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Reacting to the Past, Prof. Casey

Assembly Session #1

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Pass the Reconciliation Agreement

Athenians, I appeal to you before the gods. On this rock—a humble monument to democracy—I appeal to your better judgment. The Thirty Tyrants, greedy men puppeteered by the Spartans, have reduced our city and our people to a fraction of their former glory. In the wake of their defeat, we have the chance to rebuild both our infrastructure and fraternity. Although you can't trust foreign enemies, it is for your family's survival and your own that you must trust your fellow Athenians. I propose that we put behind us the reign of the Thirty, forgive our brothers for their sins, and move into a brighter future.

Despite the blessings that the gods have bestowed upon us, we have accumulated a great many enemies. Envy of Athens drives foreign states in attempts to dismantle our utopia. Long ago, in the time of Great Theseus, it was Crete. As their vassal state, Athens had her children snatched from their beds and sacrificed, as martyrs, to a monster beneath the Earth (Ober 4). At the same time, it was the Amazonians who wished to see Athens's downfall. Those feral warrior-women dared to take the Acropolis; however, together, in honor, Athenians prevailed against them (Ober 5). Since the beginning, whether they be Amazonians, Cretans, or any other

peoples, others have desired what Athens holds. Remember Marathon! Our grandfathers and fathers stood against mighty Persia. At Marathon, Miltiades and nine thousand Athenian hoplites made Persia, the owner of the entire world, retreat in desperate fear (Ober 29)! Even when the entire world wishes to see us fall, Athenians stand as one, shields locked, and prevail. Passing the Reconciliation Agreement is one more step we can take to restore strength and unity against our real enemies—those outside Athens.

In living memory, we have encountered foes much closer to home, tricksters that cloak themselves in friendship. Thebes has presented itself as a friend, offering asylum to Athenians during the reign of the Thirty (Ober 44). It is as if they think we could forget how Theban soldiers laughed along with the Corinthians while you and I were forced to dismantle our walls (Ober 7). A camouflaged predator, one that could offer blessings or curses depending on its ever-shifting mood. Sparta is no better; for, against Persia, Sparta was our ally. I can admit the bravery of Spartan King Leonidas and his men as they held a narrow pass against Persia; however, when the time came, Persia turned on us as well. Their tyrannical kings have besieged our way of life for the better part of thirty years (Ober 35). Each of you has felt the cold sting of Spartan barbarity, an unparalleled sense of cruelty. All is to say, you can never trust a non-Athenian. I do not make this assertion lightly. It has been proven time and again in our history, recent and ancient, that others are fickle and dangerous. Do not forget who the real

enemy is: foreign states. Look to your brothers and the gods for security rather than turning on your fellow Athenians.

If you do not wish to heed my advice, you may also look to our history for the consequences of distrusting your brothers. When Sparta entered our gates, they had every intent to end our democratic experiment, splitting us into factions. Unfortunately, plague and starvation ravaged Athens (Ober 43), and in the process, Athenians turned on each other. Spartan General Lysander forced upon us demands to cede our foreign policy, subjugating us to the Spartan Empire and dismantling our magnificent Long Walls(Ober 43). It was Lysander who puppeteered the Thirty Tyrants, using their Athenian blood to convince us that foreigners would not control us, using them to lull us into submission (Ober 44). Lysander used his Spartan troops to enforce the foreign imperial rule. The consequences of turning on each other are our sons' bodies in the streets. Do not speak of distrusting your brother. Do not even allow yourselves to think it. It could be our doom.

On the other hand, Athenian greatness is boundless in times of unity. Revel in your memories of the Golden Age of Athens. When Athenian citizens worked together to honor our polis, the Delian League was birthed and fostered by brilliant Athenians—Themistocles, Aristides, and Cimon. With member poleis charitably contributing talents and grain, Athenian triremes patrolled the Aegean (Ober 31). Persia could never think to march on Ionia, much less

Athens. Every man—from the affluent, who championed the building of the triremes, to the thetes, who rowed them with honor—had a purpose and was smiled upon by the gods. In the time of Pericles, leaders used their position and wealth to fund architecture, sculpture, theatre, and the fine arts (Ober 33). Athenian thinkers, the likes of Hippocrates, Socrates, and Plato have formulated new intellectual constructs in the realms of politics, history, ethics, and logic which future generations will meticulously study. Both theatrical tragedy and comedy have evolved from the Athenian amphitheater for the enjoyment of all (Joint Association 287). If we didn't trust each other—if we sought retribution on our fellow citizens—would any of these accomplishments have been possible? Suspicion and political infighting lead to civil war, while amnesty and forgiveness lead to collective creation. Who is to predict what more we could accomplish together?

Under our magnificent democracy, where Athenian citizens cooperated, culture exploded in worship of the gods. It is because of unity among Athenians that the Parthenon now sits atop the Acropolis. It is a beacon to all of Ionia that democracy is not only a viable form of government but the only form which allows its people to prosper. Members of each political ideology furnish Athens with the finest patriotism. Thrasybulans, it is because of your brave leadership that the democratic insurgents were able to hold out at the fort in Phyle against Critias and the Spartans (Ober 9). Solonian Aristocrats, among you are the men who assisted

negotiations with the kings of Sparta for Athens's independence (Ober 8). Socratics, you are some of the greatest thinkers in Athens, who daily contribute to our collective intellectual and spiritual growth. Everyone, your presence in the Pnyx shows your dedication to democracy and to Athens itself. You are each vital to Athens's survival; without any one of us, the whole democratic system would topple to the ground. Look to the Parthenon now. Look to strong Athena, may she give us wisdom. That golden temple, constructed in our finest hour, signifies the best of us, and we must strive for its potential everyday. Forgiving our brethren honors our best values.

I understand that many of us are hurting. The Thirty took my land, my father's estate, and all my possessions; however, properties are replaceable. Those of us who have lost a son or brother have an unfillable void. Despite this, now, it is right to honor the memory of the fallen: not in blood, but with unity. Those of us who are hurting understand the cost of civil war better than anyone. We have experienced the consequences of turning on each other, and the dire results of a foreign state exploiting our divisions. On the other hand, we have benefited from the bonds of brotherhood. We have lived in the prosperity of unity. There is greatness which the gods bestow upon those who build, create, and worship together. I cannot vote in this assembly for you, and I cannot take away your pain. I may only remind you of what you already know.

Division causes pain. Unity provides greatness. Vote to pass the Reconciliation Agreement so that we can once again co-create a free and democratic Athens that will be the envy of the world.

Works Cited

Ober, Josiah, et al. *The Threshold of Democracy: Athens in 403 BCE*. 4th ed., W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 2015.

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