

Why was Socrates charged with “introducing religious innovations”?

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Some relevant texts

(T1) DL 2.40: τάδε ἐγράψατο καὶ ἀντωμόσατο Μέλητος Μελήτου Πιτθεὺς Σωκράτει Σωφρονίσκου Ἀλωπεκῆθεν· ἀδικεῖ Σωκράτης, οὓς μὲν ἡ πόλις νομίζει θεοὺς οὐ νομίζων, ἕτερα δὲ καινὰ δαιμόνια εἰσηγούμενος· ἀδικεῖ δὲ καὶ τοὺς νέους διαφθείρων. τίμημα θάνατος.

This indictment and affidavit is sworn by Meletus, the son of Meletus of Pitthos, against Socrates, the son of Sophroniscus of Alopecce: Socrates is guilty of not recognizing the state-sanctioned gods, and of introducing religious innovations. He is also guilty of corrupting young men. The penalty demanded is death.

(T2) X. *Mem.* 1.1.1: πολλάκις ἐθαύμασα τίσι ποτὲ λόγοις Ἀθηναίους ἔπεισαν οἱ γραψάμενοι Σωκράτην ὡς ἄξιός εἴη θανάτου τῆ πόλει. ἡ μὲν γὰρ γραφή κατ’ αὐτοῦ τοιάδε τις ἦν· ἀδικεῖ Σωκράτης οὓς μὲν ἡ πόλις νομίζει θεοὺς οὐ νομίζων, ἕτερα δὲ καινὰ δαιμόνια εἰσφέρων· ἀδικεῖ δὲ καὶ τοὺς νέους διαφθείρων.

I have often wondered by what possible arguments Socrates’ prosecutors persuaded the Athenians that he deserved death at the hands of the State. The indictment against him went something like this: “Socrates is guilty of not recognizing the gods recognized by the State and of introducing religious innovations; and he is guilty also of corrupting young men.”

(T3) X. *Ap.* 10–11: οὕτως δὲ γρόντα αὐτὸν ἔφη [εἰπεῖν], ἐπειδὴ κατηγορήσαν αὐτοῦ οἱ ἀντίδικοι ὡς οὓς μὲν ἡ πόλις νομίζει θεοὺς οὐ νομίζοι, ἕτερα δὲ καινὰ δαιμόνια εἰσφέρει καὶ τοὺς νέους διαφθείροι, παρελθόντα εἰπεῖν·

Hermogenes claimed it was with this resolve that, when the complainants charged him with not recognizing the gods recognized by the State, and with introducing other, strange divinities, and with corrupting young men, Socrates came forward and said ...

(T4) Pl. *Ap.* 24b-c: λάβωμεν αὖ τὴν τούτων ἀντωμοσίαν. ἔχει δὲ πῶς ᾧδε: Σωκράτη φησὶν ἀδικεῖν τοὺς τε νέους διαφθείροντα καὶ θεοὺς οὓς ἡ πόλις νομίζει οὐ νομίζοντα, ἕτερα δὲ δαιμόνια καινὰ. τὸ μὲν δὴ ἔγκλημα τοιοῦτόν ἐστιν.

“[L]et us ... take up their sworn statement. It goes something like this: Socrates is guilty, it says, of corrupting young men and of recognizing not the state-sanctioned gods but religious innovations. Such is the charge.”

(T5) Joseph. *Ap.* 2.267: νῦν γὰρ τὴν ἱέρειαν ἀπέκτειναν, ἐπεὶ τις αὐτῆς κατηγορήσεν, ὅτι ξένους ἐμύει θεοὺς· νόμῳ δ’ ἦν τοῦτο παρ’ αὐτοῖς κεκωλυμένον καὶ τιμωρία κατὰ τῶν ξένων εἰσαγόντων θεὸν ὄριστο θάνατος.

[The Athenians] recently put to death a certain priestess, because someone charged her with initiating others into the worship of strange gods, which was proscribed by law among them, with the penalty for those introducing a strange god set at death.

(T6) Euthias fr. [Anon. Segu. p.390,19–22 Spengel-Hammer]: ἐπέδειξα τοίνυν ὑμῖν ἀσεβῆ Φρύνην, κωμάσασαν ἀναιδῶς καινοῦ θεοῦ εἰσγήτριαν. Θιάσους ἀνδρῶν ἐκθέστους καὶ γυναικῶν συναγαγούσαν.

(T7) Pl. *Apol.* 27b-c: ἔστιν ὅστις ἀνθρώπων, ὦ Μέλητε, ἀνθρώπεια μὲν νομίζει πράγματ' εἶναι, ἀνθρώπους δὲ οὐ νομίζει; ἀποκρινέσθω, ὦ ἄνδρες, καὶ μὴ ἄλλα καὶ ἄλλα θορυβεῖτω: ἔσθ' ὅστις ἵππους μὲν οὐ νομίζει, ἵππικὰ δὲ πράγματα; ἢ ἀύλητάς μὲν οὐ νομίζει εἶναι, ἀύλητικὰ δὲ πράγματα; ...

ἔσθ' ὅστις δαιμόνια μὲν νομίζει πράγματ' εἶναι, δαίμονας δὲ οὐ νομίζει; ...

οὐκοῦν δαιμόνια μὲν φῆς με καὶ νομίζεις καὶ διδάσκεις, εἴτ' οὖν καινὰ εἴτε παλαιά, ἀλλ' οὖν δαιμόνια γε νομίζω κατὰ τὸν σὸν λόγον, καὶ ταῦτα καὶ διωμόσω ἐν τῇ ἀντιγραφῇ. εἰ δὲ δαιμόνια νομίζω, καὶ δαίμονας δήπου πολλὴ ἀνάγκη νομίζεις μέ ἐστιν. ... τοὺς δὲ δαίμονας οὐχὶ ἤτοι θεοὺς γε ἠγοῦμεθα ἢ θεῶν παῖδας; ...

οὐκοῦν εἴπερ δαίμονας ἠγοῦμαι, ὡς σὺ φῆς, εἰ μὲν θεοὶ τινὲς εἰσιν οἱ δαίμονες, τοῦτ' ἂν εἴη ὃ ἐγὼ φημί σε αἰνίττεσθαι καὶ χαριεντίζεσθαι, θεοὺς οὐχ ἠγοῦμενον φάναι με θεοὺς αὖ ἠγεῖσθαι πάλιν, ἐπειδήπερ γε δαίμονας ἠγοῦμαι: εἰ δ' αὖ οἱ δαίμονες θεῶν παῖδές εἰσιν νόθοι τινὲς ἢ ἐκ νυμφῶν ἢ ἐκ τινῶν ἄλλων ὧν δὴ καὶ λέγονται, τίς ἂν ἀνθρώπων θεῶν μὲν παῖδας ἠγοῖτο εἶναι, θεοὺς δὲ μή;

(T8) τούτου δὲ αἰτίον ἐστὶν ὃ ὑμεῖς ἐμοῦ πολλάκις ἀκηκόατε πολλαχοῦ λέγοντος, ὅτι μοι θεῖόν τι καὶ δαιμόνιον γίγνεται, ὃ δὴ καὶ ἐν τῇ γραφῇ ἐπικωμῶδῶν Μέλητος ἐγράψατο. ἐμοὶ δὲ τοῦτ' ἔστιν ἐκ παιδὸς ἀρξάμενον, φωνὴ τις γιγνομένη, ἢ ὅταν γένηται, αἰεὶ ἀποτρέπει με τοῦτο ὃ ἂν μέλλω πράττειν, προτρέπει δὲ οὐποτε.

[The reason why Soc. does not participate in politics is] that I have a kind of sacred or divine sign which Meletus has ridiculed in his indictment (ἐν τῇ γραφῇ). This began when I was a child. It is a voice, and whenever it speaks it turns me away (ἀποτρέπει) from whatever I was about to do, but it never impels me to positive action [overtranslating slightly] (προτρέπει).

(T9) Pl. *Euthyphr.* 3b: φησὶ γάρ με ποιητὴν εἶναι θεῶν, καὶ ὡς καινοὺς ποιοῦντα θεοὺς τοὺς δ' ἀρχαίους οὐ νομίζοντα ἐγράψατο τούτων αὐτῶν ἕνεκα, ὡς φησιν.

μανθάνω, ὦ Σώκρατες: ὅτι δὴ σὺ τὸ δαιμόνιον φῆς σαυτῷ ἐκάστοτε γίγνεσθαι. ὡς οὖν καινοτομοῦντός σου περὶ τὰ θεῖα γέγραπται ταύτην τὴν γραφήν, καὶ ὡς διαβαλῶν δὴ ἔρχεται εἰς τὸ δικαστήριον.

SOC: [Meletus] says that I am a maker of gods, on the ground that I create new gods while not believing in the old gods, he has indicted me for their [i.e., the young men's] sake, as he puts it.

EUTH: I understand, Socrates. This is because you say that the divine sign keeps coming to you. (3b; trans. Grube)

(T10) X. Mem. 1.1.2-3: [2] ... διετεθρύλητο γὰρ ὡς φαίη Σωκράτης τὸ δαιμόνιον ἑαυτῷ σημαίνειν: ὅθεν δὴ καὶ μάλιστα μοι δοκοῦσιν αὐτὸν αἰτιάσασθαι καινὰ δαιμόνια εἰσφέρειν. [3] ὁ δ' οὐδὲν καινότερον εἰσέφερε τῶν ἄλλων, ὅσοι μαντικὴν νομίζοντες οἰωνοῖς τε χρῶνται καὶ φήμαις καὶ συμβόλοις καὶ θυσίαις. οὗτοί τε γὰρ ὑπολαμβάνουσιν οὐ τοὺς ὄρνιθας οὐδὲ τοὺς ἀπαντῶντας εἰδέναι τὰ συμφέροντα τοῖς μαντευομένοις, ἀλλὰ τοὺς θεοὺς διὰ τούτων αὐτὰ σημαίνειν, κάκεινος δὲ οὕτως ἐνόμιζεν. [4] ἀλλ' οἱ μὲν πλείστοι φασιν ὑπὸ τε τῶν ὄρνιθων καὶ τῶν ἀπαντῶντων ἀποτρέπεσθαί τε καὶ προτρέπεσθαι: Σωκράτης δ' ὡσπερ ἐγίγνωσκεν, οὕτως ἔλεγε: τὸ δαιμόνιον γὰρ ἔφη σημαίνειν. καὶ πολλοῖς τῶν συνόντων προηγόρευε τὰ μὲν ποιεῖν, τὰ δὲ μὴ ποιεῖν, ὡς τοῦ δαιμονίου προσημαίνοντος: καὶ τοῖς μὲν πειθομένοις αὐτῷ συνέφερε, τοῖς δὲ μὴ πειθομένοις μετέμελε.

T10 Mem. 1.2.2: “It was common knowledge that Socrates claimed to have a “divine sign,” which in fact seems to me the principal reason that they charged him with “introducing strange divinities.” [3] But he introduced nothing stranger than others who recognize divination and make use of augury, oracles, omens, and sacrifices. These people do not suppose that birds or people making chance remarks themselves know what is advantageous for the users of divination, but rather that the gods use them as means to reveal this, which is precisely what Socrates believed. [4] Whereas most people claim that they are deterred or encouraged by the birds or chance remarks, however, Socrates said just what he thought: he claimed that his divine sign directed him. He even advised many of his companions what they should and should not do based upon the divine sign’s warning. Those who obeyed him benefited, and those who did not regretted it.”

(T11) X. Ap. 12-13: [12] καινὰ γε μὴν δαιμόνια πῶς ἂν ἐγὼ εἰσφέροιμι λέγων ὅτι θεοῦ μοι φωνὴ φαίνεται σημαίνουσα ὅ τι χρὴ ποιεῖν; καὶ γὰρ οἱ φθόγγοις οἰωνῶν καὶ οἱ φήμαις ἀνθρώπων χρώμενοι φωναῖς δήπου τεκμαίρονται. βροντὰς δὲ ἀμφιλέξει τις ἢ μὴ φωνεῖν ἢ μὴ μέγιστον οἰωνιστήριον εἶναι; ἢ δὲ Πυθοῖ ἐν τῷ τρίποδι ἰέρεια οὐ καὶ αὐτὴ φωνὴ τὰ παρὰ τοῦ θεοῦ διαγγέλλει; [13] ἀλλὰ μέντοι καὶ τὸ προειδέναι γε τὸν θεὸν τὸ μέλλον καὶ τὸ προσημαίνειν ᾧ βούλεται, καὶ τοῦτο, ὡσπερ ἐγὼ φημι, οὕτω πάντες καὶ λέγουσι καὶ νομίζουσιν. ἀλλ' οἱ μὲν οἰωνοὺς τε καὶ φήμας καὶ συμβόλους τε καὶ μάντις ὀνομάζουσι τοὺς προσημαίνοντας εἶναι, ἐγὼ δὲ τοῦτο δαιμόνιον καλῶ καὶ οἶμαι οὕτως ὀνομάζων καὶ ἀληθέστερα καὶ ὀσιώτερα λέγειν τῶν τοῖς ὄρνιθιν ἀνατιθέντων τὴν τῶν θεῶν δύναμιν. ὡς γε μὴν οὐ ψεύδομαι κατὰ τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ τοῦτ' ἔχω τεκμήριον: καὶ γὰρ τῶν φίλων πολλοῖς δὴ ἔξαγγείλας τὰ τοῦ θεοῦ συμβουλευόμενα οὐδεπώποτε ψευδάμενος ἐφάνην.

T11 Ap. [12] And how could I be introducing ‘religious innovations’ by saying that a god’s voice plainly indicates to me what I should do? Those who consult bird cries and random human utterances presumably base their judgments on voices too. And who will dispute either that thunder ‘voices’ itself, or that this constitutes an omen of very great significance? Doesn’t even the priestess herself upon her tripod at Delphi use her voice in announcing messages from God? [13] Besides, as far as both God’s foreknowledge and his communication of it to whomever he wants are concerned, what I myself claim in this case is again just what everybody says and thinks. But whereas they name their portents ‘birds,’ ‘utterances,’ ‘omens,’ and ‘prophets,’ I call mine a ‘divine sign’; and I think that by calling it this I speak more accurately and piously than those who attribute the gods’ power to birds. That I’m in any case not slandering God, I have the following proof: whenever I’ve conveyed his counsels to quite a few of my friends, I’ve never been proved wrong.”