inkling about human life, nor be able to contribute a single word on what makes it happy or miserable. Now, if Clinias here, and the rest of our aged gathering, persuades you of all this, that when it comes to the gods you don't know what you are saying, then thank God for it. But if you require some further argument, then listen, if you are possessed at all of reason, as we address our third opponent. Indeed, I would claim that we have demonstrated to you, and made a fairly good job of it, that the gods exist and care about us humans. But the further proposition, that the gods are susceptible to being placated by wrongdoers provided they are given gifts, should not be accepted by anyone, and should furthermore be refuted by every possible means. 905 a 905 b 905 c 905 d

CLINIAS: Well said. We should do as you propose.

³ *Odyssey* xix.43, Bury.

905 e ATHENIAN: Come on then, by the gods themselves! In what way might they be placated by us, if they could actually be placated? And what would they be, and what sort of beings would they be? They must necessarily be rulers, I presume, since they manage the entire heaven to perfection.

CLINIAS: Quite so.

ATHENIAN: But what kind of rulers do they resemble? Or, comparing small with great, of all the rulers with whom we could compare them, which are they like? What about comparing them to drivers of competing teams, or steersmen on ships? Or perhaps they might be likened to commanders of armies, or indeed they might be like physicians looking after the
906 a body in a war against diseases, or like farmers fearfully anticipating seasons that tend to be difficult for the growth of plants, or even like herdsmen.

For since we have agreed among ourselves that the heaven is full of much that is good and also of the opposite, and that there is more of what is not good, the battle, according to us, is undying, and requires wondrous guardians. The gods are our allies, and so are the daimons, and we are, in fact, possessions of the gods and daimons. Injustice and wantonness, accompanied by ignorance, are our undoing, while justice and sound-mindedness,
906 b accompanied by wisdom, are our salvation. And these reside in the ensouled powers of the gods, but some trace of such powers may be clearly seen residing here within ourselves. But there are souls dwelling upon earth, and they have acquired unjust gain, akin of course to wild animals. They prostrate themselves before the souls of the guardians, be they watch-dogs, shepherds or supremely exalted masters, persuading them with flattering words and prayerful entreaties that, as the stories of the evildoers recount, they should be allowed to
906 c gain excessively at the expense of their fellow men, and suffer no grievous consequences. But we maintain that the transgression I have just named, the excessive gain, is called disease in the case of physical bodies, pestilence in the case of seasons and years, and in the case of cities and political systems this same transgression appears, through verbal transformation, as injustice.

CLINIAS: Entirely so.

906 d ATHENIAN: So, this argument really amounts to the claim that the gods are always forgiving towards unjust people and wrongdoers, provided they are given a share of the proceeds of the injustice. It's as if wolves were to give a share of their prey to the sheepdogs, who being appeased by the gifts would agree to the ravaging of the flocks. Isn't this, in effect, the argument of those who maintain that the gods can be placated?

CLINIAS: That's it, indeed.

ATHENIAN: Well then, to which of the guardians mentioned previously could anyone compare the
906 e gods without becoming a laughing stock? To steersmen, who, diverted themselves by the "flow and savour"⁴ of wine, overturn both ship and crew?

CLINIAS: Not at all.

ATHENIAN: Nor indeed to charioteers, all set for the contest, who are induced by gifts to give up their victory to another team.

CLINIAS: No, that would be a terrible verbal image to introduce into this argument.

ATHENIAN: Nor to generals either, nor to physicians, farmers or herdsmen, nor indeed to hounds who have been beguiled by wolves.

907 a CLINIAS: Mind your tongue. How could they?

ATHENIAN: Aren't the gods, all of them, the greatest of all guardians, concerned with what is most important to us?

CLINIAS: Very much so.

ATHENIAN: Shall we ever maintain then that those who guard the most precious things, and are

themselves excellent in their role as guardians, are inferior to dogs and ordinary people, who would never give up what is just because of some gifts offered by unjust men, in an unholy act.

CLINIAS: Not at all. The notion is intolerable. And of all those who are involved in any form of impiety, anyone who holds this opinion may well be adjudged, quite rightly, as utterly evil, and impious in the extreme. 907 b

ATHENIAN: May we assert then that our three propositions have presumably been adequately proved: that the gods exist, that they care about us, and that they are not at all susceptible to being placated when justice is at stake?

CLINIAS: Undeniably. Yes, we vote with you on these propositions.

ATHENIAN: And, indeed, they have been delivered with some vigour, in our thirst for victory over the evil folk, thirst for victory, my dear Clinias, in case the evil folk might prevail in their arguments, and presume that they are allowed to act as they wish, when they hold so many perverse ideas about the gods. It was our eagerness in the face of these issues that made us speak so assertively. And if we have made the least contribution towards persuading these men to hate their own character and somehow love its opposite, then we would have done well in delivering our preamble to the laws about impiety. 907 c

CLINIAS: Let us hope so. But if not, the nature of the argument will at least bring no discredit upon the lawgiver. 907 d

ATHENIAN: After the preamble, a statement that would act as a correct interpreter of the laws should follow, forewarning the impious folk to change their ways utterly in favour of pious behaviour. For those who disobey, let the law be as follows. If anyone acts impiously in word or deed, whoever comes across this should defend the laws by reporting the matter to the officials. The officials who first find out should bring the offender before the court appointed to judge such matters, according to the laws. And if any official is informed, but fails to act on this, let the official himself be liable to a charge of impiety by anyone who wishes to exact punishment on behalf of the laws. And if someone is convicted, the court is to impose a particular penalty for each particular impious act. 908 a

Now, although imprisonment is to be imposed in every case, there are to be three prisons in the city: a common one in the area of the market place for most offenders – a secure location for the majority of cases; another close to the meeting place of the Nocturnal Council,⁴ is called the house of sound-mindedness; and a third in the middle of the country, in the wildest, most isolated place imaginable, whose very name speaks of punishment. Now, since there are three causes of impiety which we have already described, and from each such cause two kinds of impiety arise, there would be six kinds of people who fall into error concerning divine matters. These need to be distinguished, as they do not deserve an equal or similar penalty. Indeed, a person who does not believe that the gods exist at all may naturally come to possess a just character, and develop a hatred of evildoers. Due to their detestation of injustice, such people would never attempt to perform such deeds, and would avoid unjust people and love the just. 908 b

Others, as well as believing that the universe is devoid of gods, are afflicted with a lack of control over pleasures and pains, but are endowed with powerful memories and keen understanding. Now, although they both suffer in common from a lack of belief in the gods, one would do less damage to people in general, and the other, more, for he would be completely outspoken about gods, sacrifices and oaths, and so, by ridiculing others, he 908 c

⁴ *Iliad* ix.500.

⁵ The details of this administrative body are discussed later. See 961 ff.

908 d would probably make others like himself, unless he meets with justice. The other fellow, although he holds the same views as this one, is referred to as ‘gifted’, full of trickery and contrivance. From these types we are supplied with prophets aplenty, skilled in all sorts of magic. Sometimes, from their number, tyrants emerge, populists and generals too, and people who devise private mysteries, and the devices of those who are referred to as ‘sophists’.

908 e There would be many forms of these, two of which require laws to be enacted. The ironical form falls into an error that deserves not one death but two, while the other deserves admonition and imprisonment. In like manner, the belief that the gods do not care about us gives rise to two different kinds of impiety, and the belief that they can be placated to another two.

Once these distinctions have been made in this way, those who have acted out of ignorance, without having an evil disposition or character, are to be placed by the judge, as

909 a the law decrees, in the house of sound-mindedness for at least five years. During this time, none of the other citizens may associate with them, except members of the Nocturnal Council, who shall visit them for the purposes of admonition and the salvation of their souls. When their term of imprisonment has run its course, any who are deemed to be sound-minded again may dwell among the sound-minded, but if not, and he is convicted once more of such a crime, let the penalty be death.

909 b But there are those who, in addition to their lack of belief in the gods, or their belief that they do not care for us, or can be appeased, have become like wild animals, and who, out of contempt for their fellow men, beguile the souls of many of the living, and claim to beguile the souls of the dead too, and promise to persuade the gods by enchanting them with sacrifices, prayers and hymns, and attempt, for the sake of money, to utterly ruin individuals, entire households and cities. Of these people, whoever is found guilty is to be sentenced by the court to imprisonment in the central prison, according to the law, where no free man shall ever visit them, and they shall receive a food ration from the attendants as decreed by the guardians of the law. When one of them dies, he is to be cast out beyond the borders, unburied. If some free citizen helps to bury him, anyone who wishes is allowed to prosecute him for impiety. If he leaves children behind, fit to be citizens, they are to be

909 c cared for by those who look after orphans, just as well as for any other orphans, from the day of their father’s conviction.

A law should be laid down, applicable in common to all these transgressors, which would make most of them offend less against the gods in word and in deed, and, what’s more, become less foolish by forbidding them from dealing in divine matters, in contravention of the law. Indeed, the following law applicable to all cases should be laid down without exception: no one is to have a shrine in his own home. If anyone is moved to perform a sacrifice, let him attend and do so at the public sacrifices, placing his offerings in the hands of the priests and priestesses who are responsible for their consecration. And he himself shall join in the prayers along with anyone else he wishes to pray with. The reasons for all this are as follows. To establish shrines and gods is no easy task, and to do this sort of thing in the right way requires some serious thought. It is the habit especially of all women, and of those who are sick in any way, and people in peril or deprivation regardless of the cause of the deprivation, and under the opposite circumstances when things go well,

909 e to dedicate whatever is to hand at the time, and swear to offer sacrifices and promise to found shrines to gods, to daimons, or to children of gods. And fears caused by apparitions whilst awake, or by dreams and likewise, as they recall numerous visions and are inclined to devise a remedy in each case, incline them to set up altars and shrines, and with these they fill every home and every village, and the open spaces too, and wherever it occurs to such people to place them. For all these reasons, it is necessary to act in accordance with

910 a

the law we have just described, so that the fraudulent behaviour of the impious people does not extend to these matters too by establishing shrines and altars in private households, believing that they are making the gods agreeable, in secret, through their sacrifices and prayers. They are multiplying their own level of injustice enormously, and so they render themselves, and the better people who trust them, guilty in the eyes of the gods, and the whole city thus reaps the harvest of impieties, and rightly so. 910 b

God, however, shall not blame the lawgiver. Indeed, let this law be set down: there is to be no possession of shrines in private households, and whoever is caught owning or worshipping at any shrines, except the public ones, regardless of whether the owner is a man or a woman, provided their wrongdoing is not enormously unholy and whoever notices this is to inform the guardians of the law, who in turn are to order that the private shrines be removed to the public areas, and if the owners do not co-operate, they are to impose penalties until the shrines are removed. But if someone is found to be acting impiously, not the trivial impieties of children but the serious impieties of mature adults, either by setting up shrines in private or while performing public sacrifices to any god whatsoever, he is to be sentenced to death for performing sacrifices when he is not in a pure state. The guardians of the law, having decided whether the offence is childish or not, shall bring the offenders before the court, and, accordingly, impose the penalty upon them, appropriate to their impiety. 910 c

910 d
