

Epistles

ΕΠΙΣΤΟΛΑΙ

Plato

translated by David Horan

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EH: FIRST EPISTLE Plato to Dionysius: may you do well

Although I spent so much time with you, administering your rule and being trusted more than anyone, you received the benefits while I endured the vexatious slanders. For I knew that people would not think I co-operated in enacting any of your more cruel deeds since I have, as my witnesses, all those who are involved in government along with you, many of whom I have assisted and saved from no small harm. And although I have often protected your city on my own authority, I was sent away with less respect than befits a beggar, banished by you, ordered to sail away having spent so much time with you. Hereafter, I shall consider my own interest, adopting a less human approach, while you, being the tyrant that you are, will dwell alone.

As for the glistening gold you gave me on my departure, Baccheius, the bearer of this letter, is returning it. For it was neither adequate to provide for my journey, nor beneficial for my life in general, and its provision reflects very badly on your reputation as the donor, and not much less upon mine as the recipient. That's why I have not accepted it. Of course, to receive or give such a sum makes no difference to you, so now that you have it back, use it to serve another one of your associates just as you did in my case, for I have had enough of your services. And it is timely for me to quote Euripides, that should other misfortunes ever befall you, "You'll pray that such a man be by your side." And I wish to remind you that most of the other tragedians, when they present a tyrant on stage being slain by someone, they have him cry out, "Bereft of friends, wretched, I perish." But none of them portrays him as perishing for want of gold. The following lines too seem sensible to sensible people: It is not gold, though a shining rarity in mortals' hopeless life, nor gems nor silver couches, that brighten the eyes of men, nor broad and self-sufficient fields laden with the harvest, but the approving thought of upright men. Farewell, and please recognise how much advantage you have failed to obtain from us, so that you may behave better towards others.

EH: SECOND EPISTLE Plato to Dionysius: may you do well

I have heard from Archdemus that you think not only that I myself should say nothing about you, but that my friends too should neither do nor say anything bad concerning you. You made an exception in the case of Dion

only, but your argument that Dion is an exception implies that I do not have control over my own friends. But what you should do in future, I think, if anyone reports anything of this sort about any of us, is to write to me and ask me about it. For I shall be neither reluctant nor ashamed to speak the truth.

As for yourself and myself and our dealings with one another: both of us are, in a sense, known to every Greek. And our relationship is no secret. Why am I saying this now? It is natural that wisdom and great power combine somehow, and they constantly pursue and seek one another. For instance, whenever people talk about Hiero, or Pausanias of Sparta, they love to bring in their association with Simonides and what he did and said to them. And they are in the habit of celebrating Periander of Corinth and Thales of Miletus together, Pericles and Anaxagoras too, and indeed Croesus and Solon, both wise, with the powerful Cyrus. Then, the poets too, imitating these relationships, bring together Creon with Tiresias, Polyeidus with Minos, Agamemnon with Nestor, and Odysseus with Palamedes.

I am saying all this because I wish to demonstrate that when we both die, the stories told about us will not be silenced, and so we need to be careful about them. Now, in our case, it is still possible, God willing, if anything improper has been done in the course of our relationship heretofore, to correct this in word and in deed. For I maintain that if we are reasonable, true philosophy will be better regarded and better spoken of, but if we are corrupt, that will have the opposite effect.

Now, I shall explain how we should proceed and where justice lies. I arrived in Sicily with the reputation of being the most distinguished of those engaged in philosophy, and when I got to Syracuse I wanted to involve you in my cause so that I might see philosophy honoured even by the general public. But the outcome was not propitious for me. The explanation I give is that you appeared not to trust me very much and wanted to get rid of me and send for others instead, and out of mistrust, to find out what my business was. With that there was a general clamour declaring that you despised me and had more important matters to attend to.

What, then, is the right thing to do next? If you have total contempt for philosophy, then bid it farewell, and if you have heard better instruction than

mine from elsewhere, or have discovered better yourself, then respect those discoveries. But if my teachings are pleasing to you, you should also have special respect for me. So now, as in the beginning, you should take the lead and I shall follow. For if I am respected by you I shall have respect for you, but if I am not respected, I shall keep quiet. To sum up then, if you show respect, it is a credit to us both, whereas if I show respect, it is a reproach to us both.

The sphere is not correct, as Archedemus will explain when he arrives. And he really needs to explain the other matter, more venerable and divine than the sphere, which was perplexing you when you dispatched him. Now, it must be related to you in riddles so that if anything happens to the writing tablet in the recesses of sea or land, whoever reads it will not understand it. It says that everything is around the King of All, and everything is for the sake of that king, the cause of all that is good. Around the second are the second things, while the third things are around the third. The human soul hungers to learn about what sort of things these are by looking to the things that are kindred to itself, none of which are adequate. This question, dear son of Dionysius and Doris, or rather, the travail about it engendered in the soul, is responsible for all difficulties. And unless a person frees himself from this he shall never really encounter the truth.

But you told me in the garden under the laurels that you had thought of this yourself and that it was your discovery, and I replied that if this proved to be the case, you would be sparing me from lengthy discussions. Since although you think you are in possession of unassailable proofs, you have not established them securely, and so for you it flits around about the appearance, now in one direction, now in another. But the reality is not like this.

Now that all this has happened, we have more or less found the answer to the question in your letter as to how we should behave towards one another. For since you have tested my arguments by associating with others and comparing my arguments to theirs, if your test is a true one they shall begin to grow within you, and you shall be familiar with them and with us. You were right in sending Archedemus, and if you do this two or three times, and sufficiently test the answers sent from me, I would be surprised if your present difficulties did not take on a very different aspect than now.

However, you must be careful that these communications are never disclosed to uneducated folk, for to most people hardly any words sound more laughable than these, while on the other hand, to those with a natural affinity, none are more wonderfully inspiring. And being frequently repeated and constantly heard over many years, they are with much effort gradually rendered as pure as gold. There are people, many of them, who have heard these words and are now at a point where they say that what had once seemed utterly unbelievable to them now appears most credible and obvious. The greatest safeguard is to avoid writing and to learn by heart, for it is inevitable that what is written down will be disclosed. That is why I have never yet written about these matters, nor is there a written work of Plato, nor will there ever be, and those writings that are now said to be mine belong to a Socrates become fair and young. Farewell and believe. And now, first read this letter many times, then commit it to the flames.

Enough of this. As for Polyxenus, you were surprised that I sent him to you, but I give the same report now as in the past about Lycrophron and the others who are with you. When it comes to dialogue you are far superior to them by nature and in your method of argument. Indeed, it seems to me that you treat them and reward them in a measured way. If you have use for Phylition, employ him yourself by all means, but if possible please send him to Speusippus and let him employ the man. Speusippus himself asks you to do this too. You did well to release that man from the quarries. And the truth deserves to be spoken about Lysicleides, for he is the only Sicilian who, on arriving in Athens, did not misrepresent the relationship between the two of us. He continues, rather, to speak well and to find something good to say about what transpired.

EH: THIRD EPISTLE Plato to Dionysius: may you have joy

Having written thus, may I, perhaps, have hit upon the best mode of address? Or might it be better to follow my usual practice and write "may you do well", which is the greeting I habitually use in letters to friends? You yourself, of course, addressed the god at Delphi with this fawning utterance, writing, "I wish you joy and that you may preserve a pleasant tyrant's life," whereas I would not greet any human, or indeed a god, by calling upon them to do this.

In the case of gods, my injunction would run contrary to their nature, for the divine is situated at a far remove from pleasure and pain. And in the case of humanity, pleasure and pain are for the most part harmful, engendering dullness, forgetfulness, folly and arrogance in the soul.

I am informed, by no small number of people, that you told some of the ambassadors in your circle that I once overheard you saying that you were going to colonise the Greek cities in Sicily, and lighten the burden of the Syracusans by changing the rulership to kingship instead of tyranny. But according to you, I prevented you from doing all this at the time, whereas I am now instructing Dion to enact these very measures, thus using your own ideas to take your rulership away from you. But you do me an injustice when you speak contrary to the facts, for I have been slandered enough by Philistides and many others. But you yourself know full well that I willingly co-operated with you on a few of your political measures in the beginning when I thought this might do some good.

I came to Syracuse at the behest of yourself and Dion, who was a long-standing, tried and trusted friend of mine. He was middle-aged and settled, two prerequisites for those of even a little intelligence when they are about to give advice on affairs as important as yours at the time. You, on the other hand, were very young and very inexperienced in those matters in which you needed experience. Afterwards, some person or some god or some random event, with your involvement, expelled Dion and you alone remained. Do you think I would associate with you politically when, having lost my wise associate, I beheld only the unwise one left behind, surrounded by lots of degenerate men, not ruling but thinking he was ruling? I bade farewell to political affairs thereafter, being wary of the slanders and jealousies, and I endeavoured by all means to make the two of you the best of friends.

And although it was difficult, the two of us nevertheless agreed that I should sail home since you were involved in a war, and that when peace came, Dion and I were to return to Syracuse and you were to send for us. When peace came you sent for me, but not in accordance with the agreement. You wrote that I was to come alone, and you said you would send for Dion later. Because of this I did not go. After this, a year later, a trireme arrived along with letters

from you, and the chief purport of what was contained in the letters was that if I were to come to Syracuse, Dion's affairs would be organised in accord with my wishes, whereas if I did not, the outcome would be the very opposite.

You know of course what happened after I arrived. In fact, I asked, in accord with the agreement in our letters, firstly, that Dion be restored and that you be reconciled with him. Secondly, I asked that Dion's relatives retain his property and that the annual revenue usually sent to him should continue to be sent. When none of these requests were granted, I asked if I could depart. You then started persuading me to stay for the year, saying that you were selling all Dion's property and were going to send half of the proceeds to Corinth. But, you surprising man, you then topped all of your promises most insolently. For when you expelled Heraclides, an action that neither the Syracusans nor I myself regarded as just, you said that it had been obvious to you for a long time that I thought nothing of you, but only of Dion and his friends.

The argument comes more or less to the second statement against which I must defend myself. I confirm that, with Archedemus present in the garden, along with Aristocritus, some twenty days before I left Syracuse for home, you said then what you are now saying in your criticism of me, that I favoured Heraclides and all the others more than yourself. And you asked me if I remembered when I first arrived calling upon you to colonise the Greek cities. I agreed that I did remember and that I still thought this to be the best policy. But I must also repeat what was said next. For I then asked you whether this was the only piece of advice I gave you or whether there was something else besides this. And you answered me most angrily and contemptuously. You said, I recall, with much feigned laughter, "You bade me to do all of these things after I had been educated, or not do them at all." I replied that your recollection was excellent.

Now, the reason I am saying all this is as follows. Do not slander me by saying that I did not allow you to colonise the Greek cities ruined by the non-Greeks, or to lighten the burden of the Syracusans by introducing kingly rule in place of the tyranny. For in my case, no lie you could ever tell about me is less appropriate than these slanders. And indeed, there is no difficulty in stating plainly that the implementation of these measures was the best course for you,

the Syracusans, and for all Sicilians. But, my friend, if you deny saying these things, even though you said them, then justice lies with me. But if you agree that you said them, you should then regard Stesichorus as wise, imitate his recantation, and renounce your false account for the true one.

EH: FOURTH EPISTLE Plato to Dion of Syracuse: may you do well

I believe that my eager interest in the unfolding events has been evident all along, and also my serious concern that they be brought to a conclusion, mainly because of my high regard for noble deeds. For I think it is only right that those who are actually reasonable and who act accordingly should get the recognition they deserve. And although for the moment, thank God, things are going well, the greatest struggle is still to come. For although various others may seem to excel in courage, speed and strength, anyone would agree that those who claim to honour such qualities as truth, justice, and high-mindedness, and decorum in their display of all these, are naturally superior to others.

We need to make it obvious that we are the sort of people we say we are, especially since, God willing, it will be easy to do so. For other people, it proves necessary to wander abroad if they are to be well known, but with you the position is that people everywhere all look towards one place, and in that place they look most of all towards yourself. So, with the eyes of the world upon you, prepare to take on the role of a Lycurgus or a Cyrus of old. This is especially important since many people are saying that with Dionysius out of the way, there is a strong possibility that your endeavours will come to naught because of the rivalry between yourself, Heraclides, Theodotus, and other notable ambitious characters. Let us hope above all that no one behaves like this, but if anyone does so, you must assume the role of a healer.

Perhaps the fact that I am saying this appears comical to you since you yourself are not unaware of these details. But I observe that in the theatres, the actors are spurred on even by the children, not to mention their friends, provided the actor thinks the encouragement is serious and well-intentioned. So, you yourselves should now act out your parts, and if you need anything just write to us. And now, in spite of the fact that letters arrived in Sparta and Aegina from Theodorus and Heraclides, we still hear much but know nothing. But

also bear in mind that you seem to some people to lack the appropriate level of care. So, do not overlook the fact that pleasing other people is a means to acting successfully whereas self-will is the housemate of loneliness. Good fortune.

EH: FIFTH EPISTLE Plato to Perdiccas: may you do well

I advised Euphraeus, at your request, to spend time looking after your affairs. And it is only right that I give you friendly and so-called sacred advice about the other issues you mentioned and as to how you should now employ Euphraeus. The man is useful in many respects, but the greatest is one that you stand in need of because of your youth. For each political system has its own language, just like various animals, one belonging to democracy, another to oligarchy, another to monarchy. And although everyone claims to know these, most people, with few exceptions, fall short of fully understanding them. Now, whatever political system utters its own language towards gods or men, and makes its actions conform to its utterance, thrives and is preserved. But if it imitates another, it is undone.

Euphraeus should prove useful to you for these purposes at least, and he is also a good man in other respects too. So, by using him for these purposes you will benefit yourself and also be of enormous benefit to him. But if someone were to say, "It seems that Plato pretends to know what is of benefit to the democracy, but despite being allowed to address the populace and advise them as to what is best, he has never yet stood up and uttered a word," you should respond: "Plato was born at a late stage in the history of his fatherland, and he came upon a populace already advanced in years and habituated by their predecessors to many practices incompatible with Plato's advice. He would have been most delighted to give advice to the populace, had he not thought that he would be running risks in vain and accomplishing nothing worthwhile." Good fortune.

EH: SIXTH EPISTLE Plato to Hermias¹⁰, Erastus and Coriscus: may you do well

It is apparent to me that some god has graciously and adequately provided you with good fortune, if you can receive it well. For you live as neighbours and your needs are such that you are of great benefit to one another. As for

Hermias, neither abundance of horses nor other military resources nor accumulated gold would contribute more to his overall power than firm friends of sound character. And to Erastus and Coriscus, in spite of my age, I am saying they should supplement the noble wisdom of the forms with a wisdom and protective power that defends them against the wicked and the unjust. For they are lacking in experience because they have lived out much of their lives with us moderate folk who are not evil.

So what am I saying? To you Hermias, since I am more familiar with Erastus and Coriscus than you are, I assert, declare and bear witness that you will not easily find more trustworthy characters than these neighbours of yours, and I advise you to cleave to these two men by every just means as a matter of no secondary importance. And again, I am advising Coriscus and Erastus to cleave to Hermias and try to develop your mutual closeness into a united relationship of friendship. But if one of you somehow seems to be severing this relationship, for nothing human is entirely firm, send me and my associates here a letter declaring the nature of the complaint. For I believe that unless the breach happens to be grievous, any communications arriving from us here in justice and reverence would do more than any charm to unite you, and restore once again your previous ties of friendship and fellowship.

And if we all, yourselves and ourselves, apply philosophy to this fellowship as best we can, as the nature of each allows, the prophecies I am making will prevail. All three of you should read this letter, preferably together or in pairs, in fellowship to the best of your ability, as often as you can. Use it as a covenant and a supreme law, a just one, swearing earnestly, and at the same time poetically, with a playfulness akin to that earnestness. Swearing to the ruling god of everything that is now and is to come, supreme father of the ruling cause, whom we, if we genuinely engage in philosophy, shall all clearly know as far as possible for happy humans.

EH: SEVENTH EPISTLE Plato to the relatives and associates of Dion: may ye fare well

You wrote to me that I should regard your thinking as being the same as that of Dion, and indeed you encouraged me to support you to the best of my ability in word and in deed. I reply that if you actually hold the same opinion

and aspiration as that man, I promise to support you, but if you don't, this will require further consideration. And I can tell you from certain knowledge, without much need for conjecture, what his thinking and aspiration was. For when I arrived initially in Syracuse, aged about forty, Dion was the same age as Hipparinus is now, and he held the opinion then that he held to the very end. He thought that the Syracusans should be free people living under the very best laws.

When I was young, my experience was the same as many others. I thought that as soon as I had become my own master I would immediately enter into the public life of the city. For the political system at the time, being criticised by many, was overthrown, and fifty-one men set themselves up as leaders of that overthrow. Some of these happened to be relatives or acquaintances of mine, and indeed they encouraged me to join them as their undertakings were worthwhile. My feelings towards them were hardly surprising given my youth, for I thought they would administer the city by leading it out of an unjust manner of life to a just one.

And of course, I saw that these men did not take long to make the previous political arrangement look like a golden age. Among their various exploits, they also sent for Socrates, an elderly man who was dear to me, whom I would almost say unashamedly was the most just man alive at that time. They dispatched him, along with some others, to fetch one of our fellow citizens by force so that they could execute him. But he did not obey them, and he ran the risk of all sorts of consequences rather than getting involved in their unholy deeds. Seeing all this, and other actions that were just as bad, I was disgusted, and withdrew myself from the evils of that era.

But as it happened, again with this companion of ours, Socrates, influential people prosecuted him, bringing a most despicable accusation against him. They charged him with impiety, while others convicted him, and condemned to death the very man who had refused to get involved in the impious plot against one of their own exiled friends. Watching these developments, and seeing the sort of people who were conducting our political affairs and the state of our laws and habits, the more I saw, as I advanced in years, just how difficult it appeared to be to manage civic affairs in the right way. For it is

impossible to do this without friends and trustworthy associates, and to find such people readily available was not easy.

And I was compelled to say, in praise of right philosophy, that from this it is possible to discern all that is just in the political realm and among individuals. So, the evils of the human race shall not cease until either the sort of people who engage in philosophy, rightly and truly, come to power in political affairs, or those who exercise power in cities, by some divine portion, actually engage in philosophy. This was my thinking when I arrived in Italy¹⁵ and Sicily for my first visit. When I got there, the so-called 'happy life', replete with Italian and Syracusan banquets, did not please me at all. They live their lives, gorging themselves on food twice a day, never sleeping alone at night. For with such habits as these no human being under heaven could ever become wise, nor could anyone ever become sound-minded.

Holding these views as well as the earlier ones, I travelled to Syracuse, perhaps by chance, although it seems that some higher power then set in train the events which have now unfolded concerning Dion and Syracuse. When I met Dion, who was young at the time, and I explained in discussion what I believed to be best for humanity, and advised him to act on these precepts, I seemed unaware that I was somehow or other bringing about the impending overthrow of the tyranny without appreciating what I was doing. Now, Dion learnt very easily in general, and he listened with more keen attention than any young person I have ever come across to the subjects that my discourses dealt with. And he was willing to live the rest of his life in a different way from most of the Italians and Sicilians, for he had come to cherish excellence more than pleasure and general luxury.

After this, Dion concluded that such thinking, which he himself had arrived at through proper discourse, would not always be confined to himself. He thought that Dionysius might perhaps, with the assistance of the gods, become one of those who pursued such thinking. What's more, if such a development took place, the result would be a life of unbounded blessedness for himself and the rest of the Syracusans. Furthermore, Dion thought I should, by all means, get to Syracuse as soon as possible to join him in these endeavours. His request went as follows: "What greater opportunities are we

waiting for than those that have now been presented by some divine good fortune?” He described in detail the Italian and Sicilian empire, and his own influence therein, how young Dionysius was, and the intense desire he had for philosophy and education.

In the end I decided on balance that it was necessary to go. If anyone was ever to attempt to implement those thoughts about laws and political systems, now was the time to make the attempt, for by sufficiently convincing just one person, I would have brought about all sorts of benefits. Emboldened by this thinking, I sailed away from my homeland, most of all from a sense of shame on my own part in case I might seem to myself, well and truly, to be some mere word, unwilling to engage in any action whatsoever. By going, I freed myself in the eyes of Zeus, the god of strangers, and put myself beyond reproach on the part of philosophy, which would have been criticised had I disgraced myself through weakness of spirit and base cowardice. On arrival, to keep the story short, I found the circle around Dionysius full of all sorts of faction and slanders brought to the regime against Dion.

Although I defended him to the best of my ability, there was little I could do. And within four months or so, Dionysius accused Dion of plotting against his tyranny, put him on a small boat, and expelled him ignominiously. After this, we, the friends of Dion, were afraid that one of us might be accused and punished for being an accomplice in Dion’s plot. Being aware of how we felt, Dionysius received us all in a kindly spirit, and he reassured myself in particular, encouraging me to take heart and asking me in all sorts of ways to remain. For my departure from him would not have been to his credit, but my remaining with him would have been, and that is why he made a great pretence of imploring me to stay.

But we know that the requests of tyrants are always mixed with compulsion, and so he made arrangements to prevent my departure, bringing me to the acropolis and housing me where no ship’s captain would take me away, unless Dionysius himself sent them a written instruction to do so. As time went on, Dionysius became steadily more affectionate as he grew familiar with my manner and character, and he wanted me to praise him more than Dion and to regard him as a more special friend than Dion. But he was reluctant to learn

discourses concerning philosophy in close company with myself, fearing the words of the slanderers. I endured all this, preserving my initial thinking with which I had arrived in Sicily, hoping that he would somehow come to desire the life of philosophy, but he succeeded in resisting this.

These were all the circumstances involved in my visit to Sicily and my activities there on the first occasion. After this I departed, only to return once more at the most urgent request of Dionysius. But first I am to advise you about what you should do under the present circumstances. When advising a sick man whose lifestyle is injurious to his health, isn't it necessary in the first place to effect a change in his way of life, and give the rest of the advice only when he is willing to comply? But if he proves unwilling, I would regard someone who stops advising such a person as a manly physician, while someone who persists, I regard as an unmanly, unskilled physician. And the same holds for a city. But there are people who go completely away from the correct political system and have no desire whatsoever to follow in its path. They warn any adviser to leave the system as it is and not to disturb it, or they will put him to death. Anyone who persists in advising such people I regard as unmanly, and those who do not persist I regard as manly.

This, indeed, is the manner in which I would advise you, just as I, along with Dion, advised Dionysius, telling him firstly to live each day of his life in such a way as to be, most of all, master of himself, possessed of trustworthy friends and companions. This would ensure that he did not suffer the same fate as his own father, who annexed many great Sicilian cities that had been plundered by the non-Greeks, but was unable when he had colonised them to establish reliable political systems in any of them composed of men who were comrades. And there is no greater indicator of one's excellence or lack of excellence than being bereft of such people or not.

Since this was what had happened to his father, myself and Dion gave this advice to Dionysius, who had had no exposure to education or to appropriate company in the first place. He was advised to acquire other friends for himself from among his kindred, friends of a similar age with an affinity for excellence. But he was advised above all to acquire such affinity for himself, for he was remarkably deficient in this. Without speaking in such plain terms, for it was

unsafe to do so, we hinted at this, and we maintained in argument that this is how any man is to save himself and those for whom he is responsible. Proceeding as we suggested, if he were then to colonise the abandoned Sicilian cities and bind them to himself and to one another against the leagues of non-Greeks, we told him that he would not merely double the size of his father's empire, but actually make it many times larger.

These were the words of exhortation to Dionysius from ourselves, who, according to reports pouring in from all quarters, were conspiring against him. Such reports eventually led to Dionysius' expulsion of Dion, and put us in a state of fear. Now, to deal briefly with a number of events, when Dion returned from the Peloponnese and Athens he taught Dionysius a practical lesson. When Dion had liberated the Syracusans and given them back their city on two occasions, they had the same attitude towards him as Dionysius had when Dion tried to educate him and train him to be a king worthy of authority. These allegations prevailed for the second time among the Syracusans, and their prevalence was a bizarre and shameful victory for those who were responsible for this.

I, a citizen of Athens, a companion of Dion, his ally, went to the tyrant with the aim of converting hostility into friendship, but I lost my struggle against the slanderers. Yet, when Dionysius tried to use money and honours to persuade me to testify, as a friend, to the appropriateness of his expulsion of Dion, he failed utterly in his endeavours. Later, as Dion was returning home, he attached himself to two brothers from Athens who had become his friends, not from a love of wisdom but from ordinary companionship. And, indeed, these two friends, having joined him for his return, became his companions. But when they arrived in Sicily, once they saw that Dion was being slandered for plotting to become a tyrant by the very Sicilians he had liberated, not only did they betray their comrade and host, but they became more or less directly involved in his murder, for they stood by the murderers as allies, with weapons in their hands.

All this has been said by way of advice to Dion's friends and associates. But I now give you some additional advice, delivering the same advice and the same argument for the third time to yourselves as the third recipients. This is what I

say. Do not subjugate Sicily or any other city to human despots, but to laws. For subjugation is good neither for the subjugated nor for those who subjugate them, neither for themselves, their children nor their children's children. The first person I tried to convince of this was Dion, the second was Dionysius, and you yourselves are now third. Be persuaded then by me, for the sake of Zeus, the third, the saviour¹⁶, looking either to the case of Dionysius or of Dion, one of whom was unpersuaded and is now living an ignoble life while the other was persuaded and died a noble death.

We should always be truly persuaded by the ancient, sacred pronouncements which tell us that soul is immortal, that it has judges and pays great retribution when someone quits the body. That is why we should regard it as a lesser evil to suffer great wrongs and injustices rather than perform them. With these arguments, and others like them, I set about persuading Dion, and I would have very good grounds for being angry with those who murdered the man, and similarly with Dionysius, for both parties did enormous damage to me, and in a sense to all of humanity in general. The murderers did this by destroying a man who was intent upon practising justice, while Dionysius, despite his great power throughout his entire empire, refused to practise justice.

Now, factions have no rest from their evils until those who have won power stop revisiting past evils through open warfare, expulsion and slaughter, and give up the search for revenge upon their enemies, and exercise some control over themselves by passing laws that are common to all, involving no more advantage to themselves than to the defeated parties. They should compel these people to have recourse to the laws by employing two necessary forces, reverence and fear. Otherwise there is no way that a city with internal factions will ever abate its evils. Rather, for cities constituted in this way, factions, enmity, hatred and suspicion, internal to themselves, tend to arise unrelentingly.

So those who have won power should always, once they are truly desirous of security, select from among themselves the very best Greeks they can find, men who firstly are advanced in years, who have households of wives and children, and preferably ancestors aplenty, who are good, reputable and all

sufficiently well off. Fifty such people should suffice for a city of ten thousand citizens. Once the laws have been enacted, it is all-important that the victors render themselves more subservient to the laws than the vanquished. Then everyone will be safe, happiness will abound, and all the evils will be avoided. So, that's enough advice and direction about my first visit to Dionysius.

Once peace had been restored Dionysius began sending for me, and although he asked Dion to wait a further year, he made all sorts of requests for me to come. Dion kept asking and imploring me to travel, and indeed there was much report from Sicily that Dionysius had now become marvelously enthusiastic about philosophy once again. Nevertheless, it seemed safer at the time to stay well away from Dion and Dionysius, and I annoyed them both by replying that I was advanced in years. After this it seems that Archytas visited the court of Dionysius. In fact, before my departure I had forged a bond of hospitality and friendship between Archytas and his people in Tarentum and Dionysius.

In fact, Dionysius, on the third occasion, sent a trireme to make the journey easier for me, and he sent Archidamus, an associate of Archytas. He himself sent a very long letter, knowing full well of my relationship with Dion and Dion's eagerness that I make the journey and visit Syracuse. In fact, the letter dealt with all these considerations, beginning with: "Dionysius to Plato", followed by the usual civilities. And then, without further ado, it said, "If you are persuaded by us and come forthwith to Sicily, then first and foremost Dion's affairs will be arranged for you in whatever way you wish. But if you don't travel, none of Dion's affairs will unfold to your satisfaction." Other letters kept arriving from Archytas and his people in Tarentum, praising the philosophy of Dionysius. So I felt that I should unequivocally test how matters actually stood.

So, clothed in this reasoning, I went on my way with many fears and, as you might expect, a considerable foreboding. It really was a case of 'the third to the saviour'. Yet fortunately I came through safely once again, and for this, after God, I must be grateful to Dionysius, for although many people were intent upon my destruction, he prevented this. Once I had arrived there, I decided first of all to test whether Dionysius really was inflamed by the fire of

philosophy. There is a way of putting such matters to the test which is not crude and really well suited to tyrants. It is necessary to point out to such people what the subject is in its entirety, the sort of subject it is, and how much complexity and effort it involves. Someone who hears this, if he be really philosophic, will believe that he has heard something wonderful and that he should now bestir himself. But those who are not really philosophic, having a mere coating of opinions, once they see how many subjects are involved and the extent of the exertion, they decide that philosophy is difficult and beyond their abilities.

Now, I can say this much about those who have written or shall write, claiming to have knowledge of the subjects I take seriously, having learned from myself or from others, or having made the discoveries themselves. They could not, in my opinion, understand anything about the matter, for there is no writing of mine dealing with these subjects, nor will there ever be. Indeed, this cannot be expressed in words like other subjects, but from much engagement with the matter itself, and from living with it a light is kindled as though from a leaping spark, and once it has arisen in the soul it sustains itself thereafter. But if it had appeared to me that this was sufficiently capable of being written down and formulated in words for people in general, what task could I have undertaken in my life more exalted than this one: to write something enormously beneficial for mankind, and bring the nature of reality to light for all to behold?

But it occurs to me to speak at greater length about these issues. There is indeed a true argument that stands against anyone who ventures to write anything at all about this sort of thing. For any of the things that exist, there are in each case three things through which the knowledge of anything is necessarily acquired. The knowledge itself is fourth, and as a fifth we must propose the thing itself, which is cognisable and which truly is. First is a name, second is an account, third is an image, and fourth is knowledge. Take one example: there is something called a circle, which has the very name we have just uttered. Second is the account of this, composed of names and verbs – that which has its extremities everywhere equidistant from the centre. Third is that which is drawn and erased, turned on a lathe and destroyed, none of which happens to circle itself. Fourth is knowledge, true reason and opinion

about these, which are not contained in utterances or in physical shapes, but in souls. Of these, reason comes closest in kinship and similarity to the fifth, the circle itself.

Now, although the unsoundness of each of the four is an endless topic of discussion, what's most important is that there are two things: what something is and what it is like. And although soul does not seek to know what something is like but what it is, each of the four offers the soul that which it seeks not, and always provides something that is easily refuted by the senses, thus filling almost everybody with perplexity and insecurity of all sorts. But instruction through all these, going upwards and downwards in each case, with effort brings knowledge to birth of that which is good by nature in one who is good by nature. That is why anyone who is serious about really serious matters should never commit them to writing and thus expose them to the rivalry and confusion of humanity in general.

Anyone who has followed this story and digression of mine will appreciate full well that whether Dionysius has written about the primary principles of nature, or some lesser or greater person has done so, then, according to my account, he has not learned or understood anything sound about the matters on which he has written. Nor did he write this down as an aid to memory, for once someone has grasped this with his soul there is no danger that he might forget it. If he did actually write, he did so out of base ambition, as if he was presenting his own ideas or as if he had received an education of which he was not worthy, all from a love of the fame associated with its possession.

Not long afterwards, although Dionysius had previously allowed Dion to retain his possessions and to derive income from them, he then no longer allowed Dion's trustees to send anything to the Peloponnese, as if he had completely forgotten about his own letter. He now maintained that the property belonged not to Dion but to his son, who was his own nephew and under his legal guardianship. These were the developments during my stay up to this point. But when matters unfolded in this way, I saw exactly the extent of Dionysius' desire for philosophy, and I had good reason to be annoyed. I thought I should tell Dionysius that because Dion had been treated so badly, it would be impossible for me to stay.

But Dionysius came up with a plan to detain me for that sailing season. He arrived the following day and presented this persuasive argument: "You and I must get Dion and his affairs out of the way and get rid of our constant disputes over these issues. For your sake I will do the following for Dion. I think it best that he takes his property and lives on the Peloponnese, not as an exile, but with permission to return home here whenever this is agreed jointly by himself, by me, and by yourselves, his friends. So consider whether these proposals are acceptable to you, and stay for this year on these conditions, and next season you may take the money and depart." When I heard this proposal I was annoyed. Nevertheless, I told him that I would give him my views on the matter the next day when I had thought about it.

Having made my decisions, I told Dionysius the following day: "I have decided to stay, but I ask you not to presume that I have authority over Dion, but send a letter to him, jointly with myself, explaining what has now been agreed, and asking whether this is acceptable to him. Meanwhile, you should implement no new measures affecting Dion." This is what was said, and this, more or less, was what we agreed upon. After this, the ships sailed away. It was no longer possible for me to depart. But Dionysius followed up on his proposals in a most high-handed manner by selling Dion's property, in its entirety, as he pleased, to whomsoever he pleased, without saying anything to me about these plans.

Until these developments took place, I had been acting in support of philosophy and my friends, but afterwards, Dionysius and I lived differently. I was looking outwards like a bird yearning to fly away from the place, while he was working out how he might intimidate me without giving away any of Dion's property. Then, contrary to the practice of his father, Dionysius tried to reduce the pay of his older mercenaries. But the soldiers, being angry, banded together and charged the walls, shouting some barbaric war cry, at which Dionysius became fearful and conceded all the demands. Word quickly spread that Heraclides had been responsible for these troubles, and when the man heard this he took himself off and disappeared, while Dionysius tried to capture him.

He summoned Theodotes to the garden where I happened to be walking at the time. I know and remember what Theodotes said to Dionysius in my presence: "Plato, I am in the process of persuading Dionysius here that should I prove capable of getting Heraclides to come here to discuss the accusations that have now been made against him, I think it best that he set sail for the Peloponnese, taking his wife and son, and dwell there without being a threat to Dionysius. I ask and implore Dionysius, should someone come across Heraclides, either in the countryside or here in the city, let no harm come to him apart from being deported from this land." Then, addressing Dionysius, he said, "Do you agree with this?" "I agree," said he. "And even if he turns up in your own home, he shall suffer no harm beyond what has just been said."

The next day, during the afternoon, Eurybius and Theodotes came to me in a hurry, remarkably troubled, and Theodotes said, "Plato, you were present yesterday when Dionysius entered into an agreement with both of us in relation to Heraclides, were you not?" "Of course," I replied. "Well, right now," said he, "there are peltasts running around seeking to apprehend Heraclides. But you really need to come with us to Dionysius." So we set off, gained admission, and while the other two stood tearfully in silence, I said, "My friends here are afraid that you might do something high-handed in relation to Heraclides, contrary to what we agreed yesterday." When Dionysius heard this he was enraged. But I said, "Take heart, Theodotes, for Dionysius will never be so bold to do anything contrary to what was agreed yesterday." But Dionysius, in a highly tyrannical manner, said, "With you I agreed nothing, great or small." "Yes you did, by the gods," said I. "You agreed not to do the very things this man is now asking you not to do." And with these words I turned around and walked out.

After this, Dionysius continued to hunt down Heraclides. According to reports, Heraclides was a few hours ahead of them and escaped into Carthaginian territory. After this, his ongoing plan to hold onto Dion's property seemed to afford Dionysius a convincing basis for enmity with myself. First, he expelled me from the acropolis. While I was staying outside the acropolis, Theodotes sent for me, and complained at length about everything that had happened. He then indicated to me that I was not acting at all well in attaching more importance to Dion and his friends than to

Dionysius himself.

Thereafter, I was residing outside the acropolis among the mercenaries. Various people came to me, including some ships' rowers who were fellow citizens from Athens, advising me that damaging stories about me were spreading amongst the peltasts, some of whom were threatening to kill me if they ever got their hands on me. So, I sent word to Archytas and other friends in Tarentum, explaining the predicament I happened to be in. Under the pretext of an embassy from their city, they sent a thirty-oared boat and also one of their own people, Lamiskus, who, on arrival, made a request to Dionysius concerning myself, saying that I wished to depart, and asking that he do nothing whatsoever to stop me. He agreed, and sent me on my way having given me provisions for the journey.

On reaching the Peloponnese at Olympia I came across Dion, who was a spectator at the Games, and I told him all that happened. He, calling upon Zeus as his witness, immediately exhorted myself and my associates and friends to make arrangements to take revenge on Dionysius. Having heard this, I encouraged him to call upon my friends to help him if they wished to do so. "As for myself," said I, "it was you, along with others, who somehow forced me to share the table and hearth of Dionysius and join in his sacred rites. And although he probably believed that I was plotting along with you against himself and the tyranny, he nevertheless did not have me put to death, but showed me respect. Now, I am no longer really at an age to be of military assistance to anybody, but if you ever feel the need for friendship towards one another and wish to do one another some good, I am fully available to both sides."

Dion had the same intention as I would attribute to myself or, indeed, anyone else who is reasonable and intends to confer the greatest benefits in terms of power and honour on himself, his friends and his own city to the greatest possible extent. For neither Dion nor anyone else ever intentionally pursues power that will be a curse for all time to himself and his family. They pursue, rather, a political system and the provision of the best and most just laws, introduced without any murders or slayings. This is what Dion was engaged in at the time, preferring to suffer unrighteous deeds rather than perform them.

For a righteous person, being sound-minded and sensible, would never wholly be deceived about the souls of any unrighteous people he was dealing with. This same failure brought Dion down, for although he was fully aware that those who brought him down were bad people, he failed to notice the height of ignorance they had attained, and their general depravity and greed, and because he overlooked this he now lies fallen, bringing countless misfortunes upon Sicily. As for the situation following the events described, the advice I have to offer has more or less been presented, so let that suffice.

EH: EIGHTH EPISTLE Plato to the relatives and associates of Dion: may ye fare well

I shall attempt to explain to you, as best I can, what principles you should keep in mind if you really are to fare well. Now that the tyranny has been undone, your entire struggle throughout all of Sicily involves two factions, one side wishing to restore the regime again, the other wishing to finalise the elimination of the tyranny. Now, most people in such situations think the correct advice about such matters is to recommend whatever will do most harm to your enemies and most good to your friends. But it is not at all easy while doing much harm to others to avoid suffering a lot of other evils yourself.

Let this then be a prayer in all respects. Now, and ever since the war began, yourselves and your enemies have been ruled throughout, more or less, by a single family which your ancestors once appointed in their hour of utmost need, at a time when there was an extreme threat to Greek Sicily of being entirely overrun by the Carthaginians. For they then chose Dionysius, who was young and warlike, for the military activities that suited him, and Hipparinus as his senior adviser. For the safety of Sicily, these two were appointed as sole rulers, or, in other words, as tyrants.

Now, it is perhaps only right that those who were saved should all be grateful after such achievements as these. But now both sides need to bear in mind just how often you have both presumed, with high expectations, that something minor was all that was needed in order to achieve your objectives. But note that this minor detail proves again and again to be the cause of countless evils. No limit is ever reached. The conclusion of a past issue always seems to be

linked to the beginning of a new one, and because of this cycle there is a danger that the entire class of tyrannical folk, and democratic folk too, will be destroyed. It therefore behoves all Greeks, with all eagerness, to come up with a remedy for these evils.

I shall now try to set out for you my own present views, in all frankness, based on our shared concept of justice. For I am speaking as a sort of arbitrator conversing with the two parties, the former tyrant and the subjects of the tyrant. Now, my word of advice to any tyrant would be to avoid this title and this role, and to transform tyranny into kingship if possible. And it is possible, as Lycurgus²¹, that wise and good man, has proved in practice. As a remedy, he introduced the authority of the Elders and of the Ephors as a bond to preserve the kingship. As a result, he brought security and fame to his own people, because for those people the rule of law became king, and people did not exercise tyrannical power over the laws.

These are my words of exhortation to you all now. Those who are intent upon tyrannical power should turn back from what mindless folk crave so greedily and count as happiness. I would advise those who are pursuing the ways of freedom to be careful never to fall foul of the disease of their forefathers, a greedy and immoderate freedom. For before Dionysius and Hipparinus came to power, the Sicilians of that age thought they were living a happy life and even stoned to death the ten generals who preceded Dionysius, so that they would be slaves to none, subject neither to justice nor law, entirely free in every respect. Consequently, they got the tyrants, for slavery and freedom in excess are in both cases utterly evil, whereas in due measure they are entirely good.

Since this is the natural state of affairs, I call upon the friends of Dion to pass on to all Syracusans the advice I have given, advice common to myself and Dion. And I shall put into words what he would have said to you were he alive and able to speak. The answer is as follows: "O Syracusans, accept, first of all, such laws as would obviously not turn your thoughts and desires towards moneymaking and wealth. Rather, since there are these three things, soul, body and wealth, assign the greatest honour to the excellence of the soul, second greatest to that of the body, and assign the third and last place of

honour to wealth, the servant of body and soul. If you come to experience what is now being said about the laws, you will know in practice that my exhortations are true.”

“Accepting such laws as these, since Sicily is in a precarious situation and your side is neither sufficiently dominant nor entirely defeated, it would surely be just and advantageous for you all to adopt a middle course. These are people whose forefathers once performed the great feat of saving the Greeks from the non-Greeks, so that today we are allowed to have this discussion about political systems. So now, let one side have their freedom along with kingly rule, while the other has responsible kingly rule where the laws are master of the citizens in general, and of the kings themselves, in case they do anything contrary to the law.”

“Under all these conditions, honest and sound in your thinking, with the help of the gods you should appoint three kings: my own son being the first because of a twofold debt of gratitude you owe, firstly to my father who in former times freed the city from the non-Greeks, and secondly to myself, who, of late, twice delivered you from the tyrants; then, as a second king, because of his present assistance and because of the piety of his character, appoint the man who is the son of Dionysius and bears the same name as my father, who, despite having a tyrant as a father, is of his own free will in the process of liberating the city; the third person whom you should call upon to become king is the man who is now leading the army of your adversaries, Dionysius the son of Dionysius, provided he is prepared, voluntarily, to transform himself into the shape of a king out of fear of misfortune, or out of pity for his fatherland.”

“This is what I had in mind for you while I was alive, and still have now. Having defeated our enemies at the time with your assistance, I would have established the political system in the way I had in mind had not alien demonic forces prevented me. After this, had events unfolded as I intended, I would have recolonised the rest of Sicily by depriving the non-Greeks of the territory they now hold. And I now advise all of you together to hold these same precepts, act upon them, exhort everyone to this course of action, and regard anyone who refuses as a common enemy.” But having given honours,

accompanied by prayers, to all the gods, never desist from gently persuading and exhorting friends and foes in any way you can, until the words we are now speaking shall, like a divine dream presented to waking eyes, be worked out in clear, full and happy completion by yourselves.

EH: NINTH EPISTLE Plato to Archytas of Tarentum: may you do well

Archippus and Philonides and their associates have arrived, bringing us the letter you gave them and reporting the news from yourself. They concluded their dealings with the city quite easily, since these were not particularly troublesome. They then told us your news and explained that you are losing patience over your inability to get free of the busyness of public affairs. Now, it is more or less obvious to everyone that the greatest pleasure in life consists in attending to your own affairs, especially if someone chooses to deal with the sort of affairs you deal with. But you should also ponder the fact that none of us has been born for ourselves alone. Rather, our fatherland confers part of what we become, our parents another part, our remaining loved ones another, and much comes from the circumstances that overtake us in life. And when our fatherland itself summons us to public affairs, it would surely be improper to disobey. So much for these matters. We are now looking after Echecrates, and will continue to do so hereafter for your sake, for the sake of his father, Phrynion, and for the sake of the young man himself.

EH: TENTH EPISTLE Plato to Aristodorus: may you do well

I hear that you are one of Dion's most faithful companions at present, and have been so throughout, which is the wisest characteristic of those who apply themselves to philosophy. For I maintain that true philosophy is steadfastness, loyalty and honesty, while other forms of wisdom and cleverness, tending as they do in other directions, are what I refer to, correctly I believe, as platitudes. So, remain strong and continue in the qualities in which you are now abiding.

EH: ELEVENTH EPISTLE Plato to Laodamas: may you do well

I wrote to you previously that it is most important for all the matters you speak of, that you yourself come to Athens. But since you maintain that this is impossible, the second best course, as you said in your letter, is that myself or young Socrates come to you, if possible. At the moment though, Socrates is

sick with strangury, and it would be unseemly for me to go there and not accomplish what you asked of me. Besides, at my age I am not physically up to the task of travelling and running the sort of risks that are encountered by land and by sea. I can, however, give advice to yourself and the colonists, which may, to quote Hesiod, “sound commonplace, while being hard to understand.” Now, they are mistaken in their thinking if they believe that it is ever possible for a political system to be well established by instituting laws of any sort without there being some authority looking after the day-to-day life of the city to ensure that it is both sound-minded and vigorous in the case of slaves and free alike. Until then you should set your hearts on these outcomes, keep in mind what I am saying about them, and don’t be so foolish as to think you will definitely accomplish anything. May good fortune be yours.

EH: TWELFTH EPISTLE Plato to Archytas of Tarentum: may you do well

We received the treatises that came from you with wondrous delight, and we had particular admiration for the man who wrote them, whom we deemed worthy of those ancient ancestors of his. In fact, your people were said to have been Myrions who were among the Trojans who left during the reign of Laomedon, good men as the traditional story declares. As for my own treatises about which you wrote, they are not yet fully complete, but I have sent them to you in their present state. And since we both agree that they are to be kept safe, there is no need for me to make that request.

EH: THIRTEENTH EPISTLE Plato to Dionysius, tyrant of Syracuse: may you do well

[Note: the best manuscripts record that this letter is not by Plato] Let this greeting mark the beginning of my letter, and at the same time be a sign that it is from me. Once, when you were entertaining the Locrian youths and were seated some distance from me, you got up, came over to me, and in a friendly way addressed some admirable words to me, so I thought, and so too did the person beside me, who then said, “Presumably, Dionysius, when it comes to wisdom, Plato here has been of great benefit to you.” And you replied, “And in many other respects too, since from the very moment I issued the invitation, because of the fact that I sent for him, I derived immediate benefit.” Now, this is the spirit we must preserve so that our mutual benefit

from one another may continually increase, and to bring this about I am now sending you some Pythagorean writings, and some 'Divisions', and also a man who could prove useful to yourself and Archytas. The man's name is Helicon, and his people are from Cyzicus²⁵. He is a student of Eudoxus, and is well versed in everything that man knows. And, unusually for such people, he is not devoid of social charm, nor it seems is he of bad character; rather, on the contrary, he seems to have a light touch and to be of good character.

As for the items you wrote to me to send to you, I have had the Apollo made and Leptines is bringing it to you. It is by a good, young craftsman whose name is Leochares. I thought that another work of his was most charming, so I bought it, intending to give it to your wife because she looked after me in sickness and in health in a manner that was worthy of you and me. Please give it to her unless you think otherwise. I am also sending twelve jars of sweet wine for the children, and two jars of honey. We arrived too late to store the figs, and the stored myrtle berries had rotted. We shall look after them better in future. Leptines will tell you about the plants.

The money for these items, for these and for some taxes due to the city, I obtained from Leptines. Now, my own circumstances are that I have charge of four daughters of the nieces of mine who died on that occasion when you bade me wear a wreath and I would not do so. The eldest is of marriageable age, another is eight years old, another is just over three, and the youngest is not yet one. These must be provided with dowries, by myself and by my friends, for those whom I live to see married. The eldest is to marry Speusippus⁷. She is the daughter of his sister, and she requires a dowry of no more than thirty minae, which is quite reasonable with us. And furthermore, if my own mother should pass away, no more than ten minae would be required for the construction of her tomb.

The next issue I address is the expenditure of your funds at Athens. Firstly, if I am required to incur some expense in funding a chorus or something of that sort, you do not have, as we had hoped, a single friend who will advance you the money. I actually discovered this for myself when I sent Erastus to Andromides of Aegina, from whom you told me to borrow if I needed anything. But Andromides replied, reasonably and understandably, that on a

previous occasion, having expended funds on your father's behalf, he had difficulty in recovering them, so he would now provide a small sum and no more. Those who ever report to you are reluctant to report anything that involves a financial expense, for fear of your displeasure. So you should get them accustomed to this and compel them to speak of these matters and of others too.

I should speak of Dion next. I cannot yet speak to him of the other matters until the letters from you arrive, as promised. But in general, I think Dion is reasonably disposed towards you in word and deed. To Cratinus, the brother of Timotheus, and my friend, let us give an armoured breastplate, one of the softer variety for foot soldiers, and to the daughters of Cebes, three seven-cubit robes of Sicilian linen. You probably recognise Cebes' name since he has been written of in the Socratic dialogues, conversing with Socrates along with Simmias in the dialogue about the soul. The man is a kind friend to us all.

Now, I presume you remember what I said about the sign, indicating which of my letters are written seriously and which are not. A serious letter begins with "God", a less serious one with "gods." The ambassadors asked me to write to you with good reason, for they sing your praises and mine with great eagerness everywhere they go. If you are sending the breastplate or anything else I wrote to you about, please give it to Terillus if you don't have someone whom you yourself prefer. He makes the journey regularly, he is a friend of ours, and he is accomplished in philosophy and other subjects. Farewell, love wisdom, and encourage the rest of the young accordingly. Don't neglect now the repayment of the money you owe to Leptines. Repay him as soon as possible so that others, seeing this, may be more eager to be of service to us. Iatrocles, whom I set free at the time, along with Myronidus, is now travelling with the items I am sending. Please give him some paid employment as he is well disposed towards you, and use him for whatever you wish, and preserve this letter, either the letter itself or a reminder of its contents, and be the same.

Notes

1. Plato's authorship of the Epistles or Letters is doubted in varying degrees and there is a lack of scholarly unanimity as to whether or not any of them are by Plato. The Seventh Epistle is the one that has traditionally been least suspected, though even the authorship of this Epistle is a matter of dispute among scholars.

2. Euripides, Fragment 956.

3. Archdemus was a prominent figure in Plato's interactions with Dionysius, and, as such, is a recurring figure in the Epistles. Third Epistle 318e; Seventh Epistle 339a, 349d.

4. Hiero I was a Syracusan tyrant; Pausanias was a Spartan general and ruler who defeated the Persian Empire at Plataea. Both were associated with the poet Simonides.

5. These are groupings of famous rulers with influential thinkers. Periander was a tyrant in Corinth; Thales was a natural philosopher from Miletus; Pericles was an Athenian general and statesman; Anaxagoras was a philosopher from Clazomenae; Cyrus II was the founder of the Persian (Achaemenid) Empire; Croesus was a king of Lydia, and Solon was an Athenian statesman and legislator.

6. Phylition was a physician and thinker from Locri in southern Italy.

7. Speusippus was Plato's nephew, who became head of the Academy after Plato's death.

8. Perdiccas III was a ruler of Macedon.

9. Euphraeus of Oreus was a student of Plato who rose to prominence in Macedon under the rule of Perdiccas III.

10. Hermias, Erastus and Coriscus were all members of Plato's Academy. Hermias became a tyrant in Atarneus and was the father-in-law of Aristotle. Erastus and Coriscus were brothers from Scepsis. Both Atarneus and Scepsis were in Ionia.

11. Although Plato's authorship of the Seventh Epistle is often doubted, there are scholars who regard it as authentic.

12. These were the supporters of the democracy. The incident is recounted in Plato's *Apology*.

13. This is Dionysius II, the son of Dionysius I, tyrant of Syracuse, whose death is described just above.

14. This actually describes Plato's second time in Sicily, but is his first interaction with Dionysius II.

15. Archytas of Tarentum was a Pythagorean philosopher and mathematician. He was also a prominent statesman in his native city in southern Italy. He was an important associate of Plato and is mentioned in several of Plato's epistles, some of which are addressed to him.

16. A proverbial expression ('the third to the saviour').
17. Lynceus journeyed with the Argonauts and served as the lookout for them.
18. Iliad vii.360.
19. Odyssey xii.428, Lattimore.
20. The Phoenicians and Opici were two ancient peoples. The former originated in modern-day Lebanon but had established colonies in Sicily. The latter occupied the Campania region in modern-day Italy.
21. Lycurgus was a Spartan legislator.
22. This is the young Socrates who appears as an interlocutor with the Eleatic Stranger in Plato's Statesman.
23. This comment about the Thirteenth Epistle comes from the best-attested manuscripts and may go back to Thrasyllus, one of the early editors of Plato's work.
24. The greeting 'may you do well' is intended as an indication of authorship due to its frequent use. Third Epistle 315a-b.
25. Eudoxus of Cnidus was an astronomer and mathematician who had studied with Archytus and Plato. He eventually moved his school from Cyzicus to Athens, and merged it with the Academy.
26. Isocrates was an influential Athenian rhetorician and teacher of rhetoric.
27. Bryson of Heraclea was a mathematician and sophist who is thought to have studied with Socrates. The ancient historian Theopompus claims that Plato had taken many ideas for his dialogues from Bryson.
28. This is a reference to the King of the Persian Empire.