

The Judgement Of Soul

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Soc: 523A Then listen to a very beautiful narrative – as they say – one which I believe you may regard as a myth, but which I regard as an account, for whatever I am about to recount to you I shall recount as the truth. Indeed, as Homer explains, Zeus, Poseidon and Pluto made a distribution of the sovereignty, after they inherited it from their father.[51] Now there was a law relating to humanity from the time of Cronos, which had always been in place, and still is among the gods. Those people who have passed their lives in a just and holy manner, **523B** depart after they die to the Isles of the Blest to dwell in complete happiness far from evils, while those who have lived in an unjust and godless manner go to the prison-house of retribution and justice that they call Tartarus. But in the time of Cronos, and even more recently under the sovereignty of Zeus, their judges were alive, and they were judged whilst still alive, on the very day they were going to die, and so the cases were judged badly. Then both Pluto and the attendants from the Isles of the Blest went to Zeus, and reported that undeserving people were making their way to them **523C** in either place. So Zeus said, “Well, I shall stop this from happening. The cases are indeed being decided badly at present, for those who are judged are judged whilst fully clothed because they are judged whilst still living. So many people possessing degenerate souls are clothed in beautiful bodies, lineage and wealth, and once there is a trial, numerous witnesses appear on their behalf testifying that they have lived **523D** in a just manner. Now the judges are overwhelmed by all this, and what is more, they themselves are fully clothed as they make their judgements, having concealed their own souls behind eyes and ears and the entire body. All of these, both their own clothing and that of the people being judged, become a screen in front of them. So in the first place, he said, “Their foreknowledge of death must be stopped, for at present they know in advance. And so Prometheus **523E** has been instructed to put an end to this foreknowledge of theirs.[52] Hereafter they must be judged naked of all those additions, for judgement must be passed when they have died. And their judge must be naked, dead, immediately beholding their soul itself with his soul itself once each person has died, bereft of kindred, having left that entire order behind him on the earth, so that the judgement may be just. Now I, having recognised these issues before you did, have made judges of my own sons, two from Asia, Minos and Rhadamanthys, and one **524A** from Europe, Aeacus.[53] Accordingly, as soon as people die, they will pass judgement in the meadow, at the fork from which two roads lead, one to the Isles of the Blest and the other to Tartarus. Rhadamanthys will judge those from Asia, Aeacus those from Europe, and I shall bestow seniority upon Minos to give a final judgement in case either of the others are in perplexity, so that the decision about the destination of human beings may be as just as possible.”

Well, Callicles, this is what I have heard, and believe to be true, **524B** and on the basis of those accounts I conclude that certain consequences follow. It seems to me that death happens to be nothing else but the separation from one another of two entities, the soul and the body. And yet once they have been separated from one another, both of them retain their own condition, which is no worse than when the

man was alive, and so the body retains its own nature, and all the care it was given, and all the afflictions it suffered, are **524C** plain to be seen. For instance, if someone's body was large either by nature or through nurture or both, the corpse of this man will be large once he has died, and if he was fat it will be fat when he is dead, and the same goes for the other characteristics. And what is more, if he had long hair his corpse will be longhaired, and if he was a rogue who merited whipping and he had the scars, the imprints of the blows on his body, either from whips or from other injuries during his life, one can see that the corpse also has these when he is dead. Or if someone's limbs were broken or deformed during his life, those same features will be in evidence when he has died. **524D** And in short, whatever bodily features he developed while he was alive will also be in evidence, all of them or most of them, for some time after he has died.

And so, Callicles, it seems to me that the same argument applies to the soul. Everything in the soul is plain to be seen once she has been stripped of the body, both the natural qualities, and the effects that the person retains in his soul due to the conduct of particular actions. Now, when they arrive in front of the judge, those from Asia stand before **524E** Rhadamanthys, and Rhadamanthys stops them and beholds the soul of each, not knowing whose soul it is. And very often, having come across the Great King, or some other king or potentate, he observes that there is nothing healthy in the soul, rather it bears the marks of scourging, and is full of scars which his own behaviour has imprinted upon his soul on account of oath breaking **525A** and injustices. Its ways are all crooked due to falsity and pretence, and nothing is straight because its nurture was devoid of truth. And he sees the soul full of distortion and deformity due to licence, luxury, insolence and unrestrained actions. Having seen this, he sends it away in dishonour straight to the confine, where on arrival it will await the afflictions that are appropriate to it.

525B It is proper that all who undergo punishment, and are punished by another in the correct manner, either become better and are benefited, or else act as examples to other people, so that others who see them being afflicted by whatever they suffer may become better out of fear. Now those who are benefited, and make retribution before gods and men, are the people who have engaged in transgressions that are curable. Nevertheless, it is through pain and suffering that the benefit comes to them, both here and in Hades, for they cannot be quit of **525C** injustice in any other way. However, those who have engaged in utterly unjust actions, and are rendered incurable on account of such injustices, are the ones who act as examples to others. These people themselves are no longer benefited at all, since they are incurable. But other people are benefited when they see them suffering the most enormous, most painful and most fearful afflictions throughout eternity on account of their transgressions, simply hanging up as examples there, in Hades, in the prison-house, a spectacle and a warning to those unjust people who are continually arriving there. **525D** And if what Polus says is true, then I maintain that Archelaus will be one of these, as will anyone else who is a tyrant of that sort. And I believe most of these examples to other people have come from the ranks of tyrants, kings, potentates and those who administer the affairs of our cities, for these people, on account of their immense power, also engage in the most enormous and unholy transgressions. Homer bears witness to these claims when he represents kings and potentates as the ones who are punished throughout eternity in **525E** Hades – Tantalus and Sisyphus and Tityus.[54] But no one represents Thersites, or any other wrongdoer

who is a private citizen, as being incurable and afflicted by these enormous punishments, for in my view he lacked the immense power, and so he is more fortunate than those who do possess power. Anyway, Callicles, the people who become extreme evil doers come indeed from the ranks of the powerful, **526A** yet there is nothing to prevent good men from arising among them too, and those who do arise deserve great admiration. Indeed, Callicles, it is difficult, and deserving of much praise, to live one's life in a just manner having come by an enormous power to act unjustly. Few people of this sort arise. And yet they have arisen, both here and elsewhere, and in my view there will be more of them, noble and good in this excellence of managing **526B** in a just manner whatever is entrusted to them. One even became extremely well respected among the other Greeks as well, Aristides,[55] son of Lysimachus. But, best of men, most of the powerful people became corrupt.

Now as I was saying, once the judge Rhadamanthys gets hold of someone like this, he knows nothing else about him at all, neither who he is nor who he is descended from, except that he is an evil doer. And having discerned this, he dispatches him to Tartarus with a mark indicating whether he is regarded as curable or incurable, and when he arrives there he suffers whatever **526C** is appropriate. But sometimes when he looks upon another soul that has lived a holy life in company with truth, belonging to a private citizen or someone else, especially, or so I assert anyway, Callicles, the soul of a philosopher who has performed his own duties and has not been excessively active throughout his life, he is delighted and dispatches it to the Isles of the Blest. Aeacus also engages in the same activities, both of them holding a staff, but Minos sits and oversees them, he alone holding a **526D** sceptre of gold, as Homer's Odysseus says that he saw him

holding a golden sceptre, passing judgements upon the dead.[56]

Now then, Callicles, I have been persuaded by these accounts, and I give consideration to how I might present my soul to the judge in the healthiest possible condition. So having bid farewell to the honours so prized by humanity, practising the truth, I shall endeavour to live my life being as good as I can actually be, and when I die to die in the same manner. **526E** And to the best of my ability I encourage all other people as well, and indeed I exhort you in return towards this life and this struggle, which I assert exceeds all the struggles of this world. And I censure you, because you will be unable to assist yourself whenever you come to the trial and the judgement I have just described. Rather, having arrived in front of that judge, the son of Aegina, **527A** once he has hold of you and is controlling you, you will gape and you will be dizzy in that place, just as much as I am in this place, and someone will probably slap you contemptuously on the face and splatter you all over with mud.

Well then, perhaps these descriptions seem to you just like a myth an old woman might recount, and you despise them. And it would be no surprise if we were to despise them, if in our search we were somehow able to discover something better and truer than them. But now you see that the three of you, yourself, Polus and Gorgias, **527B** who really are the wisest Greeks of the present day, are unable to prove that one should live any other life than this one, a life which also turns out to be profitable in the hereafter. But in the midst of all these assertions, the others having been refuted, this proposition alone is left undisturbed: that it is necessary to

be more wary of doing injustice than of suffering injustice; and it is all the more important for a man to work at being good, both in private and in public, rather than seeming good; and if he becomes bad in some respect he should be punished. And this good, becoming good and paying a penalty by being punished, **527C** stands in second place after being good. And all flattery concerning yourself or concerning others, be they few or be they many, must be shunned, and rhetoric should be used in this manner, always directed to the just, and so should every other activity.

So heed me, and follow me to a place where, on arrival, you will be happy both in life and after death, as the argument indicates. And let someone despise you as a fool and splatter you with mud if he wants to. Yes, by Zeus, and be bold enough to let him strike you that contemptuous **527D** blow, for nothing terrible will befall you if you really are noble and good, practising excellence. And after we have practised together in this way, then at that stage, if we deem it useful, we shall contribute to civic affairs, or we shall deliberate upon whatever issues occur to us, as we shall be better equipped to deliberate than we are now. Indeed it is quite disgraceful, given our present condition, that we disport ourselves in a youthful fashion as if we amounted to something, we who are in such an ill-educated state that we never, ever, hold the same views on the same issues, even on issues of the utmost importance. **527E** So let us use the argument that has now been revealed to us, just like a guide. It has indicated to us that this way of life is best: to live and to die in the practice of justice and all other excellence. So let us follow this, and encourage others to do so, and not that way of life that you believe in and encourage upon me, for that is worth nothing, Callicles.