

Demodocus

ΔΗΜΟΔΟΚΟΣ

Plato

tr. George Burges

Plato Scroll · plato-scroll.netlify.app

You are, Demodocus, requesting me to advise you on the matters, about which you are come together to deliberate. But it has come into my mind to consider, what avails this meeting of yours, and the eagerness of those, who think to advise with you, and the vote, which each of you thinks of giving. For, in the first place, unless it be possible to advise correctly and skilfully on the points, respecting which ye are come to deliberate, how is it not ridiculous for you to come together to deliberate on points, respecting which it is not possible to advise correctly? And in the second place, if it be possible to advise correctly and skilfully upon matters of this kind, still the knowledge, by which it is possible to advise correctly on them, is none. How then is it not out of place? But if there be any knowledge, by which it is possible to advise correctly on such matters, is it not necessary that there should be certain persons skilled to advise correctly on matters of this kind? And if there are certain persons, skilled to advise on those points, about which you are come together to deliberate, is it not necessary for you likewise to know how to advise on these matters, or not to know? Or that some persons should know, and some not? If then all of you know, what need is there for you to come together to deliberate? for each of you is competent to advise. But if, on the other hand, all of you do not know, how will you be able to deliberate? Or what advantage would there be to you in this meeting together, if you are not able to deliberate? But if some of you know, and others do not know, but these are in want of counsel, whether it is possible for an intellectual person to advise the unskilled, even a single person is sufficient to advise with those of you, who do know. Or do not all, who know, advise the same thing? so that it is fitting, after you have heard that person, to separate. But now you do not this; but you wish to hear many giving their advice; for you do not take upon yourselves to know those, who are attempting to advise with you on points,

on which they are advising. For if you had taken upon yourselves to know those, who were advising with you, it would have been sufficient for you to have heard one person alone. To come together then with the view of hearing those, who do not know, as if you were doing something of importance, how is it not a thing out of place? Respecting then this meeting of yours, I am in this way at" a loss.

And that too is a thing of difficulty relating to the eagerness of those, who think they can advise with you. For if, while advising, they do not give the same advice upon the same points, how can they all advise correctly, when they do not advise what he, who advises correctly, would advise? Or how can the eagerness of those, who are eager to advise on points, in which they are unskilled, not be out of place? for being skilled, they would not choose to advise incorrectly. But if, on the other hand, they advise the same, what need is there for them all to advise? for a single one of them would, if advising the same, be sufficient. To be eager then on such matters, as would be of no importance, how is it not ridiculous? Neither then would the eagerness of the unskilled be not out of place, when it is of such a kind; nor would men of sense feel an eagerness on such matters, knowing that even one of them would do the same thing by advising what was fitting; so that I am unable to discover how the eagerness of those, who fancy they are advising, is not ridiculous.

But as regards the vote which you are thinking to give, I am the most at a loss, what it can avail. For whether are you giving a judgment upon those, who know how to advise? But more persons will not advise at all any better than one, nor some one way and others another correctly upon the same matter; so that respecting them there will be no need for you to give a vote. But are you giving a judgment upon some, who are unskilled and who ought not to advise any persons?

Surely it is not fitting to intrust to such persons, as if they were madmen, to advise. But if you are to give a judgment upon neither the skilled nor the unskilled, upon whom are you to give it? But what need is there for other persons to advise with you at all, if you are competent to give a judgment upon such matters? But if on the other hand you are not competent, of what avail are your votes? Or how is it not ridiculous for you to come together, as if about to consult, when you yourselves are in want of advice, and are incompetent, and yet fancy that you ought to come together and give a vote, as if competent to form a judgment? For neither by being taken singly are you ignorant, and become sensible by being taken together; nor, on the other hand, are you at a loss individually, but by coming together are no longer at a loss. But do you become competent to see together what things are to be done by you? and this too, when you have neither learnt them from any one, nor discovered them yourselves; which is the most shocking thing of all. For being unable to see together, what is to be done, you will not be competent to give a judgment upon the party, who is advising you correctly upon these matters; nor, if a person, standing alone, as an adviser, should say this, that he himself will teach you what is to be done, is it in your power to form a correct judgment upon those, who are advising you correctly or not. Now this would be a state not less shocking than that. If then neither the meeting nor the (single) adviser is able to make you competent to give a judgment, what need is there to you for voting? Or how is this meeting of yours not opposed to your votes, and the vote to the eagerness of those advising you? For this meeting of yours is that of persons not competent, but in need of advisers; while the votes are given as of persons not wanting advisers, but able to form a judgment, and to advise; and the eagerness of those advising you, is as of persons who know; but the votes are given by you, as if the

persons advising did not know. Now if any one were to ask you, who have voted, and the person advising you, respecting the matters on which you have voted — do you know what will that be, for the sake of which you think of doing what you have voted? you would not, I think, be able to say. And even if that should take place, for the sake of which you have it in your thoughts to do every thing, do you know how it will benefit you? I think that neither you nor the party advising you would be able to tell this. But you conceive that some of those with intellect know somehow this. But if a person should ask you who is the party, I do not think you would agree on this point. When therefore both the things, about which you are consulting, are such as not to be manifest, and the persons likewise, who vote and advise, are unskilled, reasonably will you say that it often falls out that persons have no faith in, and repent of, those things, for which they have taken counsel and voted. Now such events it is not becoming to fall out to the sensible. For they know the things, about which they give advice, both of what kind they are, and that they exist firmly to the parties persuaded, for the sake of whom they give the advice, and that neither to themselves nor to the parties persuaded will there be a repentance for any thing senseless. On matters then of this kind I conceive that those, who possess any sense, should think it fit to give advice; but not about the matters on which you are requesting me to advise; for from their advice the result is good fortune, but from the trifling of these misfortune.

I was once present with a person while he was admonishing his friend, because the latter had trusted to an accuser, not having heard the other party making an apology for himself, but hearing only the accuser. He said that (the friend) had done a terrible thing, in deciding against the party without having been present himself, or having heard from the friends of the party, to whose statements it was reasonable for him to

trust. For, after having heard both, he would not have so hastily trusted to the accuser; but that it was just, before conferring praise or blame, to hear the party make his defence, as well as the accuser. For how could any one decide correctly a suit, or judge in a proper manner between persons, without hearing the opposite parties? for that it is better that assertions, like a purple colour and gold-money, should be judged of by being placed side by side. Or for what purpose has time been allowed to both the opposite parties in a suit? or the judges sworn to hear both sides equally? unless the lawgiver conceived that suits would be decided more justly and better by the judges. But you seem to me to have not even heard of what is said by the multitude. What is it? said (the other).

Decide no suit, till both accounts you've heard.

And yet this would not have been thus circulated, if it had not been well said, and as is fitting. I advise you therefore, said he, for the future not to blame or praise persons so hastily. The other then said that it appeared to him an absurd thing, if it were impossible to know, when one person was speaking, whether he was telling the truth or a falsehood, and yet possible to know, when two persons were speaking; and impossible to learn from a person, when telling the truth, but possible to be taught by that very person and another, when telling a falsehood; and if one by speaking straightforwardly and truly should be unable to show what he is saying clearly, but that two, one of whom should tell a falsehood, and not speak straightforwardly, should be able to show clearly that, which the party speaking straightforwardly was not able to show clearly. And I am at a loss, said he, on this point likewise, how they are to show it clearly; whether by being silent, or speaking. For if they are to show it clearly by being silent, there would be a need of hearing neither,

much less both. But if by speaking both are to show it clearly, and both parties speak according to no regular manner and time — for both think they have a right to speak in turn — how is it possible for both to show the matter clearly? For if both are showing the matter clearly at the same time, both will be speaking together at the same time. But this they are not wont to do, nor do the laws permit it; so that if they are to show the matter clearly by speaking, each of them will do so by speaking; and when either party speaks, then either party will show the matter clearly; so that they will speak one before and the other after; and they will show the matter clearly, one before and the other after. Now if each party in turn shows the same matter clearly, what need is there to hear the latter? for the matter will have become clear by the party first speaking. But if both parties show clearly that matter, said he, how will not either of them have done so? for how would both be able to show clearly that, which one of them shall not have done so? But if either shall have shown it clearly, it is evident that the former will have spoken of it, and the former will have shown it clearly; so that how is it not possible for the person hearing him alone to know all correctly? On hearing them I was at a loss, and unable to decide. For the others, who were present, said that the first reasoning was true. If then you can advise me on this matter, whether it is possible, when one person is saying any thing, to know correctly what he is saying, say so; or whether there is need of a speaker on the opposite side, if a person would know which is speaking straightforwardly. Or whether it is not necessary to hear both parties? Or how do you think?

The day before yesterday a person was finding fault with another, because he was unwilling to lend money or to trust him; and the party, with whom he was finding fault, was defending himself; whereupon another person amongst those, who were present, inquired of the party finding fault —

whether he, who had not trusted nor lent the money, had erred? and have not you too, said he, who did not persuade him to lend, erred? In what, said the other party, have I erred? Which of the two, said (the inquirer), seems to you to err? the person, who fails in what he wishes, or he, who does not (fail)? The person who fails, said he. Have you then not failed in wishing to borrow; while he, who did not wish to give up (his money), has not failed in that point. Truly so, said he; but in what have I erred, even if he has not given it me? Because, said (the inquirer), if you have begged the things which you ought not, how do you think that you have not erred? while he has acted correctly in not giving them up; but if, on the other hand, you have begged what you ought, and failed in this point, how have you not of necessity erred? Perhaps so, said he; but how has he not erred, who did not trust me? If you had treated with him, said (the inquirer), as was fitting, you would not have erred at all. Not at all. But now you have not treated with him, as was fitting. I appear so, said he." If then he was not persuaded, when you were treating with him, as was not fitting, how can you justly find fault with him? I am unable to say. Nor can you say that one must not pay attention to those, who conduct themselves ill? This (I can say) very much, said he. Do not then those persons seem to you to conduct themselves ill, who treat with a party in a manner that is not fitting? To me at least (they seem so), said he. In what then did he err, if he paid no attention to you, when conducting yourself ill? It appears, said he, in nothing. Why then, said (the inquirer), do persons find fault on such matters with each other, and blame those, who are not persuaded by them, because they are not persuaded, but do not find fault with themselves at all, because they have not persuaded them? Hereupon another party who was present, observed — When a person has conducted himself well towards any one, and has assisted him, and subsequently

requests that party to conduct himself in a similar manner towards him, but does not meet with such conduct, how does he not reasonably find fault? Is not, said (the inquirer), the person whom the party requests to conduct himself in a similar manner, either able to conduct himself well, or unable? (Yes.) And if he is unable, how can he properly make the request, who requests him (to perform) what he cannot? but if he is able, how did he not persuade him (to do so)? or how do persons, who speak in this way, speak correctly? But, said (the other), it is requisite, by Zeus, to find fault with such a person, in order that both he may for the remainder of his life conduct himself better, and the other mean fellows, who hear the party finding fault. Think you, said (the inquirer), that any persons will conduct themselves better when they hear a party speaking correctly, or when in error? When speaking correctly, said he. Now the party, who was speaking not correctly, did not seem to you to make a request correctly? Truly so, said he. How then will those, who hear a person finding fault in this way, conduct themselves better. Not at all, said he. For what purpose, then, would a person find fault in this way? He confessed lie could not discover. Some one was accusing a person of stupidity, because lie had given credence quickly even to parties he happened to meet with, while they were speaking. To fellow-citizens and familiar friends, when speaking, it is reasonable to trust. But to persons of that kind, whom he had never seen nor heard of before, to give credence, and this too when he was not ignorant that the majority of men are braggarts and knaves, was no little proof of silliness. When one of those present observed — For my part I thought that you considered a person of greater value, who could quickly understand even any one he met with, rather than him, who did so slowly. And so I do consider, said the other. Why then, said (the former), do you find fault, if a person gives credence quickly, even to

those he meets with, when they speak the truth? But, said (the other), I do not find fault with this, but because he gives credence to those, who tell falsehoods. But, if after a longer period even to those not accidentally met with he had given credence, and suffered annoyance, would you not have found fault with him still more? Yes; I should have done so, said he. Is it, because he gave credence slowly, even to those not accidentally met with? No, by Zeus, said he. For I suppose, said the other, you do not conceive that it is right to find fault with a person on this account, but because he gives credence to those, who state what is not credible. I do so, said he. Whether then, said (the other), do you think it is not right to find fault with him for giving credence slowly even to those not accidentally met with, but right (to do so) for giving credence quickly even to those accidentally met with? Not I indeed, said he. Why then do you find fault with him? said (the other). Because he errs in giving credence to persons accidentally met with, previous to making an inquiry. But if he had slowly given credence, previous to making an inquiry, he would not have erred. Not so, by Zeus, said he; but he would have erred even thus not the less; but I think one ought not to give credence to persons accidentally met with. But if, said (the other), you think one ought not to give credence to persons accidentally met with, how is it fitting to give credence quickly to persons unknown? and do you think that it is requisite to make an inquiry, whether they are speaking the truth? I think so, said he. Say then, said (the other), is it not requisite to make inquiry about familiar friends and acquaintances, whether they are speaking the truth? I should say so, said he. For perhaps, said (the other), some of these state what is not credible. And very much so, said he. Why then, said (the other), is it more reasonable to give credence to familiar friends and acquaintances than to persons accidentally met with? I cannot tell, said he. What then, if it is

requisite (not) to give more credence to familiar friends than to persons accidentally met with, is it not requisite to consider them less trustworthy than persons accidentally met with? How not? said he. If then there are familiar friends to some persons, and persons unknown to others, how will it not be necessary to consider the same persons more trustworthy than the same? For it is requisite to consider familiar friends and persons unknown, as not equally trustworthy, as you say yourself. This does not please me, said he. Equally, said (the former), do. some believe what is stated by them, but others disbelieve? And. this too is strange, said he. If then, said (the other), both familiar friends and persons accidentally met with state the same things, would not all things stated equally to all be credible or incredible (equally)? Necessarily so, said he. Must we not give credence then equally to those who state the same things? It is probable, said he.

On their conversing in this way, I was at a loss to whom one ought to give credence and to whom not, and whether to the trust-worthy and those who know what they are speaking about, or to familiar friends and acquaintances. Upon these matters then how think you?