Readings of Plato's *Apology of Socrates*

Defending the Philosophical Life

edited by VIVIL VALVIK HARALDSEN,
OLOF PETTERSSON,
and ODA E. WIESE TVEDT

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Introduction

Vivil Valvik Haraldsen

For many familiar with the fate of Socrates, the mere title of Plato's *Apology of Socrates* is likely to evoke images of a courageous Socrates, admirable for his unyielding defense of his philosophical life even in the face of a death sentence. How many readers of the *Apology of Socrates* have not been moved by Socrates's defiant stance toward accusers who seem both petty and ignorant and a court that appears prejudiced? With a wide readership outside university ranks and frequent appearance on the syllabi of introductory courses, the *Apology of Socrates* is many people's first meeting with philosophy. Here, in the only work of Plato including Socrates's name in the title,[1] Socrates is presented as the living embodiment of philosophy perhaps more forcefully than in any other Platonic dialogue.

The most widespread image of Socrates the philosopher is no doubt that of a man untiringly engaged in the search for truth, cordially introducing his interlocutors to philosophical conversation, but never claiming to possess knowledge or wisdom himself—the latter often being regarded as a sign of his modesty. It is often thought that what Socrates claims to have instead is a kind of human wisdom that amounts to knowledge of one's own ignorance, and the importance of this kind of knowledge has been emphasized by Socrates's admirers through the ages.

This image of Socrates stems in part from the *Apology* itself.[2] Nevertheless, the image of Socrates in this work is far from unambiguous, and the meeting with philosophy it offers does not amount to a cordial invitation. It amounts rather to a confrontation, and on several levels.

The present volume comprises eleven essays offering fresh perspectives on Plato's *Apology*. They take account of various levels of the confrontational character of the work as well as of ambiguities in its portrayal of Socrates, exploring the resulting significance for the interpretation of a range of

philosophical issues. What these issues are and how the essays pursue them will be set out in greater detail below. But let us first take a closer look at some of the confrontations with which the *Apology* presents the reader.

First, the reader is presented with philosophy in confrontation with society, a confrontation that has a violent outcome. For Socrates makes it clear that it is philosophy—his philosophical life—that brings him death at the hands of the Athenians.[3] To many readers, the *Apology* communicates a heroic image of Socrates; they see him depicted as an incorruptible defender of free thought and speech. His city was sadly not able to appreciate his gifts, and thereby exposed its own corruption.[4] In consequence, the trial of Socrates has often been regarded as representing a shameful and nearly incomprehensible lapse on the part of Athens. The city that was the cradle of democracy failed its commitment to open rational discourse. However, the specific confrontation between philosophy and society depicted in the *Apology* might also be read as illustrating the same confrontation at a more general level. The very familiarity of the icon of Socrates and of the historical fact of his death can perhaps obscure the fact that Plato's *Apology* presents philosophy as a practice that is likely to come into conflict with any society—and in a special way even with a democratic one.

Second, Socrates himself, in the sense of his demeanor in court, is highly confrontational. That he starts out by accusing his accusers of dishonesty and ulterior motives is perhaps only to be expected of a defendant in an Athenian court, but he goes much further. In his defense, he goes on the offensive. Soon not only his accusers but also the citizens of Athens quite generally are subject to his attack. In Socrates's famous story of the Delphic oracle—told to explain his philosophic activity as well as his reputation for being wise (20e6–8, 22e7–23a3)—he delivers the people of Athens a grave insult even if it is in the guise of modesty. He tells them that, although he knew that he was not wise, upon consideration he had to concede that the oracles' divination, that no one is wiser than Socrates, was right. The implication of this concession is that no one in Athens, the city reputed for wisdom, has any wisdom greater than his. And Socrates claims to have no wisdom other than the human type, consisting in not thinking that he knows what he does not know (21d1–8). Moreover, his relation to the god of the oracle seems highly ambivalent, even on the verge of impiety. Although he declares his philosophizing to be a service to the god, his initial reaction to its oracle looks like an attempt to challenge its verdict that he is the wisest. Socrates continues his defense by blaming his fellow citizens for not respecting their own laws and for not caring about the things they pretend and ought to care about, and even sees fit to compare himself to several mythical and heroic figures of epic poetry along the way. And when he has been found guilty and his accuser has proposed the death sentence, Socrates's response is an insult both to the

jurors and to the institution they serve. At this point he could probably, as was customary practice,[5] have secured a different sentence by suggesting a reasonable fine as an alternative.[6] Instead he rejects the verdict that he has done something wrong. He declares that he deserves no punishment, but rather a reward. His should be the honors shown the victors in the Olympic Games: he should be served his meals at the Prytaneum. There is no disavowal of his conviction that he has benefited Athens, and Socrates's certainty of the greatness of this benefit hardly seems an expression of modesty. After this first, preposterous,[7] counter-proposal to the prosecutors' proposal of a death sentence, it is perhaps no surprise that not enough jurors are swayed by his final suggestion, where he does propose that his friends, Plato among them, pay a credible sum.

Finally, and most important, Socrates presents philosophy itself as confrontation. The *Apology* includes the most famous account Plato's Socrates gives of his turn to, and devotion to, the philosophical life.[8] This account does not give us an image of a life of calm contemplation of realities or of friendly questioning and dialogue in common search for truth.[9] Socrates describes his philosophizing as engaging people in an examination where they must defend any claim to wisdom and ultimately answer for their lives. Philosophy in the *Apology* is demanding, probing, and challenging, and, as the embodiment of that conception of philosophy, the Socrates of that work is not content to accept common opinion, reputation for wisdom, or even an oracle's divination without further scrutiny. Moreover, philosophy is depicted not only as a way of understanding the world, but also as a way of life, one that involves confronting oneself as well as others, questioning whether things are as one thinks they are, or as they seem to be. Indeed, Socrates does not describe philosophy merely as *a* way of life; he claims that a life without philosophy, the unexamined life, is not worth living for a human being (38a5–6). In this way too, then, Socrates turns defense into attack; he is not only defending philosophy as a way of life, but is also accusing his fellow citizens—if they live without philosophy—of living a life unfit for human beings.

Even if we may still admire Socrates's incorruptible devotion to philosophy, closer reflection on his depiction of his philosophical life in the *Apology* gives rise to many questions. Is not the life he presents a life where he simply confronts all and sundry, annoying them to the point of arousing anger and hatred, and finally provoking the majority of the jurors into voting for the death penalty?[10] To pursue his practice of confronting and challenging people is exactly what Socrates says it is to philosophize, *philosophein* (29d5). It is this activity he claims makes life worth living and bestows a great good on Athens. Even if Socrates's fearlessness in the face of authority can no doubt feel inspiring, and witnessing him reducing his accuser Meletus to dimwitted silence is amusingly satisfying, one might be tempted to ask

where the philosophy is in all this. Is philosophy simply the act of reducing one's fellows to perplexed silence? Why does this activity constitute service to the god, and in what does its benefit consist? What is the relationship of Socrates's philosophizing to the divine on the one hand, and on the other to the society in which he lives? Are Socrates's claims to serve the god and to be a divine gift to Athens sincere, or rather ironic? These questions lead to a further area of inquiry. Plato's way of presenting Socrates presenting himself and his philosophical life gives rise to many questions as well. How are we to understand Plato's intentions in writing this text? Is his portrait of Socrates not so unambiguously heroic after all—and what is really the conception of philosophy at stake in the *Apology*?

The essays in this volume share a focus on the character of Socrates as the embodiment of philosophy. They employ this as a starting point for exploring the overarching question in what activity or activities philosophy and the philosophical life consist, as well as various other themes exposed in the work, such as the relation of philosophy to democracy, rhetoric and politics, or to society in general. The essays in different ways take confrontational, paradoxical, and puzzling aspects of the work as their point of departure. They all respond to the challenges these aspects present both to the heroic picture of Socrates and to a straightforward picture of his philosophy, rather than explaining them away in order to cater to such images. Some of the essays argue that what appears to be tensions or inconsistencies in the text can be reconciled and shown to be merely apparent, others highlight tensions or puzzling traits, considering that they may be intended to strike the reader as such and can thereby cast light on Plato's intentions with the work.

The volume supplements the existing literature on the *Apology* in several ways. Most existing treatments of the *Apology* present only one commentator's view of the work, and the few multi-author volumes available in English are confined to some single approach or other. The contributors to this volume are scholars working within different traditions of interpretation, writing with a view to varying points of interest. The volume thus comprises a broad range of approaches as well as treatments of a variety of themes. Some central themes and questions turn up in several essays, although they are regarded from different perspectives, sometimes leading to widely differing conclusions—and sometimes, if conclusions are not offered, pointing to new questions. The anthology in this way represents a multifaceted companion-style volume offering a fresh and comprehensive look at the *Apology*. Indeed, the fact that the authors come from various interpretive traditions that highlight different aspects of the Socratic life of philosophy helps to bring the complexity and richness of Plato's text to light.

Further, although the essays employ different approaches, they share an overarching line of approach that takes account of literary, dramatic, and

rhetorical features of the text as well as its cultural and historical context. They thereby go beyond the framework within which the *Apology* has most often been studied in comparatively recent scholarly literature.

When asking to what Socrates's philosophizing and his ideal of the philosophical life as presented in Plato's *Apology* amounts, an additional question naturally arises: Whose activities and views are we attempting to lay out; of which Socrates are we speaking? Are we assuming that the character "Socrates" in the *Apology* represents the historical person who conversed in the agora of Athens, at least in all essentials, although perhaps in an image made, if not young, then beautiful, by the literary mastery of his pupil?[11] Or do we consider that "Socrates" in this work is a character Plato did not seek to make similar to the historical Socrates in all respects, but perhaps rather used as a mouthpiece for his own views, which need not have been shared by the historical Socrates?

Over the last century and a half, many commentators have sought to discern the philosophy of the historical Socrates, or—what is often taken to mean the same thing—to identify a specifically "Socratic" position in some dialogues that is distinguished from supposedly later Platonic positions found in other dialogues.[12] In the light of the iconic status of the historical Socrates it is not surprising that there has been considerable interest in elucidating *his* philosophy and not just Plato's.[13] In this endeavor, the *Apology* has come to play a central role, precisely because some scholars have assumed that it reports the words of the historical Socrates, or at least presents his position faithfully. On this assumption, the *Apology* has been used as a standard for reconstructing the core of Socratic philosophy, and as a reference point for determining which other Platonic dialogues are "Socratic" and which are not.[14] An understanding of Socratic philosophy that has been and still is widespread, is that it includes a method of refutation through questioning, often called the elenchus,[15] and a number of views within ethics and moral psychology, among which the views that virtue is knowledge and that no one does wrong willingly are regarded as central, often being referred to as Socratic paradoxes. A further view commonly encountered is that Plato moves beyond Socratic philosophy in his supposedly subsequent works, with regard to method and moral psychology as well as in other respects. The study of the *Apology* has accordingly often centered on the interpretation of the supposed Socratic method and moral views in contradistinction to those of Plato.

The assumption that the *Apology* shows us the real, historical Socrates is, however, problematic. Most frequently it assumes what Plato could reasonably have put into such a speech, considering that his audience knew what had happened at the historical event and supposing that Plato's intention was to clear his teacher's name. That this basis is hardly conclusive is shown by the fact that different scholars have made very different assumptions and drawn

opposite conclusions.[16] The assumption of historicity has also been regarded as finding support in the purported chronological placement of the *Apology* in an assumed group of "early" dialogues. This does not constitute independent support, however, but rather involves circularity, since the stylometric studies that have been used to divide the dialogues into groups provide scant, if any support for the identification of the *Apology* as an early dialogue. The assumption that it is early appears to be based primarily on Aristotle's statements that there were differences between the views of Socrates and those of Plato, and further, on assumptions what is to count as Socratic.[17] In recent decades an increasing number of scholars have come to acknowledge that the stylometric studies cannot support all that they have been claimed to support.[18] Several scholars have questioned the fruitfulness of the grouping of the dialogues into developmental periods or of approaching the dialogues with a supposed chronological order in view at all.[19] Some have pointed instead to the importance of the chronology that is manifest in the dialogues themselves, namely the dramatic chronology underpinned by various kinds of information in the dialogues and sometimes by explicit references.[20] In this perspective, the *Apology*, which several scholars following the traditional grouping of the dialogues have assumed to be Plato's first work, is, of course, among the last of the Socratic dialogues. In fact, we do not know when Plato wrote the *Apology*, and we do not know with what intentions. We do know, however, that Plato's written version of Socrates's defense speech was one among several,[21] a fact some have taken as supporting the assumption that Plato's *Apology* does not, and never purported to report, the actual defense speech of the historical Socrates, but is one instance of a specific literary type.[22]

At the same time as the common developmental approach to the dialogues has increasingly been challenged, there has been a growing interest in the very fact that Plato's dialogues belong to a literary genre, and more generally in literary aspects of Plato's work. This has brought forth new approaches to Plato that ask how the dialogue form, considerations of genre, the use of literary allusions and other dramatic and stylistic features should influence the philosophical interpretation of Plato's dialogues.[23] In this vein, some have asked what it at all means that Plato's dialogues are works of philosophy. For although Socrates is the figurehead of philosophy for us, at the time the dialogues were written, "philosophy," or to philosophize, *philosophein*, which is the term found in the *Apology*, did not have its present connotations. It was not considered an activity connected to a specific field of study. Socrates's claim in the *Apology* is not that life is not worth living without a university course in philosophy. The literal meaning of philosophy is "love of wisdom," but what does wisdom involve and how is the love of wisdom practiced?

Recently several scholars have taken an interest in examining the evolution of the conception of philosophy at the time Plato wrote his dialogues,

emphasizing the importance of understanding this conception in its cultural context.[24] It has been argued that Plato, alongside some of his contemporaries, was developing the conception of philosophy by setting up philosophy as a new authoritative discourse in competition with other modes of discourse. All the while, the philosophic discourse incorporated elements from the competing modes, such as the epic poems, tragedy, medical treatises, forensic rhetoric and the rhetoric of the sophists.

For all this, the *Apology* has still most often been studied within the more limited framework mentioned, with a view to the method and doctrines of the "Socratic" position;[25] presumably this is at least partly because the work is so strongly embedded in a historical context and because it, in contrast to most Platonic dialogues, is mostly a monologue.

However, as the essays in this volume testify, a closer look reveals that the *Apology* still contains ample material inviting a broader approach. It abounds with literary references, includes imaginary dialogues and displays parallels with tragic drama, all of which play an important, but often overlooked, role in the characterization of Socrates in the work. Moreover, as a defense speech it formally constitutes a piece of forensic rhetoric.[26] And although Socrates denies any knowledge of the language of the courtroom at the very beginning of the work, he nevertheless proceeds to deliver a speech full of rhetorical tropes well represented in the forensic orators.[27] In this way Plato appears to present Socrates as not fully truthful at the very point where Socrates claims to be different from his accusers exactly in the sense that he will speak only the unadorned truth.[28] Plato thus seems to blur the clear-cut distinction between the direct, truth-seeking discourse of philosophy and the power-seeking rhetoric of sophistry and politics. Since this is the very distinction that his character Socrates appears to be establishing, this is yet another trait of the work that is both provocative and puzzling. Whether or not this was a feature of the historical Socrates's defense speech, the fact that Plato presents it in the way he does can plausibly be taken to suggest that he is not simply aiming to present an accurate, or reverential, portrait of Socrates. Is he not rather attempting to stir the reader to reflect upon the fuller implications of the portrait of Socrates and the concomitant characterization of philosophy and the philosophical life?

The essays in this anthology all involve reflection on these themes, while concentrating on different questions raised by the text, or shedding light on the same questions from different angles. We will now offer a closer review of their contents.

One cluster of questions standing at the center of the first four essays concerns philosophy's confrontation with and relation to society.

In "A Shameless Socrates on Trial in Democratic Athens" Arlene Saxonhouse argues that when Socrates confronts the *dêmos* with his scathing criticism, this entails a reworking of the meaning of shame, from an

other-directed emotion to an internal standard. Saxonhouse suggests that the dialogue thereby implicitly highlights a tension between frankness, *parrhêsia*, and reverence, and shows how various literary devices, allusions and analogies play a central role in achieving this transformation of shame. She points out how Socrates's speech, although for the most part a monologue, incorporates dialogue and parallels the Greek drama, arguing that the hypothetical questioners Socrates repeatedly allows to present objections to his defense function like a choir, marking transitions in the drama of his speech. Saxonhouse further emphasizes the importance of the puzzling comparison in the text of Socrates to the Homeric hero Achilles. She maintains that Socrates incorporates within himself the democratic principles of freedom, but that by realizing this freedom without restraint as a shameless freedom from reverence for the community, he illustrates the irresolvable tensions that those principles of freedom pose for the democratic regime.

The relation of philosophy to democracy remains at the center of attention in Oda E. Wiese Tvedt's essay, "Philosophy, Democracy and Poverty: The philosopher as political agent in the *Apology* of Plato." Tvedt contends that the role of the philosopher as Socrates presents it in this work is first and foremost to be an agent of subversive political activity, a view of the philosopher's role for which she finds support also in other works of Plato. Tvedt holds that the poverty of Socrates is a vital clue to the understanding of the philosopher as a political figure in the *Apology*. Taking a cue from Alain Badiou, and regarding justice as the political equivalent of truth, she investigates the relationship between democracy and philosophy in order to understand the connection between life and teachings for Plato's Socrates. Tvedt further argues that Socrates's choice to abstain from the traditional political arenas points toward a distinction in Plato's political thought: the distinction between the private and the public realm, which in certain ways corresponds to the distinction between the individual and the masses, and sheds light on implications of Plato's criticism of the political realm.

In "The Temporality of Philosophy in the *Apology*," Kristin Sampson approaches the question of the relation and seeming divide between philosophy and politics in respect of the different kinds of temporality they imply. Sampson claims that the temporality of philosophy, as this is displayed by Socrates in the *Apology*, can be characterized in terms of the concept of *kairos*. Exploring both temporal and non-temporal meanings of this term, she argues that it is apt to illuminate the conception of philosophy in the *Apology*, since philosophy is here characterized, Sampson maintains, as being outside the regular flow of time encompassing ordinary events and as constituting a critical moment of change. Emphasizing the connection between philosophy and the divine that Socrates establishes through the story of the Delphic oracle, Sampson suggests that philosophy thus represents a way of being that

is outside the realm of human affairs and ordained by the god. Connecting the concept of *kairos* to philosophical dialogue, she argues further that Socrates's rhetoric is inscribed into a temporality different from that of the political realm, which is where sophistry belongs. According to Sampson, this does not imply that Socrates's philosophical practice has no effect on the political sphere, but rather that its contribution consists exactly in its calling into question conventional conceptions and practices of the *polis*.

The divide and the confrontation between philosophy and society is also the fulcrum of Knut Ågotnes' contribution. In contrast to Tvedt and Sampson, however, Ågotnes does not find that the *Apology* suggests possibilities for reconciliation or fruitful exchange. In "Plato's Socrates in the *Apology*: Speaking in two voices," he argues that there are two different and seemingly contradictory rhetorical voices in the *Apology*. On the one hand, Socrates presents his thought as a radical break with the established Athenian virtues and values, while on the other hand he diminishes the distance between his mission and the city by employing customary moral terms and ideals and presenting himself as a loyal citizen. The first voice originates in the Delphic oracle, which authorizes Socrates's critical investigation. This voice is rooted in the individual, independent of the political community. The established religious and political discourse, on the other hand, had originally been given to the city as a community, and was a matter of communal deliberation and debate. Ågotnes concludes that there is therefore a radical contrast between Socratic philosophy, which is prone to produce discord, and democratic politics, which strives for collective unity.

The motif of a double-sidedness in the presentation of Socrates suggested by Ågotnes is pursued from a new angle in Jacob Howland's contribution. "Socrates's Daimonic Ethics: Myth and Heroism in Plato's *Apology*" forms part of a group of essays that revolve around questions concerning the character of Socrates and the way his depiction in the *Apology* should be understood in relation to its literary, historical and cultural context. Taking as a point of departure Plato's double portrait of Socrates in the *Apology*—the one presented by his accusers and the one presented by Socrates himself—Howland points to the significance of the many literary parallels to which this image of a phantom double alludes, in particular the story of Heracles. Showing in detail how Socrates throughout the work is both explicitly and implicitly compared to Heracles, Howland suggests that the *Apology* frames the trial of Socrates as the superficially laughable yet deeply serious struggle of a philosophical hero over his own after-image in the city. Drawing a parallel to Socrates's purifying discourse in the *Cratylus*, he argues that in Socrates's struggle with his shadow-image as an Aristophanic absurdity, he takes on the Olympian gods themselves and their punitive moral economy, and reenacts Heracles' last civilizing labor in the metaphorical Hades of the Athenian court.

Shifting focus from the literary to the historical and rhetorical context, Gro Rørstadbotten's "Plato's Apologies" emphasizes the singular quality of the *Apology* among Plato's works as a text where the Platonic narrative and the Athenian reality are merging. Rørstadbotten examines some of the rhetorical aspects of the *Apology* by pursuing the answers to two questions: First, to which political groups in Athens is the *Apology* responding? And second, how is Socrates's defense speech structured? The speech is contextualized with reference to three themes in contemporary discourse, namely the idea of sameness, the distinction between the men of Piraeus and the men of the city—parties to the civil war of 404-3 BCE.—and the amnesty of 403. In the period from 403 to 399, these three themes served as the basis of powerful *topoi* in the rhetoric used by the Athenian orators, and Rørstadbotten argues that these *topoi* are detectable in the *Apology*. By viewing Socrates from two angles—Socrates the philosopher and Socrates the citizen—she shows how Socrates employs the rhetoric of the restored democracy, and argues that he defends himself coherently both as a philosopher and as a citizen.

Concentrating on another aspect of the historical context, namely contemporary views of virtue, Hallvard Fossheim emphasizes the confrontational and provocative manner of Socrates's character as well as of his defense speech in his contribution, "The Character of Socrates in Plato's *Apology*: An Aristotelian Analysis." Fossheim takes as a point of departure the fact that we today find it difficult to interpret Socrates's character normatively and to understand why he was sentenced to death by his fellow citizens. He proposes to bring Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* to bear as an interpretative grid to guide our understanding of Plato's portrayal of Socrates in the *Apology*. In Aristotle's text the central virtues and vices are presented and analyzed, and Fossheim argues that it thus offers a contemporary vantage point. He discusses four Aristotelian virtues in order to cast light on Socrates's character: truthfulness, practical wisdom, openhandedness and greatness of soul. In the light of the descriptions of these virtues, Socrates's virtuousness becomes questionable. His irony, for instance, is not compatible with truthfulness; nor is Socrates's extreme frankness compatible with practical wisdom, *phronêsis*, understood as a political virtue. Fossheim concludes that Socrates's conduct in court "would have been taken by many [. . .] as at best problematic, at worst ridden by vice."

The last four essays explore different aspects of Socrates's confrontational practice of philosophy with attention to his own explicit descriptions of it as well as to the way he is depicted as engaging in it, discussing apparent tensions, and sometimes suggesting ways to resolve these tensions.

While Fossheim discusses truthfulness with a view to problematic aspects of Socrates's character and of his defense speech in the light of the contemporary ideals of virtue, Olof Pettersson's essay "Socrates's Failure:

Language and Lies in Plato's *Apology*" centers more closely on the question of Socrates's truthfulness and his use of language, highlighted at the very start of the dialogue by Socrates's denial that he is a clever speaker. Pettersson takes as a point of departure two interpretative positions that have emerged in recent debates about Socrates's truthfulness. In the light of the dialogue's distinction between a philosophical manner of speech and a politico-forensic rhetoric, Socrates has either been taken to be quite like the clever speakers he repudiates, or been taken to be fully honest and truthful. Pettersson submits that both lines of interpretation are partly right and that Socrates's failure to live up to the discursive ideals he sets forth in the dialogue can help to explain how his words can be understood so differently.

In "Self-Images of Socrates: Respect for Tradition and Critical Examination in Plato's *Apology*," Elena Irrera detects apparent tensions between differing aspects of Socrates's own self-depiction in the *Apology*. Centering on the ostensible contrast between the seemingly boastful and self-aggrandizing Socrates who acknowledges that he possesses a human wisdom that his fellow citizens lack, and the humble, self-deprecating Socrates who readily admits his own limitations in matters of knowledge, Irrera asks whether there is in fact an inconsistency in this self-depiction. Considering in detail Socrates's response to the divination of the oracle, in which one might see a conflict between Socrates's claim to be engaging in his critical examinations in order to serve the god, and his apparent willingness to challenge the oracle's divination, Irrera lays out a framework for interpreting the various images of Socrates that allows us to read them as consistent, but as emphasizing different aspects of Socrates's philosophical activity and attitude.

The relation of Socrates's philosophical practice to the divine is likewise central in "Socrates Mission," in which Paul Woodruff investigates the nature of the mission Socrates claims "the god" assigned to him. This mission is, according to Socrates, to wake up the people of Athens to the need to examine their lives and care for their souls. But what kind of life is Socrates encouraging, and why does he think that he is able to discover whether people are virtuous? Woodruff points to the apparent tensions between Socrates's trust in his own virtue, his disavowal of the knowledge needed to teach virtue, and his confidence that he can test the virtue of others through questioning. Contrasting the depiction of Socrates's conversations in dialogues of search such as the *Euthyphro* with his description of his mission in the *Apology*, Woodruff suggests that Socrates's mission is to set an example in his questioning that ordinary Athenians can apply to themselves. This understanding, he argues, accounts both for the mission-statement in the *Apology* and for the questioning in the dialogues of search, and makes Socrates's trust in his mission intelligible as an expression of his reverence for the god.

Finally, in "The Philosophical Force of Negativity: *Elenchos* and Socratic conversation in Plato's *Apology*," Vivil Valvik Haraldsen takes issue with a common view of Socrates's philosophical practice. The *Apology* contains one of the rare instances in the Platonic corpus where we find Socrates describing his practice of questioning, and not only a depiction of him performing it. Haraldsen asks whether this description fits well with a widespread way of understanding this practice according to which Socratic conversation is a method (now standardly termed "the elenchus," from the Greek noun *elenchos*) for discovering truth by refutation of false beliefs—a method, moreover, regarded as embedded in the position termed Socratic intellectualism. Haraldsen first shows that the use of the term *elenchos* and its cognates in the *Apology* does not support the view that they are used to refer to Socrates's questioning as a method of refutation. She proceeds to point out descriptions Socrates gives of the ways opinions are formed and changed and of the ways we are motivated to act that do not fit with the intellectualist position. In the last section, an alternative interpretation of the benefit of Socratic conversation is offered, which seeks to illuminate what is involved in the philosophical, examined life Socrates advocates.

The volume as a whole thus covers a variety of the themes and questions raised in Plato's *Apology*—questions pertaining to the relation of philosophy and critical thought to democracy and to society in general, to the relation of the individual to the community, to the role of rhetoric in politics and in philosophy, and to the function of the literary form and of literary references and devices in philosophical argument. Further, its chapters broach broader questions about human nature, virtue, and happiness, the conception of knowledge and of philosophy itself, and the roles these play in the virtuous and happy life.

These issues, which engaged Plato some two and a half millennia ago, are not merely antique curiosities, despite their ancient origins. The aim of this anthology will have been achieved if it functions as a cordial while thought-provoking invitation to read, reread, and think about Plato's *Apology*, a work that will no doubt remain a philosophical and literary classic exactly because it is simultaneously provocative, playful, moving, annoying, amusing, and serious.[29]

NOTES

1. It has come down to us with the title *Apologia Sokratous*, which is also the title of Xenophon's version. The literal translation is "Socrates's defense speech."

2. It is here that Socrates makes his famous comments concerning his lack of wisdom, saying that that he knows that he is not wise except in the sense of not thinking that he knows what he does not know, often referred to as expressing his

"disavowal of knowledge" (21b, d), cf. e.g. Gregory Vlastos, "Socrates's Disavowal of Knowledge," *The Philosophical Quarterly* 35, no. 138 (1985): 1–31 and Terence Irwin, *Plato's Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 8–10.

3. Several scholars have held that the real grounds behind Socrates's indictment were not his philosophical activity, but political factors. Some have argued that Socrates was regarded, and rightly so, as having anti-democratic sympathies. Others have pointed to the animosity arising toward him from his affiliation with Critias and Charmides, who took part in the reign of the thirty in Athens in 404–403, and with the scandal-ridden Alcibiades, which made him an easy target for political schemers (for discussion and references see Thomas Brickhouse and Nicholas D. Smith, *Socrates on Trial* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989), 69–82, and Robin Waterfield *Why Socrates Died: Dispelling the Myths* (London: Faber and Faber/New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2009). The point made here, however, does not pertain to the explanation of the historical events of the trial and Socrates's death sentence, but to the description of the confrontation between philosophy and Athens given by Socrates in the work of Plato.

4. For example, John Stuart Mill refers to the *Apology* in his *On Liberty*, and writes that the tribunal "condemned the man who probably of all then born had deserved least of mankind to be put to death as a criminal" (Chapter 2).

5. See for example James Riddell, ed., *The* Apology *of Plato with a Revised Text and English Notes* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1877), xiv–xv.

6. For a very different view of Socrates's counter-proposal, see Brickhouse and Smith, *Socrates on Trial*, Ch. 5 and C. D. C. Reeve, *Socrates in the* Apology*: An Essay on Plato's* Apology of Socrates (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1989).

7. Cf. the note on 36d7 in John Burnet, ed., *Plato: Euthyphro, Apology of Socrates, Crito* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1924).

8. The *Phaedo* (96a–100e) and the *Symposium* (201d–212c) contain the other two passages found in Plato's dialogues where Socrates explains how he became the philosopher he is.

9. This is not to say that such activities form no parts of his philosophizing.

10. Whether Socrates's defense speech should be read as a sincere defense or as ironic and deliberately provocative has been the subject of controversy, and commentators' views on the issue depend upon their view of the historicity of the work as well as on their view of Plato's intentions in writing it, questions to which we will return briefly below. For discussion of this divide in the secondary literature, see David Leibowitz, *The Ironic Defense of Socrates* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

11. In the second Platonic letter, by its literary hypothesis written by Plato to Dionysius II of Syracuse, the following statement is found: "There is no writing of Plato's, nor will there ever be; those that are now called so come from a Socrates made beautiful (*kalos*) and young [or "new," the Greek term is *neos*]" (transl. by Glenn R. Morrow, slightly modified, from Glenn Morrow, trans., *Letters,* in *Plato. Complete Works*, ed. John M. Cooper (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1997). The authenticity of the letter is disputed.

12. Some comparatively recent treatments of the *Apology* within this general framework are found in Vlastos, *Socrates, Ironist and Moral Philosopher* (Ithaca, NY:

Cornell University Press, 1991), Reeve, *Socrates in the* Apology, and Brickhouse and Smith, *Socrates on Trial* and *Socratic Moral Psychology* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2010). Cf. Richard Kraut, "Introduction to the Study of Plato," in *The Cambridge Companion to Plato*, ed. Richard Kraut (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 3–9.

13. This interest has no doubt been fueled by the fact that the representations in other sources, namely Xenophon and Aristotle, suggest that there is a definite difference between the two, and by the fact that many scholars have found different Platonic dialogues to embrace different and sometimes incompatible positions.

14. Since early in the twentieth century it has been all but a dogma in the larger part of Anglo-American Platonic scholarship to assume that Plato's dialogues and thought can be divided into three periods reflecting a development in his thought: an early "Socratic" period, a middle "mature" period, and a late period, and to regard the *Apology* as a touchstone of the first "Socratic" period, widely regarded as representing the philosophy of the historical Socrates. Cf. Richard Robinson, *Plato' Earlier Dialectic*, 2nd edition (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1953), W. K. C. Guthrie, *The History of Greek Philosophy*, vol. 4 (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1975), Vlastos, *Socrates, Ironist and Moral Philosopher* and Irwin, *Plato's Ethics*. Although increasingly the subject of criticism, the grouping of the dialogues and the concomitant assumptions of development are still taken for granted by many scholars.

15. From the Greek *elenchos* and *elenchein*. Cf. Robinson, *Plato's Earlier Dialectic* and Vlastos, "The Socratic Elenchus," *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* 1 (1983): 27–58.

16. On the one side, it has been assumed that the text must present the actual speech or something close to it, on the grounds that any deviation would immediately be corrected by people who had been present and knew what really was said, or because it would have defeated the purpose of clearing Socrates's name if the presentation was "out of character" (Vlastos, "Introduction," in *The Philosophy of Socrates,* ed. Gregory Vlastos [Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, 1971], 3, cf. Burnet, ed., *Plato: Euthyphro, Apology of Socrates, Crito*, 63–64). On the other side, some scholars have argued that we should trust the report by Maximus of Tyre that Socrates gave no defense speech at all at his trial but kept silent (*Oration 3*, in M. B. Trapp, ed. and trans., *Maximus of Tyre. The Philosophical Orations* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997]) and regard Plato's work as one among several in a genre of writings presenting the defense speech the authors thought Socrates should or would have given (see W. A. Oldfather, "Socrates in Court," *Classical Weekly* 31, no. 21 (1938): 203–211).

17. Stylometric studies of Plato's texts, taken up by philologists in the nineteenth century (and continued with the aid of computers in the twentieth century), study stylistic features in order to compare the dialogues and determine differences and likenesses. On the basis of such comparisons, a supposedly late group of dialogues was identified employing the *Laws* as a reference point, a dialogue Aristotle states is written after the *Republic* and which later sources refer to as a late work (*Pol.* 1264b26, cf. Plutarch, *De Iside et Osiride*, 370f and Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, 3.37. For further references and discussion, see Guthrie, *The*

History of Greek Philosophy, vol. 5, 321–322, and Leonard Brandwood, "Stylometry and Chronology," in *The Cambridge Companion to Plato*, ed. Richard Kraut [Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1992], 90). Various versions of two further groups, supposedly an "early" and a "middle," have been suggested, although such groups cannot be clearly distinguished on stylometric grounds. As mentioned, the three groups have been thought by many scholars to correspond to three main periods of Plato's thought, see Guthrie, *The History of Greek Philosophy* and Kraut, "Introduction," 4–5. The problem with using the stylometric studies as a basis for understanding the *Apology* is that there are not enough data to establish anything beyond the small group of dialogues that are stylistically similar to the *Laws*. It is interesting to note that some of the stylistic features studied suggest that the *Apology* is contemporaneous with the *Symposium* and comes after the *Phaedo* as well as parts of the *Republic* (see Ian Mueller, "Joan Kung's Reading of Plato's *Timaeus*," in *Nature, Knowledge and Virtue: Essays in Memory of Joan Kung*, ed. Terry Penner and Richard Kraut [Edmonton, Alberta: Academic Printing and Publishing, 1989]). Several commentators have, by contrast, held that the *Apology* was Plato's first work, a conviction that must clearly rest on other assumptions. Richard Kraut, who in his "Introduction" states that the distinction between Socrates and Plato along the lines sketched above "has been given further support by studies of Plato's style of composition" (4) and regards the *Apology* as early (5), acknowledges in a note that considerations of philosophical content have in several cases been more important for chronological placement than stylistic features (36, n. 21). For discussion of the question of the chronology of Plato's dialogues, see Jacob Howland, "Re-reading Plato: The Problem of Platonic Chronology," *Phoenix* 45, no. 3 (1991): 189–214.

18. For discussion of these issues, see Howland, "Re-reading Plato."

19. Howland, "Re-reading Plato," Charles H. Kahn, *Plato and the Socratic Dialogue* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1996), Julia Annas, *Platonic Ethics, Old and New* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1999), Roslyn Weiss, *The Socratic Paradox and Its Enemies* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2006).

20. Cf. Catherine H. Zuckert, *Plato's Philosophers: The Coherence of the Dialogues* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2009) and Howland, "Re-reading Plato."

21. Although the *Apology* of Xenophon is the only other contemporaneous version still preserved to us, in this work he states: "It is true that others have written about this, and that all of them have reproduced the loftiness of his words." (Xen. *Apology of Socrates*, 1, translation by O. J. Todd, in *Xenophon IV: Memorabilia, Oeconomicus, Symposium, Apology*, trans. E. C. Marchant and O. J. Todd, Loeb Classical Library 168 [Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1923]).

22. Oldfather emphasizes this as an important point counting against the historicity of Plato's *Apology* in "Socrates in Court."

23. Charles Griswold, ed., *Platonic Readings, Platonic Writings* (New York: Routledge, 1988), Michael Frede, "Plato's Arguments and the Dialogue Form," *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* Suppl. Vol.*: Methods of Interpreting Plato and His Dialogues* (1992): 201–219, G. A. Press, ed., *Plato's Dialogues: New Studies and Interpretations* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1993) and ed., *Who speaks for Plato?* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2000), Fransisco Gonzalez,

ed., *The Third Way: New Directions in Platonic Studies* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1995), Andrea Nightingale, *Genres in Dialogue: Plato and the Construct of Philosophy* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1995), and Christopher Gill and Mary M. McCabe, eds., *Form and Argument in Late Plato* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996).

24. See Andrea Nightingale, *Genres in dialogue* and Marina McCoy, *Plato on the Rhetoric of Philosophers and Sophists* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2008). The parallels between Plato's dialogues and poetry, drama, and rhetoric were widely acknowledged in earlier scholarship, but fell out of focus in most of the analytically oriented readings in anglophone Platonic scholarship in the latter half of the twentieth century. The same can be said of attention to the dialogue form and the dramatic characters, emphasized early in the twentieth century by Paul Friedländer, who on his side continued a tradition begun by Friedrich Schleiermacher, although these aspects remained a central concern among scholars influenced by Leo Strauss. A renewed interest in the parallels to other genres as well as in the dialogue form is found in some more analytically oriented scholars toward the turn of the last century, as attested by for example Martha Nussbaum, *The Fragility of Goodness* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1986/2001), Bernard Williams, *Shame and Necessity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993) and Mary M. McCabe, *Plato and his Predecessors* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2000). Presently scholars of most interpretive observations acknowledge the importance of these features of Plato's works, although the degree to which they are taken account of in the actual philosophical interpretation of the dialogues varies.

25. Although with some notable exceptions, cf. John Sallis, *Being and Logos: Reading the Platonic Dialogues*, 3rd edition (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996), Jacob Howland, "Plato's *Apology* as Tragedy," *The Review of Politics* 70 (2008), and Fransisco Gonzales, "Caring and Conversing About Virtue Every Day: Human Piety and Goodness in Plato's *Apology*," in *Reexamining Socrates in the* Apology, ed. Patricia Fagan and John Russon (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2009).

26. This dimension of the work has been thoroughly analyzed in Thomas Meyer, *Platons Apologie* (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer Verlag, 1962).

27. For an overview of the occurrence of rhetorical tropes, or *topoi*, in the speech including references to other sources, see Riddell, *The* Apology *of Plato*, xx–xxii.

28. We should note, however, Riddell's remark that "the plea of unfamiliarity with law-courts" was in itself a commonplace of forensic rhetoric (Riddell, *The* Apology *of Plato*, xxi).

29. I would like to thank my co-editors Olof Pettersson and Oda E. Wiese Tvedt as well as Vigdis Songe-Møller for preparing abstracts of the chapters, and for innumerable fruitful comments and suggestions on earlier drafts of this introduction. Thanks are also due to Kristian Larsen, who also read and offered helpful comments on an earlier draft, and to Hayden Ausland for fruitful comments, corrections and suggestions at several stages of the writing process. The responsibility for any remaining error or lack of clarity is mine.

Chapter 1

A Shameless Socrates on Trial in Democratic Athens

Arlene W. Saxonhouse

We all have our image of the Socrates who inhabits Plato's *The Apology of Socrates*: Socrates, the man accused of corrupting the young and bringing new gods into the city, affirming his commitment to the search for the Truth with a capital "T," all the while acknowledging his own ignorance and his insistence that we care for the virtue that is found in our souls; this is the man unwilling to compromise. Socrates is a beacon of strength against the corruption of a city that cannot acknowledge and welcome the excellence of this strange little man who delights in questioning and challenging others to challenge themselves. The speech that Plato gives to Socrates glorifies for future generations this man willing to sacrifice his life for the sake of his commitments. Xenophon's *Apology*—wherein Socrates courts death before the jury because he is seventy years old and does not want to suffer the ravages of old age—evokes no such admiration or nobility. It is a vision of Socrates we might rather bury. We want the hero of Plato's *Apology*, not the aged, albeit beloved, character of Xenophon. We want to have as a model this champion of a moral commitment to virtue and truth.

But who is this hero whom Plato gives us and how does he present himself, according to Plato, to the political world of ancient Athens in which he finds himself on trial? I propose to move beyond the hagiography model of reading *The Apology* to one that highlights the tensions that Socrates poses for the democratic city of Athens by his shameless readiness to speak freely.[1] This shamelessness captures a fundamental practice of democratic Athens, that of *parrhêsia*, the freedom to speak all things, but it was a practice that could also threaten the security of a city that depended on a certain reverence for the gods, for the laws, for the mores of a community. *Parrhêsia*, so often translated simply as freedom of speech, has a deeper meaning: it entails a daring refusal to limit one's speech out of respect for ancient traditions

and hierarchies, or, as we might say, a willingness to speak truth to power. *Parrhêsia* suggests a certain—really even more than "a certain"—irreverence,[2] or what I shall be referring to as shamelessness. *Parrhêsia* was a central element of Athenian democracy where all citizens enjoyed the equal opportunity not only to speak but also to speak courageously in public without regard to past traditions or the judgment of others—in other words, to be shameless. So important was *parrhêsia* to the Athenians that they named one of their official ships after it.[3] The *Apology* puts on display Socrates's own shamelessness as he exercises his *parrhêsia*, speaking fearlessly, irreverently, and truthfully, fulfilling the expectations of the democratic man. At the same time, though, *parrhêsia* alerts us to the difficulties regimes based on this parrhesetic freedom, such as Athens, face when that freedom allows for the sort of shamelessness that our heroic Socrates embodies.

Shame is a complex emotion. It is different from guilt, and for the discussion of the *Apology* that follows we need to cast aside the language of guilt and focus instead on shame as an other-directed emotion, one that arises out of our concern with our appearance before others and caring about what others may think of us.[4] It is the emotion that leads to the blush, and insofar as it makes us care about what others think of us, it has been placed in a positive light and called the "civilizing" emotion by contemporary psychologists who often see it as the glue that unites a community in common values and common behavioral expectations.[5] When the sophist Protagoras tells his myth in the Platonic dialogue that bears his name, he recounts how Zeus saved the human race from destroying itself. Zeus, Protagoras explains, gave shame (*aidôs*) and justice to humans so that they could live together in political communities. As Zeus tells Hermes, who is to distribute these qualities of shame and justice among men so that they do not destroy themselves, Hermes must give shame and justice *to all*, and whoever does not share in justice and shame is to be "killed as a disease of the city" (322d). I want to keep the potential value of shame in mind and not reflexively see it as a negative emotion as we might tend to do today. It entails reverence for one's fellow citizens, for following their traditions, accepting their hierarchies, and showing them respect.

The shameless Socrates of the speech of the *Apology* emphatically—almost offensively, to use the language of Eva Brann[6]— displays himself as without reverence, in the conventional sense, for the men of his city and for the jurors who are his judges. He speaks in a courtroom, the arena that for the Athenians constituted one of the central sites of their democracy. There in the courtroom citizens jointly, as a community, passed judgment on their fellow citizens; it was an institution that affirmed the priority of the city over the family, taking over from the family the responsibility for carrying out punishments. One can think here of the grand trilogy of the *Oresteia* that celebrated the founding

of the city through the institution of the trial. The trial was the path out of a world of unrelenting revenge and bloodshed to the civilized realm of order where responses to harm were to be addressed through universal principles and not private passions.

Nevertheless, despite this elevated status of the trial and the courtroom in the ideology of the Athenians, the shameless Socrates offends his fellow citizens when in the very first moments of his speech, he remarks that he will avoid the elegant and beautified language of the rhetors. No, he will speak not in the language of the courtroom, he tells them, the lofty world of judicial justice, but in that of the market place, the agora, the common arena of lowly commercial transactions. For us, this down-home, "just folks" attitude might appeal: honesty, authenticity, and so forth shine, but we also need to consider the context of the courtroom and its preeminent status in the political life of Athens. Commercial language brings the everyday argot of common folk, the metics—those who were not even the citizens—and the comic and crude language of Aristophanes' plays, into the courtroom, not the elegant and elevated speech of, let's say, an Aeschylus or Demosthenes.

THE HYPOTHETICAL QUESTIONERS

The Apology is clearly the most political of Plato's dialogues. It is presented as Socrates's speech not only to the jury, but also to the city at large, to the "men of Athens," *ô andres Athenaioi*, whom he often addresses as such throughout the speech, and even at times to all men when he addresses his audience simply as *andres*. It is the only dialogue that takes place in an explicitly public space before a large audience. Furthermore, although all Platonic dialogues adopt in one fashion or another, the dramatic form of the plays performed in the amphitheater as their literary model, this speech is probably the Platonic dialogue that most resembles the dramatic works performed on the Attic stage. This is the case, I want to suggest, in part because of the very public space in which it takes place, but also because of the curious rhetorical flourish of introducing imaginary interlocutors who appear to mimic the role of the chorus. These unnamed imaginary questioners remark on the speech of Socrates through their hypothetical questions and comments, thus expressing, as the Chorus often does in the tragedies, the values and concerns of the city's inhabitants. I will refer to these interlocutors throughout my essay as the hypothetical questioners—or, for brevity's sake, as the Hypothetical Questioners (HQs). These HQs serve to deepen and to highlight the very format of the Platonic dialogues, grounded as they are in the persistent questioning that goes beyond the actual participants in the specific narratives. Here, in the *Apology*, they help transform what is a speech into a dialogue.

In addition to these HQs there are also the outbursts from the crowd to which Socrates responds, outbursts that serve almost like a chorus participating in the movement of the play.

Just as the tragic and comedic authors speak to the citizens of Athens as they explore the fundamental principles of their political, religious, and moral lives, so too does the Socrates of the *Apology*, as the creation of Plato, speaking to the city of Athens, explore the nature of his life within the crucible of the democratic city, forcing his listeners to address their own political, religious, and moral lives. By understanding this speech as a public presentation analogous in certain—obviously not all—ways to dramatic productions, I want to argue that Socrates incorporates within himself the democratic principles of freedom, especially a freedom to speak what he thinks and a freedom from the reverence for what has been, for history and for what others revere. By speaking as freely as he does, Socrates illustrates the irresolvable tensions that those principles of freedom pose for the democratic regime, itself based on principles of freedom. He in his public speech thus highlights the tragic choices that underlie the democratic polity's commitment to freedom and to community.

At the end of Plato's *Symposium* Socrates forces those still awake and sober enough to listen to agree that the same man could have the knowledge and skill (*technê*) to write both comedy and tragedy. The *Apology*, I believe, is one of Plato's many works that proves the point. It is both a tragedy and a comedy, a tragedy by illustrating the inability to reconcile the goals and aspirations of a free political life with the demands of our mortal existence, and a comedy as well by showing the humor entailed in the effort to do so.[7] Although the tragic consequences of the shameless Socrates's speech to the city connect his speech to tragedy—the apparent fall of the hubristic man or woman (Oedipus, Ajax, Antigone, Xerxes)—throughout the comic intrudes as well, as Socrates, the stooped old man, compares himself to a bug who will save the city,[8] who claims to speak in the lowly language of money changers,[9] and who dares in his efforts to disprove the oracle to challenge the gods as Pisthetaerus does in the *Birds*. Not only does he dare to challenge the gods, but he—that bug-eyed gadfly of 10,000-fold poverty—also compares himself to the Homeric heroes standing beside the great Achilles, he of the flowing hair and broad shoulders. Socrates begins his speech by mocking himself, immediately presenting himself as totally befuddled by the speeches of his accusers and then reminding the jurors and the audience (lest they might have forgotten?) of how he appeared on the comic stage of Aristophanes floating in a basket and asking foolish questions about how bees buzz and fleas jump. We can both laugh at the comic Socrates and recognize the tragedy of the lessons his trial evokes.

The fulcrum around which the tragic tensions of the speech surface and on which I shall focus, however, is what I have referred to as Socrates's "shamelessness": a lack of concern with how others view him, a willingness to abandon, to be free from—and indeed scorn—the traditions and standards that emerge over time in any political community, to rely on and affirm obedience to one's own principles irrespective of the views of the many who are bound by and revere the customs and traditions of their community. Though he insists and illustrates with a couple of examples that he is law-abiding and has followed and will follow the specific laws of Athens—except one that might forbid him from philosophizing—we see how far that simple law-abidingness is from the expectations of how one ought to live within the full context of the city. The laws are not sufficient to unite the democratic city. Something more is needed and that something is what Socrates lacks: shame—or seems to lack until he redefines shame by taking it out of politics halfway through the speech. As mentioned above, one of the quirks of Plato's *Apology* is Socrates's frequent introduction of an unidentified questioner, someone who challenges Socrates by asking whether Socrates isn't ashamed of something that he has said or done. These HQs serve, as I suggested, as a sort of dramatic chorus who intervene in the drama of the speech, marking out distinct dramatic moments or episodes in the movement of the speech, underscoring the transition from one topic to another. In doing so, these unnamed interlocutors act as the community at large—like the Theban citizens who speak to Creon in Sophocles' *Antigone* or the old men who comprise the chorus in the *Oedipus*—reminding the hero of the opinions and beliefs, the conventions, that control the responses of those observing the protagonists' actions. Socrates becomes the protagonist in the drama of the *Apology*.

Since Socrates is the only actor in this performance, however, he must himself enact the role of such a chorus. And so he ventriloquizes this "someone" (this "*tis*") as if this "someone" were speaking to him. The first instance of such ventriloquizing occurs after what we could almost call the first act of the play, after Socrates has gone over and responded to the "first" or "old" slanders by affirming his ignorance of those things that he has a reputation for knowing—the things aloft and under the earth and indeed all that he appears to teach in Aristophanes' *Clouds*. He insists, as well, that he does not have the knowledge that Evenus claims to have, the sort of knowledge that, for example, would allow him to teach for money. He responds to these first accusations/slanders by emphasizing his ignorance, by appealing to the ways in which he does not measure up to the portrait of him that has been circulating through Athens for many years. In essence, he says to them: You say that I'm wise, that I claim to have knowledge, but I am not wise and my knowledge is limited. Socrates does not say that he would not like or care to know those things he claims not to know, just that he does not know them.

At this point we learn only about his inadequacies in the art of speaking and in the knowledge others would seek for themselves—inadequacies that he proclaims loudly to the whole of the city, for all to see. His defense seems to depend on his failures, what would cause most men shame, what would make them blush, what makes, for example, Thrasymachus blush when Socrates makes the definition of justice Thrasymachus offers in the *Republic* appear absurd.

Socrates's affirmation of his inadequacies—what would make other men blush—provokes the first HQ: "One of you," Socrates imagines, as he looks out at the jury and beyond, will respond to the defense that he has just given against the old slanders, namely that he doesn't know what others claim he claims to know. "Well, Socrates," this HQ would say, "What is your affair? Where have these slanders come from? For surely if you were in fact practicing nothing more uncommon than others, such a report and account would not have arisen. So tell us what it is, so that we do not deal unadvisedly with you." So speaks this unnamed "one of you" in Socrates's voice, challenging Socrates to explain the origins of the view of Socrates as a wise man teaching for money and even suggesting that there is no eagerness to cause injury to Socrates.

In response to this question posed by a speaker whom he himself has created, Socrates admits that he does indeed have a certain sort of wisdom, just not the sort that Evenus has or that others will pay money for; he has what he calls "human" wisdom. He does not immediately define what this wisdom is, though he insists that he does not have the wisdom—or any idea what that wisdom is—which others may claim to have.

At this point, we learn from Socrates's speech that there was an outburst in the courtroom: "Men of Athens, do not make a disturbance," he says to all those attending this performance (20e). We do not know why the men of Athens make a disturbance at this moment in the speech—or even if they did, apart from the Platonic recreation of the speech. But Socrates chooses to interpret it—or pretends to interpret it—as the audience's response to what may seem like boasting or literally to be speaking grand things—*mega legein*. It is unclear what the boast was. Socrates has not yet defined human wisdom and while he suggests that he might have it, he also is tentative about it, saying, "For probably I am really wise in this" (20d). At the same time, he allows that those of whom he previously spoke might have "some wisdom that is greater than human wisdom." This outburst at this moment is one of those questions that should puzzle us, but for the moment I only note that it occurs in response to the question posed by the HQ, and leads to Socrates's portrait of poor little Socrates, limited to human wisdom, when those who teach and receive money for their teaching may have wisdom "greater than human wisdom"—*perhaps*.

On one level, we can again read this as Socrates's effort to display his limits—not his superhuman powers—before the men of Athens. This would be possible were we not aware of the deep irony of all Socrates says, as when he suggests that all he has to use in the august setting of the courtroom is the commercial language of the agora and comedy. Socrates is the one who defines this as boasting, but we must wonder if that is his construction of what he said and not, as he suggests, the cause of the outburst from the men of Athens. He is the one who tells us about the outburst, making sure we know that this claim to human knowledge provokes a critical response from the audience. Were there other unacknowledged outbursts? Socrates orchestrates the movement of speech as well as the dynamic relationship this work of Plato presents between the actor/protagonist and the audience.

CHAEREPHON'S QUESTION

Socrates's own response to this outburst brought on by the question of the HQ brings us to the famed story of Chaerephon's visit to the oracle at Delphi, where the oracle's response to Chaerephon's query about whether there is anyone wiser than Socrates was that "No one is wiser than Socrates." Again, while telling this story, Socrates must remind men (not even the men of Athens this time, just *andres*, 21a) not to make a disturbance. Why is this story recalled, one that so quickly prompts another outburst—even *before* Socrates has come to the punch line? Or, what we really need to ask is, why does Plato introduce this outburst?

The context is important: Socrates is responding to the "created" HQ who asked where those old slanders came from. Socrates provides the answer by an appeal to the gods, by taking the question outside of the city and bringing the divinities to bear on his defense. Is this what stimulates the outburst? There are, no doubt, as with every Platonic dialogue, a multitude of possible responses, but the outburst makes us aware that the interaction between Socrates and his audience is a dynamic one, drawing the audience (all men, not just the jurors who sit in judgment) into an engagement with the events being enacted on the figurative stage before them.

While responses that come from the mouth of the Pythia at Delphi were notoriously ambiguous, Socrates does not initially explore the potential ambiguities in order to puzzle out the true meaning of the words spoken there. He tells the audience that his immediate reaction was to question the god, to do battle against the god. Socrates knows he is not wise, but he also knows that the god does not lie. Before trying to figure out how to reconcile this apparent contradiction, he chooses instead, as he tells the story, to refute the oracle by finding someone who was wiser than him and by presenting this person to the

god, thus proving to the oracle the error in its answer to Chaerephon's question. The god would not lie; that is not holy. But, on the other hand, might the god lack sufficient knowledge to give an accurate response to Chaerephon's question? This, we must remember, is not any god; this is Apollo, or at the very least the spokesperson for Apollo. While Socrates might hesitate to blaspheme the god by saying he lies, is there not something blasphemous and unholy about suggesting that a god might be subject to refutation, just as any human interlocutor would be? Is not such questioning of the god, in the same fashion that Socrates questions all his interlocutors (the word for refutation here is *elenchus*), not shameless in its lack of respect for the hierarchies that set gods above humans? And does not Socrates thoroughly delight in this prospect of challenging the god and proving him wrong? By being so eager to question the speech of the god, he (like Aristophanes in his comedies) demotes the gods from their elevated status to no more than mortals beset by human foibles, in this case potential mistaken speech.

Of course, we know the outcome of his search and his final admission that the oracle was correct after all, but he began with the desire to "refute"—and the (at least professed) expectation of indeed refuting the oracle once he has found someone wiser than him. Not only does Socrates not venerate the venerable courtroom in which he speaks when he uses the commercial language of the agora there, but also he is shameless in his refusal to show reverence for the god, shameless in imagining that he can use his very human investigative powers to prove himself superior in wisdom to the god Apollo.

In the *Symposium,* in the complex speech that Alcibiades gives in praise of Socrates (215a–222c), Alcibiades uses a variety of images to communicate what it is that characterizes this strange man who attracts and repels at the same time. One of the more powerful images Alcibiades employs is that of the satyr Marsyas. In Alcibiades' speech the analogy works on one level by alluding to the physical similarities captured by the ugly bodies of both Socrates and the satyr, but the more meaningful connection between the two lies in the capacity of each to enchant, to bring those who hear them under their spell. Marsyas does so with his flute, Socrates with his voice alone. What Alcibiades does not mention in his story of Socrates the enchanter, but what, of course, everyone hearing his analogy knows, is that Marsyas also challenged the flute playing of the god Apollo, imagining that he, a satyr, could be superior in flute playing to the god. For this arrogance, for his willingness to challenge the god, Marsyas is flayed alive. Socrates is not flayed alive by Apollo, but in his challenge to the god—this time concerning wisdom and not flute playing—he demonstrates the same shamelessness that Marsyas did with his flute and foreshadows the death that attends his shamelessness or lack of respect for a hierarchical order of nature that places gods above men (and certainly above flute-playing satyrs).

The testing of the god almost becomes an obsession for Socrates; he acknowledges the hatred that this pursuit, this commitment, has created for him. Nevertheless, he persists because it seemed to him that dealing with this affair about the god was the most important thing he could do—caring not at all about whether it brought him the contempt and hatred he says that it did. Again, this all seems noble to us in the modern world, but it is also a sign of his lack of concern with how he appears before others—his shamelessness. Perhaps his audience's familiarity with the story of Marsyas and Socrates's shameless contest with the god is what provokes the "men"—not only the men of Athens—to make their outburst just as Socrates begins to tell his tale? We can think of Marsyas challenging the gods, but there were others who tried to do so as well. There was poor Arachne turned into a spider for challenging Athene in the art of weaving, and then there was Pisthetaerus in the Aristophanic comedy the *Birds*. He founded his city in the sky and challenged all the gods when he constructed a wall between the gods and the mortals who made sacrifices to them, making it impossible for the gods to receive the sacrifices humans made to them. In Aristophanes' comedy all ends happily. While there may be a certain comic effect in imagining the stooped and ugly Socrates challenging the glorious god of the sun, Apollo, the *Apology*, for sure, differs from comedy in that all does not end well for Socrates with the festive marches that often mark the end of Aristophanes' comedy. Socrates's challenge, instead, ends with the god's victory, the hostility many of his fellow citizens feel toward him, and the penalty of death that came from pursuing his readiness to challenge the god.

Concluding this particular act of his speech, Socrates tells his audience that he has come to the end of his labors and his wanderings. Once again Socrates, with his reference to labors and wanderings, uses language to comic effect to introduce an absurd analogy between the stooped old Socrates and the great, physically powerful mythic hero Heracles. He is not satisfied with challenging the god. He must see himself—a stooped, bug-eyed, impoverished old man—as an incarnation of the most powerful of Greek heroes. After having incurred much hatred with his questioning, Socrates tells us, he admits defeat and concludes that "it is likely, men (again, just *ô andres*) that the god is wise and that in this oracle he is saying that human wisdom is worth little or nothing" (23a). The conclusion arrived at after all the hatred he has brought on himself is hardly a strong affirmation of the god's wisdom, though. He says "it is likely" that the god is wise, using the same qualifier here (*kinduneuein*) that he used when he presented his own wisdom as human wisdom. He attributes to the god no more certain wisdom than he assigns to himself. Yes, the god has won this contest, but Socrates does not allow him an unqualified victory at this point in the speech. The hierarchy between the gods and men may remain, but barely. Only at the very end of the *Apology* is

the victory of the god affirmed with Socrates's final words in the courtroom when concerning the question of whether it is better to live or die he says: "Only the god knows."

Once he has come to accept the god's response, Socrates changes orientations, and from challenging the god, he transforms himself into the god's servant, dedicated to showing everyone he encounters that they are not wise –acting as if the god had in any way commanded him to engage in such a task. All Socrates heard from the god was the reply to Chaerephon's query, which Socrates by himself turns into a command, one that he tells his audience leaves him no leisure and leads him into 10,000-fold poverty. For most, poverty would be a sign of failure, a source of shame, not pride. For a shameless Socrates, scorning what other men praise, it simply points to the strength of what he now calls his divine mission, that activity that has brought him the "many hatreds," crushed him, we might say, on the popularity charts.

Socrates concludes this first section of the *Apology* by addressing not the jurors, but *ô andres Athenaioi*, and tells them that in recounting this story he did not hide anything large or small. He shamelessly opened himself up before the city. Socrates had begun his speech with the assurance that he would not beautify his speech with fancy phrases or cosmetics. The story he tells to explain the ancient slanders is likewise unembellished, he claims. It has none of those flourishes that might make it more pleasing to those around him, especially, we might note, the judges who will determine his fate—those artisans, politicians, and poets who sit on the jury and whose hatred he earned as he embarrassed them on his mission to serve the god. Rather, it becomes an ugly, comic story—an ugly little man desperately trying to contend with the Olympian gods, presenting himself as a Homeric and mythical hero and yet using the language of the agora as if he were a character in an Aristophanic work.

SCORNING DEATH / SCORNING THE CITY

The next section (or "act" or "episode") of the *Apology* deals not with imaginary interlocutors, but with the very real Meletus. Yet, even here when Meletus resists responding to Socrates's rather awkward question about believing in horses and not believing in "horse matters" or believing in flutes and not believing in "flute matters," Socrates reluctantly becomes another actor in his presentation and supplies the answers that a (not surprisingly) confused Meletus does not. To mark the end of this scene with Meletus, though, our friend HQ appears again. This "someone" (this *tis*, again) enters after Socrates has gotten Meletus to admit that Socrates must believe in the gods, and Socrates presents this HQ as someone who "might perhaps ask"

the following: "Then are you not ashamed, Socrates, of having followed the sort of pursuit from which you now run the risk of dying?" (28b) Here is the chorus affirming a basic human passion that is shared among most men—the fear of traveling across the Styx to that dark and cavernous land of "gibbering ghosts."

The answer—that he is not ashamed—to this HQ's query suggests how far Socrates stands from the men who are to judge him; more particularly, it says something about the contempt he has for the city's capacity to punish. Without the fear of death (or the loss of one's possessions), the punishments the city metes out would be meaningless. Thus, Socrates's lack of concern with dying (and with poverty) sets him apart from a community that controls its citizens through that threat, whether it is by death, ostracism, fines, or imprisonment. Socrates's insistence that what matters to others does not matter to him puts him outside the bonds of the city. As Zeus had said to Hermes when he gave him shame and justice to distribute among men, the one without shame, who does not care about how he appears to others, must be killed as a disease within the city.

Now, to respond to this HQ asking whether Socrates is not ashamed to court death as he does, Socrates employs a truly shocking image that can be read as either a completely laughable or tragic analogy. He compares himself to Achilles, or, as Achilles is referred to in this passage, the bastard son of a nymph, a demigod. Interpreting this curious analogy has challenged many, precisely because it seems so absurd.[10] The awkward attempted assimilation of Achilles' decision to go back onto the battlefield to avenge the death of Patroclus and Socrates's decision to pursue the practice of philosophy only highlights the difference between them: on the one hand, the youthful Homeric hero, the beautiful demigod renowned for his glorious deeds in the battle devoted to revenge, dressed in armor provided for him by the master metalworker, the god Hephaestus; and on the other hand, the bug-eyed, snub-nosed, stooping seventy-year-old man clothed only in a tattered cloak and perhaps even barefoot, devoted to the virtues of the unseen soul. Socrates's response to his HQ has brought us face-to-face with an image that forces his audience to notice Socrates's ugliness, his threadbare clothing, and his unheroic, indeed anti-heroic, stature.

While the initial scholarly response to the analogy would focus on the weirdness of making Socrates imagine the identification of his ugly self with the glorious son of a nymph,[11] the analogy becomes even more strained and questionable when we look at how Socrates develops the theme of the motivations that each one has for facing death without hesitation. In looking for an example of someone who saw no shame in not avoiding death, Socrates turned to a hero who was eager to avenge what he saw as an injustice, the killing of his beloved Patroclus. Achilles' desire for revenge would resonate

with those experiencing the story of the *Iliad*. That is part of what makes the *Iliad* such a powerful work. But as Socrates records the story of the *Iliad* in his own words the desire for revenge changes focus. In the *Iliad*, it is Achilles' regret that he was not there to aid his beloved Patroclus that motivates him. In Socrates's version, after speaking in his own voice to say that Achilles belittled death and danger, fearing much more to live as a bad, cowardly (*kakos*) man and not avenge his friend, Socrates adds a direct quote from Achilles that is not present in the *Iliad*. "Straightway," Socrates claims Achilles said, "May I die, after I inflict a penalty on the doer of injustice, so that I do not stay here ridiculous (*kakagelastos*) beside the curved ships, a burden to the land" (28d).

As Socrates recounts the *Iliad*, Achilles, the Homeric hero, returns to battle and certain death, fearing that he will be the object of laughter if he sits by the ships of the Achaeans and does not make the effort to repay the Trojans and especially Hector for the harm they have done to him. Achilles is shamed into facing death by the expectations of his fellow warriors. He lives in their eyes—not his own. Achilles' shame works to integrate him back into the camp of the Achaeans in Socrates's story, while Homer's story is precisely the one that shows Achilles' distance from the human community both in his animal-like rage and in his grief. It is only the intervention of the gods that moderates his rage and grief and enables him to rejoin the community of humans.

The analogy with Achilles as a response to the HQ ultimately makes sense only in that neither fears death—Achilles because he fears shame more, at least in Socrates's version, Socrates for two very different reasons. First, Socrates is shameless in his admission that he is not wise enough to know whether death is something to be feared; to not fear death is for him evidence of and support for his claim that his ignorance is really his wisdom. He cares not at all whether others laugh at him. And then, there is his commitment to stay, as he says, wherever he is stationed—something that has absolutely nothing to do with Achilles' willingness to die as an act of revenge for the death of Patroclus. Significantly, Socrates phrases this as "Wherever someone stations himself, holding that it is best, or wherever he is stationed by a ruler, there he must stay and run the risk, as it seems to me, and not take into account death or anything else." He then goes on to describe being placed by his military superiors in the battle lines in Potidaea, in Delium, in Amphipolis, but it is the first part of this sentence that interests me. Socrates says, "Wherever someone stations himself." And then at the end of the passage he makes reference to "where the god stationed me" (28d-e). Of course, the god did not station him anywhere. He stationed himself when he chose for himself the task of questioning all whom he encountered in order to refute the god. He notes as well that not to stay where one is stationed is "shameful" (28d).

I see this is a significant moment in the movement of the dialogue/speech/performance, because it is here in the midst of developing the most awkward Achilles analogy that Socrates revises the meaning of shame—changing it from an other-directed emotion, an emotion that can serve as the glue for a society, as we see in Achilles' concern with being the object of laughter. Now shame becomes something we impose on ourselves for leaving the positions at which we station ourselves. Listening to our own orders, or those that come from the gods, we ignore the community as the arbiter of what is and what is not shameful. When Socrates introduces the HQ whose question led to the analogy with Achilles and his subsequent reflections, Socrates refers to this HQ simply as an *anthropos*—a human. This questioner is depicted not as a citizen of a particular city, or even an individual of a certain gender (28b). The concept of shame Socrates introduces here is universal, like this HQ, and is being internalized so that citizenship and the particularities of what we today might call identity do not matter. Shame is, as Socrates presents it, something one feels before oneself—irrespective of the customs, traditions, and political commitments of the communities within which one lives. Socrates's shamelessness becomes the virtue of the human being who exists outside the polity precisely because it works against the structure, the cohesion of the polity as Protagoras' Zeus understood it. It is like that human wisdom he allows himself to have—independent of context.

THE TRANSFORMATION OF SHAME

The response to the HQ—the *anthropos*—who had interrogated Socrates about his willingness to face death is lengthy, convoluted, and obscure, given the weird analogy with Achilles, but it is also central, I believe, to the movement of the speech—and central to my argument about what Socrates accomplishes in the speech. The answer to the next HQ is direct. First, Socrates ventriloquizes this questioner who asks: "Socrates, for now we do not obey Anytus [who had said that since Socrates was brought to trial, he must be put to death] and so we will let you go, but on this condition: that you no longer spend time in this investigation or philosophize; and if you are caught doing this, you will die" (29c). Famously, Socrates responds to this HQ by addressing the city as a whole—"O Athenian men" (29d)— and affirms that he will listen to the god rather than to them, the men of the city, the makers of its laws, that he will not stop philosophizing, and he reverses the argument and scolds them, saying that they themselves should be ashamed that they care as they do for wealth and honor and reputation, but not for wisdom nor truth nor that their souls be as good as possible.

With this response, the move that was begun in the Achilles analogy continues to change the meaning of shame from that other-directed emotion that creates the bonds of the community by making individuals care about what others think to a concern with justice and virtue, irrespective of the expectations of others, irrespective of the gaze of others. Socrates had shamelessly, we can say, used Achilles on his path to taking the shameful out of the social and political context into which Protagoras' Zeus had placed it when he gave men the political art by instilling in everyone a sense of justice and shame. The experience of shame transforms in Socrates's speech from expressing awe before those with whom one lives as fellow citizens to finding within oneself, wherever one stations oneself, the approval of one's actions; Socrates's shamelessness earlier in the speech showed his impatience with the inhibiting emotion that suggested that he should care about how he appeared before others or that he should make beautiful his speech with elegant phrases or care about the ugly self he presented to the world lest he be the object of laughter.

Socrates's dismissive response to the HQ who offers him freedom from punishment were he to stop philosophizing provokes those by now familiar disturbances from the audience. This time the outburst is less surprising. Socrates is continuing to show them his contempt for their power by not caring about the things whereby they might try to control him, making it clear that the city as a whole has no power over him as it does over its other citizens. And, even more powerfully, he is suggesting that it is he, not the jury comprised of Athenian citizens, that enacts justice. He becomes his own judge in his own courtroom and he becomes the teacher of the citizens of Athens rather than their subject. He becomes the judge, not the judged. Appropriately, Socrates follows this with the gadfly analogy where he so shamelessly describes a bug—not success in war or wealth or empire—as the gift the gods give to the city, and describes himself as that lowly bug given by the gods for which the well-born noble steed of Athens should be thankful. From the awkward analogy with a demigod to one with a noisome insect, Socrates challenges the traditional hierarchies and assumptions. Usually one does not welcome the buzzing of flies, much less being bitten by them. In Socrates's strange world, the city of Athens should do both. The gods are to be thanked for the city's being bitten by Socrates. In this shameless world that Socrates is building for his native land, hierarchies—as in comedies—are overturned, men (Socrates) challenge gods and noble steeds are grateful to lowly insects. It is the dreadful failure of the Athenians not to recognize and embrace this comic inversion of the world in which they have lived until then.

The final example of an HQ in the first and major speech of the three speeches that comprise the *Apology* is less elaborate than the previous ones, in that Socrates does not ventriloquize this "someone's" speech, but simply suggests that this someone would be a person who at his own trial would

have pleaded and begged and put on display his weeping family to curry sympathy with the jury—all of which Socrates refuses to do. Socrates posits that such a someone would be indignant that Socrates does not do likewise and Socrates imagines another "someone" who is also angered by Socrates's restraint and votes against him (34c). To these potential interlocutors Socrates now responds with his re-definition of shame: though he has a family he will not bring them forward because that would not be noble and would bring him shame. Those "someones" who are angry with him for not doing what they would do may see him mocking their customs and patterns of behavior, not caring about how he appears before them and seeing himself as superior to them. He shows that he does not value what these fellow citizens value, preserving their lives, caring for their families. He sets himself outside the community where the appeals to suffering wives and children would evoke sympathy and speaks instead about justice. Now, it is precisely his devotion, as he sees it, to the justice of the laws of the city that set him at odds with the people of the city who are to judge him.

Curiously, as a man who has shed all concern with reputation, Socrates then claims to be acting for the sake of the reputation of the city—worried about how Athens will appear to strangers, to outsiders rather than to itself. And thus from worrying that the city will appear ridiculous if it falls for the piteous appeals of those fearful of the outcomes of their trials, he moves to the general reputation of the city should they in fact execute him and how others will cast scorn on the city for killing their wise man. As Socrates himself had moved beyond the values of the city in which he lived, so he tries to move the judges beyond their parochial view to the universal stance that will judge the city, the judges, for the broader injustices that exist outside the city rather than within it, to the perspective of the *anthropos* who expressed the universal fear of dying.

DEMOCRACY AND SHAME

Let me now turn to discuss the democratic city of Athens in which the trial of this shameless Socrates—or, as I should now really be saying, this conventionally shameless Socrates—takes place. Scholars, pundits, amateur historians, anyone reflecting on the trial that led to Socrates's death have struggled with how democratic Athens, the birthplace of the regime that we associate most closely with freedom and that indeed associated itself with the freedom of speech by elevating *parrhêsia* to serve as a name for one of their ships, could try and then execute Socrates. Explanations and excuses are many. Some marvel at the mere fact that Socrates survived as long as he did in the city and see that as a testament to the freedom of the Athenian political

system. Some see Socrates as bringing about his own death because of his offensiveness and hostility to the democratic city, scorning the sovereignty of the people. Others see it simply as a political backlash that accompanied the restoration of democracy after the overthrow of the puppet government established by the Spartans.[12] Exploring these various arguments is important and gives insight into Socrates's place in the city, but they also concern questions that largely focus on the nature of historical causation—why Athens of the late fifth century allowed Socrates to be brought to trial and then executed him when he was found guilty of the charges brought against him.

My interest in the answer is somewhat different, as I want to contemplate the tensions that Socrates introduced into the theoretical foundations of the political regime that defined itself, by the time that Socrates was executed, as "democratic"—both the tensions internal to the democratic regime itself and how Socrates's address to the city in this public forum highlights these tensions, forcing us to question the needs of our own political communities.

So, instead of looking at the historical circumstances of late fifth century in Athens, I turn to the imaginary democracy that Socrates introduces in Book 8 of the *Republic*. That fantasy of a democracy, as Socrates describes it, is a regime which "is full of freedom and free speech and there is license to do whatever one wants" (557b). This democracy is what we could describe as a shameless regime, where there is no hesitation about doing whatever one wants, not caring about the expectations of others. It is a regime where everyone acts without regard to traditions of the past, the hierarchies that characterize other regimes, or the judgmental gaze of one citizen at another. As a regime that obliterates hierarchies it allows slaves, both male and female, to live no less free than those who bought them, and among women and men, as Socrates says, there is equality. And just to carry this freedom and absence of hierarchy about as far as it can go, we learn that in this democracy the animals—the horses and asses—are so free that they do not stand aside for citizens, instead bumping into them (563b-c). It is also a regime in which those who have "been sentenced to death or exile, nonetheless stay [. . .] and carry [. . .] on right in the middle of things; as though no one cared or saw, stalking the land like a hero" (558a). It is a regime where the shameless Socrates could have lived happily ever after alongside all the others who would not be offended by his own lack of concern for what they cared about. But, of course, the democracy of the *Republic* is a regime that cannot sustain itself. The city cannot be comprised of shameless citizens. The fantasy democracy of the *Republic* degenerates all too quickly into the worst form of oppression: that found in the regime of the tyrant.

For a democracy to survive and not degenerate into the tyranny that follows in Book 9 of the *Republic*, it would need to violate the principles on which it is built; it cannot be shameless and express the full freedom that

Socrates envisions for it. It needs the civilizing emotion that Zeus gave to humans so that they could live together in cities. While Socrates may have lived happily ever after in the democracy of the *Republic*, that regime was as much a fantasy as Kallipolis, the city of Book 5 of the *Republic* with its philosopher kings and queens and its shared family and property. It is Athens in which Socrates lives, a regime that as a democracy treasures freedom, but cannot give full expression to a freedom that would remove shame as part of what sustains the community. The shameless Socrates challenges democracy, although I would also argue that Socrates with his shamelessness is in fact the truly democratic man, one who is open to all, egalitarian in communicating with all, citizen and foreigner, male and female, slave and master. But while Socrates is ready to live the shameless examined life of the philosopher, not covering up the truths about himself, uncovering the truths about others, not inhibited by the gaze of others, the democratic city must also resist the uninhibited shamelessness of philosophy if it is to maintain those restraints that protect it from a descent into tyranny.

As much as Socrates could undermine the arguments of Protagoras throughout the dialogue that bears Protagoras' name, the dependence of the political community on the sense of shame is not subject to his critical investigations, and the significance of Zeus' gift to mortals suggests the problematic status of the shameless Socrates. Shamelessness is central to the practice of philosophy, as Socrates understands it: the unexamined life—the one controlled by shame—is not worth living. But shamelessness can be troubling to our lives as political, social creatures. Democracy as a regime based on deliberation on the one hand demands a certain level of shamelessness, on citizens willing to express without fear or covering over with beautifying veils their potential contributions to the public debate. But shamelessness can also dissolve the attachments that make those debates possible. The city that paid for a ship that exalted *parrhêsia* could not endure a completely unfettered tongue such as Socrates presented. Therein lies the paradox of Socrates in the city and the *Apology*, making it lean more, I would say, toward the tragic than the comic. The tragedy lies in the irreconcilable nature of maintaining community while at the same time fostering shamelessness. The comedy comes from the fact that it is the absurd funny-looking bug-like man who compares himself to Heracles, Achilles and a gadfly who must point out this truth to the city.

Throughout, I have tried to suggest that the HQs and the outbursts become a sort of the chorus in the drama of the Socrates's defense. As such, these HQs and outbursts serve as the expression of the average citizens interacting with the hero—both tragic and comic—of the work to make us aware of how Socrates angers the citizens, the "men" of Athens to whom he speaks and of how in his guise as an Aristophanic character he would make them laugh. Yet, at the same time as he responds to the HQs and the outbursts, we

follow, like Alcibiades, enchanted by Socrates's speech, ready to see him as worthy of challenging Apollo—just as Marsyas did with his flute. We adore the shamelessness of this barefoot philosopher—his honesty, his scorn for pretension, his wit. But we must also attend to the challenges he poses for the city. Internalizing the standard for shame as he comes to do in his speech before the city, he pursues the examined life, the life that he defines as the life of the philosopher. Insofar as such examination leads to the shamelessness of a Socrates, we must also be wary of the paths he holds out for us as political creatures. The paradox lies in the fact that the hero of the *Apology* is also a threat to the city, not through the impiety of introducing new gods or corrupting the young by making them potential tyrants, but by having the young listen to his siren call to refashion a shame that had focused on the external judgment of their fellow citizens and thus had served as the glue for society into a shame that looked in upon itself. The internalized shame scorning traditions could serve to isolate and separate the young from the communities in which they lived.

I would like to think that I would not have been one of the 280 jurors who voted to condemn Socrates, but I also think that the speech of the *Apology* that Plato gives to him should take us beyond the mere admiration for the hero so many have made him out to be and recognize that his presence in democratic Athens raises serious questions about the unmitigated appreciation of our beloved gadfly.

NOTES

1. Discussion of the tensions that the *Apology* poses is not absent from the scholarly literature, but for the most part the focus is on the tension between the *Apology* and the *Crito*. In the former Socrates defies the city affirming that he will not obey a command by the city to stop philosophizing; in the latter he gives voice to the laws that develop the reasons to obey the laws of the city. See, for example, J. Peter Euben, "Philosophy and Politics in Plato's *Crito*," *Political Theory* 6, no. 2 (1978): 149–72; Richard Kraut, *Socrates and the State* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984); A. D. Woozley, *Socrates and Obedience to the Laws in Plato's* Crito (London: Gerald Duckworth and Company Limited, 1979), 83 and 40–59; Timothy A. Mahoney, "Socrates' Loyalty to Athens and His Radical Critique of the Athenians," *History of Philosophy Quarterly* 15, no. 1 (1998): 1–22; R. G. Mulgan, "Socrates and Authority," *Greece and Rome* 19, no. 2 (1972): 208–12. Others have been interested in the tensions that existed between Socrates and Athens, whether in I. F. Stone's suggestion that Socrates brought about his own execution because of his hostility to the democracy (I. F. Stone, *The Trial of Socrates* [Boston: Little Brown, 1988]); also, Mark Munn, *The School of History: Athens in the Age of Socrates* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000); or, the tension is understood in the language of Chris

Emelyn-Jones as "The Misunderstood Intellect vs. The Uncomprehending State, in Socrates, Plato, and Piety," *Mediterranean Studies* 2 (Greece and the Mediterranean) (1990): 21–28, see p. 28. Others have addressed the *Apology* as an exploration of the way of life of the philosopher; see especially Alexander Nehamas, *The Art of Living* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000). I am probably closest in approach to the work of Dana Villa, in *Socratic Citizenship* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001); Jacob Howland in *The Paradox of Political Philosophy: Socrates' Philosophic Trial* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1998), esp.1–38; and Gerald Mara in *Socrates' Discursive Democracy:* Logos *and* Ergon *in Platonic Political Philosophy* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1997), esp. Chapter 2. My concern is not the tension surrounding the question of obligation or the "intellect" versus the "uncomprehending" many, but the democratic principle of a willingness to speak freely what one truly thinks as exemplified by Socrates and the dangers that such shamelessness poses for the democratic city, or how democracy works against itself.

2. See Arlene W. Saxonhouse, *Free Speech and Democracy in Ancient Athens* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2006); S. Sara Monoson, *Plato's Democratic Entanglements* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000), esp. Chapter 2; Michel Foucault, *Fearless Speech*, ed. Joseph Pearson (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2001); Elizabeth Markovits, *The Politics of Sincerity: Plato, Frank Speech and Democratic Judgment* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008).

3. Saxonhouse, *Free Speech,* 8.

4. I deal with the literature addressing difference between shame and guilt extensively in Chapter 3 of my *Free Speech*., but see especially E. R. Dodds, *The Greeks and the Irrational* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1951); Bernard Williams, *Shame and Necessity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), and for the relation between *parrhêsia* and shame see Foucault, *Fearless Speech*, as well as his *The Courage of Truth: The Government of the Self and Others II: Lectures at the Collège de France 1983–1984*, ed. Frédéric Gros (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008). Though Christina Tarnopolsky focuses primarily on the *Gorgias*, she finds that in the *Apology* Socrates displays what she calls "respectful shame" rather than shamelessness. Christina H. Tarnopolsky, "Prudes, Perverts, and Tyrants: Plato and the Contemporary Politics of Shame," *Political Theory* 32, no. 4 (2004): 468–94.

5. See, for example, Agnes Heller, *The Power of Shame: A Rational Perspective* (London: Routledge and K. Paul, 1985).

6. Eva Brann, "The Offense of Socrates: A Rereading of Plato's *Apology*," *Interpretation* 7, no. 2 (1978): 1–21.

7. Jacob Howland explores the *Apology* as a tragedy, but does so by developing the analogy between Socrates and Oedipus. See Jacob Howland, "Plato's *Apology* as Tragedy," *The Review of Politics* 70, no.4 (2008): 519–46. In n. 7, Howland also recognizes the comedic potential of the *Apology*. Michael Zuckert highlights the structural as well as the theoretical analogies between the *Apology* and the *Clouds*. See Michael Zuckert, "Rationalism & Political Responsibility: Just Speech & Just Deed in the 'Clouds' & the 'Apology' of Socrates," *Polity* 17, no. 2 (Winter 1984): 271–97. See especially the diagram on p. 280 that captures how the *Apology* reproduces the rhythm of the *Clouds.*

8. Think here of Trygaeus' trip on a dung-beetle to the heavens in order to bring Peace to the Greeks in Aristophanes' *Peace*.

9. We should remember that the *Clouds* begins and basically concludes with the language of interest owed. Strepsiades goes to Socrates's *phrontisterion* to learn how to escape from the debts he owes, and after Pheidippides studies at Socrates's school Strepsiades displays his learning by dismissing those who are eager to collect those debts.

10. See Thomas G. West, *Plato's* Apology of Socrates: *An Interpretation*, *with a New Translation* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1979), 155; J. Peter Euben, *The Tragedy of Political Theory: The Road Not Taken* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990), 216–26; Roslyn Weiss, *Socrates Dissatisfied: An Analysis of Plato's* Crito (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 8–9; David Leibowitz, *The Ironic Defense of Socrates* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 138–42. Richard Holway highlights the positive elements of the analogy, rejecting any ironic overtones, "Achilles, Socrates, and Democracy," *Political Theory* 22, no. 4 (1994): 561–90.

11. See references in above footnote.

12. See, for example, George Grote, *Greece* (New York: Peter Fenelon Collier, [1851–6] 1900), vol. 8, 466–67, who along with the more recent Robert W. Wallace, "Private Lives and Public Enemies," in *Athenian Identity and Civic Ideology*, ed. Alan Boegehold and Adele C. Scafuro (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994), 142–43, marvels at the tolerance of the Athenians for Socrates's often scathing attacks. Gregory Vlastos, *Socrates: Ironist and Moral Philosopher* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991), 297; Villa, *Socratic Citizenship*, Stone, *The Trial of Socrates*, and Munn, *The School of History*, 286–87, all find fault with Socrates and his aggressive questioning and/or dismissal of the legitimacy of a regime ruled by the *dêmos*, whereas Robert Parker, *Athenian Religion: A History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 147, finds the recent history of Athens' defeat at the hands of the Spartans to lie behind the trial and condemnation of Socrates.

Chapter 2

Philosophy, Democracy, and Poverty

The Philosopher as Political Agent in Plato's Apology

Oda E. Wiese Tvedt

Why did Socrates choose to abstain from the political life of Athens? This question seems to have irked scholars, and is asked perhaps most succinctly by Paul Woodruff in his article "Socrates and Political Courage."[1] In spite of his evident political courage, Woodruff states, Socrates chose not to employ this courage on the arena of politics. Woodruff thus accuses Socrates of, in the worst case, cowardice, or, at best, a sin of omission. Ryan K. Balot, in "Socratic courage and Athenian Democracy," finds that Woodruff's question is timely, even though he holds that the answer is not so simple.[2] In the following I take a cue from these articles to the extent that they deal with Socrates as a political figure; however, I disagree with them both. And I disagree not only with the answers that the respective writers provide to the questions concerning both the reasons for, and the implications of, Socrates's presumed failure to act politically as a citizen, but also with the framing of the question itself: Why did Socrates choose to abstain from the political life of Athens? First of all, I do not agree with the premise that politics or political work is limited to institutions. In the light of this, other questions may prove more fruitful. Even so, I believe we should take Woodruff's question seriously, predominantly for this reason: In the *Apology* Plato has Socrates explicitly address this issue: "Perhaps it may seem strange that I go about and interfere in other people's affairs to give this advice in private, but do not venture to come before your assembly and advise the state."[3] Since Plato seems to take the question seriously, so should we. The reason Socrates gives for abstaining from politics is quite plain, although not very clarifying: his *daimonion* forbade it.[4] He also says that had he engaged in politics, he would have "been put to death long ago, and done no good either to you or to myself."[5] This claim is what Woodruff bases his criticism on, claiming that it is a false statement, and a detrimental one at that. This claim of Socrates's

will also be at the center of my reading, in which I argue that the distinction between private and public in the *Apology* points to yet another distinction: one between the individual and the masses. Placing the philosopher firmly in the private realm, that of the *idiotês,* Plato also gives us occasion to consider the ambivalence in the relationship between philosophy and politics, which are ostensibly so starkly contrasted in the *Apology*. I will make a lecture by Alain Badiou my point of departure in order to say something first about the relationship between philosophy and democracy, and second about the relationship between philosophy and politics in the *Apology*.

The *Apology*, as all Platonic dialogues, is many-layered and has thus been the subject of a wide range of interpretations and readings. Here, the *Apology* is first and foremost read as a political work. In this chapter, I shall argue that Plato, contrary to what Woodruff holds, presents Socrates as a political agent and that his absence from the political forums of the *polis* should be regarded as a political act in itself. Socrates's very first remark in the *Apology,* although ironic, gives us a clue to how we could read his defense speech: He says that his accusers spoke so persuasively that they "almost made me forget myself."[6] What is this "self" that he almost forgot and who is Socrates?[7] On a superficial level the *Apology* can be said to provide at least two answers regarding this latter question: Socrates is poor, and he is unpopular. My claim is that Socrates's poverty, and the fact that Plato alludes to it on numerous occasions throughout the defense speech of his protagonist, should be a matter of import when we investigate the political implications of this dialogue. What kind of life the philosopher chooses to lead is not a matter of secondary interest when considering whether the philosopher may function as a political figure. In fact, Socrates himself brings this matter to the fore, asking himself why the prejudices against him have arisen.[8] Since there would be no smoke without fire, since, if nothing were out of the ordinary, he would not stand trial on this day, Socrates claims he will try to answer his hypothetical questioner truthfully and to give an honest explanation. Noting this, a rephrasing of Woodruff's question seems to be in order. I suggest we rather ask: How, or in which *way*, did Socrates choose not to partake in the everyday politics of Athens? I shall argue that Plato in the *Apology* points to two separate but related distinctions that are important for the understanding of his stance on politics: the distinction between the individual and the masses and the one he draws between the private and the public. These two separate but connected distinctions between societal strata, or functions, points to what I, inspired by Alain Badiou, will argue is an opposition between philosophy and democracy in Plato. Furthermore, in the last section of this article, I will point to what I perceive to be the relation between life and philosophy and life and politics in the *Apology,* emphasizing the poverty of Socrates.

A FRAMEWORK FOR A READING

The *Apology* holds a particular position within the corpus since it is in large part a monologue, a speech, and not a dialogue. Instead, it is what Leo Strauss calls a "conversation with the city."[9] When reading the *Apology* one must, in other words, take special considerations into account regarding the matter of its content in relation to context. This only adds to the usual interpretative problems one encounters when reading Plato: Is it at all possible to talk of a Platonic philosophy? Are his texts to be considered educational pieces only, intended to hone the mind in order to prepare it for the true philosophical activity?[10] Is Socrates the mouthpiece of Plato? How much of the original meaning has gotten lost, not only in translation from a now long since dead language, but in the sheer oceans of time separating us from the ancients? I will not dwell on these issues, on which many interesting contributions are available, for they are not the subjects of this chapter. Still, I would like to clarify two of the premises that underlie my own reading. First, I reject a developmentalist line of reading, mainly on the basis of the two following points, both convincingly argued by Jacob Howland. The first is that there is no substantial argument that supports the hypothesis that the order of the dialogues is a prerequisite for understanding them, and the second is that we simply do not know in what order they were written.[11] Second, I here put forth what one might call a dogmatist view on Plato, in the sense that I do think that Plato has a positive, if not doctrine, at least philosophy. While the Platonic dialogues may not make out a coherent whole, they belong to the same corpus. Further, while some are related in dramatic time, the sheer number of different ways of cataloguing the works of Plato should alert the reader to the fact that there are many and varied ways both in which the works of Plato can be seen as interconnected and in which they mutually inform each other. In this reading I will try to take Jacob Howland's striking remarks to heart:

> To understand the unity of each dialogue as a living conversation is also to understand its necessary incompleteness, and so to appreciate the ways in which it points beyond itself toward other dialogues that can help to complete it, not because these other dialogues are any more complete, but because their horizons are different. Indeed, it may well be that every dialogue in some way implicates every other dialogue in this manner.[12]

It is my view that the philosophical meaning imbedded in the ancient, but still surprisingly relevant works of Plato is best understood by looking at the dialogues as complimentary. Therefore, the reader of this chapter will find that I rely on a number of Plato's other dialogues when making my interpretative claims about the *Apology*.

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PHILOSOPHY AND DEMOCRACY

In a 2006 lecture, Badiou addressed the relationship between democracy, politics and philosophy.[13] He observes an inherent contradiction in philosophy in that philosophy in itself on the one hand is fundamentally democratic in its attitude, while, on the other, the developed political concepts of most philosophers, from Plato to Hegel, Nietzsche, Wittgenstein, Heidegger, and Deleuze—and he sees fit to include himself in this group—are "not democratic in the generic sense of the word."[14] Still he maintains—and I think he is right—that the development of philosophy and democracy is fundamentally intertwined in Western thinking. The reason for this is, according to Badiou, twofold: First, the development of philosophy as it came to be with Plato, is dependent on, and coinciding with, the development of democracy. Badiou argues that the democracy of the Greek polis was a prerequisite for the development of philosophy as we know it, and that philosophy is therefore indebted to democracy. Second, philosophy in its essence is connected to democracy: in philosophy, at least ideally, it is irrelevant *who* the speaker is—the sole focus is on the contents of what is being said. Badiou holds this to be a fundamentally democratic and egalitarian trait, an aspect that Plato himself seems to endorse, at least if we let the following passage from *Theaetetus* be decisive.

> The philosophers grow up without knowing the way to the marketplace, or the whereabouts of the law courts or the council chambers or any other place of public assembly. Laws and decrees, published orally or in writing, are things he never sees or hears. The scrambling of political cliques for office; social functions, dinners, parties with flute girls—such doings never enter his head even in a dream. So with questions of birth–he has no more idea whether a fellow citizen is high born or humble, or whether he has inherited some taint from his forbearers, male or female, than he has of the number of pints in the sea, as they say.[15]

In this passage, Plato lets Socrates paint a picture of the philosopher as an egalitarian. Interestingly he does so in a dialogue that criticizes Protagoras' famous postulate: "man is the measure of all things," a view that can be taken to imply that all opinions are equally valid.[16] Signs of the fundamentally egalitarian roots of philosophy can also be found in the *Apology*, although they are not made the subject of an investigation, when Socrates says that he shall examine "anyone I happen to meet, young and old, citizen and stranger," and also that he is "equally ready to question the rich and the poor."[17] Badiou observes that even if philosophy originates from democracy, it cannot necessarily accept democracy as a goal of its practice. Since Plato, Badiou asserts, the goal of philosophy has been, first, to distinguish between correct and incorrect opinions, and second, as anyone could happen to have a

right opinion on false terms, to distinguish opinions from truth. While anyone can be a philosopher, not all statements are equally valid on philosophical terms. Pluralistic conceptions of truth are thus a contradiction of the essence of philosophy, which in turn comes to contradict the democratic principles of the freedom and the equality of opinions. In philosophy, equality of minds does not imply the equality of opinions.[18] Since the democracy of Athens was, in Badiou's view, a crucial prerequisite for the very conception of philosophy, he regards it as a paradox that the movement from philosophy and back toward politics still presents itself as problematic. In his own words: "If you want, democracy is a necessity before philosophy, and a difficulty after philosophy."[19] Badiou consequently asks: What is it, then, that the philosophical act changes in politics? The answer is to be found in the relation between the democratic conception of freedom and the philosophical conception of truth. If there is such a thing as political truth, this truth is an obligation for every rational mind. If there is no political truth, then there is no positive relation between philosophy and politics. The three concepts of philosophy, democracy and politics are interconnected by the question of truth—in itself an obscure category. Badiou suggests justice as a political equivalent of philosophical truth.[20] In the following, I will base my reading of Plato's *Apology* on this premise, in order to inquire whether it may illuminate the question of Socrates as a political figure.

In the passage quoted above from the *Theaetetus*, and in passages preceding it, Socrates is making a point of how ridiculous the philosopher must appear when entering the political arenas, as would anyone forced to appear at a public event unaware of the social conventions called for at that particular event. Socrates is of course exaggerating in his description; he knows his way to the courts to which he has been summoned. The case at issue is not so much that he is oblivious to the conduct expected of him by the *dêmos*, but that he refuses to accept the premises of politics; they seem to be incompatible with the premises of philosophizing. This becomes strikingly clear in the *Theaetetus* when Socrates compares the men of politics to slaves.[21] Only the philosopher thinks freely, or so Socrates seems to claim. Within the *Apology* itself the opposition between the philosopher and the men of the *dêmos* also becomes manifest by the fact that Socrates continuously points out the differences between himself and the political citizens of Athens.[22]

THE GOALS OF PHILOSOPHY AND THE GOALS OF DEMOCRACY: TRUTH VS. JUSTICE

From the very beginning of the dialogue, Plato establishes what we, in accordance with Badiou, may call a connection between philosophical truth and

political justice. Socrates's opening remark is, as mentioned, an example of the famous Socratic irony: he praises his accusers for their riveting speeches, although "hardly anything they said were true."[23] Furthermore, Socrates claims not to be an accomplished speaker; "unless indeed they call an accomplished speaker the man who speaks the truth."[24] "From me you will hear the whole truth." And furthermore: "for I put my trust in the justice of what I say."[25] He makes a plea for the jurors not to mind the way he speaks, for he will not speak in "embroidered and stylized phrases," like his accusers, and implores the jurymen to "concentrate your attention on whether what I say is just or not, for the excellence of a judge lies in this, as that of a speaker lies in telling the truth."[26] As is often the case in the Platonic dialogues, the prologue provides valuable hints as to the main themes of the dialogue, indicating what the careful reader should be observant of. In this specific text, we are introduced to the literary drama *in medias res*. As such, there is no prologue, but I will count the passage up to and including 18a5 as an introduction.[27] The philosophical themes suggested in the prologue can be taken to be the following: the concepts of truth and justice, but also the power of language and oratory, and the relationship between language and truth. Truth and justice are, ideally, fixed entities, in the sense that what is true and what is just is independent of language. Language, on the other hand, can be both deceptive and truthful. It is the medium through which both lies and truths are expressed. The ability to see through language, and to separate truth from lies is then the hallmark of a true judge, Socrates seems to say. In the first passages, where Socrates is addressing the jurymen, and "the men of Athens" in general, defending himself against "the old slanders" (up until 24b2), Socrates keeps insisting he "speaks the truth." In fact, the word "truth" (*aletheia*) is mentioned no less than 11 times only in these first passages. Socrates continues to repeat himself, almost poetically, in claiming that he tells the truth, throughout the dialogue.[28] When he turns to cross-examining Meletus, on 23c—28a5, the theme of truth is downplayed as he dismantles the charges against him. Still, Socrates maintains that he speaks the truth and that Meletus does not, and he concludes his examination, turning away from Meletus as though he has grown tired of him, by again stating that he, Socrates, has told the truth.[29]

Even if refuting Meletus seems boringly easy, Socrates claims that he and his accusations are not the real threat. As Plato again lets the defendant turn to address the audience in general, Socrates remarks that the current accusations are not what will be his undoing, but that he has a far more elusive and difficult adversary to tackle; the rumors and old slanders and the unpopular reputation his philosophical examinations have gained him. These old slanders, against which he himself proclaimed he had made a "sufficient defense before" earlier, are what he now addresses in the remainder of his defense

speech.[30] From this point on he turns his inquisitive powers to a much more interesting subject: himself. The performative self-examination that we, and the audience, witness in what follows have two major themes: the first part (28a5–31c5) revolves around virtuous conduct, that is, the question whether Socrates has acted impiously or unjustly.[31] In the second part of the self-examination Socrates turns, quite abruptly, to the question of politics, and it is what follows in this passage that will be the focus of the next sections of this chapter.[32]

JUSTICE DOES NOT TAKE PLACE IN POLITICS

My reading depends on the idea that, for Plato, justice does not take place in politics, a view that I find affirmed in the following, much discussed statement: "A man who really fights for justice must lead a private, not a public, life if he is to survive for even a short time."[33]

In this quote, Plato can be read as, at the very least, stating that justice cannot take place in a democracy. Perhaps is there no place for justice in politics at all. If we return to Badiou's claim that justice is a political equivalent of philosophical truth, this means that democracy, as it were, is not a goal in itself for philosophy, or at any rate, not for Plato, even though this premise seems to be taken for granted by both Woodruff and Balot. Woodruff asserts that the incidents that Socrates refers to as evidence for the proclaimed dangers associated with engaging in politics were anomalous, and that Socrates's use of these examples is painting a false picture of the threat represented by the democratic system in Athens.[34] The amnesty of 403 BCE has been in effect for four years when Socrates gives the potential threat to his life as a reason for his absence from politics, and, Woodruff further argues, even before that there were only a few cases of political murders that we know of.[35] One of them was the execution of Antiphon who was condemned for plotting to overthrow democracy. Woodruff comments as follows: "Had Socrates plotted with Antiphon to overthrow the democracy, he would have put his life in danger, but normal political action would have had no such result."[36] This argument is problematic in that it relies on a premise that Socrates was democratically inclined, a premise that I in the following shall argue is false.

Badiou problematizes the general agreement on democracy as ideal governance in an article entitled "Highly Speculative Reasoning on the Concept of Democracy." Here he claims that the notion of democracy as the one good form of governance is one of the authoritative opinions of our times. The overall consensus on democracy should, in itself, be enough to raise suspicion in the philosopher.[37] This, of course, comes down to a question of what the real *purpose* of politics is. We said that the goal of philosophy is truth, and the

goal of politics, justice. Is democracy then the most just form of governance? In order for it to be a goal in itself for the philosopher this would have to be the case. Badiou observes that the evil twin of mass democracy is always mass tyranny, or the dictatorship of the majority. Socrates seems to make a similar point when he recounts his experience as a council member. After the battle at Arginusae, the majority put themselves above the law and tried to silence Socrates by threats, as Woodruff also mentions. Accepting Woodruff's accusation that Socrates should have used his courage on the political arena implies a premise that the public democratic arena *is* the place where one can do the most good to the benefit of the most people. I will argue that this shows itself as a highly problematic premise in the *Apology*, as well as in several others of Plato's works.

WHY IS IT THAT JUSTICE DOES NOT TAKE PLACE IN POLITICS?

In the following I will try to clarify some of the fundamental aspects of this question—which is of course much too complex to be comprehensively accounted for here. I suggest that in Plato's political thought there are (at least) two aspects to this question. One has to do with the individuals of whom the masses are composed; the other concerns the masses as one body. When it comes to the issue of the individuals that in sum constitute the political arena, Plato, through his dialogues, maintains a distinction between the private and the public, which I will argue is transferable to a distinction between the individual and the masses. Plato lets Socrates himself give an answer to Woodruff's question as to why he did not participate in politics: His response to hearing that no one was wiser than himself, and to indeed discover that this was so, was not to immediately try to assume power or influence. Instead he went to each one privately and "conferred upon him what I say is the greatest benefit."[38] This decision, to do his work outside of politics, implies that Socrates sincerely thought the personal, or private, sphere to be the one where he and his form of knowledge could make an impact of some consequence. The citizens of the Athenian *polis* in the fifth century BCE surely had conceptions of "private" and "public" different from our modern conceptions. The Athenian men of a certain social and economic standing were expected to devote a large part of their time to managing the city, but the city itself was not comprised only of free Athenian male citizens. The *polis*, used as a synonym for society, or for the community governed by a political entity, included slaves, women, children, and men without the status of citizens. The *politeia*, as Aristotle makes clear, is the governing body or

the political organization of the city-state.[39] One should of course be careful not to think that a translation of terms means that one has identified a corresponding phenomenon. One example of the way in which the Greek ancient *polis* differs from society in its modern sense is that we tend to include social and economic relations in the latter term, while for the Greeks these matters belonged to the *oikos*—the household. In other words, they were private matters.[40] So the ancient Greek society can be said to consist of three distinct, although constantly interchanging spheres: the *oikos*, the *polis* and the *politeia*.[41] When Socrates says he preferred to do his work in the private realm, the realm of the *idiotês*, this should not to be taken to mean that he confined his philosophical activities to the *oikos*, the private homes. He simply means outside of the governmental institutions of the *polis*, although his philosophical activities were very much "public" in the modern sense of the word. The distinction Socrates makes when he places philosophy firmly in the non-political realm appears to be based in a notion that humans behave differently as a part of a crowd from how they would behave in more private situations. This claim finds support in an often-quoted passage from the *Republic*, where the masses are compared to a large and irrational animal:

> Not one of those paid private teachers, whom the people call sophists [. . .] teaches anything other than the convictions the majority express when they are gathered together. It is as if someone were learning the moods and appetites of a huge strong beast that he's rearing—how to approach and handle it, when it is most difficult to deal with or most gentle and what makes it so, what sounds it utters in either condition, and what sounds soothe or anger it. Having learned all this [. . .] he calls this knack wisdom [. . .] In truth, he knows nothing about which of these convictions is fine or shameful, good or bad, just or unjust, but he applies all these names in accordance with how the beast reacts—calling what it enjoys good and what angers it bad. [42]

Here, it seems to be implied that the opinion of the crowds, "when gathered together," at least potentially differs from the opinion they each hold as individuals. The sophists, the rhetoricians and the members of the *dêmos* are not only lacking in virtue, but also lacking in insight into what virtue *is*. Hence, neither possessing nor having knowledge of justice they are not even able to pose the question regarding what is the purpose of the state, far less are they able to answer it. If what Socrates accuses his fellow citizens of holds water, lacking even the knowledge that justice is the measuring standard for the body politic, the members of the *dêmos* could not tell whether a given state or political decision is good or bad. The democratic *polis* is comparable to a ship adrift at sea, where everybody fights to be the one steering, but nobody thinks to ask where they are going.

ALCIBIADES AS THE EMBODIMENT OF THE DISTINCTION BETWEEN THE PRIVATE AND THE PUBLIC *PERSONA*

The distinctions between the private and the public, and between the individual and the crowd, can also be said to be illustrated in Plato's work through the story of Alcibiades. Alcibiades, who is a young man on the verge of adulthood in the dialogue that bears his name, is about to set out for a career in politics. This he intends, despite the fact he doesn't know the first thing about justice, which, it becomes clear in the course of the dialogue, is the very insight that is required for the good management of the affairs of the *polis*. Socrates makes him see that he lacks the knowledge to do what he has set his mind to, but the ominous words at the end of the dialogue point to the downfall of them both: "I should like to believe that you will persevere, but I'm afraid—not because I distrust your nature, but because I know how powerful the city is—I'm afraid it might get the better of both me and you."[43] In the *Symposium* the same Alcibiades relates his inner turmoil at the sight of Socrates. On the one hand, he's torn between the Socratic ideal of self-examination and truth-seeking, and "yet; the moment I leave his side, I go back to my old ways: I cave in to my desire to please the crowd."[44]

The character of Alcibiades can thus be said to serve as an example of how the distinction between the public and the private person is displayed in Plato. In his private talks with Socrates Alcibiades admits to not having the knowledge needed for politics, but as soon as he enters the public realm the sway of the crowds outweighs that of Socrates's philosophical insight.[45] In the *Apology* Socrates makes much of his own unpopularity, calling the prejudices "most harsh and grievous."[46] One can therefore be tempted to ask whether to be unpopular is also a prerequisite for philosophy, or if it is the other way around: If one is popular one is most likely not engaged in philosophy? I said before that the distinction between private and public could be transferred to a distinction between individuals and masses. I think it needs to be pointed out that this is not a seamless transference. While individuality seems to be irreducible in the Platonic dialogues, in the political writings of Plato, the *Republic* and the *Laws,* the private sphere understood in terms of the *oikos,* the household, seems to be what is problematic and what needs to be eliminated for the sake of a just state.[47] In the *Republic*'s Book V, we find that in Socrates's famous proposal that women also should be included in the guardian classes, Plato lets Socrates claim that the upbringing of children shall be taken over by "officials appointed for the purpose" and that "no women are to live privately with any man."[48] Similarly, in the *Laws,* the meals should be communal, for both men and women. Plato has the old Athenian, the main speaker in the *Laws*, give several reasons for this. I will account for one: he first poses the question: What if someone thinks that even if one *could*

proclaim laws for private conduct that doesn't necessarily imply that one should. Suppose he thinks that a man ought to be allowed to do what he likes with his day, and not be regulated at every turn. The Athenian's answer to his own question is unambiguous: "Well, if he excludes private life from his thinking, and expects that the citizens will be prepared to be law-abiding in their public life as a community, he's making a big mistake."[49] Leaving out the women and the feminine realm of the *oikos* is losing half the battle, so to say.

Another important reason why the private realm should be regulated, I suggest, has to do with the accumulation of wealth, although this is not explicitly mentioned in this passage of the *Laws*. Here we will have to go back to the *Republic* again, before I will go on to try and show how all this relates to the *Apology* and Socrates as a political agent. It is in the private sphere man can pursue and accumulate goods and luxuries. In the *Republic* Socrates describes a city where each individual has what is needed, and not much more. But when Glaucon protests, Socrates goes on to say that they might as well make up a luxurious city and that indeed this might shed light on what they are looking for: "how justice and injustice grows up in cities."[50] That Plato goes on to describe sharp limitations for property, and for all intents and purposes abolishes private life for his guardians all together, is well known and there is no need to go further with this line of reasoning here. Let it suffice to say that while the specific behavior of the masses as opposed to the individual is what seems to present itself as problematic in politics, the solution to this problem seems to rest upon a notion that the private life is what must be abolished, or at least severely restricted, for the sake of a better public realm. In the *Republic* Plato expels part of the private realm in the sense of the *oikos*. But the private sphere in the sense of the part of *polis* that is not *politeia*, governmental institutions, is as mentioned not extinguished, rather the contrary: In the *Republic,* it is the private realm, the *polis*, the realm of philosophy that governs the *politeia*. In this sense neither the public nor the private sphere is abolished, but the relation of power is shifted so profoundly between them that the words hardly can be taken to hold their original sense any longer. With this, Plato can be said to include both the *oikos*- and the *politeia*-sphere into the *polis*-sphere, or to extend the *polis* to contain all three spheres in such a way that the city can be said to truly be one with itself. In the *Republic* Book IV, the importance of the city being at one with itself is elaborated upon just before Socrates proposes that marriages, wives and children should be governed by the old proverb: "Friends possesses everything in common."[51] What makes a city one, so that it can rightfully be called *a* city, and not in reality be many cities; "at war with each other," is the elimination of both wealth and poverty.[52] This, in turn brings me to the last section of this chapter, where I would like to look at Socrates as a political figure in the *Apology* in relation to his poverty.

LIFE AND TEACHINGS: SOCRATES'S POVERTY AS POLITICAL CRITICISM

The final point that I would like to make is concerned with the relationship between life and teachings with regard to Plato's Socrates. Balot writes that anyone who wishes to succeed in politics "will have to digest and regurgitate Demo's own opinions back to it": "The successful politician must adopt the *dêmos'* own conception of the good."[53] He claims that this aspect of political life would lead to a corruption of Socrates's soul if he were to enter into politics on these terms, and that this is the reason for Socrates's lack of involvement on the political scene.[54]

While this may be true, at least in part, I am suggesting that this also says something important about democracy in itself, and also about the philosopher's role as a political agent. I would also like to propose an alternative, and less selfish, reason for Socrates's absence from the political scene. Political success within a democracy depends on one's ability to adjust, as Balot himself points out.[55] The chances of succeeding are proportionally greater the less critical one is of the system within which one is operating.

This in turn raises the question: What, exactly, is it then, that one succeeds in? From the beginning of the *Apology*, Socrates distances himself from the public life of Athens, and makes it clear that his interests are oriented elsewhere: "The position is this: This is my first appearance in a law court, at the age of seventy; I am therefore simply a stranger (*xenos*) to the manner of speaking here."[56] I want to relate this to the poverty of Socrates. This aspect of the *Apology* is also treated of in Drew E. Griffin's article "Socrates' Poverty: Virtue and Money in Plato's *Apology*."[57] Griffin notes that while earlier biographies of Socrates never fail to treat the matter of his poverty as a subject of some philosophical importance, more recent biographies tend to pass over the subject quickly—as if poverty no longer is of any philosophical interest.[58]

Socrates alludes to his poverty several times in the *Apology*; the first time is at 23c. Socrates concludes the account of his philosophic practice by saying that he has neglected his own affairs and is in "vast poverty (*penia*) on account of my service to the god."[59] Directly after this he describes his followers as "the young men who have most leisure, the sons of the richest men."[60] The reason why Plato makes this contrast is not completely clear, but one suggestion is that he simply wants to make the rhetorical point that Socrates might very well have made a profit from his occupation. The fact that he has not, goes to show that his commitment is to morality and his actions guided by a sense of duty, not greed. This is further supported by Socrates's calling on his poverty as witness to the truth of his words, at 31c. Here again Socrates makes a point of the fact that he has not derived any profit from his practice.[61]

When he is about to propose his own punishment, he again makes a point of his philosophical endeavors being so all-encompassing that he has neglected the things that absorb most people, at least, we might add, the members of the *dêmos,* namely "wealth, household affairs, the position of general or public orator or the other offices, the political clubs and factions that exists in the city."[62] He furthermore holds that he thought himself too honest to be able to survive were he to set out in such a direction, and that he instead: "went to each of you privately and conferred upon him what I say is the greatest benefit, by trying to persuade him not to care for any of his belongings before caring that he himself should be as good and as wise as possible, not to care for the city's possessions more than for the city itself."[63] Shortly after this, he states that he is a poor benefactor, and that, while the Olympic victor does not need alms in order to eat, he himself actually does.[64] Seeing as his endeavors have been of "the greatest benefit" to the Athenians, he suggests that he does not deserve punishment at all, but rather to be dined at the Prytaneum as was custom for Olympian victors.[65] His poverty is made a point of also at 38b when Socrates suggests that the assembly sets his fine to the amount he can afford to pay: one *mina*.[66]

One main obstacle for interpreting the poverty of Socrates as an unambiguous sign of virtue is the scholarly controversy surrounding the sentence of 30b: "*ouk ek chrêmatôn aretê gignetai all' ex aretês chrêmata kai ta alla agatha tois anthrohpois apanta kai idia dêmosia*." Here Socrates can be taken to state that "Wealth does not bring about excellence, but excellence makes wealth and everything else good for men," which John Burnet holds to be the correct translation.[67] The alternative, that has also been the standard translation, runs like this: "Not out of money does virtue arise, but out of virtue money and all other goods for human beings, both private and public."[68] This translation raises some fundamental problems; if Socrates is poor it then follows that he is not virtuous, or alternatively, that he is lying. Griffin holds the latter alternative to be the probable explanation, and solves this problem by distinguishing between caring *about* something, and caring *for* it. While it is possible to care *about* numerous things at the same time, here: money and virtue, one can only care *for* one of them at a time. Thus, he argues that money is simply not a matter of interest for Socrates. It is not a case of Socrates being opposed to or disgusted by having a fortune, but this is simply a matter of no consequence for the virtuous philosopher. E. de Strycker and S. R. Slings are in tune with Griffin in their commentary, presenting what Myles F. Burnyeat claims is the "only reasoned opposition" to Burnet's interpretation: "If Plato had wanted to say what Burnet makes him say, he would certainly not have said it in such an ambiguous and misleading way."[69] After showing that both translations are philologically possible, Burnyeat goes on to make a case for Burnet's translation on

philosophical grounds, asking: "Where else does Socrates in *properia persona* call money or wealth a good?"[70] And I might add rhetorical a question of my own: Where else does Socrates address the *dêmos*, the city of Athens? One possible objection against de Strycker and Slings is namely that they underestimate how radical Socrates's criticism of his fellow Athenians is. In *Rhetorica ad Alexandrum* the case of the poor being more just than the wealthy is given as an "example of an example" (*sic*) that would surprise and invoke skepticism in the listener:

> Examples are of two kinds; for some things turn out according to our expectations, others contrary to them. The former cause credit, the latter discredit. For instance*, if some one declares that the rich are juster than the poor and instances certain just actions on the part of rich men, such examples are in accordance with our expectation, for one can see that most men think that rich people are juster than poor people.* If, on the other hand, some one shows that certain rich individuals have acted unjustly in order to get money, thus employing an example which is contrary to expectation, he would cause the rich to be distrusted.[71]

So, when the impoverished Socrates takes it upon himself to lecture the Athenians on justice, he does not have convention on his side. The mere claim that Socrates should be exemplary in any way would have been extremely radical. Wealth in itself was likely seen as an evidence of virtue, a view not far from what is proffered by Cephalus in the *Republic*, when he claims that great substance is not the only requirement for being just, but makes it a lot easier.[72] This claim, as it turns out, is connected to the view that justice is defined as speaking the truth and paying one's debts, and seems to be thought of as a relatively uncontroversial assumption of what justice is. This suggests that Plato may well have had good reasons for stating his claim a bit ambiguously, taking the context into consideration. And, if Leo Strauss' description of Plato's writings as a text that will, "and is designed to, say different things to different readers"[73] has any truth to it, this must be especially true in regard to the *Apology*. Let us not forget that in this specific text, the *Apology*, Socrates is addressing both his friends, the "true judges," and the Athenian assembly as well as all men, in general. In other words, Plato had strong rhetorical and strategical reasons for leaving the claim about the relation between money and virtue a little muddled. Still, the most convincing argument for interpreting this sentence in the sense that virtue makes everything good for men, I find is this: At the very end of the dialogue, after he has received his verdict, and right before his famous closing remark, Socrates, still addressing the "true jurors," seems to direct his words at the men of the *dêmos* again:

> However, I make this request of them: when my sons grow up, gentlemen, punish them by troubling them as I have troubled you; if they seem to you to care for *money or anything else more than for virtue*, and if they think they amount to something when they do not, rebuke them as I have rebuked you [. . .]. If you do this both I and my sons shall have received just treatment from you.[74]

This is Socrates's dying wish to the city that has condemned him. There is no trace of irony here, as I see it. It seems highly unlikely that Socrates at this, of all times, is speaking in jest or simply taunting the Athenians by stating, as he has earlier, that he has cared for them as a "father or an elderly brother."[75] It is hard to believe that a father's dying request for the care of his three sons could be made out of spite. Especially so considering that it is for the sake of his sons that Socrates comes as close to pleading as he ever does in the *Apology*, asking the jurors not to cast their vote in anger, and by vindictiveness deprive three children of their father.[76] On these grounds I conclude that Burnets' translation is by far the most plausible. This means that money and wealth not only make it on to the very long list of things that philosophers do not care about, but are to be seen as something that Plato explicitly addresses in this dialogue; as something we should guard against.

If we are to see the life and teachings of Socrates as interconnected, which I think we should, seeing as Socrates presents himself as exemplary,[77] and seeing as Socrates's way of life is emphasized in so many of the Socratic dialogues, I think it is possible to deduce something of more profound philosophical and political meaning from Socrates's poverty: the fact that Socrates does not engage himself in the pursuit of material goods, puts him in a unique position for engaging in criticism. Someone who has no economic interests in the current state of affairs is free of one of the strongest interests in preserving this state of affairs, as well as of any incentive to change or exploit the system for his own economic benefit. Therefore, it is precisely Socrates's poverty and indifference toward material wealth that make him dangerous; he is incorruptible, and he is loyal not to the system, but to truth. At the same time, his way of life in itself represents an implicit criticism against those who work toward achieving the greatest possible benefits for themselves, and who care more about what the *polis* has to offer, than they do for the city itself.

I will not elaborate at length on the meaning of "the city itself" here. Rather, I will let it suffice to refer to the discussion between Socrates and Callicles in the *Gorgias*, where political activity seems to be summed up by the goal of making citizens "as good as possible."[78] This view is also expressed in the *Apology* itself. Socrates, in his interrogation of Meletus, asks: If he, Socrates, is the one corrupting the young, then who is it that improves them? The answer to this is: those who know the laws, that is, the judges and all

other citizens. In the following passage, however, it becomes clear that the one who knows the laws best, and who is furthermore willing to uphold them, is Socrates himself. [79] With this it becomes clear that also in the *Apology*, betterment of the citizens is a goal, at least for Socrates.

So, to propose a tentative conclusion, I hold that Plato in the *Apology* establishes the philosopher as very much a political agent, but in terms of engaging in subversive activity. He thus places the philosopher outside of the everyday political discourse. If we see the *Apology* as mainly a political work and Socrates as a political figure, it is not unlikely that Plato in the *Apology* depicts the execution of Socrates as a political murder. Taking into consideration the relationship I have premised between politics and philosophy—the goal of philosophy is truth, and the goal of politics is the political equivalent of truth, justice—one can suggest that what is sentenced to death in the Athenian democracy is justice, in other words, truth. The Athenians have chosen money and wealth over virtue.

With this it seems that justice does not have a place in democracy. But does this amount to saying that there is no positive relation between philosophy and politics at all? It is not possible to answer this question without a longer elaboration on the relationship between philosophy and politics as it appears in the *Republic*, but it is my view that the concept of politics in the *Republic* is so radically altered that one might, tentatively, conclude that this is the case. At the very least it is, according to my reading, safe to say that Plato's Socrates was not a democrat, and so that he had real reason to fear what would become of him if he were to engage in a political life.

The philosopher's role, and plight, is the search for truth and, in a political context, justice. By posing the uncomfortable questions nobody wants to hear, the philosopher becomes unpopular and a menace to society, or to democracy, in the case of Socrates. I will let Socrates have the final word, perhaps summing up the political role of the philosopher at the same time: "I know well enough that this very conduct makes me unpopular, and this is proof that what I say is true."[80]

NOTES

1. Paul Woodruff, "Socrates and Political Courage," *Ancient Philosophy* 27 (2007): 289–302.

2. Ryan K. Balot, "Socratic Courage and Athenian Democracy," *Ancient Philosophy* 28 (2008): 49–69.

3. *Apology* 31c. The translation is by Harold North Fowler, in *Plato: Euthyphro; Apology; Crito; Phaedo; Phaedrus*, Loeb Classical Library 36 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1914). Most translations will be from this work, although

some translations will be from G. M. A. Grube, trans., *Apology*, in *Plato. Complete Works*, ed. John M. Cooper (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1997). The first will be marked by the insertion of (i) after the reference, the latter by (ii). The Greek text from the *Apology* is from *Platonis Opera*, vol. 1, ed. E. A. Duke, W. F. Hicken, W. S. M. Nicoll, D. B. Robinson, and J. C. G. Strachan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995).

4. *Apol.* 31c. Socrates also says that he simply did not have the "leisure" to do so, on account of his service to the God (Apollo) (23b8).

5. *Apol.* 31d.

6. *Apol.* 17a, (ii).

7. This is a big question, to which a fair number of scholars have devoted their attention, and my answer is in this perspective a very limited one. See, for example, Cathrine H. Zuckert for a narrative approach in "Becoming Socrates," in *Reexamining Socrates in the* Apology, eds. Patricia Fagan and John Russon (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2009). The matter of Socrates's identity is certainly a subject in a number of other dialogues as well, and Jacob Howland makes this issue a main concern in his readings of the *Theaetetus,* the *Euthyphro,* the *Cratylus,* the *Sophist*, and the *Statesman*, reading these as Socrates's philosophical trial, as opposed to the law-trial of the *Apology*. Howland, *The Paradox of Political Philosophy. Socrates' Philosophical Trial* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1998). Other dialogues, perhaps most notably the *Phaedrus*, also call forth the question of Socrates's identity, as, among others, Page duBois notes, in "The Homoerotics of the *Phaedrus*," *Pacific Coast Philology* 17, no. 1/2, (1982): 9–15.

8. *Apology* 20c, (i).

9. Leo Strauss, *City and Man* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964), 56.

10. See, for example, John Beverslius, "A Defence for Dogmatism," *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* 31 (2006): 85–111, for an account of the views of the so-called anti dogmatist.

11. Jacob Howland, "Re-Reading Plato: The Problem of Platonic Chronology," *Phoenix* 45, no. 3 (1991): 189–214.

12. Howland, "Re-Reading Plato," 195.

13. Alain Badiou, "Highly Speculative Reasoning on the Concept of Democracy," trans. Jorge Jaurregui, *Abrégé de métapolitique* (Seuil: Paris, 1998). English version printed in *lacanian inc 16.* Accessed: 01.09.2017. http:// www.lacan.com/jambadiou.htm

14. Badiou, "Highly Speculative Reasoning."

15. *Theaetetus* 173c–174a. Translation by M. J. Levett, rev. Myles F. Burnyeat, in Cooper, *Plato. Complete Works* (Indiapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1997).

16. It can be objected against this interpretation that his picture of the philosopher seems to be somewhat caricatured since Socrates's first question about Theaetetus is in fact about his birth. Socrates seems to address Aristophanes' slandering of him in the *Clouds*, but manages to turn the picture around so that the politicians are portrayed as the ones with their heads in the clouds. See also Rachel Rue, "The Philosopher in Flight: The Digression (172C-177C) in the *Theaetetus*," *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* no. 11 (1993):71–100.

17. *Apol*. 30a, 33b.
18. Badiou, "Highly Speculative Reasoning."
19. Badiou, "Highly Speculative Reasoning."
20. Badiou, "Highly Speculative Reasoning."
21. *Theaet.* 172e6.
22. At 17d4 Socrates uses the word *xenos*, stranger, to describe his presence in the courts.
23. *Apol.* 17a4.
24. *Apol.* 17 b.
25. *Apol.* 17c, (ii).
26. *Apol.* 17b–18a.
27. *Apol.* 18b6 is the point where Socrates begins to address the charges against him.
28. *Apol.* 17a4, 17b9, 17b10, 18a7, 18b3,18b7, 19e2, 22a, 22b7, 24a5, 24a9.
29. *Apol.* 26b, 28a5.
30. He does so at 24b.
31. Vlastos makes a point of the fact that the Greek word *dikaiosynê*, normally translated as "justice," in Aristotle has both a broad and a narrower meaning. In the first sense, it covers all virtuous conduct toward others. But most often *dikaiosynê* is used specifically in the sense of refraining from gaining advantage by grabbing what belongs to another, or denying him what is rightfully his. Gregory Vlastos, "Justice and Happiness in the *Republic*," in Vlastos, *Platonic Studies,* 2nd ed. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1981), 116. Cf. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* V.1 and V.2. It seems that Socrates is trying to prove that to convict him would be unjust in both the wide and the narrow sense of "justice." In his examination of Meletus and in the first part of his self-examination the broad meaning of the term seems to be what Socrates addresses, aiming to prove that he is innocent of justice in this sense; namely that of not practicing, or mal-practicing social virtuousness. In his defense against "the old accusers," and in the second part of the self-examination, it is the narrower sense of justice he addresses: He shows that convicting him of the charges will be unjust, first in the sense that he has not unrightfully gained anything that belonged to any other (but the men of the assembly have—they have taken what belonged to the city), and second: that convicting him will be unjust because, since he has not acted unjustly in the broad sense, that is, not trespassed against the "practices of the city" or gained what is not rightfully his, a sentence is not what is due to him, and also therefore unjust by the city's own standards.
32. At *Apol.* 31d7, (ii).
33. *Apol*. 32a.
34. Woodruff, "Socrates and Political Courage."
35. Woodruff, "Socrates and Political Courage."
36. Woodruff, "Socrates and Political Courage," 293.
37. Badiou, "Highly Speculative Reasoning."
38. *Apol.* 36c, (i).
39. Joshia Ober, "The 'Polis' as a Society: Aristotle, John Rawls and the Athenian Social Contract," in *The Ancient Greek City-State,* ed. Mogens Herman Hansen (Copenhagen: The Royal Danish Academy of Sciences and Letters, 1993); Aristotle,

Politics 1279a25. Cf. also Allan Bloom's translation of the *Republic* (New York: Basic Books, 1991). *Politeia* is also the Greek title of the Platonic dialogue we by convention call the *Republic*.

40. Ober, "The 'Polis' as a Society."

41. Ober, "The 'Polis' as a Society."

42. *Republic* 493a–c.

43. *Alcibiades* 135e. See also Martha Nussbaum, *The Fragility of Goodness,* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2001), chapter 6, for an elaboration on the character of Alcibiades.

44. *Symposium* 216b. Translation by Alexander Nemahas and Paul Woodruff, in Cooper, *Plato. Complete Works*.

45. This distinction can perhaps also be related to the concept of shame, a feeling of which the individual is capable, but that the crowd lacks. See Arlene Saxonhouse's article in this volume (chapter 1) for a thorough investigation of how shame and shamelessness is related to an internal or external moral standard, respectively. Another aspect on which the philosophical distinction between the public and private realm may have an impact is that of time, on which Kristin Sampson expounds in her contribution to this volume (chapter 3). When Socrates has been found guilty he relates that he is not surprised, "for we have only conversed with each other a little while." Philosophy takes time, as is also affirmed in the passage of the *Theaetetus* at 172e where philosophical activity is contrasted to political activity in that the latter is subject to the "water-clocks."

46. *Apol.* 23a. Also, 21e, 22a, 24a, 28a.

47. By claiming that the individual seems to be "irreducible" I mean that Plato, by emphasizing pedagogy, and by writing in the form of the dialogue, seems never to lose individuality from sight, fine-tuning the Socratic dialectic depending on the personality of the interlocutor.

48. *Republic* 460b, 457c. Translation by G. M. A. Grube, rev. C. D. C. Reeve, in Cooper, *Plato. Complete Works*.

49. *Laws*, 780b. Translation by Trevor J. Saunders, in Cooper, *Plato. Complete Works*.

50. *Rep*. 372e.

51. *Rep*. 424a.

52. *Rep*. 422a, 442e.

53. Balot, "Socratic Courage," 65.

54. Balot, "Socratic Courage," 65.

55. Plato makes this point himself, in the *Gorgias*, when he lets Socrates state that one who seeks to be successful must make himself not only approximate to the regime within which he wishes to succeed, but *like* the regime in every way: "You mustn't be their imitator, but be naturally like them in your own person if you expect to produce any genuine result toward winning the friendship of the Athenian people (*dêmos*)." *Gorg.* 513e. Translation by Donald J. Zeyl, in Cooper, *Plato. Complete Works.*

56. *Apol.* 17d, (i).

57. Drew E. Griffin, "Socrates' Poverty, Virtue and Money in Plato's *Apology of Socrates*," *Ancient Philosophy* 15, no. 1 (1995): 1–16.

58. Griffin, "Socrates' Poverty," 1.

59. *Apol.* 23c1, (i).

60. *Apol.* 23c1.
61. *Apol.* 31c.
62. *Apol.* 36b–c, (ii).
63. *Apol.* 36c–d.
64. *Apol.* 36d.
65. *Apol.* 36c–d.
66. A considerable sum. The equivalent of 100 standard daily wages. See note 8 in Grube, *Apology*.
67. John Burnet, ed., *Plato: Euthyphro, Apology of Socrates and Crito. Edited with Notes* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1924), 127. This is also the translation used in the Cooper edition from 1997, with the original Grube translation noted as an "alternative." The point is also made by Myles F. Burnyeat, "*Apology* 30B 2-4: Socrates, Money, and the Grammar of ΓΙΓΝΕΣΘΑΙ," *The Journal of Hellenic Studies* 123 (2003): 1–25.
68. Griffin, "Socrates' Poverty." See Burnyeat, "*Apology* 30B 2-4," for an historical overview of the translations.
69. Burnyeat, "*Apology* 30B 2-4"; E. de Stryker and S. R. Slings, *Plato's* Apology of Socrates*: A Literary and Philosophical Study with Running Commentary* (Leiden: Brill, 1994).
70. He exempts those passages where Socrates is appealing to his interlocutors' values (in *Protagoras, Gorgias*), and those passages where he launches the idea with the purpose of refuting it (*Meno, Euthydemus, Lysias*). Burnyeat, "*Apology* 30B 2-4," 3–4.
71. Anon. *De Rhetorica ad Alexandrum* 1429b, trans. E. S. Forster, in vol. 11 of *The Works of Aristotle*, ed. W. D. Ross (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1946). My italics.
72. *Rep*. I, 329e–331d.
73. Strauss, *City and Man*.
74. *Apol*. 41e, (ii). My italics.
75. *Apol*. 31 b.
76. *Apol*. 34 c–d.
77. As noted also by Fagan and Russon,"Socrates examined."
78. *Gorg.* 515d.
79. *Apol*. 25d.
80. *Apol*. 24a–b, (ii).

Chapter 3

The Temporality of Philosophy in the *Apology*

Kristin Sampson

How are we to understand the relation between philosophy and politics? To what degree do philosophers reside in an ivory tower removed from the urgent concerns of politics? And to what degree are they to be blamed for not involving themselves in political life and government? Or is it possible to consider philosophy as political in a different sense? Can philosophical activity be regarded as having a political impact exactly by providing an outside to politics, and by offering different perspectives? If so, what ground makes such a perspective possible? Asking a question about the ground of philosophy can be understood as involving a question of temporality. Is there a temporality that may be termed philosophical? And if so, in what way can this be said to open up a different perspective from that belonging to politics?

The aim of this chapter is to consider how Plato displays what I call the temporality of philosophy in the *Apology*. First I turn to the notion of *kairos* and examine the ways in which this notion of temporality can be related to philosophy. Then I look at how the divine plays an important part in the *Apology*, and also take into account how this invokes a particular temporality. This temporality of the divine is then linked to philosophy and placed in relation to—while differing from—that of the political realm where sophistry may flourish. Important here is the difference between the political and the philosophical realms in terms of the temporalities they imply. At the end of this chapter I argue that philosophy may have an effect upon the political but that this is precisely because it is placed somewhat outside of the political and evokes a different kind of temporality.[1] Let me start with a short explanation of what I call the *kairos* of philosophy.

THE *KAIROS* OF PHILOSOPHY

Kairos, which denotes a critical time, an opportunity or right moment for an event, can be contrasted with *chronos*, which expresses time in a more general sense, and is more akin to our own modern concepts of time. As John E. Smith puts it, "In *chronos* we have the fundamental conception of time as measure, the *quantity* of duration." *Kairos*, by contrast, he states, "points to a *qualitative* character of time, to the special position an event or action occupies in a series, to a season when something appropriately happens that cannot happen just at 'any time,' but only at *that* time, to a time that marks an opportunity which may not recur."[2] *Kairos* is used within various discourses and disciplines, among them both Hippocratic medicine and Pythagorean thought. In Homer the word *kairos* can be found in its adjectival form: *kairios*. In the 8th book of the *Illiad*, for example, *kairios* is used to indicate "a point and time at which an arrow strikes its target," delivering a mortal wound.[3] According to Smith, *kairos* here marks the significant and particular moment of a deadly blow. It designates an exceptional time, an outside to ordinary events and the regular flow of time. It marks a temporality that is extraordinary and unique, and according to Phillip Sipiora and James S. Baumlin *kairos* represents the uniquely timely, the radically particular.[4]

However, *kairos* does not merely carry meanings related to time. The word also contains non-temporal meanings for instance "due measure." This notion of "due measure" should not, of course, be confused with the quantitative measurement involved in *chronos*. "Due measure" indicates the qualitative measure of something that is "just right." In contrast, purely quantitative measurement neither makes qualitative distinctions nor suggests what is due. Before moving on with the temporal meaning of *kairos*, which is the focus of this chapter, let us take a brief look at the non-temporal meaning of *kairos* as "due measure." To uphold due measure involves not going to extremes, and to avoid the dangers of excess. In the expression, attributed to Pittacus, *kairon gnôthi*—"recognize moderation"—we find such a sense of the word. This is in accordance with what can be found also in, for instance, Hesiod and Theognis.[5] *Kairos* used in the sense of due measure is the opposite of *hubris*. In Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus*, for example, the *hubris* that creates the tyrant is connected to lack of *kairos*, (in this instance the lack of *epikairos*).[6] *Kairos* in this sense, as something the lack of which leads to *hubris*, speaks to the border between mortals and immortals. It relates to the divine. Excess may not be due measure for mortals, but it may be for the gods. *Hubris* thus involves not recognizing or having true knowledge of one's own due measure as a mortal. Not to observe due measure—not to recognize the importance of *kairos*—is dangerous for mortal men. It is also, in a sense, disrespectful of the divine: impious.

The non-temporal meanings of *kairos*, including "due measure," are especially prominent in the centuries before Plato. Some even argue, as does John R. Wilson, that *kairos* receives its temporal meaning only with the tragic poets, first in Aeschylus, but even more so in Sophocles and Euripides. In the comedies the use of *kairos* is almost completely temporal, and in the historian Herodotus the use of *kairos* is entirely temporal.[7] By the latter part of the fourth century non-temporal meanings of *kairos* appears to become a rarity in all types of literature, and "by the end of the 4th century *kairos* in Attic would appear to be almost entirely temporal or temporally derived in its meanings."[8]

In Plato, however, *kairos* carries both temporal and non-temporal meanings. It has been argued that "about half of the fifty odd examples of *kairos* in Plato are non-temporal or at least partially so."[9] *Kairos* in Plato can both mean the right moment in time and indicate due measure. One example of the latter can be found in the eleventh book of the *Laws*, at 938b2, where the expression *para kairon*—"contrary to due measure"—is used of someone who is multiplying suits unduly. The word used in Greek here, for what in English could be termed litigiousness, being too prone to go to legal action, is *poludikeîn*.[10]

A curious picture emerges if we consider the depiction in the *Apology* of the accusers of Socrates in light of this notion of litigiousness—*poludikeîn*—as something contrary to due measure—*para kairon*—and as involving the dangers of excess and a form of *hubris*, remembering also how this can be considered as inconsistent with a proper respect for the divine. The very act of accusing Socrates of impiety and of not honoring the gods emerges as *hubris* and thus as lacking in respect for the divine. When Meletus too easily and lightly accuses Socrates of disrespecting the divine, he could himself be accused of litigiousness and consequently of acting hubristically and thus—implicitly—impiously. And this is exactly how Socrates himself portrays Meletus. At *Apology* 24c Socrates says to the men of Athens that Meletus is a wrongdoer, and someone who lightly involves people in a lawsuit.[11] Furthermore, Socrates literally uses the word *hubris*—twice even—of Meletus at *Apology* 26e, when he says: "For this man appears to me, men of Athens, to be very violent and unrestrained (*hubristês*), and actually to have brought this indictment in a spirit of violence and unrestraint (*hubrei*) and rashness."[12] To put it in a different way, one could describe this *hubris* of Meletus' as contrary to due measure, contrary to *kairos*: *para kairon*.

Socrates, on the other hand, in the *Apology*, appears as preeminently non-hubristic, at least in the sense that more than any other man alive he recognizes the limits to his knowledge. In this respect Socrates is very much in keeping with due measure, and attuned to *kairos*. Moreover, this moderation is attributed to Socrates by a divine message through the oracle at Delphi. The other side of this divine designation of Socrates as the wisest is that he

is marked as exceptional. This may seem as the opposite of moderation. One could also argue that there is an element of something hubristic in Socrates's refusal to play by the rules of the courtroom and to act as is expected of him. Furthermore, he literally claims that his practice of philosophy is "not like human conduct" (*Apol.* 31b). There is an element of ambiguity in Socrates's position as the wisest, because of his recognition of his own ignorance, that also relates to *hubris*. The notion of *hubris* points to a lack of moderation and a failure to recognize the limits between human mortals and the divine immortals. The dangers of *hubris* arise when men fail to recognize their limitations and strive beyond them. Socrates, however, is appointed the wisest among men by a divine instance, and interprets this wisdom as a recognition of his own limitations. In this wisdom of recognizing his own ignorance Socrates stands as a corrective to his fellow citizens. Both the fact that he does not play by the ordinary rules of the courtroom and his practice of philosophy, which involves helping others to achieve greater insight into their ignorance, at the cost of neglecting his own affairs—something that is "not like human conduct"—should also be understood in light of this. The moderation that Socrates personifies is made possible by his exceptionality. His attunement to *kairos*, in the sense of due measure, is inherently connected to the divine. This does not make Socrates hubristic in the sense that he fails to recognize his own limits. One could perhaps rather claim that he is a tool of the divine in terms of reminding his fellow citizens of the importance of the *kairetic* and of recognizing the limits to one's own understanding. Both the *kairetic* and the exceptional aspect of Socrates could be ascribed to inspiration from something divine.[13]

This point about the divine I will return to shortly, in the next section of this chapter. For now, with this little detour by way of the non-temporal sense of *kairos* as "due measure" let me return to the temporal sense of *kairos*, as designating an exceptional time.

Martin Heidegger connects the notion of an exceptional temporality to philosophy. According to him, philosophy is "essentially untimely." This is because "it is one of those few things whose fate it remains never to be able to find a direct resonance in their own time, and never to be permitted to find such a resonance."[14] According to Heidegger, philosophy "always remains a kind of knowing that not only does not allow itself to be timely but, on the contrary, imposes its measure on the times."[15] According to Melissa Shew, this time of philosophy is inherently related to *kairos*. As she claims, "If philosophy is to have a time or a place, it must do so in the sense of *kairos*, which stands outside and perhaps measures chronological time."[16] When Heidegger claims that philosophy puts its measure on the times and Shew argues that *kairos* measures chronological time, this points to the outside perspective that both philosophy and *kairos* can offer. *Kairos* can offer a measure that differs

in quality, so to speak, from the quantitative measurement of chronological time. Or to put it in a slightly different way: the way that *kairos* measures chronological time is by imposing a different form of measurement from that of the quantitative one.

Shew speaks of what she calls "the *kairos* of philosophy" and links this to dialogue, claiming that "the kairos of philosophy is dialogue."[17] Dialogue is kairological in two ways, according to Shew: 1) dialogue "imposes its own time in order to see how life (or being) is disclosed to us" and 2) "it denotes a moment in which we are pushed into the open, a moment that demands our receptivity and response."[18] This openness of philosophy is something that also Marina McCoy points out as characteristic of Socrates's philosophic practice, and she relates this to *kairos*. In her book *Plato On the Rhetoric of Philosophers and Sophists* McCoy writes as follows: "Philosophy does not presuppose a method but instead maintains a kind of openness as to what sort of *logoi* are helpful in discovering the truth, as well as an openness to the very question of what *logoi* are and how they relate to truth."[19] To speak in accordance with some of these thoughts from Heidegger, Shew and McCoy, my claim is that the *kairos* of philosophy expresses the untimeliness of philosophy, at least as seen from a practical perspective of politics, and in the sense of representing both an outside standpoint and an openness in relation to the historical time within which thinking always and necessarily is embedded. These two aspects are related. It is through constituting something exceptional and being an untimely outside to the timeliness of its time that philosophy manages to create new openings that allow new thoughts to be thought. Furthermore, the *kairos* of philosophy is related to the inherent dialogical quality of true philosophical thinking.

So, how does this relate to the *Apology*? There is not one single instance of the word *kairos* in the *Apology*, and neither Shew nor Heidegger treats of this dialogue when they write about the temporality of philosophy in terms of *kairos*. Still, I argue that Plato displays philosophy in this dialogue dressed in a temporality that may well be termed *kairos*.

To evoke the notion of *kairos* in relation to Plato's *Apology* is, however, not completely unprecedented. One commentator who does mention *kairos* in her reading of the *Apology*, although more in passing, is Marina McCoy. She emphasizes *kairos* as something that characterizes the philosopher, as opposed to the sophist, in Plato. The difference between the two is less one related to the use of rhetoric, and more one related to the fact that they differ in relation to *phronêsis* and *kairos*. These two—*phronêsis* and *kairos*—are specifically related to philosophical activity and are contrasted with *technê*, in the sense that philosophy is less of a technical method than a concern with rhetoric, here understood as related to finding the right way to speak and the right kind of speech, adjusted to the specific moment in time and

the particular circumstances given the context in question. This emphasis on distancing philosophy from a *technê* or some sort of more general technical method is even repeated twice by McCoy.[20] The *kairos* that she seems to have in mind, is of a pragmatic character, related to the right time and place.

Now, although it is noteworthy that McCoy mentions *kairos* in relation to Plato's *Apology*, she does not speak of it in terms of a specific temporality of philosophy, in the way that I wish to do. McCoy's project in her reading of this dialogue is a different one. She argues that what distinguishes philosophy from sophistry is "neither rhetoric-free speech nor a precise philosophical method."[21] I agree with her in this, but the argument of this chapter has a different aim. Where I part ways with McCoy is in the focus on what explains the difference between philosophy and sophistry. McCoy emphasizes that "Socrates' use of rhetoric is at the service of the virtues of wisdom, justice, courage, and piety."[22] I instead emphasize how Socrates's rhetoric inscribes itself into a different temporality from that of the political realm to which sophistry belongs. This temporality of philosophy is one of the exceptional, the outside, the changing moment, or *kairos*.

By way of my detour to the non-temporal meaning of *kairos* as "due measure" I put forth a contrast between the non-hubristic—or kairetic—Socrates and his hubristic—or non-kairetic—accuser Meletus. An important aspect of this contrast is related to the divine, both in terms of the question who of the two—Socrates or Meletus—really is impious and insulting the gods, and in terms of the connection between acting in accordance with *kairos* and showing proper reverence for the divine. Part of my argument that philosophy in the *Apology* is embedded within a specific temporality, rests on an assumption that it is linked to the divine and that the divine functions as an invocation of this different temporality in the dialogue. Let me turn to the relation between the divine and philosophy as it is unfolded in the *Apology*.

DIVINITY AND PHILOSOPHY IN THE *APOLOGY*

A striking feature of the *Apology* is how Socrates calls the oracle at Delphi as a witness to the piety of his philosophical activity. As Socrates says at *Apology* 20e, "For of my wisdom (*sophia*)—if it is wisdom at all—and of its nature, I will offer you the god of Delphi (*ton theon ton en Delphois*) as a witness (*martura*)." Through appointing the god of Delphi as witness to his wisdom, which consists in the recognition of his lack of wisdom, a lack which in turn moves Socrates to seek wisdom, that is, to practice philosophy, a direct connection is established between the divine and philosophy. It is in deference to the god of Delphi that Socrates keeps on questioning, keeps on practicing dialectic.

The divine takes a quite prominent place in the *Apology*. It has been argued that of the Greek virtues mentioned in this dialogue, piety is perhaps the one—apart from wisdom—that receives the most explicit attention.[23] This may of course be seen as quite natural considering that one of the accusations made against Socrates is that of impiety. Nonetheless, the way that Socrates responds is not the conventional one, but is quite unusual and foreign to the forensic genre. This indicates something about the significance of the divine in the *Apology*.

Although several aspects of Socrates's defense speech share similarities with traditional forensic speeches in Athens, this is a point where his apology differs from the traditional or expected genre. Already in 1912 Heinrich Gomperz pointed out the similarities and differences between the *Apology* and Gorgias' *Defense of Palamedes*. In more recent years, James Barrett and also McCoy have pointed out how unusual a witness the oracle—the divine—is, within the genre of forensic rhetoric.[24] Furthermore, the god of Delphi, through the oracle, turns out to be Socrates's only witness. This was not the common way to defend oneself against accusations of impiety; Socrates did not have to defend himself in this manner because there were no other, more conventional, possible forensic strategies. As McCoy maintains, "Had Socrates argued that he is a pious man by demonstrating that he participated in the religious-civic festivals of Athens, he might easily have shown that he is not a threat to the city. But rather than appeal to the regularity of his political-religious participation, Socrates appeals exclusively to the oracle of Delphi."[25] By invoking the god of Delphi as his witness, Socrates's defense differs starkly from the traditional forensic speech.

Moreover, Socrates's apology also differs from more traditional conceptions of piety. One might say that Socrates acts philosophically by not conceding to standard conceptions of how one should behave in court, as well as in religious matters. By calling the god as his witness it becomes apparent that Socrates's main aim is not to display how his piety is in accordance with the common and conventional religious practices in Athens. Instead he displays a different way of adhering to the divine that opens up for a re-thinking of the concept of piety. That is to say, he is practicing philosophy, in the sense of providing an outside to and putting into question common conceptions. Or to speak in terms of temporality, Socrates presents an untimely outside to the conceptions of his time about forensic speeches and about religion, thereby opening up for new ways of thinking about, for instance, the divine.

Furthermore, in calling the god of Delphi as his witness, Socrates also manages to establish a link between the divine and philosophy. The oracle commands Socrates to keep on with his philosophical questioning. When Socrates goes around questioning the men of Athens, displaying their ignorance of things about which they thought themselves knowledgeable, he gives

"aid to the god and shows that he [the person in question] is not wise," as Socrates says at *Apology* 23b. Socrates is in fact a gift from the god, as he claims at *Apology* 31a–b, where he even gives reasons for this claim:

> That I am, as I say, a kind of gift from the god, you might understand from this; for I have neglected all my own affairs and have been enduring the neglect of my concerns all these years, but I am always busy in your interest, coming to each one of you individually like a father or an elder brother and urging you to care for virtue; now that is not like human conduct.

In this portrayal of himself, to a modern ear perhaps sounding a bit like a monk giving up all care for his own mundane, human affairs, Socrates presents himself as behaving in accordance with a divine command when practicing philosophy. This is not like human conduct, as he explicitly says. And at *Apology* 33c Socrates states even more explicitly that he is acting by divine command: "I believe," Socrates says, "I have been commanded to do this by the god through oracles and dreams and in every way in which any man was ever commanded by divine power to do anything whatsoever." It is by divine demand that Socrates practices dialectic and examines the people of Athens. The divine claims made by the oracle of Delphi on behalf of the god thus serve to connect Socrates's piety and his philosophical questioning. When Plato lets Socrates describe the words uttered by the oracle of Delphi in this way, it is not only of Socrates that Plato presents a defense in the *Apology*, but of philosophy itself.[26]

So how does this affect temporality? My argument is that this exceptional way of thematizing the divine has a bearing on the unusual temporality that is evoked through Socrates in this dialogue. According to Julia Kristeva, what she calls a coming to earth of the divine "is vested in a specific temporality: it cuts through the homogenous flow of time, it breaks up the usual chronological experience."[27] Kristeva relates this to what she calls the crisis of temporality, which, as she puts it, "allows for an exception, anomaly, or even genius." This crisis of temporality is, in this sense, according to Kristeva, "a *kairos* that cuts, incises, and inscribes in the cosmic and vital flux, an expanse of sharable stories, of acknowledgment, of memory." Kristeva thus here connects the exceptional temporality expressed through *kairos* to the divine.

Such a connection between the divine and *kairos* is not foreign to Plato. In the fourth book of the *Laws*, for instance, the Athenian stranger declares that "chance (*tuchê*) and occasion (*kairos*) cooperate with god in the control of all human affairs" (*Laws* 709b).[28] *Kairos*—together with *tuchê*—literally cooperate with god. The exceptional temporality that is involved in *kairos* is here displayed by Plato in connection with the divine. It is by representing

an outside to human affairs—related to the divine—that *kairos* can be said to "control of all human affairs," which also includes imposing due measure.

In the *Apology* Socrates is portrayed as living in accordance with a divine rather than a human standard, it has been claimed.[29] Or, as I would put it, he lives according to the standards of a different temporality from that which pertains to the political life of the city. As I have argued above, Socrates's philosophical practice, ordained by the divine through the oracle at Delphi, is to call into question the conventional conceptions and practices of the *polis*. The temporality of ordinary political life in Athens is directed toward the here and now, governed by conventional perceptions. Within such a perspective, being condemned to death, for example, will appear as a dreaded destiny, and one that one would expect someone put on trial—like Socrates—to do a lot to avoid. In defiance of such notions Socrates refuses to put up the expected defense. He even refuses the fear of death. This implies a different perspective and a different conception of time. Socrates embodies and personifies a relation to death that functions subversively in relation to the expectations of his accusers, and one that opens up a path that differs from the usual one taken in court in Athens. Embedded within this perspective is a temporality that looks beyond the conventions of the *polis*.

In the next and final section of this chapter I consider the differences between the temporalities of politics and philosophy in the *Apology*, and also the intertwinements between the two.

POLITICS AND PHILOSOPHY IN THE *APOLOGY*

In the *Apology* Socrates evokes two different logics or realms: One is that of politics, which is unfolded within the realm of human concerns and a human lifespan. The other is that of philosophy. This points toward something outside the limits of the *polis* of Athens. It is commanded by something divine; it evades the public political life in favor of more private conversations, and it does not fear death as the worst possible destiny.

However, the opposition between the political and the philosophical should not be understood as too strong or absolute. The two are also inherently intertwined. On the one hand, the *polis* is where the philosopher unfolds his thinking. Athens provides the conditions under which Socrates thrives in his dialogical activity. On the other hand, even as a critical counter-voice to the politics of Athens, thereby presenting a threat to the political order, Socrates at the same time also opens up a possibility for renewal for the city state. As Claudia Baracchi states in her book on the *Republic*, "[t]he figure of the philosopher […] appears paradigmatically to indicate both the threat posed to political order and the possibility of the renewal of such order."[30] One

could argue that it is for the sake of the *polis* that Socrates acts outside of the expected patterns embedded within the political in the *Apology*. His aim is not to destroy Athens or its politicians, but to improve the city and its citizens. Similarly, to speak in terms of temporality: the temporality of philosophy—with its inherent kairetic aspects—is not introduced in order to destroy the temporality of the political realm. The aim is to make the political better by proposing a different and outside perspective, such as the one a different temporality can offer: namely that of philosophy.

At the very end of the *Apology* Socrates contrasts himself with his accusers; at *Apology* 39a–b he says: "it is not hard to escape death; it is much harder to escape wickedness, for that runs faster than death. And now I, since I am slow and old, am caught by the slower runner, and my accusers, who are clever and quick, by the faster, wickedness." Socrates will be outrun and overcome by death through his sentence. His accusers, however, have succumbed to a worse fate, namely that of wickedness. To die a good man with a clear conscience is better than to surrender to evil and become a wicked person. If we consider this in terms of temporality, two perspectives on time seem to be put into play: one belongs to the time of political and human life, and the other is directed beyond death. To fear death is to fear the end of the temporal duration of this human life. This is a common fear. To fear wickedness more than death invokes a different temporality, namely one that reaches beyond the concern for this life and the fear of its end. According to Socrates, wickedness runs faster than death. Maybe this implies that it runs farther as well: beyond the limits of the duration of this life.

At the same time the temporality that Socrates adheres to is also directed toward the moment, in the sense that in order to outrun or avoid wickedness, one needs in each moment to act right. The temporality that Socrates personifies is both contextual in its focus on the specificity of the situation and the person with whom he is talking, and it is also eternal, in the sense that it is supposed to measure up to standards that belong to a realm that reaches beyond even death. This is the kairological temporality of philosophy, divinely ordained, according to Plato's portrayal of Socrates in the *Apology*.

The two realms of the political and the philosophical thus evoke two different perspectives on time. What characterizes philosophy in Socrates's depiction and personification is that it combines the most personal and private with the most general and philosophical. The Socratic activity is at the same time the most concrete and the most lasting: the one with the longer perspective. The Socratic conversation is specific, and needs to be adjusted to the particular moment, person or situation. At the same time it constitutes something much more lasting than what the interests of the political agenda aim at. One might say that what is unfolded by Plato in the *Apology* is how

Socrates seizes the moment—for eternity. Socrates is immortalized through his actions and words on this day in court.

This also, to a certain degree, blurs the distinction between private and public, and thought and action. Rather than saying that Socrates does not act publicly, I would argue that he acts in a way that subverts the ordinary political way of playing the game. Socrates refuses to respond to his accusers in the expected way, by either pleading for his life, and thereby succumbing to his accusers, or running away into exile, and thereby undermining the laws. Instead he finds a new, and unheard of, way of responding that evades the structure of the legal and political system, while not ending up in mere rebellion. Socrates displays how philosophy and thinking open up ways of acting that function as a critique of the establishment. It is thought as action. Philosophy thus can affect the political, but not by abiding by the rules that govern the political, or by playing the political game. This is a point where philosophy also parts ways with sophistry. Where the rhetoric of sophistry aims at playing the political game in the best possible way, the rhetoric of philosophy aims at questioning the game itself. Where the sophists live, also quite literally, by their proficiency in the art of political rhetoric, Socrates gains neither wealth nor personal gain nor favor by his philosophical practice. It is by *not* playing the game of politics that philosophy can have an effect on the political.

Therefore I do not agree with the accusations raised against the Socrates of the *Apology* by, for instance, Gregory Vlastos and Paul Woodruff. Vlastos reproaches Socrates for not paying enough attention to his obligations to his city.[31] He claims that Socrates kept his self-respect, as he writes, by "an ethics which cannot be ours—a simplistic one, recognizing only wrongs by persons to persons," ignoring what Vlastos calls a "social dimension of morality."[32] According to Woodruff, Socrates showed us both the power and the cost of living, as he writes, "in what we now call the ivory tower."[33] Woodruff's verdict on Socrates is harsh: "Socrates made a cowardly excuse for staying out of politics. It is an excuse, moreover, that was damagingly false."[34] The problem with these reproaches and harsh verdicts is that they consider Socrates as if he belonged to the same realm and the same temporality as the political. The point I am making is that this is exactly what he places himself as an outside to. Furthermore, it is by constituting an outside to the political that Socrates has an effect upon it. My disagreement with Woodruff thus differs from that of Ryan K. Balot, for instance, who rather tries to bring out how Socrates does act within the realm of the Athenian political society and norms.[35]

In the *Apology* Plato succeeds in displaying this outside position of Socrates—and of philosophy—not least by invoking the divine. The very last word of the dialogue is "god": *theos*. In his last words in the dialogue Socrates speaks of the time that has come: "Now the time has come to go

away. I go to die, and you to live" (42a). This is the time of human life and knowledge. Socrates can have knowledge of this: that the time has come to go away. What he proclaims ignorance of, is the answer to the question "Which of us goes to the better lot?" This is knowledge that "is known to none but god" (*adêlon panti plên hê tô theô*, 42a). These are the very last words of the *Apology*. Philosophy—and the philosopher—lives in recognition of the limits of his knowledge. But what makes such recognition possible is the acknowledgment that there are such limits and that there is something beyond them. In the *Apology* the name of this something beyond that makes possible the recognition that there is an outside to human life and society, is god. It is the name of the exceptional, and it is "vested in a specific temporality" that "cuts through the homogenous flow of time," to speak with Kristeva. In the *Apology* the divine opens up the path for philosophy, as a kind of knowing that "imposes its measure on the times," to speak with Heidegger. This has been named *kairos*. And although this word is never used in the *Apology* my claim is that Plato in this dialogue shows the temporality of philosophy as *kairos*.

NOTES

1. I would like to thank the participants at the conference *Poetry and Philosophy in the light of Plato's Apology* at the University of Bergen June 10–12 2015 for fruitful comments and suggestions to an early presentation of this chapter. I am especially grateful to Vigdis Songe-Møller for valuable and highly helpful comments to an early draft of this chapter.

2. John E. Smith, "Time and Qualitative Time," in *Rhetoric and Kairos*, eds. Phillip Sipiora and James S. Baumlin (New York: State University of New York Press, 2002), 47. Smith is here not in agreement with John R. Wilson, who in his article from 1980–"*Kairos* as 'Due Measure'," *Glotta*, Vol. 58, 3/4. H. (1980): 180–argues that in these examples from Homer *kairos* should be understood in a strictly, concrete spatial way.

3. Melissa Shew, "The *Kairos* of Philosophy," *The Journal of Speculative Philosophy* 27, no. 1 (2013): 47. See Homer, *Iliad*, *Vol. I: Books 1-12*, trans. A. T. Murray, Loeb Classical Library 170 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1924), VIII, ll. 83–86, VIII, ll. 326–30.

4. Phillip Sipiora and James S. Baumlin, eds., *Rhetoric and Kairos. Essays in History, Theory, and Praxis* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002), xiii.

5. See Wilson, "*Kairos* as 'Due Measure'," 179.

6. Wilson, "*Kairos* as 'Due Measure'," 192–193.

7. Wilson, "*Kairos* as 'Due Measure'," 197 (see also the pages before this).

8. Wilson, "*Kairos* as 'Due Measure'," 202.

9. Wilson, "*Kairos* as 'Due Measure'," 200. On Plato's use of *kairos* see Wilson, "*Kairos* as 'Due Measure'," 200 ff. Note the use of *kairos* of music (which is inherently temporal), 201.

10. The only reference to *polydikeîn* listed in Liddell & Scott is this instance in the *Laws*. See H. G. Liddell and R. Scott, *Greek-English Lexicon* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996).

11. "But I, men of Athens, say Meletus is a wrongdoer, because he jokes in earnest, lightly involving people in a lawsuit" (*Apol*. 24c). (Translation by Harold North Fowler, in *Plato*: *Euthyphro; Apology; Crito; Phaedo; Phaedrus*; trans. Harold North Fowler, Loeb Classical Library 36 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press/ London: Heinemann, 1914)).

12. All translations from the *Apology* are by Fowler, *Apology*.

13. Two other examples could, for instance, be Socrates's *daimonion* (see *Apol*. 40a), and also when he calls philosophy the highest form of music (*Phaedo* 61a), which implies that philosophic activity is enthused in some way by the Muses.

14. Martin Heidegger, "The Fundamental Question of Metaphysics," in *Introduction to Metaphysics*, trans. Gregory Fried and Richard Polt (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2000), 9.

15. Heidegger, "The Fundamental Question of Metaphysics," 9.

16. Shew, "The *Kairos* of Philosophy," 53.

17. Shew, "The *Kairos* of Philosophy," 48.

18. Shew, "The *Kairos* of Philosophy," 48.

19. Marina McCoy, *Plato on the Rhetoric of Philosophers and Sophists* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 18.

20. McCoy, *Plato on the Rhetoric of Philosophers and Sophists*, 4 and 14–15.

21. McCoy, *Plato on the Rhetoric of Philosophers and Sophists*, 55.

22. McCoy, *Plato on the Rhetoric of Philosophers and Sophists*, 55.

23. See, for example, McCoy, *Plato on the Rhetoric of Philosophers and Sophists*, 47.

24. James Barrett, "Plato's *Apology*: Philosophy, Rhetoric, and the World of Myth," *The Classical World* 95, no. 1 (Autumn 2001): 3–30, and also McCoy, *Plato on the Rhetoric of Philosophers and Sophists*. See Barrett for a list of parallels between the two and McCoy for more on both the similarities and differences between the speeches of Socrates in Plato's *Apology* and Palamedes in Gorgias' *Defence of Palamedes*.

25. McCoy, *Plato on the Rhetoric of Philosophers and Sophists*, 48–49.

26. McCoy, for instance, argues this, *Plato on the Rhetoric of Philosophers and Sophists*, 47 and 55.

27. Julia Kristeva, *This Incredible Need to Believe* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 30. This has also been pointed out by Shew, "The *Kairos* of Philosophy," 48.

28. As John E. Smith points out in "Time and Qualitative Time," in Sipiora and Baumlin, *Rhetoric and Kairos* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2002), 55: "In the fourth book of the *Laws* (709b ff.), Plato discusses the different factors that govern human life in connection with the question whether laws are explicitly and designedly made by man or whether external factors are involved. He declares, 'Chance [*tuchê*] and occasion [*kairos*] cooperate with God in the control of all human affairs.' These two mundane factors are said to condition human action and also to be in harmony with each other."

29. McCoy, *Plato on the Rhetoric of Philosophers and Sophists*, 50.

30. Claudia Baracchi, *Of Myth, Life, and War in Plato's* Republic (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002) 40, see also 29.

31. Gregory Vlastos, "Epilogue: Socrates and Vietnam," in Gregory Vlastos, *Socratic Studies*, ed. Myles F. Burnyeat (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 128.

32. Vlastos, "Epilogue: Socrates and Vietnam," 133.

33. Paul Woodruff, "Socrates and Political Courage," *Ancient Philosophy* 27 (2007): 301.

34. Woodruff, "Socrates and Political Courage," 293.

35. Ryan K. Balot, "Socratic Courage and Athenian Democracy," *Ancient Philosophy* 28 (2008): 49–70.

Chapter 4

Plato's Socrates in the *Apology*

Speaking in Two Voices

Knut Ågotnes

In the *Apology* philosophy finds itself on a dramatic collision course with political society. One would perhaps expect that Plato used this opportunity to state in a clear and unambiguous way what he considered to be the essence of (his) philosophy as well as its relation to and mission in society.[1] What transpires is less than unambiguous and clear, however. In this chapter I will try to show that the text indeed gives us a take on the foundation of philosophy, on how to do philosophy, as well as its aim and its problematic relation to political society. However, when Plato decided to present these themes in a defense speech supposedly given by Socrates at his trial, he had to take the complex communicative situation into consideration. If the main purpose had been to show the Athenians that they had condemned Socrates unjustly, Plato could have given him a much more straightforward speech. Xenophon has shown how this could be done.[2] According to him Socrates's activity had been based on the virtues and values that pervaded the political culture; he just lived up to them in a wiser and more consistent way than anybody else. Plato thought otherwise. But for him to base Socrates's defense squarely on the premise that he did not share the Athenians' consensus on the basic tenets of morality and politics would have been to bolster many Athenians' belief that Socrates's philosophy constituted a threat to society. On the other hand, despite his aloofness from the business of politics, Plato's Socrates does not turn his back on society; he certainly wanted his philosophy to be a force for change. Thus the text could not confine itself to presenting the fundamental differences that existed between Plato's Socrates and the city flat out. It had to convey these differences in a way that could make the Athenians feel that Socrates's philosophy was of concern to them. There are thus two different rhetorical aims in the text, which Plato tried to harmonize. On the one hand Plato wants to show that Socrates's philosophy indeed could play a beneficial

role in the *polis* and that it certainly should be tolerated, if not loved. On the other hand the radical and superior nature of the thinking of Plato's Socrates should be made to show through. The difficult task to bring the two dimensions constituted by these aims together in a semblance of unity must also have been affected by the need not to stray too far away from people's memories of what had happened at the trial. The nature of the job made it necessary to make use of hyperbole, silences, and ambiguities. It is the aim of this chapter to try to show the role played by each of the two dimensions of the text, and the most important instances of hyperbole, silences and ambiguities. I will try to do so by differentiating between two "voices," which, I will argue, give expression to the two aims mentioned.

TWO VOICES

Socrates is speaking in two voices in the text; I call them the voice of the city and the voice of Apollo. He is using the voice of the city in order to deliver a message along these lines: I am one of you, I want only the best for our community, there is a misunderstanding here, you have been deceived by Aristophanes and others, see what a good man I am, I have more than met the established criteria for courage, as my military merits show, and for justice, as my defense of the law when others wanted to disregard it bears witness to. I am also eminently pious as my obedience to Apollo shows. I do great services to the city, including giving my advice for free to anybody who is willing to listen; I identify its moral defects, and point out the liars and ignoramuses of our city (such as Meletus). The other voice conveys a message from Apollo and its implications. This voice says to the judges that you, the representatives of the Athenians, are engaged in unjust practices based on ignorance; you, the people, lack genuine virtue and true ideals. Apollo has given me access to the truth about the moral and political life in the city and it would be impious not to listen to me.

The voice of Apollo sounds self-assured, even arrogant. The message from the oracle that Socrates imparts originates outside the established religious/political discourse. A presupposition of this discourse was that virtues, values, and laws had originally been given to the city as a community, and had not been conveyed by individual prophets.[3] The voice of the city speaks in an arrogant tone too. Yet it is designed to diminish the distance between Socrates's Apollonian mission and the city by presenting its implications in a more familiar and more acceptable light. Socrates even employs customary moral terms and ideals, not always with a critical intent. This voice contains potential for confounding and disarming the Athenians, by suggesting that Socrates's teaching is not incompatible with the basic values of the city. Plato

thus makes Socrates play both sides; attacking Athenian mores from "above" at the same time as he seemingly accommodates basic conventional attitudes.

A CONCEPTION OF PHILOSOPHY: THE DELPHIC PERSPECTIVE

Chaerephon had gone to Delphi and had been told by the oracle that no one is wiser than Socrates. Chaerephon is now dead, but he has told his brother what the oracle said, and this brother, who is present in court, can bear witness to this. The sayings of the oracle most often had to be interpreted, and such interpretations could point in different directions. Socrates lets his interpretation rest on a test. It follows, he thinks, from the utterance itself, that if he manages to find one person who is wiser than himself, there must be something wrong with his own first understanding of the meaning of Apollo's words. For he states that "[i]n nothing, great or small, I am conscious (*sunoida*) that I am wise" (21b).[4] Knowledge of the fine and good is included here. This raises a problem for the test: If he himself lacks wisdom, how can he make judgments concerning the wisdom of others? It turns out that he can detect *lack* of the awareness of lack of wisdom he found in himself in others, and he detected such lack in (representatives of) all the citizens. Thus he sees that there is something peculiar to their ignorance that does not pertain to his. *They* thought they were wise, but *he* didn't think *he* was. Let us assume that he was conversing about justice with his first interlocutor, a politician, and the latter said what he thought justice was. Socrates, we must assume, had learned the same lesson in school about justice as him, and so he could make a similar statement. But the politician thinks it represents knowledge, while Socrates knows that it does not. He had discovered false knowledge. How was that possible? Maybe he could have had this gift, this kind of wisdom, without being aware of it (remember he had said at 21b that he was not, in any way, conscious of being wise). Anyhow, when he left the politician, he was fully aware of this competence.

He also felt vindicated in his belief that he was not wise in the ordinary sense of the word: "probably indeed neither of us knew anything fine and good" (*ouden kalon kagathon eidenai*, 21d). His questioning of the poets and the craftsmen seemed to strengthen his findings and to make them almost universal: All people, Socrates excepted, have two kinds of ignorance: ignorance of the fine and good things, which I will call entity-ignorance, and lack of awareness of this ignorance. This lack of awareness is an ignorance that makes them think they do in fact have entity-knowledge. This last ignorance (*amathia*), Socrates is alone to be without. *Amathia* is in *Alcibiades 1* (118a) called the most disgraceful (or evil) sort of ignorance, and in the *Apology* at

29b, it is also called most disgraceful (*eponeidistos*). It must be on account of this sort of wisdom that Apollo has singled him out as the wisest, since there is no other alternative left, Socrates seems to conclude. This kind of knowledge, or awareness of what you know and do not know, I will call meta-knowledge. It turns out to be a knowledge that manages to differentiate between types of cognitive apprehension of different kinds of entities; to identify different sorts of knowledge and non-knowledge, false knowledge, opinions, what could count as knowledge in the strictest sense, *epistêmê*, and what couldn't. It becomes quite rich in content. It gives Socrates the ability to judge the performance of his interlocutors in a quite nuanced way. He can establish that the poets cannot speak more knowledgeable about their own works than their readers can; therefore their poetry is not composed with wisdom. Yet Socrates can recognize the competence involved in making poetry, and make a distinction between this and the incompetence of the poets in speaking about it. The craftsmen do in fact have knowledge (*epistêmê*) in their discipline, but not about the more important matters (*ta megista*, 22d). This implies that the craftsman is not ignorant when plying his craft, which must mean that he is free of *amathia* in regard to his craft-competence: he has knowledge and correctly thinks that he has. But Socrates detects that he has *amathia* with regard to the "important things"; he lacks insight into moral entities, but he thinks he has such knowledge. This means that his lack of *amathia* with respect to his craft is not rooted in a general insight into types of knowledge. The craftsman lacks general meta-knowledge, then. An implication of this is that he would not be able to explain fully what it meant that his craft was based on *epistêmê*. Socrates's lack of *amathia* was presented as a general competence, which he could use unerringly regardless of the discipline of entity-knowledge in question, and regardless of his own competence or lack of competence in these fields.

If meta-knowledge had been an unerring competence to be had independently of entity-knowledge, Socrates would be in possession of an extremely powerful tool for mapping and judging practices, disciplines, genres, types of arts, handicrafts and discourses, which would set him up as an unrivalled authority and judge in such matters. Apollo would have guaranteed this. Socrates could then without being justly accused of hubris repeat his bombastic proclamations on his own truthfulness and on the ignorance of everyone else. At the same time it would be a competent awareness of where you yourself are in relation to knowledge, and thus a form of self-knowledge, although of a rather narrow kind.

Is it this self-knowledge that Plato puts forward as the gist of philosophy in the *Apology*? It looks like it so far, especially in view of Socrates's constant insistence that he does not have any entity-knowledge. Here we must have in mind that the entity-ignorance that people, including Socrates, is supposed to

have is not the same as cognitive emptiness. This ignorance is packed with opinions and convictions. The task of getting rid of entity-ignorance, then, does not primarily consist in filling a lacuna in the mind but in throwing out what is already there and put in something else.

In the *Charmides* Socrates takes up Critias' statement that temperance (*sôfrosunê*) is knowing (*gignôskein*) oneself. Socrates immediately changes the less clearly defined word *gignôskein* for *epistêmê*, the word usually used in Plato's texts for the most certain knowledge: "for if temperance is knowing (*gignôskein*) anything, obviously it must be a kind of science (*epistêmê*), and a science of something, must it not?" (165c)[5] Here one would perhaps think that the object of this knowledge is oneself. Critias tries to keep the self in mind, but in what follows, Socrates, by focusing on the kind of *knowledge* that could be involved, gets him to declare that the *epistêmê* at stake here, reflects back on *itself*: "this [*epistêmê*] alone is a science of the other sciences and its own self" (166c). It is also a science of lack of science (171c). Critias seems to have found a meta-science that is supposed to be as scientific as other sciences (such as medicine, 170e), but which does not have a delimited object outside itself. It has itself as its object, and when it has another science for its object, it is not the object of this science it studies, but the nature of (this) science. Would it be useful to have such a science? Well, even if we granted that such a science is possible, Socrates says at one point, if we knew nothing of medicine we would not be able to distinguish between a doctor and a quack. So in addition to having this *epistêmê*, we would have to be a doctor too (171c). On its own, this meta-science seems to be useless.

In the *Apology* Socrates is supposed to have error-free meta-knowledge. The discussion in the *Charmides* does not conclude on the possibility of such knowledge. Instead it proceeds on the hypothesis that such knowledge *is* possible, and seems to conclude that even if it was, it would not by itself produce *epistêmê*-judgments about the knowledge involved in unknown disciplines. However, this is exactly what he claims to be able to do in the *Apology*. He knows that the artisans have *epistêmê*. Moreover, he says that he knows nothing fine and good, which must mean that he has no *epistêmê*-knowledge of the virtues. All the same, he knows that no one else has such knowledge. He gets to know all this by questioning people. This questioning, however, is not focused on learning about their trade or discipline. He, for instance, knew before he met them that artisans have *epistêmê* (22d). The *Charmides* tempts us to accept that the conclusion that Socrates projects in the *Apology*, namely that he can teach or exhort his fellow citizens to become more virtuous on the basis of his meta-knowledge alone, is futile and impossible.[6]

What about the meta-knowledge itself? Plato's Socrates, in all the texts where he is the protagonist, undoubtedly displays elements of what we could call meta-knowledge, quite independently of any oracle. His way of directing

the investigations he undertakes with his interlocutors, his general idea of what philosophy is all about, his notions of the significance and meaning of virtue, and much more are constantly on display in the texts. But when we search for specifications and concretizations of these ideas and notions, we again and again notice tentativeness, even an experimental spirit, as when he tries out methodical procedures, for instance. "Dialectic" could perhaps be seen as a concept that is imbued with this tentativeness and experimentalism. Nowhere else, with the possible exception of the *Charmides*, are we led to believe that this kind of meta-thinking can be seen as occupying an independent theoretical field. The dialogues suggest that it is a reflective practice that is developed in tandem with the exploration of the "entities." The authority of Socrates's Apollonian voice in the *Apology*, however, is grounded in the idea that meta-knowledge can be had in isolation.

Both of Socrates's two main knowledge-claims in the *Apology* seem to be false, then. First, leaving the fiction of the oracle out of the picture, he can hardly have independent *epistêmê*-type meta-knowledge, because the possibility of such knowledge is a moot point, to say the least. Second, he does have some entity-knowledge. He knows something about medicine, as well as about justice. This "knowledge," however, must be *doxa*, opinion, and yet it is the material that a search for higher, deeper, truer knowledge must take as a place to start. And this is the way he operates in the dialogues. An understanding both of the virtues and of abstract notions and problems of a meta-nature will have to be reached through an integrated reflective thought process.

HOW FAR CAN THE DELPHIC PERSPECTIVE TAKE US?

Socrates's first move was to interrogate Apollo himself in order to establish a correct interpretation of the oracle. This attempt led to something like a representative questioning of his fellow citizens in order to assess their wisdom and lack of wisdom: "I investigated at the god's behest" (*zêtounti kata ton theon*) (22a). He finds that they all suffer from *amathia*, while he is aware (*sunoida*) that he doesn't. A whole repertoire of meta-knowledge followed from this, as we have seen. The next step he takes, however, does not seem to follow from the words of the oracle. There is nothing in these words and their now seemingly uncontroversial interpretation that bids Socrates to continue to point out their *amathia* to his countrymen, with the aim of helping them to shed this kind of ignorance. But Socrates presumes that it does. "I, as I say, have been ordered by the god to do this [examination of people], both in oracles and dreams and in every way in which any other divine dispensation (*theia moira*) has commanded a man to do anything at all" (33c). "I say

that it is the greatest good (*megiston agathon*) for a human being, every day to discuss virtue and the other topics on which you have heard me conversing (*dialegomenou*) and examining myself and others, and that life without examination (*anexetastos*) is not worth a man's living" (38a).

Apollo's marching order is thus an instruction to be of moral benefit to his fellow citizens, starting with an undermining of their unthinking conviction that their basic moral-political ideals are indisputably true. Socrates seems to assume that the shedding of *amathia* represents a moral step forward. Well, it certainly would be a remedy against *hubris*.[7] And it would perhaps not be implausible to think that more could follow. If you have been made to see that you are ignorant of the fine and good through the questioning that aims at getting rid of *amathia*, you may become more inclined to look for truer notions of the entity in question (such as a virtue).[8] Could this in its turn lead to a practice of self-questioning among the citizens, and perhaps also to a practice of questioning of *each other*, so that we could begin to get rid of *amathia* in society as a whole, as well as seeking for truer moral conceptions? We could envisage a philosophical practice which transforms itself into a political mission. It would then seem that it could be possible to close the gap between philosophy and politics by giving politics a new and deeper level, where it should question and reform its own presuppositions which until now have been wrapped up in *amathia*.

Apollo did not give Socrates epistemological tools for establishing the truth about the virtues and other relevant entities. However, the general impression that the Delphic story manages to convey, is that Apollo, aided by dreams and divine dispensation, is the author of Socrates's philosophical activity as a whole, and that this philosophy's mission is to change the basic tenets of society. But in the *Apology* we find a lacuna where we would expect Socrates to tell us how to get from meta-knowledge, which is supposed to be solid, to even merely somewhat truer insight into virtues and values than the one prevalent in the city at the time. Socrates is ignorant of these entities, as we remember.[9]

The first part of Socrates's interrogation of Meletus (24cff) must be read on this background. Socrates starts by mentioning—ironically—that Meletus has called himself a good and patriotic (*agathon kai philopolin*) man. He then tries to show that Meletus is not concerned with, or even interested in the morality of the young. Socrates presumes that any "concern" and "interest" would naturally have prompted Meletus to make a study of this question. Socrates argues as if it is an obvious duty for an individual who is accusing someone of corrupting the young to ponder the nature of virtues and values. Meletus seems to be taken aback by this; as well he might, for as he obviously sees it, these questions are taken care of by the community he is part of. When Socrates asks outright: "who makes them [the youth] better?" (24d),

Meletus has the answer ready to hand: it is the laws. Socrates: "But, my very good chap, that's not my question, but rather what *person* with prior knowledge of the very thing you mention, the laws?" (24e). Meletus, of course, is not looking in the direction of an individual person. His next answers are "the judges" as a collective, then the members of the Council, and at last the Assembly. Socrates sums up Meletus' stance thus: "It turns out, it seems, that all Athenians make them fine and good[10] (*kalous kagathous*) except for me, and I alone corrupt them. Is that what you are saying?" "Most emphatically, that's what I am saying" (25a).[11]

Socrates has managed to establish a sharp contrast between the traditional collective attitude to morals and moral education that is deeply ingrained in Meletus, and the critical and explorative approach of Socrates that is rooted in the individual. Meletus would have been joined by most of the judges here, who would have found Meletus' answers wise enough. Moreover, the judges would undoubtedly have taken note of Socrates's provocative jibe at them when Meletus had pointed them out as moral educators: "What's that you say, Meletus? Are these people able to educate the young men and make them better?" (24d).

THE VOICE OF THE CITY

So far Socrates's attitude is confrontational and provocative. His *tone* can hardly be said to become more amenable in the rest of the text. If we focus on *content*, however, we find a subtle but significant change shortly after the interrogation of Meletus.[12] Now Socrates is going to tell the Athenians how to live, and it is thus necessary to address virtues and values directly. We witness a certain accommodation to the moral vocabulary of the city, and even to common *topoi*.

Between 28b4 ("Are you really not ashamed, Socrates") and 29d3 ("aren't you ashamed") Socrates pulls off the remarkable rhetorical feat of pretending to accept the virtues of the city as they are and presenting them in such a way that *he* comes out as a paragon of these virtues as well as their strongest defender. *En route* he has managed to pull the virtues away from their foundation in the common culture and placed their legitimacy squarely in the relation between himself and Apollo.

When his honor was at stake, Achilles had contempt for death. In war "wherever a man posts himself, thinking that best, or is posted by a commander, there he ought, as it seems to me, to stand his ground in the face of danger, taking no account either of death or of anything else rather than of dishonor" (28d).[13] Socrates himself has done that, at Potidaea, at Amphipolis, and at Delium.[14] He is now doing the same when he is obeying the oracle. To

disobey would be dishonorable. It is morally bad and shameful "to commit injustice and to disobey one's superior."[15] (29b6). Socrates has brought into play prevailing moral terms like shame, loyalty, courage, honor, and justice (28d3), and argues implicitly that his observance of the virtues involved here follows from his subordination to the god. How does he know all this? He returns to his ignorance, and mentions *amathia*; *he* knows what he knows and does not know. "But [. . .] to commit injustice and to disobey one's superior, both god and man, is bad and shameful, [that] I do know (*oida*)"[16] (29b6). This cannot belong to the same kind of knowledge that was involved in our discussion of meta- and entity-knowledge. It must have come as a spontaneous realization of what it means to be under Apollo's command. That he "shall obey the god rather than you" (29d3) follows implicitly. Socrates has now established his authority as a dispenser of exhortations, and the city's moral authority is, if not completely destroyed, relegated to second place:

> "[A]ren't you ashamed of concerning yourself with the acquisition of as much money as possible, and reputation and honors, but not concerning yourself with or devoting thought to prudence (*phronêsis*) and truth (*alêtheia*) and the best possible condition in future of your soul?" And if any of you disputes this, and claims to make this his concern, I will not let him go at once, nor go away myself, but will question and examine and test him, and if I think he does not possess virtue (*aretê*), but claims to, I will reproach him for attaching the lowest value to the most valuable and a higher value to what is worth less. I will do this to both younger and older, whoever I may meet, both foreigner and citizen, but more to my fellow-citizens—more by as much as you are closer to me in kinship. For these are the god's order, you must know. I think you have never in the past had a greater good for you in the city than my service of the god. For there is nothing else I do, as I go about, than persuading both younger and older among you not to concern yourselves with your bodies nor with money above or even so deeply as with the best possible condition in future of your souls. [. . .] What I say is: virtue does not arise as a result of money, but as a result of virtue, money and other things, all things personal and public, become good for human beings. (29d–30b)[17]

Socrates knows that he should obey Apollo. It is hard to imagine, however, how the positive ethical content of this passage could be warranted by Socrates's philosophical insight as he has presented it until now. He has insisted that he is ignorant of everything fine and good. How could Socrates then know what is more and less valuable? How does he know that prudence, truth, and the best possible condition of one's soul ranks higher than honor and money? He obviously thinks that he knows the correct scale of values. That his voice is stern and arrogant, we would expect from a philosopher with a secure grasp of the truth. But by his own admission, he does not know the

truth about the "entities" he is talking about. Furthermore, the passage does not criticize the basic prevailing notions and ideals, but people's deviations from them. There is a blending of the two voices here, and those who did not become too much provoked by the arrogant voice of the one who knows, might get the impression that the message of philosophy is not so radical after all, that its task certainly is to make people better but without straying too far from the ideals of the city. Apollo's mission, however, shows through in the words "question and examine and test." All in all, 29d–30b is marked by ambiguity.

You should strive to become virtuous and virtue will give you success in life, such was the basic "Sunday school" line in Athens. The established *ideal* was thus not that money and honor[18] were higher on the moral hierarchy than the virtues. But in practical life, the reverse was often true. People's actions, and sometimes their words, could indicate that they "attach[ed] the lowest value to the most valuable." Moralists, however self-righteous and irritating they might have been regarded, often felt that they should exhort people.[19]

Xenophon had the mind of a moralist. He could have agreed to most of what Socrates said above. He would not have seen this message as something new, however, based on a novel utterance from one god. A deeply religious man, he saw the exemplary life of Socrates as embedded in *the ideals* of Athenian culture. He presents Socrates as a moral hero in his *Apology* and especially in his *Memorabilia*. Becoming virtuous is man's paramount task: "the society of good men (*chrestoi*) is a training in virtue" (*Memorabilia*, I. ii. 20); "if any of [Socrates's] companions had evil desires he openly tried to reform them and exhorted them to desire the fairest and noblest virtues" (I. ii. 64). Socrates is depicted as an ascetic, but Xenophon does not make him teach the necessity of a clear choice between virtue and the things man desires, such as fame, money, and power. He makes him accept the well-known convention that virtue is good in itself as well as the best way to attain these goods. The quotation above ("the society of good men is a training in virtue") is followed by: "by which men prosper in public and private life." An instrumental attitude to the virtues shines through here. They should not, however, be cultivated only for the benefit of oneself. The good of society should be put first. Not that Xenophon would see any fundamental conflict here; if you are virtuous, it follows that you will have the good of the community as a primary concern. Xenophon also adheres to a common view of the moral perils of fulfilled desires: "many by their wealth are corrupted, many through glory and political power have suffered great evils" (*Memorabilia*, IV. ii. 35).

If we accept that Xenophon gives us a version of common moral and political *ideals*, we must conclude that the Socrates in Plato's *Apology* 29d–30b

does not deviate from them in any decisive way. However, at 30b we find a possible exception to that: "What I say is: Virtue does not arise as a result of money, but as a result of virtue money and other things, all things personal and public, become good for human beings." The translation of the text on this point is controversial. Michael Stokes writes: "The obvious sense of the Greek in isolation would be that 'from virtue come money and all other things good for men…'. But this sounds odd from Socrates' lips, and on the face of it cannot be right. [. . .] Plato's Socrates [cannot] say with truth that he *does nothing but* go around saying that virtue brings riches." Stokes is not convinced that "Plato's Socrates, whose at least relative indifference to material things is notorious, could say he *habitually* recommends virtue on the ground that it leads to wealth; one would far rather believe that Plato wrote one difficult sentence."[20] I would suggest that Plato's formulation here is chosen with the jury and the wider Athenian audience in view. The result is ambiguity on an important point in the text.[21]

The voice of the city does not only surface in the text when virtues and values are directly addressed. Before he tells the oracle story, Socrates makes a lot of the malignant slanders he has suffered for years. These have led to misunderstandings, as have the way his young companions have made use of his practice of interrogation. The drift of this is that his philosophical activity has not been contrary to the mores and interests of the city. That he attacks Anytus' and Meletus' accusations as groundless, since they are built on ignorance and bad faith, is not only in tune with common usage of forensic rhetoric.[22] It also conveys the impression that if the judges had known the truth, they would not have had any reason to prosecute him.

Socrates does not substantiate the moral content of 29d–30b with references to any truth Apollo could have imparted to him or to any philosophical work he himself may have done on the moral entities. We get the impression that Socrates goes far in accepting the prevalent version of the moral terrain. In the dialogues Plato lets Socrates make inquiries into the problems this terrain is fraught with. He persistently investigates the nature of the virtues, our aims and values, as well as our desires and the inner relations between all these items; in short the whole moral psychology of man. He uses extant cultural material in these inquiries, and so the generally accepted notions are constantly in view. So even if this material is not lifted uncritically from common usage, elements of existent discourse penetrate the investigations throughout.

Even Socrates's first investigation of people's *amathia* in the *Apology* is informed by notions that are circulating in public discourse. When Socrates says that he knew beforehand that the craftsmen knew many fine things (*polla kai kala epistamenous*, 22d), he is referring to their craft-competence, which is entity-knowledge. And he recognizes this competence straight away when

he meets and talks with them. Since these are things he doesn't know, as he says, we must conclude that he draws on common notions about the concept *epistêmê*, in order to be able to make this judgment. He would also need to have *some* technical knowledge of the different crafts.

There is thus a deeper philosophical reason behind the blending of the two voices, a reason that is suppressed in the *Apology*. Socratic discourse is dependent upon opinions and ideas that the culture has to offer. Philosophy is left to work with that material, although in its own—critical—ways. Such is the nature of philosophy. It is always "contaminated." This gives philosophy its "betwixt and between" (*metaxu*) character, so often demonstrated in the dialogues, especially where Socrates is the protagonist. Philosophy is under way and in-between.

The text is silent on several of the aspects of the teaching and behavior of the Socrates we know from other texts. The situation, Plato must have thought, called for a rhetoric that highlighted certain aspects of his activity and his character. We should thus not expect this text to give us a context-independent account of the gist of Plato's philosophy. But then, *every* dialogue is crafted with the rhetorical—as well as methodical—tools that a specific setting demands. In most dialogues, however, Socrates is depicted while engaged in—often time-consuming—philosophical work, which does not result in any clear-cut conclusions. Plato could not present philosophy in this vein in the *Apology* if his aim was to show how important, powerful, and dangerous philosophy could be. He wanted to present Socrates as a martyr for philosophy, and the Socrates that is present in his text was certainly sentenced for his philosophical activity. Plato was successful; the masterful rhetoric in the *Apology* has undoubtedly contributed to the high regard philosophy has been held in ever since.

PHILOSOPHY VERSUS POLITICS

Are philosophy and politics incompatible? Is there even a fundamental enmity between them? Or, to limit the scope, is there a fundamental conflict between the philosophical investigation of ethics and politics and the state? Or are conflicts of this type due to specific historical situations?

There are some strong arguments in the research literature for the viewpoint that the enmity so strongly displayed in the *Apology* was a product of a specific conjuncture in Athens' history. The basic norms and ideals of the *polis* had been desecrated during the civil war. "Impiety provided the Athenians an easy way to understand the period of civil unrest. Citizens who had violated the laws of the gods were also responsible for Athenian political troubles. What better way to ensure the success of the restored democracy

than by removing them and their pollution from the city?"[23] Josiah Ober writes: "No canny politician would willingly put himself in the position of attacking basic values."[24]

The oracle story implies that Apollo found fault with the basic tenets of the community, which the Athenians had always supposed to be accepted and defended by the gods as a group. By deploying Apollo as *his* unshakeable guarantee for a different understanding of fundamental ideals, Plato's Socrates draws attention to the hallowed aspect of the Athenians' own ideals. When the voice of Apollo is heard, free from any compromise with the voice of the city, it says that you either piously follow Apollo, and question the basic assumptions of society with the aim of showing that these tenets represent false knowledge, or you stick to the traditional assumptions and the piety the city demands. This would be a harsh message for the Athenians to swallow at any time, but especially at the time of the restored democracy. However, Socrates makes compromises in his defense speech, which to a certain extent blurs the radical difference between the two alternatives.

Throughout his speech Socrates is preoccupied with conveying that he is concerned with the good of the city. From 30d5 to 34b6 we find several arguments that are intended to show this concern. This commitment, however, is not rooted in his nature as a social being, but in Apollo's order, and this order also points out *how* Socrates shall benefit the city: by questioning, examining, and exhorting *individual* citizens. He says, hyperbolically: "I think you have never in the past had a greater good for you in the city than my service of the god" (30a6). Thus Socrates's focus on questioning and investigation does not harmonize well with the emphasis the Athenians put on deliberation and debate. The Athenians thought that their political activity, including their constant legal amendments, made society better. The laws could be changed, always with reverence for traditional principles. Reforms should be a communal effort. According to the democratic ideology that had gained an even more dominating position after the catastrophic events of the reign of the thirty tyrants, collective, institutionalized deliberations produced the best decisions.[25] Wisdom belonged to the community, more so than to the individual, and Socrates's approach is personal: "trying to persuade each of you" (36c). Even when new ideas were in demand, Socrates's contributions would hardly have fitted in, then.[26]

The Athenian ideal of outspokenness and frankness (*parrhêsia)* was thus not seen primarily as an individual human right. That an individual should have freedom to express his opinions on political and cultural matters with as few restrictions as possible was understood to be a precondition for democracy, and thus contributed to the best *society*. At the same time experience taught them that the unrestricted use of *parrhêsia* could threaten social

cohesion. Consensus (*homonoia*) was a strong ideal, and this ideal naturally tended to shield the basic assumptions of the *polis* from attack. There was not, however, a clearly drawn demarcation line between these two considerations in practice, and it probably changed position over time. The verdict in the case against the historical Socrates could perhaps be seen as an attempt to draw such a line by deciding that Socrates had gone too far in his outspokenness, in the opinion of the majority of the judges.[27]

The "fundamental conflict" view, on the other hand, is not without a basis in Plato's text. Socrates's Apollonian voice had signaled that *all* moral-political assumptions should be questioned. This is what any philosopher should say and do, as Arlene Saxonhouse argues: "For Socrates the examiner nothing is too sacred to remain covered by a deference to or reverence for what is."[28] If philosophy accepts that some basic assumptions should not be investigated, if it finds a secure haven within some -ism for example, it renounces its claim on being the discipline that investigates man's basic questions, including the philosopher's own. This means that where philosophy comes into contact with politics, it must question its basic premises, regardless of the concern of the state for consensus and stability. Philosophers, so far as they are doing philosophy, should not show reverence for the glue in society. Here philosophers should be shameless, as Saxonhouse says.[29]

Can any state exist for any length of time without its glue? Saxonhouse seems to say no: "Can all be probed and revealed without the destruction of the political society?"[30] "The unexamined life that [Plato' Socrates] refuses to live can at times be foundational for the city, especially the unexamined life of the pious man."[31]

Plato's philosophy would not have been possible if he and his Socrates had entertained piety toward the political consensus. The basic problem, however, is still with us. For philosophy the choice is not simply between saying frankly and shamelessly what we think, and paying lip service to convention. We, no more than Plato, have ready true statements to offer. The shamelessness and frankness of the philosopher must be a result of the will to *investigate* the fundamental questions without any restraints. But more often than not, the political society will not be interested, neither in the philosopher's resolve, nor in his—tentative—results. For the politicians always already know the truth. Plato's Socrates had to take recourse to the fiction of the oracle in order to create the illusion that philosophers are the superior purveyors of truth. Socratic ignorance is outdone by the hyperbole of Apollo's mission.

There is then, a fundamental difference between philosophy and politics. Seen from the vantage point of politics, philosophy is prone to sow doubt and discord where unity is necessary, and seen from the perspective of philosophy, politics harbor unexamined suppositions and even lies—be they ever so noble—in its heart.

NOTES

1. "The traditional view of Plato's *Apology*, in both ancient and modern times–maintained in the last century by such scholars as Ueberweg, Grote and Zeller–has been that it is substantially a reproduction of the actual defense made by Socrates at the time of his trial. This interpretation is now generally acknowledged to be untenable. The actual defense was, according to the joint testimony of Xenophon and of the Platonic *Apology* itself, an absolutely extemporaneous effort. The Platonic *Apology* is distinctly a work of art both in its general structure and in its least details. If based upon the speech of Socrates, as can hardly be doubted, it must have undergone no mere revision or alteration, but a thorough remodeling. In its finished form it is to all intents and purposes a dramatic monologue." Theodore De Laguna, "The interpretation of the *Apology*," *The Philosophical Review* 18 (1909): 23. It is remarkable that this excellent introduction to De Laguna's article was written as early as 1909. Cf. Christopher Rowe, *Plato and the Art of Philosophical Writing* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 90: "the *Apology* may be characterized as a literary version of an already literary, or at any rate partly fictionalized, Socrates." The translation used is Michael C. Stokes, trans., *Plato: Apology of Socrates*, *Aris & Phillips Classical Texts* (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 1997).

2. Xenophon's Socratic dialogues, *Memorabilia*, *Oeconomicus*, *Symposium* and *Apology* are published in Loeb Classical Library 168 as *Xenophon IV* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1923).

3. With reference to Xenophon's *Memorabilia* (iv 4.19–21), K. J. Dover writes: "the unwritten laws of mankind, together with elements common to many written codes, were explicitly prescribed by gods at some time in the remote past." K. J. Dover, *Greek popular morality in the time of Plato and Aristotle* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1994), 255. Cf. Walter Burkert, *Greek Religion* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1985), 249: "that there are unconditional categorical duties is presupposed as something absolute; no morality without authority. In Greek popular morality this appears as the basic code: honour the gods and honour one's parents. The one supports the other; both together guarantee the continuity of the group, which is defined by rules of conduct."

4. On the question of whether *suneidenai* should be translated as "to know" or "to be aware of," see Gail Fine, "Does Socrates claim to know that he knows nothing?" *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* 35 (2008): 49–85.

5. Plato, *Charmides*, trans. W. R. M. Lamb, Loeb Classical Library 201 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1927).

6. I am not trying to put forward an interpretation of the last part of the *Charmides*. That would have to be done in the context of that dialogue itself. I do, however, maintain that the rather thorough treatment of meta-knowledge and its relation to the virtues in the *Charmides* is highly relevant for a reflection on the similar, but suppressed problem in the *Apology*. Francisco Gonzales has noticed the similarity. See his *Dialectic and Dialogue. Plato's Practice of Philosophical Inquiry* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1998). 52. See also Gabriela R. Carone, "Socrates' Human Wisdom and *Sôphrosunê* in *Charmides* 164c ff.," *Ancient Philosophy* 18 (1998).

7. *We* would think so. But for many conventional Athenians it would be seen as the opposite. It could be seen as hubris to embark on such an investigation, since its premise was that traditional moral attitudes and beliefs were wrong.

8. A development (hopefully) often set in motion by Socrates in many dialogues.

9. Philosophers and other "enlightenment" figures in Athens could well find a practice that concentrated on identifying and undermining *amathia* a beneficial task to perform. To the citizens at large, both to most of the aristocratic elite and to the *dêmos,* such a task would not only be seen as provocative and inherently hubristic, it was also a superfluous and useless activity since they *did* have consensual, if vague, "knowledge" about moral entities.

10. Meletus' view is also expressed by Protagoras in his great speech in the *Protagoras* (326e–327b), and by Anytus in the *Meno* (95a). Socrates's "refutation" of the slanderer and liar Meletus is in fact a "refutation" of sorts of the Athenians in general. Many of the judges would probably have seen this.-Alcibiades has known from he was a little boy what justice is. He does not need Socrates to teach him that, he needs him to help him stay on the narrow path (*Alc.1*, 110c, compared with *Sym*. 216b).

11. Cf. Xenophon's version of this: Socrates: "surely we know what kinds of corruption affect the young; so you tell us whether you know of any one who under my influence has fallen from piety into impiety, or from sober (*sôfronos*) into wanton (*hubristên*) conduct, or from moderation in living into extravagance, and from temperate drinking into sottiness, or from strenuousness/exercise into flabbiness, or has been overcome by any other base pleasure." But, "by Heaven!" said Meletus: "but I most certainly know of those whom you have persuaded to listen to you rather than to their parents" (*Apology*, in *Xenophon IV*, trans. O. J. Todd, 19–20). How could Socrates be a better teacher than their parents? Xenophon is a defender of conventional morality, but he is an aristocrat and keeps a certain distance to the "collective thinking" of the *dêmos*. He sees the value of the contributions of wise individuals.

12. Robert Metcalf, "The Philosophical Rhetoric of Socrates' Mission," *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 37 (2004): 143–166, argues that "Socrates becomes much more aggressive in his manner of speaking to the jury from this passage onward, and most importantly, the way that he portrays his philosophical activity changes significantly." He is "no longer posing as a mere interpreter of the oracle" (159). Metcalf thinks that the rhetorical function of the oracle story is to show that Socrates is not responsible for his provocative philosophical practice. "[H]e carefully avoids casting himself as the agent responsible for the process by which he has come to be hated, and repeatedly portrays his involvement in as innocuous a way as possible" (145). There is something in this: Socrates is *pretending* that he cannot do anything else than what Apollo bids. On the other hand, the story sets up Socrates as Apollo's only prophet, and thus gives him an authority that no one else, not even the hallowed tradition, can match. Metcalf's interpretation seems to presuppose that the judges had bought the oracle story. If they did not, which I think is more probable, its utilization by Socrates could have been regarded as hubristic and impious. For the "rhetoric of innocence," see especially pp. 145–47, and p. 161, n. 10.

13. This moral steadfastness is generalized at 28b7: "consider one thing alone in every action, whether the action is just or unjust, and the behaviour that of a good man or a bad."

14. "This appeal to one's sterling military record is a familiar rhetorical *topos*." Josiah Ober, *Political Dissent in Democratic Athens. Intellectual Critics of Popular Rule* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998), 172.

15. "Righteous" and "pious" were often mentioned in the same breath. Dover quotes Demosthenes: "'nor is it righteous or pious for you to acquit him' [is] a rhetorical pleonasm." Dover, *Greek Popular Morality*, 248.

16. *Oida* is a common and "nontechnical" word meaning "I know," "to be familiar with," "to know about," from "I have seen." It signifies a completed state, not a knowledge-process.

17. A man who thinks he is ignorant of the virtues would hardly express himself in this vein. The passage as a whole, however, does not emphasize the *having* of the virtues, but *caring for* (*epimeleisthai*, 29e3) the soul. Still, since there are many ways one can care for one's soul (participating in mystery cults, for instance), that does not set us on the path to true virtue; it would be strange if Socrates more or less identified *the care* of the soul with being virtuous. And it would be strange if Socrates thought that merely caring (which admittedly implies some searching, in one way or another) should give you the correct hierarchy of values. Stokes, *Apology*, 149, discusses this question. Stokes translates *aretê* as "goodness," which I have replaced by "virtue."

18. Yet honor was a cherished good. Socrates frets quite a bit over his own honor (and the city's too) in the *Apology,* something we do not find much of elsewhere. The judges would probably have felt a grudging admiration for his courage in the face of death, but also for his concern about his honor (34e, 35a, 35b, 35d). At 29d, however, honor is listed along with money and reputation and contrasted to moderation and truth.

19. We could easily get the impression from the *Apology* that it is Socrates's main task to exhort people. This is not in line with Socrates's focus elsewhere, except to a certain extent in the *Gorgias*.

20. Stokes, *Apology*, 149–50 (Stokes' italics).

21. The ambiguity emerges again at 41d, where Socrates says that "nothing bad can come to a good man either in life or in death, *and his affairs are not neglected by the gods*" (My italics).

22. Josiah Ober writes that rhetorical conventions "served to establish the speaker's adherence to a generally accepted and specifically democratic code of belief and behaviour. Along with explicit claims to having performed services for the polis appropriate to one's social station, rhetorical topoi were intended to integrate the interests of speaker and audience. The establishment of the speaker's credentials as a useful citizen who adhered to standard democratic norms of belief and behaviour would be interwoven with the substantive case establishing a defendant's technical innocence. What the Athenian jury expected, then, was for Socrates to show through rhetoric that the specific charges were without factual basis, and furthermore that they were incredible given his standing as a loyal citizen of the democratic polity. He could, moreover, explain how the baseless charges came to be lodged against him, in the process exposing his accusers as scoundrels who were corruptly willing, even viciously eager, to undermine democratic ideology and practice. Finally, he might try to show that his own behaviour consistently conformed to a model of socially maintained citizen dignity." Ober, *Political Dissent*, 167.

23. Andrew Wolpert, *Remembering Defeat. Civil War and Civic Memory in Ancient Athens* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002), 63.

24. Josiah Ober, *Mass and Elite in Democratic Athens. Rhetoric, Ideology, and the Power of the People* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989), 299.

25. Josiah Ober writes about the "Athenian faith in group decisions": "that faith was grounded in the assumption that the collective wisdom of a large group was inherently greater than the wisdom of any of its parts. This conviction is one of the central egalitarian tenets of Athenian political ideology. It is implicit in both the structure of the decision-making process and the emphasis that Athenians were willing to place upon 'common report' as an index of an individual's character and behaviour, since what 'everybody knows'—or everybody believed—was deemed likely to be right." Ober, *Mass and Elite,* 163.

26. Socrates's excuse for not bringing himself "publicly to stand up before your assembly and offer advice to the city" was that he was stopped from doing so by his *daimonion* (31c–d).

27. The arguments for the "conjuncture-theory" presented above rest on the questionable premise that the jury sentenced Socrates for his philosophical activity and not for his supposed collusion with the enemies of democracy (for instance).

28. Arlene W. Saxonhouse, *Free Speech and Democracy in Ancient Athens* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 110.

29. See also Saxonhouse's contribution to this volume.

30. Saxonhouse, *Free Speech*, 111.

31. Saxonhouse, *Free Speech*, 112.

Chapter 5

Socrates's Daimonic Ethics

Myth and Heroism in Plato's Apology

Jacob Howland

A PHILOSOPHICAL HERACLES

The beginning of the *Apology* presents the strange spectacle of a double Socrates: the man himself and a specter or phantasm, fabricated long ago by his first Athenian accusers and revived by his current ones, that nearly slips by him unrecognized. The two have little in common but a name, for "even I myself," Socrates observes, "almost didn't notice myself" (17a).[1] This optical illusion—the splitting of Socrates in the refractive medium of speech into plus and minus, philosophical original and sophistical counter-image—has some suggestive dramatic antecedents. It recalls Euripides' *Helen*, in which Hera, jealous of the transcendent beauty of Zeus' illegitimate daughter, maliciously produces "a breathing phantom compound[ed] from heaven" (34) who cheats on Menelaus and launches a devastating war. It also recalls Euripides' *Bacchae*, in which Zeus is said to have molded a dummy of the infant Dionysus from heavenly *aithêr* in order to protect his bastard son and namesake from Hera's wrath (286–297). We shall see that Hera, whom Diskin Clay has described as "*phthonos* [envy or rancor] itself,"[2] figures centrally in the *Apology* as well, and not just because she personifies the city's deadly resentment of Socrates. But the dialogue's beginning also brings to mind an incongruous ancient legend passed down by the Roman author Aelian. At the performance of the *Clouds*, some foreigners began to ask who in the world this "Socrates" was whom Aristophanes was ridiculing. Aelian writes: "In order, therefore, that he [Socrates] might resolve the perplexity (*aporia*) of the foreigners, he stood up through the whole performance while the actors were contesting, and watched while standing. So great was his contempt for the comedy and the Athenians" (*Varia Historia* 2.13).

The *Apology* offers yet another occasion for the Athenians to compare Socrates with his public persona. But in this case it is he who is (or claims to be) the foreigner, and his by now familiar mimetic *Doppelgänger* who dwells among the "Athenian men," as he calls his judges. Having been forced to abandon his accustomed posts and practices in the agora, Socrates has entered a political theater in which seeming eclipses being, and where he must beg to speak in "the idiom and manner [. . .] in which I have been raised" (17d–18a). Here, in the courtroom of the restored democracy, ambitious politicians move indignant crowds to settle scores against ostensible enemies (cf. 23d–e). Here Socrates attempts in earnest to distinguish himself from his apparitional double.[3] Like one "fighting with shadows," as he says, he must wrestle a multitude of men who are *aporôtatoi*, "most unmovable," because their anonymity, and especially their mindless capitulation to envy and slander, put them utterly beyond the reach of refutation (18d). His situation is as ridiculous and dangerous as that he describes in the Cave Image of the *Republic*, wherein one coming down from light into darkness is "compelled in courtrooms or elsewhere to contest about the shadows of the just [. . .] [before] men who have never seen justice itself" (517d).

In the *Apology*, it seems, Socrates has metaphorically descended into Hades. What is he doing down there? An answer begins to emerge from the connection Aristophanes implies, and Plato draws explicitly, between the philosopher and the Greek hero Heracles, the illegitimate son of Zeus and a mortal woman, whose twelfth and greatest civilizing labor was the capture of the three-headed guard-dog of Hades. On first catching sight of the emaciated students in Socrates's school, the *Clouds*' Strepsiades exclaims "Heracles! What beasts are these?" (184). A spontaneous cry of recognition, or perhaps a call for help,[4] Strepsiades' surprise is echoed in the Platonic dialogues by Anytus, Hippias, Alcibiades, and Thrasymachus, when, shocked or scandalized by Socrates, they, too, shout "Heracles!"[5] In the *Apology*, Socrates associates himself with Heracles when he speaks of the "labors" he performed on behalf of the god at Delphi, when he swears in this context "by the dog" and "by Hera," and when he compares himself to Achilles, who tells his mother, a few lines after a passage from the *Iliad* quoted by Socrates, that "not even mighty Heracles escaped death [. . .] but fate overcame him, and the grievous wrath of Hera" (22a, 24e; cf. 28c-d with *Il.* 18.117–19).[6] Lest we miss these allusions, Phaedo explicitly identifies Socrates with Heracles as he awaits execution (*Phdo.* 89c).[7]

Like Heracles, Socrates speaks and acts with a loftiness that seems by turns divine and ridiculous. While his appearance *ex machina* in the *Clouds* is clearly absurd, Plato's Cleitophon seriously describes him as "taking human beings to task like a god on the tragic machine" (*Cleit.* 407a), and Socrates

observes in the *Apology* that his continuing neglect of his family and care for the Athenians "does not seem human" (31b). Heracles, a *hêrôs theos* or "hero-god" in Pindar's fitting epithet (*Nemean* 3.22), is the daimonic child of a mortal and an immortal, a point Socrates underscores by calling daimons "bastard children of gods" (27d). But as such Heracles resembles the lowly mule, born of horses and asses, to which Socrates ludicrously compares his *daimonion* (27e).[8] Like Socrates, the mulish and so presumably sterile Heracles nevertheless generates mimetic doubles across the poetic spectrum. Homer's Odysseus solemnly informs us that Heracles dwells above, among the gods, while his *eidôlon* or phantom—a word Plato uses of the apparitions of the Cave (*Rep.* 520c)—walks below, in Hades (*Od.* 11.601–03). And Aristophanes' *Frogs*, whose underworld chorus anticipates Plato in referring to the Athenians as "the corpses above" (420), begins with a humorous encounter between Heracles and a cowardly look-alike—Dionysus, dressed in a lion-skin to steel himself as he enters Hades for no reason other than his longing for the dead Euripides. The gods deserve mockery, Aristophanes implies, because they lack *karteria*—the signal hoplite virtue of courageous endurance, characteristic of Heracles and Socrates alike,[9] that sustains mortals as they move through the realms of death. Heroes, it seems, are better than gods because they have to be.

I am suggesting that the *Apology* frames the trial of Socrates as the superficially laughable yet deeply serious struggle of a philosophical Heracles over the after-image he will leave behind him in the netherworld of the city. At stake is the Platonic myth of Socrates, who enters the Athenian theater of justice precisely as a destroyer of the *city*'s myths and rituals. For in the *Apology* Socrates takes on much more than his phantom double. He attacks the vicious passions that feed the gods of the poets and the swollen and jealous god the Athenians have made of the city itself.[10] He aims in particular at the punitive moral economy of Olympianism, a system of social and psychological exchange in which civic *homonoia* is purchased by scapegoating violence, and preeminent virtue buys envy and hatred. These political pathologies of resentment and revenge are poetically exemplified in the tragic plight of Heracles, whom Hera drives to murderous madness in Euripides' *Heracles*, and whose suffering at the hands of the dead centaur Nessos in Sophocles' *Women of Trachis* is so overwhelming that he must beg his son to burn him alive. But in the *Apology*, Socrates disarms the dynamic of Athenian scapegoating and neutralizes the sting of popular ill-will, thereby displaying a kind of heroism one might call post-Olympian. For in defeating the spiteful spirit of Hera, he sheds the tormented figure of her namesake *Hêra-kleês*, "Fame of Hera," like a butterfly taking flight from a cocoon.

MIMETIC REVERSAL AND THE ECHO OF OFFENSE

Socrates hints at the ambiguous origins of the *muthos* he crafts in the *Apology* when he informs the judges that it would not be proper for him "to come to you molding speeches (*plattonti logous*) like a youth" (17c), surely a pun on the name of young *Platôn*. In the *Second Letter*, Plato attributes his dialogues to "a Socrates grown beautiful and young" (314c); in the *Apology*, this Platonized Socrates or Socratized Plato shares with the court the cautious hope that he may on this occasion be able "to do or make something more" (*pleon ti poiêsai*) (19a). He does both, laying his life on the line in a way that gives credence to, and is clarified by, his philosophical mythologizing. In a rhetorical *tour de force*, he proceeds to fashion a new and noble poem out of the old and base materials provided by his accusers. With a Heraclean combination of heroic resoluteness and ironic lightness, he lays hold of Meletus' fantasy about a "most polluted" corrupter of the young (23d, 25a) and suddenly and completely flips it. His is the tale of a heaven-sent scourge who comes to cleanse the city of *its* pollution of vice and ignorance through the chastising application of divine measures.

What sort of poetry is this? It is not just epic, for the essential tragic elements of *hamartia*, *katharsis*, *peripeteia*, and *anagnôrisis*—error, purification, reversal, and recognition—are all at play in the *Apology*. Socrates's openness and fidelity to the word of the god at Delphi leads him steadfastly to examine others and deflate their erroneous claims to wisdom. These purifying refutations, so painful to the Athenians as well as to himself, produce a diabolically reversed image of him in the public consciousness—the *diabolê* or slander against which he must now defend himself. But his trial turns out to be an opportunity for the god to bring to completion a plan set in motion many years before, when Socrates's first accusers unwittingly publicized the name he now proceeds to reclaim. This divinely enigmatic plan culminates in the dramatic public presentation of a new paradigm of human virtue: that of the philosopher who fearlessly serves the god in opposing ignorance and vice. The reversal that brings this paradigm to light—the revelation of Socrates's suffering as action and his accusers' action as suffering—coincides with Socrates's narration of the moment in which he finally grasps who he is and what the god intends to do with him. Socrates's story about the Delphic oracle is meant to accomplish a related *anagnôrisis* in his audience: the recognition that he has come, like a slayer of man-made monsters, to vanquish the vicious idols of the city.

Socrates, then, is ultimately neither an epic figure nor a tragic one.[11] For he overcomes the very gods of tragedy and epic alike in a manner at least somewhat reminiscent of satyr-play—the simultaneously hero-mocking and hero-praising genre that Demetrius describes as "tragedy at play" (*tragôidian*

paizousan) (*On Style* 3.169). Recalling Nietzsche's description of the Platonic dialogue as "the barge on which the shipwrecked ancient poetry saved herself with all her children,"[12] the *Apology* is a primary scene of shipwreck and rescue alike, because Socrates's victory over the city consists precisely in his defeat of its constitutive political poetry. The mechanism of this victory is a certain kind of inspired imitation: the *Apology* confirms the *Clouds*' depiction of Socrates as one whose speech mimes the nature of his interlocutors. In response to Meletus, whom he exposes as "playing" (*paizontos*: 27a) in a serious matter, Socrates offers a serious defense that merely looks like play (*paizein*: 20d). This mirror-imaging is also reflected in the order of speeches at Socrates's trial, which reverses the order of being and causation: it is, we learn, the purifying action of the sole savior of Athens that provokes Meletus' knee-jerk identification of him as the city's sole corrupter (25a). And just as the indignation aroused by his investigation of the Athenians inadvertently serves the purposes of the god, the riddling jest of Meletus turns out to be but a thin and distant echo of the solemn riddle of Delphi.

In sum, Socrates mimetic discourse appropriates and transvalues the speech of his antagonists in a way that retroactively deprives them of substance and agency. One is tempted to say that, in standing to the Athenians like a living man to the shades in Hades—a potent and vital being surrounded by bloodless phantoms—Socrates inverts Aristophanes' association of him with dead or disembodied souls (*Clouds* 94, 103–04, 186, 504, 508). Yet the comparison is inexact; the Athenians are more like soulless bodies or zombies, and they can bite. Heracles subdues Hades' dog with the forceful persuasion of a powerful chokehold.[13] Just so, Socrates's philosophical elenchus long ago reduced to an angry yelp the triple-headed guardian of the Athenian underworld—the politicians, poets, and craftsmen who collectively represent the city's claim to wisdom. But it is the final act of this Platonic drama, played out across a series of dialogues and culminating in the *Apology*, that most perfectly exemplifies Socrates's daimonic ethics.

THE *APOLOGY* IN CONTEXT: SOCRATES'S CATHARTIC SPEECH

Socrates's ethics, his distinctive habits and character, are displayed and described in the dialogues that immediately precede his trial—particularly the *Theaetetus*, *Euthyphro*, and *Sophist*—and in the *Cratylus*, a closely related dialogue. The general picture that emerges from these dialogues is of an ironic imitator whose purifying discourse involves both the recovery of identities that have been lost in a welter of distorted images and the repair of severed connections between words and the beings they are supposed to

name. The *Theaetetus* occurs on the day of Socrates's preliminary hearing and introduces the question of Socrates's identity, which seems somehow to stand outside him; his looks are reflected in the face of Theaetetus and his name in Young Socrates, who is present in the *Sophist* and answers questions in the *Statesman*. That same day Socrates encounters Euthyphro, who erroneously claims kinship with him on the ground that they are both slandered by the many out of envy for their wisdom about things divine (*Euth.* 3b-c). Euthyphro's mistake becomes apparent when Socrates exposes the viciousness of his utterly conventional conception of the gods as violent deities whose shifting preferences, like those of imperial Athens itself, furnish the only meaningful criteria of piety. In the *Sophist*, which takes place on the following morning, the philosophical Stranger from Elea—who himself looks like a god of refutation, and whose anonymity is a perfect counterpoint to Socrates's public name—produces multiple definitions of the sophist, two of which seem to apply specifically to Socrates. The first identifies a noble educator who attempts to purify human beings of vice by refuting their presumed wisdom (226b–31b). The second identifies a maker of phantasms or disproportionate images who fears he is ignorant, privately contradicts others with short speeches, and, "being an imitator of the wise man (*tou sophou*), will clearly get some name derivative of his" (268c)—i.e., *sophistês*. Both of these sophists practice a cathartic pedagogy of cross-examination, and both are on display in the *Apology*, in which an image-generating and contradictory Socrates comes to be regarded as a sophist but claims the title of wise man precisely because of his knowledge of ignorance (23a–e).

But the dialogue that most nearly anticipates the specifically poetic action of the *Apology*—albeit in an entirely playful register—is the *Cratylus*, in which Socrates repeatedly refers to Euthyphro, claiming in particular to have spent the morning with him and been inspired by him. He is clearly being ironic. In the *Cratylus*, Socrates makes good on a suggestion to which Euthyphro had paid no heed: that the gods are rational, erotic beings who need our help in accomplishing some noble work. His unique contribution to this as yet unidentified work takes the form of philosophical poetry. Socrates systematically corrects Euthyphro's deeply discordant worldview: in his playful etymologies, the gods whose castrations and imprisonments furnish a model for Euthyphro's metaphorical patricide, and the humans who fear, bribe, and imitate them, become paradigms of philosophical wonder and thoughtfulness. Zeus, through whom there is life (*di' hon zên*, a play on *Dia* and *Zêna*), turns out to be the son of a "great intellect," for the name Kronos signifies "his purity and the undefiled nature of his mind" (*to katharon* [. . .] *tou nou*), (396a–b). Even Ouranos or Heaven, who would seem to stand higher than everything else, bears a name that signifies "looking at the things above (*horô ta anô*), from which, meteorologists assert, a pure mind (*ton katharon noun*) comes to be present" (396c). Moving downward, Socrates cleans up the poets'

depiction of the lower orders of living beings according to the same pattern. Daimons are so called because they are "knowing" (*daêmones*: 398b); "hero," *hêrôs*, comes from *erôs* and *erôtan*, "to question" (398c–e); *anthrôpos*, "human being," displays the nature of the only animal that "looks up at that which he has seen" (*anathrôn ha ôpope*: 399c); and the name Hades, *Haidês*, derives not from the invisible (*aeidês*) but from knowing (*eidenai*).

Socrates's purifying discourse in the *Cratylus* replaces the violent conflict of gods and men with the erotic attunement of souls to beings. The keynote of this musical performance is philosophical *erôs* itself, the daimonic power of intelligent speech that both reveals and produces cosmic harmony. A joke about Socrates's having put on a lion-skin (411a) makes it clear that his heroic or erotic exploration of what his inspired wisdom can "make" or "do" (*ti poiêsei*: 396c) is essentially Heraclean. But whereas Heracles strove to rid the world of monsters in deed, Socrates more sublimely defeats the monstrosities of poetry in speech. And whereas the labors of Heracles were confined to the earth and the underworld, Socrates's civilizing work begins with the reformation of the highest gods.

In the *Cratylus*' erotic cosmos, there is no place for envy and rancor, and so none for the deity who most fully embodies these thumotic passions—passions that stand at the heart of the sacrificial politics of Olympianism, in which a name for surpassing excellence must be paid for in blood. This brings us to Socrates's exemplary unmasking of Hera, whose hateful character in the poetic tradition is itself a slander against the gods. To repeat over and over the name of *Hêra*, Socrates observes at 404c, is to grasp that her name reduces itself to *êra*—specifically, we may infer, the air that is shaped by the tongue of the one who performs this experiment. The supreme poetic justice of this etymology can hardly be overstated. In dissolving Hera into air, Socrates precisely reverses her vindictive composition of the phantom Helen. And because no other Hera exists outside of the ethereal shapes of human speech, she simply vanishes, along with the ugly passions that disfigure her superficially beautiful form. This evaporation of negative agency—a metaphysical act of love rather than one of personal spite—is, in microcosm, what Socrates's music does to the Olympian order as a whole, if only in speech. For he turns the jealous gaze of men and gods away from their fearful and resentful perceptions of one another and toward the full and unchanging measures of reality.

SOCRATES'S HEROIC AND DAIMONIC VICTORY

The contrast between the *Cratylus* and the *Apology* is unmistakable. In the *Cratylus*, Socrates converses in private with philosophical friends; in the *Apology*, he speaks publicly in the presence of declared enemies. The *Apology* takes place at a precise historical moment and is seriously political and

polemical. It is heroic-erotic combat in which the stakes are life and death. But it must be said that Socrates could have refused this final contest. He instead chooses to enter the agony of history, an *agôn* that he strives to refashion on his own terms.

Socrates explains that the slander against him arose from his public examination of the Athenians, and he refers in this connection to Aristophanes and his *Clouds* (19b–c, cf. 18d). He must therefore have begun his interrogations sometime before 423, when the *Clouds* was first produced. Athens was then in the first decade of the long war, its illiberal democracy having eagerly embraced the inflamed self-image reflected in the lavish architecture of the Parthenon, the enormously expensive chryselephantine statue of Athena, and the Funeral Oration of Pericles, to whom the Athenians attached the surname "Olympian" (Plut. *Per.* 8.2). The imperial megalomania of the politicians who promoted war, the poets who celebrated it, and the craftsmen who happily cut marble and shaped timbers paid for by subject cities was surely a primary target of Socrates's public refutations, judging from his strong criticisms of Pericles in the *Gorgias* (472b, 503c, 515d–16d, 519a) and of the swollen or feverish city in the *Republic* (372e–73e)—a city essentially indistinguishable in its excesses from late fifth-century Athens. By 399, the disaster of Sicily, the loss of the war, and the depredations of the Thirty Tyrants had brought home the tragic error—Socrates's word at 22d is *hamartêma*—of which he had tried to warn the Athenians so many years before. Socrates reminds the court of these events when he describes Chaerephon as "a companion of your multitude [. . .] [who] shared in your recent exile and returned with you" (20e–21a). To be fair, his democratic judges surely—and not without reason—believe themselves deserving of praise for having saved the city from the Thirty, but Socrates, who did not go into exile with them, and who in fact seems to have been one of the 3,000 "noble and good" Athenians the oligarchs selected for citizenship,[14] will not let them off the hook. To the contrary, he now presents himself as a chastising prophet of the god at Delphi—the same god the Athenians had chosen to ignore at the war's outset, when he notoriously promised to stand by the Spartans and predicted their victory (Thuc. 1.118). This is called throwing down the gauntlet.[15]

Whatever else it may accomplish, Socrates's pointed provocation of the jury establishes his heroic *bona fides*. He incurs shame and risks death in the cause of virtue not so much by his past actions as by his present ones. Speaking before the court, he boldly turns what had been a subject of comedy into something more serious and noble, earning by his evident boasting or "big talk" (*mega legein*, 20e; cf. Xen. *Apol.* 1) the precise comparison he makes between himself and the doomed Achilles. For by slightly misquoting Homer's *Iliad*, Socrates recasts Achilles as a punisher of injustice whose death in combat redeems his useless and ridiculous abstention from battle (28c–d).

Yet one can hardly fail to notice that the fate of the maniacally vengeful Achilles—like that of Heracles, overcome by Hera's "grievous wrath" (*Il.* 18.119)—is tragic. Given that Socrates clothes himself in the heroism of these men, must we not say the same of his fate?

This question becomes particularly pressing when we consider the *Apology*'s striking resemblance to the *Heracles* of Euripides, the dramatist with whom Aristophanes, and later Nietzsche, most closely associated Socrates.[16] At the beginning of the *Heracles*, we learn that the eponymous hero, "mastered by the goads of Hera or by necessity," has undertaken "to civilize the earth" (20–21). Having completed all of his other labors, he has descended into Hades in order to bring back "the triple-bodied dog" (24), but has not returned to his home in Thebes. In his absence, Lycos has killed Creon and usurped his throne. Planning to murder the hero's wife and sons as well, Lycos slanders Heracles with the accusation of cowardice (160–61; cf. 174–75). At this point Heracles, having subdued the dog of Hell and rescued Theseus from the underworld, arrives at Thebes. He proceeds to slay the tyrant and save his family. But this great moral triumph proves to be terribly ephemeral: Hera causes Heracles to slaughter his wife and three sons in a fit of madness, and so to pollute himself with murder. The vengeful goddess thus completely absorbs and reverses Heracles' purifying agency. "Why should I live?" the hero now laments; "What profit will I possess, having acquired a life both useless and accursed?" (1301–02). Yet he achieves a measure of redemption in denying his biological paternity—"I deem you my father now instead of Zeus," he tells Theseus (1265)—and in stubbornly rejecting the divinity of Hera:

> I do not believe (*nomizô*) that the gods desire the forbidden marriage-bed, and I never deemed worthy nor will ever be persuaded that they bind chains around the hands of others, or that one god by nature despotically rules another. For the god, if indeed he is correctly called god, lacks nothing. These are the poets' wretched tales. (1341–46)

The tragedy ends with Theseus granting Heracles 'honored asylum," thereby "annex[ing] to Athens," as William Arrowsmith observes, "the greatest Dorian hero."[17]

In the *Apology*, as we have seen, Socrates reenacts Heracles' last civilizing labor in the metaphorical Hades of the Athenian court. Like Heracles, Socrates fights heroically for justice (28b) and is rewarded for his virtue by the slander of his enemies—one of whom, coincidentally, is named Lycon. Like Heracles, he bears the stigma of pollution. Most importantly, Heracles' noble rejection of the gods of the poets reads like a concise summary of Socrates's philosophical theology (cf. *Rep.* 379a–83c). But his famously defiant speech

does not change the fact that he has insanely murdered his family. As for Socrates, he is executed by the very city in which Heracles finally finds refuge. Of what use, then, is *his* rejection of Olympianism? What has he really accomplished in the *Apology*?

An answer to these questions emerges from the signal differences between the protagonists of the *Apology* and the *Heracles*, to say nothing of the epic and tragic heroes Ajax and Palamedes, to whom Socrates imagines comparing his experiences in Hades (41b). In serving the god to the point of death, Socrates does, in a sense, sacrifice *his* wife and three sons,[18] but he does so calmly and deliberately. However much Heracles may deny Hera's claim to godhood, his fate turns on her decisive annulment of his virtuous character in a moment of madness. This closing of the gap between *daimôn* and *êthos* is, as always in tragedy, a source of great suffering.[19] For Socrates in the *Apology*, however, there is no such gap to speak of, and so no tragic reversal. This is not simply because, in solving the riddle of the oracle, Socrates willingly becomes the servant of the god. It is rather because his *êthos* is from the first indistinguishable from the Delphic *daimôn*.

Socrates heeds the oracle's assertion that no one is wiser than him only because he supposes that it is not permissible for the god to utter a falsehood. This unargued assumption, which directly contradicts the poets, is fundamentally ethical in origin as well as in content. Its warrant is nothing other than the person of Socrates: like Heracles' refusal to credit the poets' wretched tales, it is an absolute demand of his unwavering moral character. But because his character coalesces around the erotic quest for wisdom, his ethics are also daimonic in a specifically philosophical sense. He comes to see that his unswerving quest to answer the two questions implicitly posed by the oracle—"Who is Socrates?" and "What is wisdom?"—is the god's work as well as his own, and he makes it clear that the god has stationed him in Athens as in battle no more or less than he has stationed himself (28d–29a). Most astonishingly, we come to realize that the hatred and envy Socrates arouses among the Athenians, the political equivalent of the rancor of Hera, is essential to the deep and unsuspected plot authored by this philosophical hybrid of *hêrôs* and *theos*, divine poet and human actor: it makes him a public figure by magnifying and broadcasting his name, and so must be welcomed as the necessary precondition of his paradigmatic significance. Much the same is true of his death, which precisely in perfecting his good name gives the Athenians a name worthy of reproach (38c). In meeting execution with equanimity, Socrates offers the only conclusive proof that his philosophizing has liberated him from the habitual fear and shame that enchain his fellow citizens.

Euripides' Heracles wanders the earth slaying monsters, but his cathartic labors cannot root out the resentment his moral greatness itself arouses. In

the end, he can do no more than stand with dignity beneath the undeserved blows of a cruel world. Plato's Socrates is subject to the same reflexive psychological necessity, but he thoroughly disarms it. Far from being obliterated by the ugly political passions concretized in the figure of Hera, his daimonic ethics absorbs these passions in a kind of Hegelian *Aufhebung*. Like an echo reverberating in a cave, the thumotic outburst provoked by his erotic philosophizing, and in particular the phantasm to which ignorant men attach his name, turns out to be no more than an acoustic illusion that originates in the speech of the god. The apparitional Socrates trotted out by his accusers resembles Hera's phantom Helen, except that Socrates allows us to see that Hera herself is an illusory image of divinity. The completeness of Socrates's victory in the *Apology* is neatly suggested by his otherwise incongruous comparison of himself to a gadfly, sent by the philanthropic god of Delphi to sting the great horse of Athens into wakefulness (30e–31a). This very insect is the instrument with which Hera is said to have relentlessly tormented Io, an erotic conquest of Zeus whom she turns into a cow and drives to madness with its bite (Aesch. *Supp.* 299–307). While Hera's gadfly is a concrete image of her cramped and pestilent soul, Socrates's comparison honors both the god and himself. And in assigning new meaning even to the smallest and lowest of living beings, his poetry leaves no room for the dehumanizing scapegoating with which the Olympian city jealously guards its accustomed privileges.

In Euripides' eponymous tragedy, Heracles defends the gods from poetic slander. Like the hero's name, this unavailing defense is thoroughly ironic; Heracles' unmerited suffering in itself suffices to defame the Olympians. A different sort of irony characterizes Plato's presentation of Socrates as a new Heracles. This deeper irony consists in the fact that his accomplishment in the *Apology* is essentially symbolic. In leaving the Athenians with the image of a man who "assimilates himself to a god insofar as is possible for a human being" (*Rep.* 613a–b), Plato's myth of the philosophical hero points beyond itself to the transcendent truths by which the life of philosophy takes it bearings, truths to which only the intellectual labor of the soul can guide one. The myth is thus the discarded lion-skin, so to speak, of the man himself, whose inner activity it both reveals and conceals. In emphasizing the symbolic character of this myth, I am not suggesting that Socrates is defeated by his accusers. I mean rather that no one, not even Socrates, can save the Athenians from their collective madness. Like the great horse with which the Achaeans conquered Troy, the dream of Athens is, from the perspective of the *Apology*, a hollow and mindless construction; only the individuals within it are humanly substantial, and then only to the extent that they choose to emerge from it. This is why the public legacy of Plato's Socrates can be nothing more than a poetic image, a *paradeigma* of individual salvation that can light the way for others but cannot lead them up.

NOTES

1. All translations from Greek in this chapter are my own.

2. Diskin Clay, "Socrates' Mulishness and Heroism," *Phronesis* 17, no. 1 (1972): 60.

3. It seems that Socrates never seriously defended himself prior to this occasion. Cf. his remark that "no one spoke in my defense" against his first accusers (18c).

4. Eva Brann, "The Music of the Republic," in *The Music of the Republic: Essays on Socrates' Conversations and Plato's Writings*, ed. Eva Brann (Philadelphia: Paul Dry Books, 2004), 120; Nicole Loraux, "Socrate, Platon, Héraklès: Sur un paradigme héroique de philosophe," in *Histoire et Structure: A la mémorie de Victor Goldschmidt*, ed. Jacques Brunschwig, Claude Imbert et Alain Roger (Nicole, Paris: Vrin.1985), 97.

5. *Meno* 91c, *Hipp. Maj.* 290d, *Sym.* 213b, *Rep.* 337a.

6. Clay, "Socrates' Mulishness and Heroism," 57.

7. Cf. *Euthyd.* 297c–e with *Crat.* 411a–b. In three other dialogues, Socrates swears by Heracles (*Euthyph.* 4a, *Charm.* 154d, *Lysis* 208e).

8. Clay, "Socrates' Mulishness and Heroism," 55.

9. Loraux, "Socrate, Platon, Héraklès: Sur un paradigme héroique de philosophe," 95 and 104n39. On Socrates's *karteria* see esp. *Sym.* 219d and 220c, and cf. Mark Anderson, "Socrates as Hoplite," in *Ancient Philosophy* 25, no. 2 (2005), 273–89.

10. Cf. Thuc. 2.43.1, where Pericles encourages his audience to surrender their virtue (*aretê*) to the city as "the most beautiful offering" (*eranon*). An *eranos* is a banquet to which each contributed his share: like the Olympian gods, Athens feeds on the sacrifice of human vitality. Jacob Howland discusses this theme in connection with Aristophanes' speech at *Symposium* 189c–93d. "Glaucon's Fate: Plato's *Republic* and the Drama of the Soul," *Proceedings of the Boston Area Colloquium in Ancient Philosophy* 29, no. 1 (2014).

11. Cf. Jacob Howland, "Plato's *Apology* as Tragedy," *Review of Politics* 70, no. 4 (2008), 519–46.

12. Friedrich, Nietzsche, "The Birth of Tragedy," in *The Birth of Tragedy and The Case of Wagner*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Random House, 1967), 90.

13. Apollodorus writes that Heracles gripped Cerberus by the head *heôs epeise*, "until he persuaded [the beast]" (2.5.12).

14. Ellen Meiksins Wood and Neal Wood, "Socrates and Democracy: A Reply to Gregory Vlastos," in *Political Theory* 14, no. 1 (1986), 73–74; Peter Krentz, *The Thirty at Athens* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1982), 82–83.

15. Cf. Brann, "The Music of the Republic," 19: "When philosophy comes upon the city [in the *Apology*] it comes as a threat."

16. See esp. *Frogs* 1491–99 with 884–94 and 971–79, and cf. Nietzsche, "The Birth of Tragedy," sections 11–13.

17. William Arrowsmith, "Introduction to the Heracles," in *The Complete Greek Tragedies*, vol. 3, ed. David Grene and Richmond Lattimore (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1959), 270.

18. Charles Segal, "'The Myth Was Saved': Reflections on Homer and the Mythology of Plato's *Republic*," *Hermes* 106, no. 2 (1978): 321.

19. Vernant, Jean-Pierre and Pierre Vidal-Naquet, *Myth and Tragedy in Ancient Greece*, trans. Janet Lloyd (New York: Zone Books, 1990), 37.

Chapter 6

Socrates's Telling of the Truth

A Reading of the Apology *17a1–35d9*

Gro Rørstadbotten

When reading the Platonic dialogues as philosophical-literary dramas, and when reading them chronologically from the outset of their (internal) dramatic dating,[1] the reader employs a strategy which represents a kind of philosophical-literary time-travel. The impact is that the reader somehow senses that different aspects of the past are on trial or that the past is tested throughout the various Platonic narratives. However, when confronted with the *Apology* a point zero is reached; this is a point where the Platonic narratives and the Athenian reality are merging. The problem, if a problem, is that Socrates, the main literary character throughout the narratives, is put on trial on a stage in the real (empirical) world and in addition Plato, the author, is present *in* the narration as an eyewitness to the events unfolding on stage. Hence, the correlation between Socrates the character and Plato the author is severely altered and the borders between narration and reality are being blurred; or maybe the case is that there are no borders anymore. This blurring represents a displacement, or a dislocation, a movement in which the reader gradually experiences being lead from narration into reality, so to speak. It is a textual fact that Socrates is in court in Athens and that Plato is present; it is a bibliographic fact that Plato has written this text; thus, these facts present a forced change in perspective. I will take this point zero as an invitation to step into the limbo between narration and reality. From this place I will inquire into a few rhetorical aspects of the *Apology* and try to answer two questions.

First, Socrates's position when entering the stage is that at the age of seventy this is his first appearance in court (cf. 17d1–3). At this place Socrates is a stranger (*xenos*) and an unskillful man (*atechnos*) because he does not know the conventions of how to speak (cf. 17d3); but he knows very well the excellence (*aretê*) of a judge and a speaker, and he knows what makes a speech just

(cf. 18a4–5, *dikaia legein*). So, how does Socrates the "dislocated"[2] philosopher and Socrates the citizen structure the defense in court?

Secondly, during the period 403–399 BCE three types of civic discourse[3] served as powerful *topoi* in the forensic rhetoric employed by Athenian orators: the *homonoia-topos*, the *dêmos-topos* and the *reconciliation-topos*. How does Socrates respond to these *topoi*? Or, how does Socrates employ this new rhetoric which was developed during the restoration of the democracy?

In the present reading, my point of departure will be a brief sketch of the three types of civic discourse in order to contextualize the *Apology*; on the basis of this sketch I label the three *topoi*. I will then inquire into how Socrates activates and makes use of them; during this investigation it will come to light that the defense as a whole is structured around these *topoi*. Through this literary and rhetorical reading I do not intend to conclude whether Socrates was guilty or not;[4] my aim is rather to show that he presented a coherent defense both as a philosopher and as a citizen.[5]

THE IDEAL OF SAME-MINDEDNESS OR THE *HOMONOIA-TOPOS*

According to Andrew Wolpert, the Athenians' fear of factional parties can be traced back to the origin of Greek notions of citizenship. As the polis emerged during the eight century the Greeks "began to define their communities as groups of 'middling' citizens."[6] These middling citizens were "not a class but 'an ideological construct' allowing citizens to locate themselves in the middle and to suppress those traits and characteristics that distinguished them from other citizens."[7] Wolpert stresses that this ideological construct was not limited to a specific political system or a polis; on the contrary, it could be seen throughout ancient Greece. J. E. Lendon shows that besides Athens, Sparta presents an example where the full citizens "proudly called themselves the *homoioi*, 'the peers' or 'the similar',"[8] and Bruce Rosenstock argues that in Athens *homonoia* (literally: same-mindedness) denoted a "hoped-for consensus which would protect Athens' democratic institutions from dissolving into factional parties seeking power at each other's expense."[9] In addition, the Athenians also signaled their unity through the laws and decrees passed by the Athenian Assembly which all began with the phrase "The people resolved (*edoxe toi dêmoi*)."[10] Hence, in Athens participation in political affairs depended on an ideal of same-mindedness "and this characterized those men who possessed citizenship which again distinguished them from those individuals prohibited from politics: resident aliens, slaves, and women."[11] This ideal had a definite function: "in order to avoid the citizens to visualize conflicts as a necessary part of the city, they constructed screens between

themselves and the outer world."[12] Wolpert presents a literary example of this: the chorus, at the close of Aeschylus' *Euminides* (984–87), prays that the citizens of Athens should "repay joy with joy in the thought of common love and hate with one heart; for this is the remedy of many griefs for mortals."[13] This remedy—common love and hate with one heart—created a dichotomy and the main point was to uphold "a collective hostility and hatred directed outward, and a unified *philia* inward."[14] By placing hatred and *philia* in two distinct spheres, the Athenians managed to create harmony instead of *stasis*, strife or discord, which would destroy the polis. With *stasis* the hatred was misdirected inward against the community and destroyed it rather than strengthening it outward.[15] In addition, Josiah Ober has showed that the ideal of same-mindedness was at odds with both liberty and freedom of thought and speech.[16] He argues that "the values of homonoia on the one hand and of the *eleutheria* and *parrhêsia* on the other, although theoretically in conflict, were accepted by Athenians as simply two aspects of a single lived political reality."[17]

Throughout the Platonic corpus we may witness how Socrates is practicing philosophy;[18] we may learn how Socrates is doing philosophy when he meets a variety of people distinctively named (i.e., historical personae) who—one way or another—have had an impact on culture, education or politics in ancient Athens. Hence, it is safe to assume that the ideal of same-mindedness is not in accordance with the philosopher's words and deeds.[19] On the contrary, with regard to the Athenian *homonoia-topos* Socrates stands forth as being *atopos*.[20] But in his defense Socrates uses the values of the *eleutheria* and *parrhêsia* in order to claim that it is his god-given right not to be attuned to the Athenian ideal of same-mindedness.

THE MEN OF PIRAEUS—OR THE *DÊMOS-TOPOS*

The crimes of the Thirty and their supporters were so terrible that it was nearly unthinkable that anyone would ever be able to repeat them; and as the Thirty were responsible for the civil war, the democratic resistance alone was given recognition for the restoration of the democracy. Viewed as a group named "the men of Piraeus" the democratic resistance gradually came to be serving as paradigms of excellence and thus as an illustration of how the Athenians should and should not act.[21] Further, these new paradigms of excellence helped the Athenians "to bracket the period of civil unrest and *stasis* from their past and future."[22] At the time of Socrates's trial "the men of Piraeus" were referred to as the *dêmos* (the people) and the Athenians claimed that during the *stasis* the *dêmos* were in exile.[23] This phrase—the *dêmos* in exile—became a new *topos* in forensic speeches which I denote

as the *dêmos-topos*. Because of this *topos* "the men of the city" (those who had not left the city during the civil war) experienced a new kind of pressure. They had to deny any involvement in the crimes of the Thirty not only by professing their innocence but also by declaring that their intent was to adhere to the laws of the restored democracy. So as the Athenians praised "the men of Piraeus," they simultaneously made it very difficult for many individuals who belonged to the group named "the men of the city." Socrates belonged to the latter.

In his defense Socrates is not at odds with the *dêmos-topos*; on the contrary, he activates this *topos* right at the outset, and employs it later in order to convince the jury that he is, and has always been, loyal toward the democrats.

THE AMNESTY—OR THE RECONCILIATION-*TOPOS*

The amnesty from 403 served as a condition to end the *stasis* and to reunite the opposing parties; it was a necessary concession for allowing a transition from a state of *stasis*, to a state of peace.[24] Nicole Loraux explains that the democrats proclaimed the general reconciliation with a decree and an oath: "The decree proclaims the ban: *mê mnêsikakein*, 'It is forbidden to recall the misfortunes'; the oath binds all the Athenians, democrats, oligarchs, important people, and quiet people who stayed in the city during the dictatorship, but it binds them one by one: *ou mnêsikakêsô*, 'I shall not recall the misfortunes'."[25] Edwin Carawan shows that the phrase *mê mnêsikakein* is usually understood as a general amnesty: granting immunity from prosecution for the wrongs of *stasis*.[26] Wolpert emphasizes that the phrase does not mean that the Athenians were prohibited from *speaking* about the past, but from initiating certain types of legal procedures,[27] and Loraux stresses that the phrase is also "a way of proclaiming that there is a time limit for seditious acts" and further that the "aim is to restore a continuity that nothing breaks, as if nothing had happened."[28] Thus, the amnesty can be viewed as "an admission that the city had no alternative way of resolving the *stasis* fairly"[29] and because "the purpose of the amnesty was to prevent individuals from seeking revenge for the wrongs that they had suffered, this concern was not with the act of recounting the past, but rather with the possibility that someone would get revenge by recalling the past."[30] The possibility to *get revenge by recalling the past* also implies that remembering the past could be used as a weapon against others. With this in mind, there is yet another matter to consider. Robin Waterfield argues that due to the amnesty and the reconciliation agreement, it would not "be safe to rule out the kind of political subtext that impiety trials made possible. It even begins to look as though a prosecution for impiety could be a prosecution for 'un-Athenian activity'."[31] Waterfield maintains that on

examination, a surprisingly high portion of known impiety trials has been revealed as involving a strong political agenda. Not to recall past wrongs on the one hand and the concealed political agenda on the other turns out to be a twofold perspective which Socrates makes use of when implicitly referring to the reconciliation-*topos*; thus, this *topos* is present at the core of the defense.

THE ACCUSERS

Meletus, Anytus and Lycon were the three men prosecuting Socrates. We do not know much about them, and the little information available is partly found within the Platonic corpus and partly outside (cf. the limbo in between narration and the real world). How are these men described?

In the *Euthyphro* (dramatic date 399) Meletus is described by Socrates as a young and unknown man with long hair, scraggly beard and a somewhat hooked nose (cf. 2b10–11). Meletus is said to have prosecuted Andocides[32] of impiety in 400 and according to Waterfield "it may be safe to infer that he was a champion of traditional piety."[33] In the *Apology* Socrates states that Meletus brought charges on behalf of the poets (cf. 23e6); it was he who laid down the charges of impiety (35d1–2) and ridiculed Socrates's *daimonion*, divine or spiritual sign (31d1–3).

We meet Anytus in the *Meno* (dramatic date 402) where we learn that he is educated to the satisfaction of the Athenians who elected him to the city's highest offices; we further learn that Anytus cannot stand sophists, and that he is warning Socrates: "I think, Socrates, that you easily speak ill of people. I would advise you, if you will listen to me, to be careful. Perhaps also in another city, and certainly here, it is easier to injure people than to benefit them. I think you know that yourself" (94e4–95a1).[34] Socrates's reply to this warning is somewhat arrogant when he addresses his answer to Meno (not to Anytus): "I think, Meno, that Anytus is angry. He thinks that I am slandering those men, and he believes himself to be one of them. If he ever realizes what slander is, he will cease from anger, but he does not know" (95a2–6). Anytus also appeared as a character witness for Andocides[35] when he was charged with impiety. In the *Apology* Socrates states that Anytus prosecuted him on behalf of craftsmen and politicians (cf. 23e6–24a1); and further that Anytus said in court that maybe Socrates should not have been brought to trial in the first place, but now that he is here the jury cannot avoid executing him (cf. 29c1–6).

Lycon was a prominent democratic politician whose son was executed by the Thirty. According to Debra Nails, Lycon may have believed that Socrates had been aligned with the oligarchy responsible for his son's death; this is a case the amnesty forbade mentioning, but the incident can possibly help

explain both Lycon's participation in the prosecution and Socrates's silence toward him.[36] Socrates states in the *Apology* that it was Lycon who prosecuted him on behalf of the orators (cf. 24a1), but what Lycon might have said during the trial is not mentioned in the *Apology*.

With regard to the accusers it is noteworthy that after having received the verdict of guilty and after Meletus has asked for the death penalty, Socrates stresses that he himself supposed that he had been cleared from the charges of Meletus. And not only did he suppose that, he was convinced that if Anytus and Lycon had chosen not to join Meletus, it would have been the latter who "would have been fined a thousand drachmas for not receiving a fifth of the votes" (36a6-b1).

PREPARING FOR TRIAL

At the end of the *Theaetetus* (dramatic date 399) Socrates departs because he "must go to the King's Porch to meet the indictment that Meletus has brought against" him (210d1–2). At the beginning of the *Euthyphro* (dramatic date 399) Socrates runs into Euthyphro, who is surprised to hear about the indictment. Socrates, who has just heard Meletus presenting the charge for the first time, also signals a kind of surprise when he says the following: "Strange things (*atopia*), to hear him tell it, for he says that I am a maker of gods, and on the ground that I create new gods while not believing in the old gods, he has indicted me for their sake, as he puts it" (3b1–4). "This is because you say that the divine sign (*to daimonion*) keeps coming to you" (3b5–6), is Euthyphro's response. This reply strongly indicates that Socrates's "divine sign" was a well-known theme discussed in Athens and which had probably resulted in a lot of slander, as Socrates later will highlight in his defense.[37] It is also likely that the discussions concerning Socrates and his upcoming trial increased during the two months' interval between Socrates's preliminary hearing and trial.[38] It is imaginable that the fronts between Socrates's devotees and his opponents toughened in this period. Such a climate usually creates conflicts and thus the controversies connected to Socrates could have been taken as a confirmation that he was a potential source of faction; this is in turn a reaction connected to the Athenians' fear of conflicting parties and the *homonoia-topos* as sketched above. During this period of time Meletus gained support from Anytus and Lycon who joined him in the prosecution against Socrates. But Socrates also gained support: in his defense he names a cluster of prominent men who are willing to speak in his favor, and an anecdote relates that the famous speech-writer Lysias actually composed a defense-speech which Socrates declined to use.[39]

SOCRATES INTRODUCES HIS DEFENSE

The point zero is now reached; not only within the Platonic corpus, as mentioned above, but also in Athens the trial must have denoted a critical moment packed with tension. The first time Socrates heard the charges against him they were put forth by Meletus alone. Now, in court, prior to his defense he has listened to the deposition and heard how the three prosecutors have joined forces against him; but whatever the impact their speech had, it is not with discouragement Socrates enters the stage. He marks his distance toward his accusers by drawing three distinctions which create the first foundation for his defense. The first distinction is between fabrications and truth; this he launches through the opening lines: "I do not know, men of Athens, how my accusers affected you; as for me, I was almost carried away in spite of myself, so persuasively did they speak" (17a1–3). He goes on by insisting that most of what the accusers said were lies and he promises that from him they will hear the whole truth (cf. 17b7–8). The second distinction, between styled rhetoric and everyday-language, rests on the first; Socrates proclaims that the "whole truth" will not be "expressed in embroidered and stylized phrases like theirs" (17b9), but "things spoken at random and expressed in the first words that come to mind" (17c1–3). This, he says, is imperative because it would not be fitting at his age, as it might be for a young man, to toy with words when appearing before the jury (cf. 17c4–5). By rejecting "embroidered and stylized phrases" he discards forensic rhetoric, and by arguing that it might be fit for a young man to play with words in front of the jury he signals that he does not intend to take Meletus seriously. By this maneuver he thus simultaneously pinpoints Meletus as his main target, so that quite at the outset he succeeds in a distinct manner to belittle Meletus. The third distinction, between the Socrates described by the accusers and the Socrates "*you* gentlemen" know, rests on the two former and is launched through an appeal to recognition: "One thing I beg of you gentlemen: if you hear me making my defense in the same language as I am accustomed to use in the marketplace by the banker's tables, where many of you have heard me, and elsewhere, do not be surprised or create a disturbance on that account" (17c5-d1). The three distinctions are used by Socrates as rhetorical devices for appealing to the jury's common sense: Meletus is young and unknown, Socrates is old and well known; Meletus has ridiculed Socrates through embroidered and stylized phrases, Socrates has excused Meletus' conduct referring to young men's manners; the Socrates described is not the Socrates *they* know; so, when listening the gentlemen of the jury can nod among themselves and hopefully they recognize this.

Socrates continues by stating that he is forced to defend himself not only against the new accusations, but against old ones as well (cf. 18a6–b3); it is

the latter he fears the most. Whether the mentioning of the old accusations is an allusion to the reconciliation-*topos* or not, is a matter of speculation. But there was some whispering that many in Socrates's circle had participated in the mutilation of the herms and profanation of the mysteries in 415;[40] some also whispered that he had participated in the oligarchic revolutions of 411 and 404.[41] Xenophon even states that Socrates's accusers mentioned his association with Critias and Alcibiades and further that "Socrates' accuser" holds him responsible for all the faults executed by the two later in life (cf. *Mem.* 1.2.12). Mentioning these events would be a violation of the amnesty, so if these whispering rumors have some truth to them, Socrates could not have been prosecuted on these accounts; thus a speculative conclusion at this moment is that there was a political agenda underlying the indictment.[42] But if we listen carefully to Socrates's own words when he is confronting Meletus, the grade of speculation decreases.

THE OLD ACCUSATIONS (19A8–24B4)

With a desire to try—in a short period of time—to remove the slander of him from the minds of the Athenians (cf. 18e4–19a2),[43] Socrates the philosopher addresses the old accusations. This defense is a necessary shadow-fight due to the slander on the basis of which Socrates claims that the Athenians have already convicted him. Long before the trial started it had been a widespread opinion that "Socrates is guilty of wrongdoing in that he busies himself studying things in the sky and below the earth: he makes the worse into the stronger argument, and he teaches these same things to others" (19b4–c1). The momentousness of this threefold charge can be enlightened by Socrates's elaboration to Euthyphro two months later:[44] "the Athenians do not mind anyone they think clever, as long as he does not teach his own wisdom, but if they think that he makes others to be like himself they get angry, whether through envy [. . .] or for some other reason" (*Euth.* 3c6–d2). So, in addition to trying to prove that he differs both in words and in deeds from the famous sophists and philosophers, he also has to refute that he possesses a wisdom of his own which he teaches others. This threefold undertaking is the main aim in this section of the defense.

Socrates sets out by creating a distance to the philosophers by claiming that the slander began with Aristophanes' comedy the *Clouds* (first produced in 423 BCE). In this play many of the Athenians had seen "a Socrates swinging about there, saying he was walking on air and talking a lot of nonsense about things of which I know nothing at all" (19c3–5). Does Meletus think that he is prosecuting Anaxagoras of Clazomenae? Socrates asks (cf. 26d). Or does Meletus believe that Socrates pretends that these absurd theories are of his

making? (cf. 26e). Socrates strongly refuses to have any part of this kind of knowledge; on this he boldly calls on the majority of the jury as his witnesses when arguing that "I think it is right that all those of you who have heard me conversing [. . .] should tell each other if anyone of you has ever heard me discussing such subjects to any extent at all. From this you will learn that the other things said about me by the majority are of the same kind" (19d1–7). He uses the same strategy toward the sophists; he rejects that he possesses their kind of knowledge and he strongly denies that he has ever undertaken "to teach people and charge a fee for it" (19d9–e1).[45] To underline this Socrates refers to Callias who allegedly had spent a lot of money on the sophists, who Callias and others considered to be experts on excellence and received fees for their teachings: "I would certainly pride myself and preen myself if I had this kind of knowledge, but I do not have it, gentlemen" (20c2–4), Socrates argues. So, in addition to having proved that he differs both in words and in deeds from the famous sophists and philosophers, he has in this manner also refuted that he possesses a wisdom of his own which he teaches others. But he acknowledges that the slander has a cause; all these rumors and slanders would not have arisen unless he did something other than most people (cf. 20c8).

Socrates argues that the cause of his bad reputation is due to a certain kind of wisdom, which he denotes as "human wisdom" (*anthrôpinê sophia*, 20d7). He stresses that he *might* be in possession of this wisdom; but is reluctant because the story connected to it did not originate with him. So in order to present a trustworthy source he calls "upon the god at Delphi as witness to the existence and nature" (20e7–8) of this wisdom. Socrates now points to the late Chaerephon who was a friend of his from childhood; he was well known and respected in the city especially because he had shared the exile and return of the men of Piraeus (cf. 21a1–2).[46] Then he presents a story relating that Chaerephon once ventured to ask the oracle of Delphi if anyone was wiser than Socrates. The oracle allegedly stated that no one was wiser. As Chaerephon now is dead, Socrates maintains that "his brother will testify to you about this" (21a7–8).

This is a critical point in the defense for at least three reasons. First, so far, Socrates has distanced himself from a certain kind of philosophical knowledge and denied that he possesses the knowledge of the sophists. Hopefully, the jury is now convinced that he does not teach others what the accusers claim he does. Secondly, he has activated the *dêmos-topos* by connecting himself to Chaerephon, the celebrated pro-democrat who took part in the democratic resistance, and who shared the exile and return of the men of Piraeus. Thirdly, according to the story of Chaerephon the oracle of Delphi has witnessed to Socrates's kind of wisdom. Thus, by calling upon two highly respected witnesses (the god of Delphi and the men of Piraeus) Socrates can

claim to be telling the truth. The implicit question is: How can I not be telling the truth, for who would dare to call on these authorities in vain? Whether the jury accepted this or not, is not easy to decide upon; but noticeably their reaction was loud: in this short section Socrates twice asks them not to "create a disturbance" (cf. 20e4, 21a5). He continues by entreating the jury to consider his version because his intent was *only* to inform them about the origin of the slander. Now he wants to tell them how he reacted when Chaerephon delivered the oracle's words.

His first thought was: "Whatever does the god mean? What is his riddle? I am very conscious that I am not wise at all; what then does he mean by saying that I am the wisest? For surely he does not lie; it is not legitimate for him to do so" (21b3–6). For a long time he was at loss, but after a while he—again very reluctantly—decided to investigate and "attach the greatest importance to the god's oracle" (21e5). He went to one of the city's public men "reputed wise" in order to "refute the oracle" (cf. 21b8–c1). When Socrates investigated this man, and when he tried to show him that he only *thought* himself to be wise, the man and many of the bystanders came to dislike Socrates. So he concluded: "I am wiser than this man; it is likely that neither of us knows anything worthwhile, but he thinks he knows something when he does not, whereas when I do not know, neither do I think I know; so I am likely to be wiser than he to this small extent, that I do not think I know what I do not know" (21d2–7). Socrates has now established a god-given authority regarding his systematically performed investigations of the wisdom of his fellow citizens; hence he is in the position to claim that all his investigations were performed in service of the god. In his inquiry he himself experienced that "those who had the highest reputation were nearly the most deficient, while those who were thought to be inferior were more knowledgeable" (22a4–6); and he again stresses that these labors were undertaken solely to prove the oracle irrefutable (cf. 22a6–8). After having investigated the poets, the craftsmen and the politicians he found a shared error: "each of them, because of his success at his craft, thought himself very wise in other most important pursuits, and this error of theirs overshadowed the wisdom they had" (22d6–e1). The result was that Socrates "acquired much unpopularity, of a kind that is hard to deal with and is a heavy burden; many slanders came from these people and a reputation for wisdom, for in each case the bystanders thought that I myself possessed the wisdom that I proved that my interlocutors did not have" (23a1–5). But despite the unpopularity and slander he continued as the god bade him (cf. 23b4–5). For the first time he stresses that it was because of this occupation that he had no leisure to take care of his own affairs but lived in great poverty due to his service to the god (cf. 23b8–c1). The underlining premises here are: if it were not for my service to the god, I would have had the leisure to take care of my household and other affairs. And, if I had been

teaching my own theories to others and received a fee, I would not have been poor.

His next step is to comment briefly on the charge of corrupting the young. The young men who have been following him around were the sons of the very rich, the ones who had most leisure and the ones who have taken pleasure in hearing him questioning people now started to imitate him by trying to question others themselves. His comment to their imitating praxis is that he thinks "they find an abundance of men who believe they have some knowledge but know little or nothing. The result is that those whom they question are angry, not with themselves but with me" (23c5–9). When asked, these men who were questioned by the youths imitating Socrates, presented ignorant answers and just repeated the old accusations which are available against all philosophers (23d4).[47] They were not willing to admit that it had been proved that they laid claim to knowledge which they did not possess. These offended men are now identified as one concrete course of the slander and they are dangerous, "ambitious, violent and numerous; they are continually and convincingly talking about me; they have been filling your ears for a long time with vehement slanders against me" (23e2–4). Socrates infers that it is from the perspective of these offended men that his three accusers now attack him. Once more he stresses that he has told the jury the truth—and if the jurors themselves are willing to investigate, they will find exactly what he now has explained (cf. 24b1–2).

So far his strategy has been to elaborate on the cause of his bad reputation and the origin of the slander against him. He has tried to convince the jury that his human wisdom is of another kind than the one possessed by the philosophers and the sophists: "What is probable, gentlemen, is that in fact the god is wise and that his oracular response meant that human wisdom is worth little or nothing" (23a5–7). By arguing that the "human wisdom" has little value, he implicitly urges that there is no wisdom which he can teach others. He barely touches upon the charge of corrupting the young; but when he does, he claims that he only was obeying the god's order and the youths were imitating him. From this argument the jury is implicitly requested to infer that he has actually never taught anything to anyone. In addition, by implying that the oracle of Delphi has warranted his human wisdom, and simultaneously activating the *dêmos-topos* through his dear friend Chaerephon, he has gradually widened his foundation. In addition, when he through Chaerephon emphasizes his belonging to the democratic *dêmos* (cf. the *dêmos-topos*) and simultaneously distances himself from his fellow citizens (cf. the *homonoia-topos*) he has managed to situate himself both as citizen and as philosopher: the loyal citizen belongs to the democratic *dêmos*, while the philosopher's right to live a life in opposition to the *homonoia*-ideal is warranted in the god. This he will both utilize and conceal in the next section of his defense; and

it is from this grounding he encounters his new accusers. The condition for him to succeed is that the jury is convinced that he has told them the truth. It seems like Socrates is comfortable when he changes his strategy from elaboration to attack and attempts to substantiate that he is brought to trial on false presumptions.

THE NEW ACCUSATIONS (24B4–35D9)

The three accusers argue that "Socrates is guilty of corrupting the young and of not believing in the gods in whom the city believes, but in other new spiritual things" (24b8–c1). Instead of dealing directly with this twofold charge, Socrates presents a countercharge: "Meletus is guilty of dealing frivolously with serious matters, of irresponsibly bringing people into court, and of professing to be seriously concerned with things about none of which he has ever cared" (24c4–8). Socrates's questioning of Meletus may have an odd ring to it compared with how his questioning is executed throughout the Platonic corpus.[48] But contrary to what is the case in these well-known procedures, his aim here is to show that Meletus has a concealed agenda and hence that the real charge is not in accordance with the charges of the deposition (cf. the twofold perspectives of the reconciliation-*topos*). How does he do this? When confronting Meletus, after having dealt with the charge of corrupting the young (cf. 24d2–3), he concludes and claims to have shown that Meletus, through the questioning, has made it sufficiently obvious that he has never had any concern for the youths of Athens and has given no thought to the subjects about which he brought Socrates to trial (cf. 25c1–4). Addressing the jury, Socrates stresses that what he "said is clearly true: Meletus has never been at all concerned with these matters" (26a9–b2). The same happens when he turns to the charge of impiety. After the questioning, and after Meletus has upheld twice that Socrates does not believe in gods at all (cf. 26c7–d1, 26e4), Socrates urges: "The man appears to me, men of Athens, highly insolent and uncontrolled. He seems to have made his deposition out of insolence, violence and youthful zeal" (26e6–27a1) and "he appears to contradict himself" (27a8). This sequence ends when Socrates concludes: "You must have made this deposition, Meletus, either to test us or because you were at loss to find any wrongdoing for which to accuse me" (27e3–5). Socrates seems to be at ease and very self-confident when he utters his last words to Meletus: "There is no way in which you could persuade anyone of even a small intelligence" (28e5–6). His last address to the jury in this sequence looks like a closing argument: "I do not think, men of Athens, that it requires a prolonged defense to prove that I am not guilty of the charges in Meletus' deposition, but this is sufficient" (28a2–4). Socrates's rhetorical use of the countercharge turns out

to be his main defense against Meletus' twofold charge, and Socrates signals intensely that he himself thinks he in this way has refuted Meletus. He has also (apparently) refuted that he has a wisdom that he teaches to others. But it does not mean that he is finished and comfortable, because he now presents a reservation: "On the other hand, you know that what I said earlier is true, that I am very unpopular with many people. [. . .] This has destroyed many other good men and will, I think, continue to do so. There is no danger that it will stop at me" (28a5–b1).

The defense now takes a new turn. In this section Socrates argues implicitly that he does not present a potential political threat because he is law-abiding and loyal to the superior—be it god or men. He starts with posing a hypothetical question: "Someone might say: 'are you not ashamed, Socrates, to have followed the kind of occupation that has led to your being now in danger of death?'" (28b2–4). He answers by referring to the heroes who died in Troy and especially Achilles who "despised death and danger and was much more afraid to live a coward who did not avenge his friends" (28d1–2). From this reference he reminds the jury that "wherever a man has taken a position that he believes is the best, or has been placed by his commander, there he must I think remain and face danger, without a thought for fear of death or anything else, rather than disgrace" (28d5–9). So, when Socrates was ordered, at Potidaea,[49] Amphipolis[50] and Delium,[51] by commanders elected by the Athenians, would it not have been a dreadful thing to abandon the post out of fear of death? And when Socrates was ordered by the god (as he thought and believed) to live the life of a philosopher, to examine himself and others, would it not have been a dreadful thing to abandon the post out of fear of death? (cf. 28d10–29a1). If this had been the case, Socrates argues, then he might "truly have justly been brought here for not believing that there are gods, disobeying the oracle, fearing death, and thinking I was wise when I was not" (29a1–5). He has now made "the fear of death" into a steppingstone which enables him to exemplify for the jury his way of philosophizing: "To fear death, gentlemen, is no other than to think oneself wise when one is not, to think one knows what one does not know. No one knows whether death may not be the greatest of all blessings for a man, yet men fear it as if they knew that it is the greatest of evils. And surely it is the most blameworthy ignorance to believe that one knows what one does not know" (29a6–b3). This is an instruction which in turn enables him to activate the *homonoia-topos* directly: "It is perhaps on this point and in this respect, gentlemen, that I differ (*diapherein*) from the majority of men, and if I were to claim that I am wiser that anyone in anything, it would be in this, that, as I have no adequate knowledge of things in the underworld, so I do not think I have" (29b3–6). After having explicitly situated himself as a genuine philosopher, Socrates goes on; even if he is different from them and not attuned to their

ideal of same-mindedness—he shares their values because he knows "that it is wicked and shameful to do wrong, to disobey one's superior, be he god or man" (29b6–8).

When Socrates at this point turns his attention indirectly toward his second accuser, Anytus, he once again makes references to the *homonoia-topos*: he now presents a proposition: What will happen if the jury stated that they do not believe Anytus now? What will happen if the jury acquits him on the condition that Socrates stops his investigations and promises not to practice philosophy? And if caught in doing so, then he will die? In his answer he maintains that it is his duty to be different from them; he will continue his god-given mission because it is the god's order; it is for the Athenians sake he is doing this—he is a gift to the city; a gadfly placed there by god. He lectures them and he threatens them: "I will obey the god rather than you, and as long as I draw breath and am able, I shall not cease to practice philosophy, to exhort you" (29c1–e2). What Socrates is describing is his well-known approach when meeting and questioning people; this approach is confirmed by the famous general Nicias twenty-five dramatic years earlier when he in the *Laches* (dramatic date 424) defended Socrates's questioning and actually recommended his procedure to Lysimachus.[52] That Socrates is now forced to explain how he practices philosophy to the Athenians, could indicate that the mood in Athens had changed during the restoration of the democracy and especially due to the fear of factions and the highly valued ideal of same-mindedness. In this regard Socrates the philosopher is placeless (*atopos*).[53] He ends his exhortation with a promise: "I shall treat in this way anyone I happen to meet, young and old, citizen and stranger, and more so the citizens because you are more kindred to me" (30a2–4); whereupon he reassures his jury that they can be sure "that this is what the god orders me to do, and I think there is no greater blessing for the city than my service to the god" (30a5–7). He then, for the second time, touches upon the reason why he has not taken part in public affairs: his divine sign which never tells him what to do, but what not to do, has ordered him: "This is what has prevented me from taking part in public affairs, and I think it was quite right to prevent me" (31d5–7). And since he has lived his philosophical life as a soldier fighting for justice, he stresses for the third time that he could not live a public life. He states: "A man who really fights for justice must lead a private, not a public, life if he is to survive for even a short time" (32a1–3).

Socrates the philosopher now rests his case; and Socrates the citizen takes the stand. Somehow Socrates is convinced that if he had been a part of the public life, he would have been executed long ago. But, he stresses that as a citizen he once served as a member of the Council. During this period he experienced that ten generals failed to pick up the survivors after a naval battle—this was an illegal act according to the democratic laws in 406.[54] Socrates

explains that he was the only member of the presiding committee to oppose when the others wanted to try the ten general as *one* body; he recognized that this was an act contrary to the laws, thus he voted against it (cf. 32b). He states the following: "the orators were ready to prosecute me and take me away, and your shouts were driving them on, but I thought I should run any risk on the side of law and justice rather than join you, for fear of prison or death, when you were engaged in an unjust course" (32b–c). This is a citizen's underlining of the righteousness of following the laws; and by being law-abiding he has also rescued several Athenian democrats from wrongdoing. By this example he expresses his loyalty to the democratic rules and laws; and in addition he manages to leave the impression that he was even more righteous toward the democratic laws than the democratic leaders themselves.

His next example is from the period when the oligarchy was established and the Thirty summoned him and four others to arrest Leon of Salamis (cf. 32c4–d8). The Thirty gave many such orders, he says, in order to implicate so many as possible in their guilt. But, he continues, "then I showed again, not in words but in action (*ou logô all' ergô*) that I did not fear death" (32d); even the powerful and violent government did not frighten him into any unjust or impious wrongdoing, he says. The others brought Leon in, but Socrates went home. If the government had not fallen shortly afterwards, he might have been put to death for not obeying orders. These two instances show that also the citizen Socrates saw it fit to employ the new rhetoric of the *dêmos-topos*; while the philosopher used it to present his wisdom as warranted by the oracle of Delphi through reference to the celebrated democrat Chaerephon, the citizen uses it first by putting forth that he saved democrats from a potential wrongdoing (I am a democratic sympathizer), and in the latter he marks his distance to the Thirty (I am not a sympathizer with the oligarchs).

A SHORT SUMMARY

From my perspective in the limbo between narration and reality, I have presented a reflection on how the new forensic rhetoric can be traced in the *Apology*. Through the three activated *topoi* Socrates has used the *homonoia-topoi* in order to situate himself as a philosopher and claim his right to live the life of a philosopher in accordance with the god's demand—that is, he argued for his right to live as *atopos*; he implicitly activated the *reconciliation-topos* (cf. the twofold perspective mentioned above) in order to claim that he should not have been prosecuted in the first place; and he activated the *dêmos-topos* both as philosopher and as citizen in order to argue that he first and foremost had been law-abiding and had lived in accordance with the orders given him from both men and god. I will not conclude whether Socrates was guilty or

not according to the charge. Instead I will once again quote Socrates when he signals surprise when receiving the guilty verdict: "I think myself that I have been cleared of Meletus' charges, and not only this, but it is clear to all that, if Anytus and Lycon had not joined him in accusing me, he would have been fined a thousand drachmas for not receiving a fifth of the votes" (36a6–b1). Maybe Socrates's self-confidence and sometimes arrogant tone signals a seventy-year-old man not attuned to the new waves and frames of mind within the society he is a part of? Or, maybe Socrates was right when arguing that he was prosecuted on false assumptions? His prosecutors did not harvest honor for their victory. According to one anecdote the Athenians were so angry at the death of Socrates that they put Meletus to death without trial (Diodorus, 14.37.7); and another tells us that the Athenians repented, executed Meletus and banished Anytus and Lycon, meanwhile commissioning Lysippus to cast a bronze statue in Socrates's honor (Diogenes Laertius, 2.43).[55]

NOTES

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1. Recently such chronological readings have been presented by Jacob Howland, *The Paradox of Political Philosophy. Socrates' Philosophical Trial* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1998), Catherine H. Zuckert, *Plato's Philosophers. The Coherence of the Dialogues* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), and Laurence Lampert, *How Philosophy Became Socratic. A Study of Plato's Protagoras, Charmides, and Republic* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010). Compared to these readings I have quite a different aim; in addition, there are several controversies regarding the dramatic dates of the dialogues; none of these discussions will be a theme in this paper. In this context, I lean on the dramatic dates as they are set by Debra Nails, *The People of Plato. A Prosopography of Plato and Other Socratics* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 2002).

2. I could also denote Socrates the philosopher "placeless" or as "having no place." Cf. Claudia Baracchi, "The "Inconceivable Happiness" of "Men and Women": Visions of an Other World in Plato's *Apology of Socrates*," in *Reexamining Socrates in the Apology*, ed. Patricia Fagan and John Russon (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2009), 274.

3. The term "civic discourse" I have borrowed from Andrew Wolpert, *Remembering Defeat. Civil War and Civic Memory in Ancient Athens* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002), xiii–xiv. He uses the term to "refer to speeches delivered in a civic setting to a mass audience, whether at an official public ceremony or in one of the political institutions of the city." I follow him.

4. Francisco J. Gonzalez, "Caring and Conversing About Virtue Every Day: Human Piety and Goodness in Plato's *Apology*," in *Reexamining Socrates in the* Apology, ed. Patricia Fagan and John Russon (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2009), 117., argues that in the disagreements regarding the *Apology* a central concern is whether Socrates's defense is to be seen as ironic or sincere. The first group argue that Socrates is not seriously defending himself; and that he was guilty as charged; cf. Thomas West, *Plato's* Apology of Socrates*: An Interpretation with a New Translation* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1979).; the latter group argue that the defense is sincere and that Socrates is innocent; cf. C. D. C Reeve, *Socrates in the Apology. An Essay on Plato's* Apology of Socrates (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1989). Gonzalez himself argues that "neither view is correct, but that instead the defense is ironic in the true sense of the word; neither literal not deceptive, but ambivalent."

5. The Greek text used in this chapter is from *Platon: Œvres Complètes*, eds. A. Croiset, M. Croiset, l. Bodin, L. Méridier (Paris: Les Belles lettres, 1973). The English translation used is G. M. A. Grube, *Apology*, in *Plato. Complete Works,* ed. John M. Cooper (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1997).

6. Wolpert, *Remembering Defeat*, 78., cf. Ian Morris, *Archaeology as Cultural History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 3.

7. Wolpert, *Remembering Defeat*, 78.

8. J. E. Lendon, *Song of Wrath: The Peloponnesian War Begins* (New York: Basic Books, 2012), 32.

9. Bruce Rosenstock, "Athena's Cloak: Plato's Critique of the Democratic City in the *Republic*," *Political Theory* 22, no. 3 (1994): 367.

10. Cf. Wolpert, *Remembering Defeat*, 78. This phrase is also discussed by Allan Bloom, trans., *The Republic of Plato. Translated with Notes and an Interpretive Essay* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, Basic Books, 1991 [First published 1968]), 441n6. and Jacob Howland, *The Republic. The Odyssey of Philosophy* (Philadelphia: Paul Dry Books, 2004), 36–7.

11. Wolpert, *Remembering Defeat*, 78.

12. Wolpert, *Remembering Defeat*, 79.

13. Quoted in Wolpert, *Remembering Defeat*, 79.

14. Wolpert, *Remembering Defeat*, 79.

15. Cf. Wolpert, *Remembering Defeat*, 79.

16. Josiah Ober, *Mass and Elite in Democratic Athens: Rhetoric, Ideology, and the Power of the People* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989), 298–99. Referred to in Rosenstock , 367 and 86n11.

17. Ober, *Mass and Elite*, quoted in Rosenstock, 367.

18. In accordance with my strategy of reading the dialogues in the order of their dramatic chronology, we first meet Socrates in the *Parmenides* (dramatic date 450 BCE) as a young man (approximately 18–20 years old), and we bid him farewell in the *Phaedo* (dramatic date 399 BCE) as he has reached the age of 70.

19. Cf. Michael Frede, "Plato's Arguments and the Dialogue Form," in *Methods of Interpreting Plato and His Dialogues*, eds. by James C. Klagge and Nicolas D. Smith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 217. I argue that the aim of Socrates's "words and deeds" is to show that the one questioned lean on false authority, the

authority of tradition, the authority of the many or the authority of self-styled experts Frede explains further: "But the point of this questioning is not just to expose the ignorance of so-called authorities. If somebody, having watched Socrates, drew the inference that he had been following the wrong authorities and needed to look for the right ones who would be in a position to tell him what to believe, he would draw the wrong inference. [. . .] For, at least on these questions which matter, it is crucial that one arrive at the right view by one's own thought, rather than on the authority of somebody else, e.g. the questioner."

20. *a-topos*, as I use it here, denotes a negation related to the *homonoia-topos.*
21. Cf. Wolpert, *Remembering Defeat*, 133.
22. Wolpert, *Remembering Defeat,* 136.
23. On "the *dêmos* in exile" see Wolpert, *Remembering Defeat*, 91–5.
24. Cf. Wolpert, *Remembering Defeat*, 77.
25. Nicole Loraux, *Mothers in Mourning, with the Essay "Of Amnesty and Its Opposite"*, trans. Corinne Pache (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998), 87.
26. Edwin Carawan, "The Athenian Amnesty and the 'Scrutiny of the Laws'," *The Journal of Hellenic Studies* 122 (2002).
27. Cf. Wolpert, *Remembering Defeat*, 77.
28. Loraux, *Mothers in Mourning*, 88.
29. Wolpert, *Remembering Defeat*, 77.
30. Wolpert, *Remembering Defeat*, 77.
31. Robin Waterfield, *Why Socrates Died. Dispelling the Myths* (London: Faber and Faber/New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2009), 33.
32. Andocides was first prosecuted in 415 as one of the men having mutilated the herms and for profanation of the mysteries. In this case he was granted immunity for providing information against his accomplices. Later the decree of Isotimides was enacted; this decree prohibited those who once had committed impiety from entering holy places and the agora. Andocides now went into exile and returned to Athens after the restoration of the democracy were he once again was prosecuted for impiety; this time he was accused of having participated in the Eleusinian mysteries when he was prohibited from doing so due to the decree. In his defense Andocides argued that the decree of Isotimides had been annulled due to the amnesty and the law reforms. Even if it was well known that he had oligarchic sympathies and was distrusted by the democrats, he maintained in court that he was and would continue to be a loyal democrat; he claimed this although he could not point to any services that he had performed during the *stasis*; he declared that the Thirty would have killed him if he entered the city, and he argued they considered him a serious threat to their rule. Thus, he rendered his absence from Athens as a proof of his loyalty, cf. Wolpert, *Remembering Defeat*, 65–7.
33. Cf. Robin Waterfield, "Introduction to Socrates' Defence," in Xenophon, *Conversations of Socrates*, ed. Robin Waterfield (London: Penguin Classics, 1990), 37 n. 1.
34. Translation by G. M. A. Grube, *Meno,* in Cooper, *Plato. Complete Works*.
35. See note 32 above.
36. Cf. Nails, *The People of Plato*, 189.

37. The first mention of Socrates's "divine sign" we find thirty-three dramatic years earlier in the *Alcibiades I* (dramatic date 432), when Socrates explains it to the young Alcibiades.

38. On the interval of two months, see Nails, *The People of Plato*, 321.

39. Lysias was involved as a speech-writer when Andocides was prosecuted for impiety in 400, cf. note 32 above.

40. Cf. Nails, *The People of Plato*, 17–20.

41. Cf. Wolpert, *Remembering Defeat,* 64.

42. Cf. Waterfield, *Why Socrates Died*, 33. Cf. note 31 above.

43. The seriousness of this desire becomes clear when Socrates continues: "I wish this may happen, if it is in any way better for you and me, and that my defense may be successful, but I think this is very difficult and I am fully aware of how difficult it is. Even so, let the matter proceed as the god may wish, but I must obey the law and make my defense" (19a2–7).

44. Cf. note 37 above.

45. Later Socrates even argues that he has never been anyone's teacher at all (cf. 33a6).

46. In Greek this reads: *outos emos te hetairos ên ek neou kai humôn tô plêthei hetairos te kai sunephuge tên phugên tautên kai meth' humôn katêlthe.* Compared to the translation of Grube which I use, Harold North Fowler translates this with some differences in the nuances: "He was my comrade from youth and the comrade of your democratic party, and shared in the recent exile and came back with you." Harold North Fowler, trans., *Plato*: *Euthyphro. Apology. Crito. Phaedo. Phaedrus*, Loeb Classical Library 36 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press/London: Heinemann, 1914).

47. Socrates here refers to an ancient, deeply rooted and essentially imponderable hostility against philosophers; and in this situation especially against Socrates, the philosopher. On this perspective, see Baracchi, "The 'Inconceivable Happiness'."

48. Socrates's "refutation" of Meletus has been a theme broadly discussed, and there has been severe disagreement about what Socrates accomplished through this questioning. For a survey and discussion, see Gonzalez, "Caring and Concersing About Virtue Every Day," 118–24.

49. In the *Charmides* (dramatic date 429) we meet Socrates when he just has returned from Potidaea (cf. 153a). In the *Symposium* (dramatic date 416) Alcibiades states that Socrates saved his life when they served together at the battlefields of Potidaea (cf. 220d–e). On a discussion of Socrates's partaking in the battle of Potidaea, see Leonard Woodbury, "Socrates and Archelaus," *Phoenix* 25, no. 4 (1971).

50. On a discussion of the controversies regarding Socrates's partaking in the battle of Amphipolis, see Woodbury, "Socrates and Archelaus."

51. In the *Symposium* Alcibiades gives Socrates credit for the coolness and determination that he showed in the retreat from Delium (cf. 220e–221a). On a discussion of Socrates's partaking in the battle of Delium, see Woodbury, "Socrates and Archelaus."

52. Nicias: "You don't appear to me to know that whoever comes into close contact with Socrates and associates with him in conversation must necessarily, even if he

began by conversing about something quite different in the first place, keep on being led about by the man's arguments until he submits to answering questions about himself concerning both his present manner of life and the life he has lived hitherto. And when he does submit to this questioning, you don't realize that Socrates will not let him go before he has well and truly tested every last detail. I personally am accustomed to the man and know that one has to put up with his kind of treatment from him, and further, I know perfectly well that I myself will have to submit to it. I take pleasure in the man's company, Lysimachus, and don't regard it as at all a bad thing to have it brought to our attention that we have dome or are doing wrong. Rather I think that a man who does not run away from such treatment but is willing, according to the saying of Solon, to value learning as long as he lives, not supposing that old age brings him wisdom of itself, will necessarily pay more attention to the rest of his life. For me there is nothing unusual or unpleasant in being examined by Socrates, but I realized some time ago that the conversation would not be about the boys but about ourselves, if Socrates were present. As I say, I don't myself mind talking with Socrates in whatever way he likes." *Laches*, 187e6–188c3. Translation by Rosamund Kent Sprague, in Cooper, *Plato. Complete Works*.

53. Cf. note 2 above.

54. Cf. Nails, *The People of Plato*, 79–82.

55. Both anecdotes are taken from Nails, *The People of Plato*, 202. She calls them "equally false tales."

Chapter 7

The Character of Socrates in Plato's *Apology*

An Aristotelian Analysis

Hallvard Fossheim

While Socrates is taken by us as a sort of philosophical ideal, and his presence is felt in Plato's dialogues, his character is not easily understood. We know that Plato's Socrates, like the historical Socrates, ended his life in what appears to be something like a philosophical martyrdom. But we do not easily grasp why this happened, or how far from their own (or any) ideals were those who decided to convict him according to Plato's dramatized account. Partly, this is because we know so little of the context to which the original readership would have been supposed to relate. But our ignorance is also a result of the fact that we are uncertain about how to interpret Socrates normatively as a character, not least in Plato's portrayal of him in the *Apology*. This is in part a consequence of the fact that our conception of human goodness remains implicit, and perhaps unduly contemporary, in our consideration of him.

Faced with this tricky hermeneutical situation, I propose an alternative approach. Central to it is realizing that we do possess one almost perfectly adjusted instrument for reading the character of Socrates in the *Apology*. For we have access to Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, where all the central virtues and vices are presented and analyzed. This approach has the advantage of supplying us with an analytic tool for characterizing Socrates's presence in the *Apology* (one that can also be applied to other dialogues). At the same time, that tool forces us to take seriously the possibility that some of his features might require further thought. The results in their turn will engender questions (only acknowledged in this chapter) about Aristotle's stance vis-à-vis his contemporaries and about Plato's philosophical motivations for shaping his *Apology*'s Socrates the way he does. Thus, applying Aristotle's interpretive grid to Plato's Socrates makes available a fresh and

contemporaneous perspective—and one that might reveal a character less ideal than we tend to think.

CHARACTER, FACT, AND PRACTICE

The notion that Socrates is difficult to get at is well known. And there are many aspects to this difficulty. One is the Socratic problem, when it comes to the historical Socrates, and that is not something this alternative approach will transcend. Our three major portrayals of Socrates by contemporaries—the texts by Aristophanes, Xenophon, and Plato—are in most respects so different from each other that had we not been informed of it, we would not have guessed they are using the same man as their point of departure.

Anyway, trying to analyze aspects of the *Apology* does not necessarily amount to analyzing aspects of something like the historical Socrates. Saying anything about that would require looking into whether, or to what extent, we can consider Plato's depiction as somehow conveying the historical person's character or presence. But some kind of truthfulness on the level of character is not identical to truthfulness on the level of exactly what he said. So while, in Burnet's words, Plato was not a "newspaper reporter," this is not to say that Plato was not in the *Apology* striving to render a portrait of Socrates—a portrayal, dramatization, or mimesis of him.[1] This could be done by, for instance, showing the *sort* of thing that *sort* of man would have said or done. Both Thucydides and Aristotle confirm this possibility.[2] And even if, or to the extent that, we cannot think of Plato as truthful on this level, we still need to ask why Plato wanted to portray the character he did portray in the *Apology*. A preparation for this is investigating what sort of character that is.

Another difficulty has to do with the political setting. Socrates's explanation, in the *Apology*, for not entering into politics in the standard sense, highlights this problem. There has been a debate for a long time about what sort of error, if any, Socrates is committing in refusing to enter politics in the traditional or received sense. Gregory Vlastos and Paul Woodruff, among others, have found reason to criticize Socrates for not speaking up on behalf of goodness when faced with the excesses of Athens' foreign policy.[3] Their arguments have been partially met by those of Ryan Balot, pointing out that there could be a real risk both to one's life, citizenship, or property, and to one's soul, in entering into Athenian politics.[4]

While the question of risk and courage is not a question that shall occupy me directly in this chapter, some of the points made might be of indirect relevance to it. Vlastos, Woodruff, and Balot take as their vantage point in evaluating Socrates his claims about contemporary institutions and compare them with historical facts accessible to us. But these procedures do not ask

about Socrates in light of values that are contemporary with him. If what we want to ask is how his jurors would have reacted to him in their evaluations, we should use a contemporary source for articulating those values. And Aristotle can help us there.

Arlene Saxonhouse's sustained reading of Plato's *Apology* as an expression of the potential for conflict between *parrhêsia* and *aidôs* gives us something to go on that comes closer to character than the question of risk.[5] But *parrhêsia* and *aidôs* are still first and foremost qualities of a regime and a set of regime-related practices and only secondarily qualities of a person's ethical dispositions; and not least, between them they do not come close to enabling the evaluation of a whole character. We need different ammunition in order to do this, and again, Aristotle offers us this.

We might thus also get a richer basis for considering whether a radically negative evaluation of Socrates constituted a departure from the citizens' own values, which is one question animating Saxonhouse's discussion. A case can be made that the majority of jurors made a serious mistake even by their own lights. Coming to a negative evaluation of someone is certainly not tantamount to passing a death sentence on him. However, grappling directly with that evaluation will help us see whether and how the sort of man who might have said and done the things Socrates says and does in the *Apology* might have been taken as problematic by someone imbued with a given value set. That value set is offered to us through Aristotle's analysis of virtues and vices. The Aristotelian analysis presumably has normative authority both to us and to his contemporaries, the Athenian jurors, whose values Aristotle to an important degree took himself to be spelling out, systematizing, and developing philosophically. One import is that the degree of negative evaluation we shall conclude is entailed by the Aristotelian framework cannot off hand be dismissed as simply unfounded and illegitimate.

ATHENIAN COURT CASES AND THE REVEALING OF CHARACTER

In a couple of ways at least, the institution of the ancient court case was more suitable for focusing on character than contemporary court cases usually are, whether that focus took the form of revealing or concealing character. This is not least because being on trial in Athens really meant that one's character and life as a whole was on trial, in spite of the specificity of the accusation. We can glean from the written speeches that have come down to us that both sides took this to be what was at stake. Through their presentations, each side would typically present themselves as good, trustworthy, and, not least, useful to the city, while painting their adversaries in the opposite light—often

by quite freely referring to earlier stories and episodes that did not pertain directly to the case at hand.[6]

Socrates too in Plato's *Apology* seems to understand that this is the expected framework within which he is supposed to insert himself, as his talk about the "old accusers" and constant references to his life as a whole seems to testify. Similarly, when he is convicted, both sides obviously take the verdict as a response not to the accusation understood in the abstract, but as a response to his life as a whole seen in light of what is good—or bad—for the city. The irony is, of course, that this matches how Socrates's own activity is taken by others: his conversations too regularly start as examinations of some apparently limited question, and end up with the interlocutor having to answer more or less for his whole life.[7]

For our purposes, this aspect of the nature of Athenian court cases means that the *Apology* is a suitable document for asking questions about Socrates's character as dramatized here not only because this might have been a central purpose on the part of the author, but also because the presentation and misrepresentation of character is part and parcel of the genre of court speeches.

ARISTOTLE'S VIRTUES

Aristotle operates with a surprisingly large number of ethical and intellectual virtues in his ethical discussions.[8] I have chosen four virtues that I hope together help bring out Socrates's complex and potentially problematic qualities. First, I will look at truthfulness, since this is so crucial not only to a virtue-based conception of human agency, but to philosophy as well. Then, practical wisdom in some of its main guises will be considered, before openhandedness and greatness of soul. While a consideration of practical wisdom should need no further justification, due to its importance and centrality, it will hopefully become clearer along the way why the two last social virtues deserve to be picked out. Let it be said for now that while the spectrum within which openhandedness is the mean is a main indication of someone's ability to take care of one's own life and those who depend on one, greatness of soul is crucial for what it tells us about how one sees oneself in relation to others, and—perhaps not least in Socrates's case—how others see that same relation.

A POINT OF DEPARTURE: TRUTHFULNESS ABOUT SELF AND OTHERS

Let us start with a broad view on a quality, encompassing several virtues, which we might take to be a philosophical quality par excellence: truthfulness.

Judging from his own self-reporting in the *Apology*, Socrates has so much integrity that he has had to stay away from public office as much as possible: "I thought myself too honest to survive if I occupied myself with those things [i.e., 'general or public orator or the other offices']" (36b–c).[9] The term often translated and understood as "too honest" here is *epieikesteron*, suggesting perhaps that a decency on his part is what will make Socrates speak out truthfully about wrongdoings in the city.[10] Not surprisingly, if their words are taken at face value, both Socrates and Aristotle cherish truth and what it takes to get there. Says Aristotle: "In itself falsehood is a bad thing, and to be censured, while truth is fine and something to be praised" (1127a28–30).[11]

However, when we get down to it, things get muddier. For one, there is no virtue simply matching truthfulness in Aristotle. All of the intellectual virtues are abilities for grasping truth in one way or another. But this is not the same as our truthfulness. And if we ask about a more practically minded attitude to truth, Aristotle in his *Nicomachean Ethics* seems to think of this as falling directly into at least two quite different virtues. One virtue deals with truthfulness about oneself, another deals with truthfulness about others. Truthfulness per se is not something for which either seems to acknowledge a virtue.

First, concerning truth in matters of self-representation, Socrates is a shifty character, as attested by the tendency in the literature to overuse the term "irony" about him. More specifically, irony according to Aristotle is presenting oneself to someone as less than one is (whether or not this is done for the benefit of that person, oneself, or someone else). And Socrates does this even in the *Apology*, from his earliest statements on: "as for me, I was almost carried away in spite of myself, so persuasively did they speak" (17a). "I am therefore simply a stranger to the manner of talking here" (17d–18a). Furthermore, Socrates's various claims not to know in the *Apology* may also be read as possible examples of irony, although this is not an equally straightforward matter.[12]

From Aristotle's point of view, irony is not a virtue, but a vice. Self-deprecation is neither more nor less than a lack of truthfulness about oneself, and this is not a good thing. The other extreme would be imposture—presenting oneself as possessing something one doesn't have, or possessing more of something one possesses only to a small degree. "[T]he self-deprecating person (*ho* [. . .] *eirôn*) seems to deny that he has what he does have, or to make less of them [things that bring repute] than they are" (1127a23–24). Aristotle even makes a special reference to Socrates at this point: "The way self-deprecating people understate themselves makes their character appear more attractive, since they seem to do it from a desire to avoid pompousness, and not for the sake of profit; most of all it is things that bring repute that these people too disclaim, as indeed Socrates used to do" (1127b22–276).

Socrates is willing to appear habitually in the guise of irony. And such willingness is, after all, central to what virtues and vices are all about, and part of what sets them apart from mere techniques or crafts (1105a26–1105b5).

But perhaps this is too myopic a manner of framing the issue. Among the interpretive challenges we face here, is the fact that it may not be easy to say whether the irony that is apparent in Socrates's interactions with others is a bona fide character trait or rather a means of doing what he does in his life's work. In short, we do not know where the man ends and the method begins. It could certainly be argued that elenctic practice—Socrates's method of questioning—when it is carried out in the marketplace and not within the safe institutional framework of a school requires that one lure people in and make them safe in the belief that they have something to tell you. And Socrates even claims in the *Apology* that this practice, method, or manner of address is what he will be dishing out in what turns out to end in his own funeral: "the same kind of language I am accustomed to use in the marketplace by the bankers' tables" (17c).

In the same vein, Aristotle's characterization of irony—altering oneself in order to appear attractive to others—suggests that irony has a structurally close relation to flattery, which is about presenting others in ways that are attractive to them. And no one could accuse Socrates of flattery or *kolakeia* in the *Apology*. "All the Athenians, it seems, make the young into fine good men, except me, and I alone corrupt them. Is that what you mean? [. . .] Or is quite the contrary true?" (25a-b). Similarly, he says, "I was convicted because I lacked not words but boldness and shamelessness and the willingness to say to you what you would most gladly have heard from me" (38d). Socrates's utter lack of flattery in this context suggests that we should be open to seeing both flattery and irony, when they do appear, as tricks of the trade and not as *hexeis* constitutive of character.

Part of the complexity here is due to how the *Apology* blends both established philosophical practice and established courtroom practices where we might tend to see nothing but direct expressions of character. Making an effort to point out that one is good, innocent, well-meaning, and deserving of sympathy for one's situation, and that one's accusers are plotting people with doubtful pasts and shady morals, both seem to be part and parcel of the courtroom defense. And Socrates too goes some way toward playing this game in his very own way, when he says that "[t]he things I shall tell you are commonplace and smack of the law courts, but they are true" (32a), or when he reminds them of his past (anti-)political efforts, when the rest of the people wanted to go against its own laws in trying and convicting the generals collectively, "I was the only member [. . .] to oppose" (32b). Similarly, Socrates also uses the ubiquitous "I have a family" card at one point (34d), albeit without actually dragging his family in front of the jurors.

In a way, then, Socrates goes along with the demands of the courtroom. A standard strategy for a defendant would be to deny all guilt in front of the jury, claim that one's accusers are lying, and present oneself as an upright, useful, and concerned citizen. And Socrates does all of this. But a simple flatterer he is certainly not. On the contrary, Socrates seems to abuse the standards of the courtroom defense to do the very opposite of flattering. And what he does finds resonance in Aristotle's analysis of an unnamed virtue expressing friendliness—and its related vices.

> When it comes to mixing with others—living in their company, sharing with them in conversations and the business of life—one sort of people are thought to be obsequious (*areskoi*): people who praise everything in order to please and offer no resistance in anything, thinking they must be no trouble to anyone they meet. Others, contrary to these, offer resistance in everything, and have not the slightest concern about causing distress to people; this sort are called morose and contentious (*duskoloi kai duserides*). It is quite clear, then, that the said dispositions are to be censured, and that the disposition intermediate between these is to be praised. (1126b11–18)

> [O]n occasions when it is not fine, or is harmful, to be pleasant, he will object, and will decide in favour of causing distress—so that if someone is doing something that actually brings disgrace, and no slight disgrace at that, or brings harm, and opposing it will cause little distress, the "friendly" person will not accept it but will object. (1126b31–35)

Aristotle is describing a nameless virtue and its connected vices, something like the vices of the flatterer and the quarreler, respectively. And although it is not easy to place Socrates precisely on that continuum, few would take Socrates in the *Apology* as someone nicely placed in the virtuous mean. If anything, he is verging on the quarrelsome and down-putting.

INTELLECTUAL VIRTUE: COMPREHENSION, CLEVERNESS, AND PRACTICAL WISDOM

Let us now consider intellectual qualities, as these would appear to be a mainstay of Socrates's activities and presence. A case could perhaps be made for him possessing *sunesis*, "comprehension"; for this is the virtue of understanding what others are describing, without it being linked directly to one's own agency. Aristotle explains this third person excellence by saying that comprehension

> is concerned with the same things as wisdom (*phronêsis*), but comprehension and wisdom are not the same thing. For wisdom is prescriptive (*epitaktikê*):

> what one should do or not do—this is the end, whereas comprehension is merely discriminative (*kritikê*). […] [O]ne "comprehends" when exercising judgment in order to discriminate about the things wisdom deals with, when someone else is speaking. (1143a6–15)

Socrates's deftness in refuting people might seem to require something like this quality. In his explanation in the *Apology* of how he has managed to make so many enemies, he even reports that he is often taken that way: "in each case the bystanders thought that I myself possessed the wisdom that I proved that my interlocutor did not have" (23a). If we reasonably take Socrates's art of conversation as involving his seeing the implications of others' assertions better than they themselves do, then this statement could be seen as indicating something like *sunesis*, in that the elenctic format makes Socrates appear as someone capable not only of discriminating about the topics tackled by *phronêsis*, but as doing it in a way that includes seeing them from the other person's perspective. The other person's words are after all what is being tried and tested, not the topic of conversation (virtue, courage, knowledge, or whatever) considered in isolation from him.

But is this *sunesis*, or is it something else, something more awe-inspiring and perhaps even frightening? *Sunesis* seems to be about following others in their deliberations and helping them see things more clearly by being able to grasp what they are struggling with or planning. But an elenchus, or indeed the cleverness Socrates demonstrates even in the monological bulk of the *Apology*, often looks more like *deinotês*, understood as the ability to scheme toward any end.

> There is an ability that people call "cleverness"; and this is of a sort such that, when it comes to the things that conduce to a proposed goal, it is able to carry these out and do so successfully. Now if the aim is a fine one, this ability is to be praised, but if the aim is a bad one, then it is unscrupulousness; which is why we say that both the wise and the unscrupulous are clever. (1144a23–28)

In fact, there are two motifs clearly present in the *Apology* that could create such an impression. First, there is Socrates's devilish ability to anticipate (the implications of) others' standpoints and use them for what seems like his own advantage in an argument, a quality that might be interpreted as *sunesis* or *deinotês* depending on the context. This alone is sufficient for someone to suspect Socrates of having the cynical ability of making "the worse argument the stronger," which is part of what he is accused of according to the *Apology* (18c; cf. 23d), that is, supporting odd or immoral conclusions at the cost of the judgments generally deemed to be the sound ones.

But second, there is also Socrates's shocking tendency to speak too frankly about too many things. *Parrhêsia*, "frankness," was a characteristic on

which the Athenians prided themselves, and for good reason, as a relatively high degree of laxness concerning who is allowed to speak and what they are allowed to say in settings like the assembly, or concerning what can be dramatized in the theater, constituted an important value for them. Without such openness, enabling the citizens to think of themselves as pooling their resources in getting to grips with the challenges of the day, there would be much less merit in a democratic regime. But Socrates is someone who takes frankness too far, saying whatever he takes truth or the argument to require: that some admired figure does not know what he is talking about, that his fellow citizens ignore virtue for the sake of material goods, or that they habitually display levels of corruption unacceptable to a decent man like himself. And Socrates does this in whatever context he finds himself: the street, the marketplace, the court room where one is supposed to acknowledge the authority of one's peers. More generally, then, Socrates can be said to have taken a central value and inflated it to the extreme in the name of knowledge and truth.[13] And this would not unreasonably have been taken as a form of *deinotês*, which to Aristotle is simply practical wisdom without what we might call a moral compass.

Even the virtue of *sunesis* is anyway only the poor cousin (once removed) of practical wisdom, *phronêsis*. As I have just suggested, there are strong reasons to think that the figure we see dramatized in the *Apology* could have been taken as someone simply lacking in *phronêsis* understood as the combination of a general deliberative ability (*deinotês*) and the solid directedness toward recognized goods dictated by complete ethical virtue.

If we consider another aspect of *phronêsis*, we will also see a further reason why Socrates's fellow citizens might have taken him to be lacking in virtue. Aristotle divides *phronêsis* into a personal and a political part. The former is characterized as follows: "it is thought characteristic of a wise person to be able to deliberate well about the things that are good and advantageous to himself, not in specific contexts [. . .] but what sorts of things conduce to the good life in general" (1140a25–28).

But *phronêsis* as witnessed by personal success would not seem to be easily attributed to Socrates; among other things, there is his lack of proper control of his own household. "Because of this occupation, I do not have the leisure to engage in public affairs to any extent, nor indeed to look after my own, but I live in great poverty because of my service to the god" (23b–c; Socrates repeats the point at 31a–c). Now it is of course impossible to say with any confidence where the historical truth lies, or what is the relation between historical truth and Plato's *Apology*. But it might tint the picture both for us and for his contemporaries that Socrates probably at one point in time did not live in poverty, but with an inheritance from his father *and* the dowry from Xanthippe (who, judging by her name, may have come from a more

prosperous and respected family than did Socrates).[14] In our admiration for Socrates's integrity, it is easy to overlook how one would probably be seen as an abject failure, to the point of there being something seriously wrong with one, for squandering one's possessions and letting a whole household fall to ruin, sons and all. In Athens, the head of the household was the authority not only in the sense of ruling it, but also in the sense of being seen as responsible for all the people in it as well as for the household's contribution to the community. And so even those who are prone to conclude that Socrates's contribution to the Athenian community are absolutely invaluable would be hard pressed to see his life strategies as a success story when it comes to his responsibilities toward those who depend on him in his own household.

Similarly, turning to *phronêsis* as a political virtue in Aristotle's book, "people look for what is good for themselves, and think this is what they should do. It is this view, then, that has given rise to the idea that this sort of person is wise; and yet presumably one's own well-being is inseparable from managing a household, and from political organization" (1142a7–10). Socrates immediately excludes himself from *phronêsis* in its political aspect by not partaking in political activities. "Because of this occupation, I do not have the leisure to engage in public affairs to any extent" (23b). In the *Apology*, Socrates's explanation of his own lack of political engagement in the traditional sense is also potentially undermined by how he overdetermines it. For, as we saw above when considering truthfulness, besides the explanation just quoted he also emphasizes that he would anyway not have been able to partake in political affairs because his integrity would have been the death of him.

Although it is certainly true that the conclusion that Socrates is lacking in political *phronêsis* is not entirely straightforward, since one might claim (as Plato has Socrates do at *Gorgias* 521d) that his dialectical activity is the only true political activity of the time, Socrates none the less must be said to lack Aristotelian political *phronêsis* taken as an activity taking place through recognized political channels. In a radical democracy where all citizens are supposed to contribute to the common good through recognizably political activities, there is every reason to be suspicious of someone who does not so contribute. That he even prides himself on his lack of engagement only exacerbates the matter.[15]

ETHICAL VIRTUE I: OPENHANDEDNESS

Both Socrates's cleverness and his poverty considered separately would seem to make him fall short of practical wisdom in its personal mode. A further investigation of the latter shortcoming requires that we move from a

consideration of Aristotle's intellectual virtues to his ethical virtues. According to Aristotle's ethical theory, since *phronêsis* is an intellectual virtue depending on and unifying the complete set of ethical virtues, the lack of *phronêsis* can be partly explicable in terms of a shortcoming in some ethical virtue or other. This particular aspect of *phronêsis* seems to be related to openhandedness, described by Aristotle as follows: "it is emphatically the mark of the openhanded person even to go to excess in giving, so as to leave too little for himself; for it is characteristic of the openhanded person not to look to his own interests. [. . .] It is not easy for an openhanded person to be wealthy, given that he is not the sort of person either to take things or to keep what he has, but rather to part with it" (1120b4–7, b14–16). It is true that Socrates's predicament does not come from him giving away external goods. But the dimension of practical life which openhandedness covers is still the one that concerns us here, because this virtue deals with the relation between considerations of one's material goods and considerations of one's friends (in a wider sense as those one cares about and acts for the sake of) when they have to be weighed against each other. If we consider one of this virtue's related vices, we see how it fits as a contemporary and systematic description of Socrates's situation. "[B]y 'wasteful' (*asôtos*) is meant the person who has one failing, that of destroying his substance; for the person who is being ruined through his own agency is wasteful, and the destruction of one's substance seems to be another sort of ruining of oneself, the thought being that life depends on these things" (1119b34–1120a3). The crucial difference between virtue and vice here is that, while both the openhanded person and the wasteful person place friends over material goods, the openhanded person will not do so in a way that leads to his own ruin. "Nor will he [the openhanded person] neglect his possessions, given that there are people he will want to use this to assist" (1120b2–3). Again, Socrates comes out as someone clearly failing, and even making a spectacle of it in court. Wastefulness as a shortcoming by itself does not make him downright despicable, however. For "he actually seems not to be a bad character; for it is not the mark of a worthless person, or of an ignoble one, to go to excess in giving and not taking, but rather of a fool (*êlithiou*)" (1121a26–27). But the state of destructive wastefulness is none the less reason to be suspicious of his character.

ETHICAL VIRTUE II: ARROGANCE AND GREATNESS OF SOUL

Socrates's confusing combination of cleverness and foolishness is matched by an equally confusing contrast in his presentation or appreciation of self. For, while we have seen that his irony amounts to what can reasonably be

taken as a belittling of himself in front of others, there is one aspect of existence where Socrates fits Aristotle's bill for someone not prone to place his lamp under a bushel. This is the side of Socrates, and of ethical qualities, that finds its zenith in his assertion that "I think there is no greater blessing to the city than my service to the god" (30a), a statement leading to Socrates's conclusion concerning what would be a fitting form of punishment for him that "[n]othing is more suitable, gentlemen, than for such a man to be fed in the Prytaneum" (36d). Taken together, the two statements just quoted amount to an assertion of his status as a divine blessing worthy of public recognition. The focal point for these statements, then, is honor, as a particular and irreducible dimension of social life.[16]

How can these claims be harmonized with Socrates's irony? A partial solution might be found in the fact that irony concerns a broader field than merely the honorable: one might be ironical about personal qualities other than those that bring (or deserve) honor. But since there is obvious overlap, this explanation only goes part of the way. I think the only way to square the two is to remind ourselves that while irony concerns only oneself, honor concerns the relation between oneself and others. So to some extent, it will be true that an implication of extreme worth in terms of what commands honor from others, and irony—the expression of a lack of worth—come together in the implication that others are of very little worth indeed.

In order to better understand Socrates's extreme position vis-à-vis honor, we again find support and explication in Aristotle's list of ethical qualities. This time, it is in his analysis of the great-souled man (*megalopsychos*) that the fitting picture emerges. It is the great-souled that is concerned with "honour, for this is in fact greatest of the external goods" (1123b20–21; cf. 1123b23). Aristotle's analysis reads like a catalogue of some of Socrates's qualities in this regard. First, even if honor is accorded him by excellent people, "he will be moderately pleased, on the grounds that he is getting what belongs to him, or actually less than that" (1124a6–8). This is a dead ringer for Socrates's calm estimate of being worthy of meals in the Prytaneum. Similarly, it explains (at least part of) his extreme arrogance, in that "the person to whom even honour is of small consequence will treat the other things like that too. This is why great-souled people seem to be arrogant (*huperoptai*)" (1124a19–21). Furthermore, his very defiance in the face of death can be seen in light of *megalopsuchia*.

> [T]he great-souled person is justified in looking down on people (since his judgements are true). He does not risk himself for small things, or often, because there are few things he values, but for great things he does, and when he does he is unsparing of his life, as one to whom there are some conditions under which it is not worth living. (1124b5–9)

The same goes for Socrates's directness or even bluntness (e.g., in separating judges and mere citizens) in communicating his evaluation of accusers and jurors alike. Aristotle's comment in this regard even makes further sense of how someone might combine greatness of soul and irony.

> But necessarily, he is also open about his hating and his loving (for concealment implies fear, and shows less care for the truth than for one's reputation), and he talks and acts openly (for he is the sort to speak his mind (*parrhêsiastês*), since he tends to look down on people, and tell the truth, except when being self-deprecating (*di'eirôneian*) with ordinary people) (1124b26–31).

While this is an impressive list of ways in which Socrates matches Aristotle's account of the great-souled man, there are one or two ways in which he might perhaps be said to fall short of that role. First is the fact that the great-souled man is not supposed to dwell on the past. "Nor does he remember past wrongs; for great-souled people do not store things up, especially a memory of things done them, but rather overlook them" (1125a3–5). Second, and closely related to the previous point, is how this personage should not be someone to go on about himself. "Nor does he talk about personal things—he will not talk either about himself or about someone else, since he is not anxious either to be praised himself or to see others censured" (1125a5–7). As I have argued, however, these features of Socrates's appearance in the *Apology* can quite reasonably be put down to the fact that talking about the past and talking about oneself are among the demands of the court room. Socrates respects the law in following the rules of the game. This does not at all imply, then, that his talk about the past or about himself is a direct expression of his own character.

While Socrates's words make him someone fitting Aristotle's notion of greatness of soul, however, actually receiving the relevant honors depends on the perceiver in the principled sense that honor is a social good only bestowed by someone acknowledging it. Aristotle has a framework for understanding what it means to take oneself as being great-souled in a situation where the potential bestowers of honor do not share one's interpretation. "[G]reatness of soul seems to belong to the sort of person that thinks himself, and is, worthy of great things; for the sort of person who does so not in accordance with his real worth is a fool, or mindless (*êlithios* [. . .] *anoêtos*)" (1123b1–3). Thus, "the great-souled type would appear quite laughable if he were not good" (1123b33–34). The difference of opinion between Socrates and at least the majority of jurors in this respect makes them see him as a figure who, apart from any risk he might pose to the community, is ridiculous and mindless.[17]

CONCLUSION

Judging by Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, Socrates was a deeply problematic character. To know him may have been to love him, but he was far from a paragon of Aristotelian virtue. His irony, his quarrelsomeness, his lack of shame and new conception of shamefulness, arrogance, ungodliness, wastefulness, cleverness, and seemingly doubtful greatness of soul make him a troublesome figure. Socrates's characteristic presence would have been taken by many—including the (by contemporary Aristotelian standards) good—as at best problematic, at worst ridden by vice.

Let me finish by mentioning what I take to be two ambiguities that follow the present approach: first, there is the ambiguity between the historical Socrates and the Socrates of Plato's *Apology*; second, there is the ambiguity between Aristotle's ethical analysis and the Athenian gentleman's horizon. In combining these two sets of ambiguity, we find that they generate four potentially interesting sets. First, to the extent that we can consider these findings to be about the historical audience's take on the historical Socrates, they might be of some relevance for understanding some of the many the mechanisms at play at the trial and verdict. Second, if the results are taken to speak about Aristotle's philosophical response[18] to the historical Socrates, then they also speak about philosophy's judgment of itself across two generations. Third, seen as articulating part of the historical audience's reading of Plato's Socrates as distinct from the historical figure, they bring interesting questions about the author's intentions and a possible first readership for a text with a long and intricate *Wirkungsgeschichte*. And fourth, taken as Aristotle's indirect philosophical response to Plato's construct, the results uncover something about two ways in which to construe ethical and philosophical presence.

I have nothing further to say on these four alternatives in the present chapter.[19] I would simply like to end by suggesting that for all four alternatives, Aristotle is a uniquely useful and generally untapped resource for getting a grip on Socrates in the *Apology*, and on other characters in Plato and in other classical authors. While it is obvious that we cannot erase the complex distance between them and us, Aristotle can help us reach a better understanding of certain sides of this plethora of characters.

NOTES

1. John Burnet, ed., *Plato: Euthyphro, Apology of Socrates, Crito. Edited with Notes* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1924), 143.

2. This ability to strive for the universal is in fact the quality that makes poetry more philosophical than history according to the opening of Aristotle's *Poetics* ix,

and Thucydides' speeches (in spite of Aristotle's well-known judgment of history as a discipline) are constructed with a similar point in view.

3. Gregory Vlastos, "The Historical Socrates and Athenian Democracy," in Gregory Vlastos, *Socratic Studies*, ed. Myles F. Burnyeat (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1994); Paul Woodruff, "Socrates and Political Courage," *Ancient Philosophy* 27 (2007): 1–14.

4. Ryan K. Balot, "Socratic Courage and Athenian Democracy," *Ancient Philosophy* 28 (2008): 49–69.

5. "The Trial of Socrates," chapter 5 in Arlene Saxonhouse, *Free Speech and Democracy in Ancient Athens* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2006): 100–126; see also Saxonhouse's contribution to this volume.

6. For a detailed account of this state of affairs, cf. David Cohen, *Law, Violence, and Community in Classical Athens*, *Key Themes in Ancient History* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1995), esp. Part II.

7. This quality of Socrates's conversational skills is pointed out explicitly by Nicias at *Laches* 187e–188a.

8. Aristotle operates with ten ethical virtues in the *Nicomachean Ethics*: courage (*andreia*) moderation (*sophrosunê*), openhandedness (*eleutheriotês*), munificence (*megaloprepeia*), greatness of soul (*megalopsychia*), a nameless excellence to do with honor, mildness (*praotês*), a nameless virtue concerning friendliness in social contexts, a nameless virtue concerning truthfulness in social contexts, and wit (*eutrapelia*). Similarly, he offers comments on no less than nine intellectual virtues or competences: intellectual accomplishment (*sophia*), knowledge (*epistêmê*), intelligence (*nous*), wisdom (*phronêsis*), technical expertise (*technê*), excellence in deliberation (*euboulia*), comprehension (*sunesis*), (good) sense (*sungnome*), and cleverness (*deinotês*).

9. Translations based on G. M. A. Grube's (*Apology*, in *Plato. Complete Works*, ed. John M. Cooper [Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1997]).

10. Balot, "Socratic Courage," 58, suggests "too principled," "reasonable," "fair," "honest."

11. All references to Aristotle are to the *Nicomachean Ethics*, and all quotations from this work cite Christopher Rowe's translation, from Sara Broadie and Christopher Rowe, eds., *The Nicomachean Ethics: Translation, Introduction, and Commentary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), Translation and Historical Introduction © Christopher Rowe 2002.

12. Cf. 21b (not to have much by way of wisdom); 20c (about a specific question); 22c–d (that he knows very little); 23b (Socrates's interpretation of the oracle's meaning). Possible support for seeing some of these statements as cases of irony is found in the fact that they coexist in the text with very strong claims to knowledge; cf. 28d (that it is right to hold the position one has been placed in by a superior), 29b (that it is wicked and shameful to do wrong).

13. For a detailed treatment and further references, cf. Saxonhouse, *Free Speech and Democracy*, Ch. 5.

14. Cf. Debra Nails, *The People of Plato: A Prosopography of Plato and Other Socratics* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2002): 299, referring to Burnet, ed., *Plato's Phaedo* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1911), 60n.

15. Naturally, if he on top of everything else allows himself to voice radical criticism of the political system and its practitioners the way Socrates does in the *Apology*, this could be said to add insult to injury; but this critical activity does not seem to be directly relevant to Aristotle's notion of political *phronêsis*.

16. Also of relevance here is Socrates's likeness to "all the heroes who died at Troy" (28c). Socrates in this connection famously also compares himself to Achilles (28b–d) as somebody setting the issue of right or wrong over that of life or death, unlike his co-citizens; cf. how he looks forward to comparing experiences with heroes in Hades who have been unjustly convicted (41b).

17. "The one who goes to excess is conceited (*chaunos*)" (1125a17), and "the conceited sort [. . .] are foolish, and ignorant of themselves" (1125a27–28). Socrates's apparent arrogance even touches the gods, making him a candidate for impiety as well as a–to most–thoroughly misplaced greatness of soul. "I could refute the oracle and say to it: 'This man is wiser than I, but you said I was'" (21c). If Socrates is a god-fearing man, his is certainly a paradoxical *eusebeia*.

18. This take on the analysis in the *Nicomachean Ethics* is the basic approach dictated by Aristotelian methodology: first, set out the *phainomena*, then, strive to leave all *endoxa* standing to the extent that this is possible.

19. An Aristotelian comparison between the Socrates in Plato's *Apology* and Xenophon's Socrates might help us reach some clarification regarding the first ambiguity, while an approach like K. J. Dover's *Greek Popular Morality in the Time of Plato and Aristotle* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1994) would be a natural ally in beginning to sort out the second ambiguity.

Chapter 8

Socrates's Failure

Language and Lies in Plato's Apology

Olof Pettersson

Plato's *Apology* opens with a distinction. By opposing his accusers' deceitfulness to his own blunt truthfulness, Socrates distinguishes a philosophical manner of speech from its politico-forensic counterpart. This can be said to culminate at 17d3, where Socrates claims to be a stranger (*xenos*) to the manner of speech—the *lexis* (17d3)—of the court. He asks to be allowed to talk with his own voice (*phônê*), in his own way (*tropos*, cf. 17d5–18a3) and without making fine speeches ("*kekalliepêmenous ge logous*," 17b9). In contrast to the accusers' claim that he is a clever or dangerous speaker (17b1: "*deinou ontos legein*") Socrates asks to be excused for talking at random (*eikê*, 17c2). But wouldn't this be exactly what a clever speaker should say? The question is as urgent as it is old. In recent research, there are two tendencies. Either Socrates is taken to be just like the clever speakers whose strategies he renounces or he is taken to be honest and truthful. In this chapter, I shall call the defenders of these two tendencies *Liars* and *Fanatics,* and argue that the *Apology*'s treatment of the ideals of human discursivity shows that both, to a certain extent, have it right.

The Liars, first, claim that Socrates's words are articulated in perfect harmony with customary forensic procedure.[1] Socrates's claim not to be a clever speaker and his counter-accusation of his prosecutors would be the standard thing to say. Socrates is not unfamiliar with the established politico-forensic jargon. Instead he knows it well and his words—communicated to us in Plato's carefully premeditated form—are persuasive because they are so eloquently deceptive.[2] Socrates does not only lie, but he also lies about lying.[3] David Leibowitz puts it in this way: "Socrates' reason for telling the whole truth haphazardly is that he counts on the jury to recognize the justice of what he says. Yet he also makes it clear that this *cannot* be counted on." "[T]he jurors," Leibowitz explains, "*lack* their proper virtue: most are prejudiced

against him and have, in fact, been slandering him for many years." The implication, accordingly to Leibowitz, "is that [Socrates] will not tell the truth haphazardly."[4] In order to communicate the truth to his biased audience, he needs to choose his words with care. But if Socrates thus proceeds only by telling parts of the truth "in saying that he will tell the whole truth haphazardly, he has already lied—and lied cleverly, for it was necessary to disarm the suspicion of the jurors at the outset. However, this means that he also lied in saying that his accusers lied in calling him a clever speaker."[5] Marina McCoy makes a similar point: the difference between philosophy and politico-forensic rhetoric is "nuanced, for Socrates uses common forensic *topoi* in his speech, seemingly giving credence to the prosecution's insinuation that he is a 'clever speaker'."[6] Not only does his manner of speech often coincide with the common language of the court; a fact that Socrates, of course, denies. McCoy also reminds us that the *Apology* has so many similarities with Gorgias' *Defense of Palamedes* that it is beyond reasonable doubt that Plato did not write the former without the latter in mind.[7] And this, she goes on, makes it clear both that Socrates's speech in the *Apology* is not "rhetoric-free" and that the "overall structure [of Socrates's speech] is typical of the courtroom speeches written by courtroom logographers such as Lysias and Antiphon."[8]

The Fanatics, on the other hand, are devoted to Socrates's cause. Thomas C. Brickhouse and Nicholas D. Smith, for example, use an anecdote to frame their case. "According to Diogenes (2.40)," they write, "the great attic orator Lysias actually wrote a defense for Socrates, which the latter refused to accept on the ground that it was 'more forensic than philosophical'."[9] According to Brickhouse and Smith, even if this anecdote does not necessarily describe what actually happened, it perfectly captures the attitude toward forensic oratory Socrates displays in the *Apology*. In relation to their discussion of what many scholars have suspected of being a standard forensic *prooimion*, they claim that even if Socrates's introductory words may seem to resemble ordinary forensic jargon, similarities are deceptive. Socrates's own explanations, they insist, are more trustworthy than such similarities. The problem, as they see it, is that the similarities have overshadowed the differences and that "this has led so many serious and intelligent scholars to invent subtle and elaborate interpretations of Socrates's words, despite his explicit announcement in the prooimion […] that he will be blunt and honest."[10] The solution is that we should trust that Socrates "will not deceive the jury," for what "Socrates says here is the unvarnished truth."[11]

As we shall see, there are reasons to believe that both the Liars and the Fanatics got it right. Socrates is lying, but only insofar as he is telling the truth. The problem is that the truth is not that easily told. According to Socrates, humans cannot, and should not, say what they do not know. But Socrates is the wisest human and he is aware of the fact that he "knows, so

to speak, nothing" (22c9–d1). So what, then, can he do? As I shall propose, there is a viable way. He can fail. A good failure can not only serve accurately to identify the nature of success. It can also demonstrate what is not within one's reach. If one fails with precision, one may not only manage to identify the nature of one's aspirations in a subtle and humble way. One can also show why and how they are unreachable. The *Apology*, I will suggest, offers good reasons to think that this is what Plato makes Socrates do. He makes Socrates identify the general truthfulness-problem of politico-forensic rhetoric so as to be able to contrast this to the discursive ideals of the Socratic elenchus. And he makes Socrates fail to live up to these ideals in a way that outlines the scope of what, in truth, can be said by a human being.

This chapter has three parts. In part one, I ask what manner of speech Socrates renounces at the dialogue's outset. This, I suggest, is made reasonably clear in his proceeding analysis of the accusation. I argue that Socrates identifies three features that make the accusation deceptive, and, as such, a representative expression of politico-forensic standards: it is probabilistic, hubristic and conservative. In part two, I argue that Socrates analyzes the accusation in a way that makes its language irreconcilable with the Socratic elenchus. I look at three generally acknowledged functions of the elenchus—*interpretation*, *disproof* and *exhortation*, and suggest that as these functions are meant to correspond to truth they make up an ideal discursive standard. In part three, I take a look at three well-known examples of Socrates's strategies in his defense and argue that despite his honest ambitions, he fails to live up to his own ideals. He uses a set of arguments from probability, claims to know what is beyond the scope of his own notion of knowledge, and tries to make himself believable by exploiting conservative values. As I conclude, however, Socrates's failures are not random, but chosen with care. They suggest that there is a limit to what can be accomplished with human words, and help us to see of what this limit consists.

SOCRATES'S ANALYSIS

When Socrates says that he is a stranger to the manner of speech of the court, to what, exactly, is he referring? Socrates's analysis of his accusation offers a clue: If we are to understand its persuasive force, it is not enough to look at its words alone. Another player must be introduced. "For many accusers," Socrates says to his prosecutors, "have risen up against me before you" (18b1). Except in the case that "one of them happens to be a writer of comedies," these accusers are the most difficult (*aporôtatoi*, 18d1) to pinpoint.[12] It is not possible to say or know their names (*onomata*, 18d1). They cannot even be challenged, we learn, because they will not come when called upon (cf. 18d).

To explain what this is supposed to mean, Socrates introduces a very peculiar type of agent. In order to defend himself against his anonymous accusers he claims that he is forced to fight with shadows (*skiamachein*, 18d6).[13] Why? Socrates's answer is reasonably clear. Not only are these shadows explained in terms of rumor (*phêmê*, 20c7). In addressing his judges, Socrates also elucidates the matter by saying that "they got hold of most of you in childhood" (18b4–5). If we can trust Socrates's notion of childhood in the *Republic*, this means that the shadows in the *Apology* are the offspring of ignorance. A child cannot see the true meaning (*huponoia*, 378d7) of the stories they hear. Applied to the *Apology,* this means that when the voices of the shadows were established in the minds of the public it was at an age when they mistook them for the truth. When Socrates eventually comes to explain how he responded to the oracle's claim that *there is no one wiser than Socrates,* he attempts to counteract these rumors and tries to tell the real story. But of this, of course, the shadows spoke not. Instead, another story lingered in the minds of the rising generation. Nurtured by the resounding echoes of the multitude (*hoi polloi*, 19d6–7), Socrates became known as

> a wise man, a ponderer over the things in the air and one who has investigated the things beneath the earth and who makes the weaker argument the stronger […] teaching others the same thing. (18b7-8, 19c1)

There are many ways of explaining why Socrates introduces these rumors. Brickhouse and Smith argue that the official charges were based on them; and that Socrates's defense gained force by undermining them.[14] Colaiaco and others[15] claim that Socrates's reasons for introducing them were not to defend his innocence, but to expose a tragic and irresolvable tension between himself and the city. But there is also another story to tell. Neither Colaiaco nor Brickhouse and Smith think that Socrates cares much about the form of the words he analyzes.[16] There are, however, some reasons to think that he does.

As is well known, Socrates introduces the official charges after his account of the rumors and the shadows. There is a reason for this. Socrates wants to show that it is only by corresponding to the shadows that his accusers' words have any bearing. It is these rumors, Socrates says, "in which Meletus trusted when he brought this suit against me" (19b1–2).[17] Accordingly, it is clear that Socrates thinks that Meletus' words were based on his confidence that these rumors were firmly established in the minds of the public. This is important for at least three reasons.

First, as Socrates's analysis shows, Meletus' words were meant to correspond to what the public already thought. The charge of impiety corresponds to the rumor that Socrates investigated "the things in the air and […] the things beneath the earth," a rumor causing those who heard it to believe

that a "man who investigates these matters does not even believe in gods" (18b7–c3).[18]

The charge that Socrates corrupted the young had the same source: it was only by corresponding to Socrates's generally acknowledged reputation that Meletus' accusations had any force (19b-c). How so? Although this is not spelled out in the *Apology*, other dialogues make it quite explicit. In the *Gorgias* it is called flattery; in the *Phaedrus* probability. The art of persuasion, used "to persuade (*to peithein*) with speeches either judges in the law courts (*en dikastêriô dikastas*) or statesmen in the council-chamber or the commons in the Assembly" (*Gorg*. 452e1–4)[19] is a matter of adapting one's words to what one's audience already thinks is the case (e.g., *Gorg*. 463b–c, 465b, 501c, 503a or 513d). This is one reason why Socrates, in the *Gorgias*, calls rhetoric flattery. The art of flattery thus outlined in the *Gorgias* also corresponds to Socrates's characterization of courtroom speeches in the *Phaedrus*: Their efficacy, we learn, is gained at the expense of truth: "For in the courts (*en tois dikastêriois*) […] nobody cares for truth […], but for that which is persuasive (*pithanos*); and that is probability (*to eikos*)" (*Phaedr*. 272d7–e1). In order to explain what this means, Socrates appeals to one of the legendary founders of rhetoric, and tells the following story:

> [Tisias] wrote that if a weak but brave man assaulted a strong coward, robbed him of his cloak or something, and was brought to trial for it, neither party ought to speak the truth; the coward should say that he had not been assaulted by the brave man alone, whereas the other should prove that only they two were present, and should use the well-known argument, "How could a little man like me assault such a man as he is?" (273b4–c2)

An argument from probability works by answering to what the audience already finds to be common sense. The words of probability are persuasive because they confirm and affirm the assumptions and prejudices of public opinion. In this sense, truth is irrelevant. A flatterer does not need knowledge to persuade. But he needs to know the mind of the public. Insofar as Socrates's analysis is accurate, the persuasive force of Meletus' words is therefore also reasonably characterized in terms of flattery and probability. They seem to be trustworthy, not because they are true, but because they are articulated in accordance with what Meletus rightly expects everyone to find likely (cf. 31b7).

As we shall see, one important consequence of using an argument from probability in this context is that it commits its users to reduce all relevant factors to human size. This means that no factors other than those that can be entertained by a human mind are to be taken into consideration, because if one is to use an argument based on one's estimation of public opinion

this argument must rest on an examination of what people think, and nothing else. This can of course include religious beliefs and practices; but only on an anthropological level, as it were; only institutionalized or established religious beliefs and customs are relevant. And although it might certainly be important to consider to what extent the public considers divine intervention to be possible, there would be no use in taking the actual possibility of such extraordinary events into consideration.[20]

Second, by analyzing Meletus' accusation as an argument from probability, Socrates's account shows that it is persuasive by appearing to be true. The logic goes something like this: it is true that nothing exists without a cause.[21] If there is a phenomenon there must be some underlying reality, its cause. But a rumor does not have the same etiology as other phenomena. Yet this is difficult to see because rumor feeds on ignorance, and is strengthened by exploiting the logic of causation. In contemplating on behalf of the jurors, Socrates captures the operating mechanisms:

> From where have these prejudices against you [sc. Socrates] come? […] For surely if you did not busy yourself with something out of the ordinary, all these rumors and talk would not have arisen unless you did something other than most people. (20c4–8)

It is on this logic that Meletus' accusation feeds. His words appear to be true, because they have a similar structure of correspondence as truth. But while truth answers to reality, Meletus' accusation only answers to what most people find real. In the first case, there is a real cause; in the second, not necessarily so. In the *Phaedrus,* again, this is a further characteristic of an argument from probability: probability gets its force its likeness to truth. In reply to a fictive Tisias, Socrates says that "this probability (*to eikos*) of yours happens to be accepted by the many because of its likeness to truth (*di' homoiotêta tou alêthous*)" (*Phaidr.*273d3–4). Understood in this light, it is also clear that the accusation made by Meletus is hubristic. In fact, all self-oblivious lies are. If Meletus believes in the words of the accusation and if Socrates's analysis is correct, Meletus thinks that he knows what he does not know. Meletus supposedly believes that the words of the accusation are valuable and important and that they have the force of authority. But like his audience, he is deceived by the logic of causation and the appearance of truth.

Third, it follows from the above that Socrates's analysis of Meletus' accusation also makes it conservative. It did not introduce anything that was not already firmly established in the minds of the public. Meletus had no intention of claiming anything extraordinary. Instead, his words were merely a manifestation of the strengthened echoes of rumor. In the *Republic,* Socrates discusses the conservative forces operating in such circumstances. An argument

that is to address the public point of view, Socrates explains, must first submit to its will:

> [I]t is as if a man were acquiring knowledge of the moods and appetites of a great strong beast. [In order to make the arguments persuasive it is necessary to learn] how it is to be approached and touched, and when and by what things it is made most savage or gentle. [And] after mastering this knowledge by living and spending time with the creature […] knowing nothing in reality about which of [its] opinions and desires is honorable or base, good or evil, just or unjust [one] should apply all these terms to the judgements of the great beast, calling the things that pleased it good, and the things that vexed it bad. (493a9–c6)

In order to persuade the public, one must confirm their already establishes notions and make one's own voice an echo of theirs.

SOCRATES'S DISCURSIVE IDEALS

Perhaps it should not come as a surprise that Socrates's characterization of his own conduct corresponds to his analysis of the accusation. As Socrates tries to counteract its force, he does more than simply outline the framework of an ideal discursive pursuit: he does so in a way that dismantles Meletus' believability point by point. There are at least three passages that make this clear. As we shall see, these passages are well known and correspond to the three basic uses of the Socratic elenchus identified by Paul Woodruff: *interpretation*, *disproof* and *exhortation*.[22] First, at around 21b3–9, Socrates tells us how he reacted when he heard how the Pythia answered Chaerephon's question.

> "What in the world does the god mean, and what riddle is he propounding? For I am conscious that I am not wise either much or little. What then does he mean by declaring that I am the wisest? He certainly cannot be lying, for that is not possible for him." And for a long time I was at a loss as to what he meant; then with great reluctance I proceeded to investigate him somewhat as follows. (21b3–9)

On the face of it, this passage makes it clear that Socrates reckons with the authority of the divine (cf. 21e5–23c1, 28e4–29a2, 31d2–4 and 33c4–7). He recognizes the nonhuman source of the oracle's words,[23] and he shows that he believes this is a source of truth.[24] For Socrates, truth is divine. He does not reduce all relevant factors to human size, and in sharp contrast to the presuppositions of an argument from probability, in attempting to persuade his jurors, he invokes a divine source of truth instead of relying on public opinion and probability.

But this passage has troubled scholars, because it seems to contradict Socrates's commitment to the Rationality Principle, that is, that one should never trust anything besides reasoned argument.[25] Arlene Saxonhouse writes: "Socrates' response when told the oracle's answer is to contest the words of the god, to question and perhaps prove the god wrong. […] Ultimately, he fails […] but only […] as parts of his effort to show the fallibility of a reliance on the oracle and thereby the gods as the source of knowledge."[26] In a similar vein, many other influential scholars, including Gregory Vlastos, agree with Hegel: "Socrates is the hero who established in the place of the Delphic oracle the principle that man must look within himself to know what is Truth."[27] Socrates's trust in extra-rational sources of truth must therefore either be taken to be a sign of irony[28] or a part of some ornamental fiction.[29] But these suggestions have come to be questioned on the ground that they throw out the baby with the bath water. There is no trustworthy reason to single out this passage as ironic or fictional and instead we must take Socrates's words at face value.[30]

There is however a third way. Without making Socrates into an empty medium or falling back on an ironic or fictional interpretation, Jacob Howland has suggested that instead of taking Socrates to be a mouthpiece for the oracle or vice versa, we need to understand how they can speak together.[31]

Heraclitus once pointed out that "[t]he lord whose oracle is at Delphi neither declares nor conceals (*oute legein oute kruptei*) but signifies (*alla sêmainei*)."[32] Insofar as Heraclitus is to be trusted, the words of the oracle, in accordance with which we should try to understand Socrates's words, are neither designed to clear things up nor to deceive. Instead they are signs (*sêmeia*, cf. 40b1). But what is a sign? A sign (*sêmeion*) is what has significance or is significant (*sêmantikos*).[33] According to Aristotle, this is what distinguishes a *voice* from a mere *sound*.[34] A voice has meaning. But how are we to access that meaning? There are at least two ways. Either we explain the meaning of the sign with already familiar conceptions, or we stay open to the extraordinary. While the first method involves scaling down the material to familiar size, the second is a matter of translating the unfamiliar to an understandable language. In the first case, the task is to cleanse the sign of all strange elements and extract a proposition that makes sense (cf. 31b7: *eichon an tina logon*). In the second, one would need to reject the presupposition that the unfamiliar is irrelevant and accept whatever strangeness the sign involves.

According to Woodruff, Socrates prefers the latter approach. Instead of reducing the oracle's words to the familiar, he interprets them by accepting their extraordinary content.[35] Socrates stays open to the oracle's divine strangeness. He trusts that it cannot lie (21b6). And in an attempt to challenge his own familiar presupposition—that he is not wise—he questions and examines the words of the god (21c).[36] Socrates's interrogation of Athens' politicians, poets and craftsmen is a part of this interpretative task.[37]

"Interpretative elenchus," Woodruff concludes, "seeks to find the truth as hidden meaning in statements that seem false on a straight reading."[38] Seen in this light, Socrates does not exploit the oracle's voice so as to strengthen his own. Nor is his trust based on a lack of reasoned argument. Instead, Socrates suggests that there is a way to spell out the oracle's truth that does not reduce all factors to human size.[39] And instead of speaking like the poets, and uttering words that make no sense to the speaker, interpretative elenchus provides both divine truth and a comprehensible account.

We find at 23a5–b4 a second, and closely connected, passage that also suggests that the Socratic elenchus is irreconcilable with the persuasive mechanisms of Meletus' accusation. Here, Socrates famously spells out the consequences of his interpretative examination of Athens' professionals:

> [I]t seems that the god is really wise and by his oracle means this: "Human wisdom is of little or no value." And it appears that he does not really say this of Socrates, but merely uses my name, and makes me an example, as if he were to say: "This one of you, o human beings, is wisest, who, like Socrates, recognizes that he is in truth of no value in respect to wisdom." (23a5-b4)

Corresponding to what Woodruff calls the *disproving* function of the Socratic elenchus, this passage indicates that Socrates's interrogations of Athens' professionals had a negative and limiting result. Of all the persons he talked to, none were wiser than he, because none of them could see the limits of their knowledge. According to Woodruff there is nothing exceptional about this: "Here Plato's dialogue fall under the tradition of the dramatic poets of Socrates' generation, all of whom were concerned in one way or another with the hubris of knowledge."[40] Two things are nevertheless worth noting.

On the one hand, Socrates's devotion to the anti-hubristic ends of the elenchus is phrased in a way that makes it irreconcilable with customary politico-forensic language. Its disproving function is clearly to expose the appearance of truth and all types of arguments that rest on such grounds. On the other hand, the elenchus also seems to have a more constructive aim. It is meant to articulate and determine the scope of human knowledge and wisdom. In its disproving function, the elenchus is not merely a skeptical strategy, but a discursive procedure that, in Woodruffs' words, aims "to yield the conclusion that its victims are ignorant, and the conclusion is supposed to be true."[41] By exposing the hubris of the Athenian professionals, the elenchus sets a standard for knowledge and wisdom: (a) that it can be accounted for, (b) that it is coherent, and (c) that it does not result in epistemic overreaching.[42]

Besides these standards, there is however also something more at stake here. Because Socrates's acceptance of the claim that he is the wisest does more than just imply that there are a bunch of wise-guys who claim to know

more than they know. On the simplest reading, we are all in that situation, because Socrates—the wisest one—is at the bottom of the pile (21d): He is aware of the fact that he is wise neither in big nor in small (21b4–5). He is conscious that he "knows, so to speak, nothing" (22c9–d1).[43] And as his interpretation of the oracle makes clear, whatever a human can know, it is of little or no value (23a5-b4). What is worthwhile, and what is true wisdom, is beyond our reach. And insofar as truth is valuable, it is not accessible.

A third passage that further indicates that the Socratic elenchus is irreconcilable with the politico-forensic language of the court is 30e1–5. Here, Socrates makes it clear that whatever the elenchus is supposed to do, it is not supposed to flatter:

> For if you put me to death, you will not easily find another, who, to use a rather absurd figure, attaches himself to the city as a gadfly to a horse, which, though large and well bred, is sluggish on account of his size and needs to be aroused by stinging. (30e1–5)

Socrates's elenctic practice aims to improve by provocation. This would be what Woodruff calls its *exhorting* function.[44] In contrast to the conservative effects of the flattering mechanisms of Meletus' accusation, it is not designed to please. In his post-verdict speech, Socrates elaborates the point:

> Perhaps you think, gentlemen, that I have been convicted through lack of words […] Far from it. And yet it is through a lack that I have been convicted, not however a lack of words, but of impudence and shamelessness (*alla tolmês kai anaischuntias*), and of willingness to say (*tou mê ethelein legein*) to you such things as you would have liked best to hear. (38d3–8)

In line with the *exhorting* function of the elenchus, Socrates's defense was not meant to be in line with established values and customary procedure. In contrast to Meletus—who arguably had exactly this aim—Socrates had no desire to adapt his words to the moods and appetites of his judges. And insofar as we can assume that his characterization of his own practice is meant to answer to what he found true and worthwhile, we can also assume that the ideals on which this gadfly's elenchus rests are extraordinary and irreconcilable with the traditional and conservative values of the Athenian horse.

SOCRATES'S FAILURE

We have seen that Socrates's analysis of Meletus' accusation shows that it is probabilistic, hubristic and conservative. In addition we have also seen that there are reasons to think that Socrates's account of the standards of the

elenctic procedure makes it irreconcilable with the persuasive force of the accusation. With these standards in mind, let us now turn to a few passages where Socrates seems to fail to live up to his own ideals.

First, even if Socrates makes it clear that public opinion and likelihood is irrelevant to the truth of his words, he repeatedly falls back on probability. One passage that makes this clear is 20a–c. According to Marina McCoy this passage shows both that Socrates uses "a probability argument"[45] and that this argument conforms to the standards of politico-forensic jargon: Socrates, McCoy argues, must persuade his judges that he is not a teacher, as he has, indirectly, been accused of being.[46] His claim of ignorance is designed to reach this end. Socrates, McCoy explains, exploits the probability of the fact that, as everybody knows, you cannot be a teacher if you have nothing to teach.[47] In this light, the whole section on Socrates's ignorance is a part of an argument from probability. Socrates seems to know precisely what his audience would find convincing. Despite his efforts to establish the opposite standard, he exploits their assumptions about teaching and knowledge, so as to make himself look immune to the charges of corrupting the young.

There are many similar examples. Steven Nadler mentions two: "[At 25c–26a] Socrates is insisting that it is highly unlikely [or improbable] that he is so ignorant as to wish to corrupt the young, given that these individuals would be his associates and that no one wishes to live among wicked and corrupt fellow-citizens."[48] Further, at 26d–e Socrates's denies that he taught that the sun and the moon are not gods: In the light of the fact that Anaxagoras' books could be bought for a drachma in the bookshops, Nadler writes: "It is hardly likely, [Socrates] is insisting, that he would maintain as his own theories such as these."[49]

Another reason to think that Socrates fails to live up to the discursive standards of the elenchus is the familiar fact that he repeatedly makes claims to know what he, according to himself, cannot know. One such famous passage is 29b6–7, where he says the following: "I do know that it is evil and disgraceful to do wrong and to disobey him who is better than I, whether he be god or man." In the light of Socrates's earlier claim that human wisdom is of little or no value and that he is wise in neither small nor big, Socrates cannot, without incoherence, lay claim to this morally relevant and thus valuable knowledge.[50] This passage is of course just one example of many.

C. D. C. Reeve has a list, and comments: "The length of the list should disturb anyone who thinks that Socrates claims to know only that he knows nothing."[51] The problems that lists such as Reeve's mount have grown into a scholarly industry.[52] But one fact remains unchallenged: the more attention Socrates's epistemic inconsistency gets and the more people want to solve it, the stronger the evidence for it becomes. There are many clever solutions and ways of phrasing the matter that makes it seem as if Socrates's ignorance is

reconcilable with his knowledge. But as the literature grows, it becomes less and less reasonable to explain the problem away. This, if any, is a reason to think that Socrates's incoherence is meant to be there.[53] However we want to phrase it, Socrates outlines the limits of human truth and knowledge, and he fails to speak within these boundaries.

Third, besides Socrates's repeated use of arguments from probability and his talk about things he does not know, there is also a further reason to think that he fails to live up to the discursive ideals of the elenctic practice. Despite Socrates's gadflyism and his claim of impudence and shamelessness, he has the unattractive tendency to fall back on established procedure and conservative values.

As has recently been argued by Mark Anderson, it is common to present Socrates as a man of peace. According to Vlastos, Socrates was committed to the claim that a person who has "true moral goodness is incapable of doing intentional injury to others […] so that the idea of a just man injuring anyone, friend or foe, is unthinkable."[54] On this point Smith agrees, and argues that Socrates, in Anderson's words, "repudiated the aggression and violence that were so much a part of his world."[55] This seems to be in line with the *exhorting* function of the elenchus. Socrates endorsed and wanted to defend a moral standard that stood in contrast to the war-loving values of Athens. But even if this might be the case, as it turns out, Socrates is at best ambivalent. As Anderson persuasively argues, Socrates repeatedly exploits his participation in the Athenian wars as a part of the defense of his moral integrity. Famously, around 28e1–3, in an attempt to defend his divine mission, Socrates refers to his military loyalty and says "when the commanders whom you chose to command me stationed me, both at Potidaea and at Amphipolis and at Delium, I remained where they stationed me" (28e1–3). The battle at Potidaea, which aimed to strike down the Potidaean rebellion, was brief but bloody: "one hundred fifty Athenians were killed," and the Potidaeans lost approximately three hundred men.[56] As we know from Plato's *Symposium*, it was during this fight that Socrates rescued Alcibiades. Not only did he save his life, but also his armor (*Symp.* 220e). "From this," Anderson writes, "we can infer that Socrates fought in or very near the front lines [and] if Alcibiades had been wounded and was in mortal danger, the fighting around him must have been severe."[57]

As Socrates draws attention to his fighting in this battle, it seems that he not only wanted to show off his loyalty to Athens but that he also wanted to argue that his divine mission was just as important as it is to kill for your country. In addressing the jury in this way, he does in any case treat the mentioned battles as good and honorable. And even if Socrates may have subscribed to a different point of view in private, there seem to be no reasons to doubt that

his speech of defense appeals to the established values of the Athenian war machine.[58] In this, Anderson concludes, "we see not a revolutionary but a traditionalist."[59]

With this in mind, let me turn to a second example, one that brings us back to the Liars and the Fanatics. While the Liars claim that Socrates lies when he says that he is not a clever speaker, the Fanatics claim that his intentions are honest and that he tells the truth. As it comes down to the details, however, even brilliant Fanatics like Smith and Brickhouse admit that Socrates's speech has many customary traits. They may not want to claim that Socrates lies when he says that he will talk as the words pop into his mind, but they are ready to admit that he says things in a way that allows his speech to come forth in its forensic context: "[T]he fact that the things he says are similar to […] the things said by various other litigants gives us no reason […] to question his sincerity."[60] Accordingly, it is clear that even Fanatics can think that Socrates's words are not totally out of bounds. And even if they may not want to agree with Jon Hesk and Josiah Ober, who both locate Socrates's antirhetoric within a larger rhetorical movement,[61] they do consider Socrates's speech to have a traditional and conventional form.

What do these examples show? Even if they have different moral implications, they have one thing in common. They indicate that Socrates's defense is not free from conservative tendencies. Even if Socrates claims that he is a stranger and that his speech will be as strange, he appeals to traditional values and exploits established procedures. He pleases his Athenian audience by saluting their praise of war, and despite the fact that he claims that he will do otherwise, he speaks in a way that maintains and cements conventional customs and procedures. Insofar as true gadflyism involves persistent, radical and open resistance, Socrates fails.

CONCLUSION

What conclusion can we draw from this? As I hope to have shown, there are reasons to believe that Socrates's failures are intentional. Plato's words are not random, but meant to mark a border. Socrates's failures correspond to the discursive ideals of the elenchus and, as such, they delineate the conditions for what can be accomplished by human language. It is also on these grounds that I want to maintain that both the Liars and the Fanatics got it right. When Socrates says that his words will be different from the manner of speech of the court, he is both lying and telling the truth. He is lying because his words, just like his accusers', are probable, hubristic and conservative. But even as he then fails to tell the truth, there are at least three ways in which certain truths nevertheless are told.

First, as Socrates fails to live up to the *interpretative* standard of the elenctic practice, he fails to maintain the standard of true speech. The oracle cannot lie, but Socrates repeatedly reverts to a mode of expression that is closed to its divine truth. He reverts to probability and flattery. Socrates trusts in divine sources of truth. But his failure to keep his words open to them signals that his attempts to tell the truth are insufficient. This marks a limit to what human words can accomplish. As Socrates is made to represent humanity at its best (23a5–b4), this means that from a human point of view, the language of truth will always be trumped by probability and flattery. If he wants his words to be believed, even the wisest one of us, must say what he thinks his audience will expect. In this sense, human language is weak. It is not resilient enough to resist the lies of public opinion and rumor. And in this light, it seems, human language is inherently deceptive.[62]

Second, Socrates's failure to speak within the boundaries of human knowledge further outlines the scope of what can be accomplished with our words. In his interrogation of the Athenian professionals, Socrates outlines a standard for knowledge and wisdom: knowledge requires (a) that it can be accounted for, (b) that it is coherent and, most importantly, (c) that it does not result in epistemic overreaching. But Socrates fails to maintain this standard. A successful *disproving* application of the Socratic elenchus should have been able to counteract this. But in the *Apology*, Socrates does not pursue that path.[63] Instead he fails. And this is telling. Not even the wisest one can communicate his message without violating the epistemic modesty that proves his wisdom. Why? Here, there seems to be a conflict between Socrates's epistemic standard and what could perhaps be called the temporality of human language. The ideal is to speak only at that moment when you have coherently accounted for all concepts you are to use. But for us humans there is of course no such moment. To reach a point when we can say the truth, we are bound to use notions that we have yet to understand. Our language, it seems, is inherently hubristic.

Third, insofar as Socrates fails to uphold the standard of the *exhorting* function of the elenctic practice we may ask: Is it possible to say anything provocative enough to make people better? Socrates has his doubts, it seems, for why would he otherwise have curbed his provocations and reverted to flattery? Again, this might be possible to understand in terms of language. A successful application of the *exhorting* function of the elenchus would have proven that directness and honesty are the strongest of arguments and powerful discursive forces. But Socrates does not succeed. He says a lot of things that may seem to be at variance with established customs and norms, but he fails to maintain this standard. Why? By making him succeed, Plato could have shown that Socrates was right and Athens wrong. But by making him fail Plato manages to say something much more provocative: words

alone cannot make us better. This provocation, qualified by the context from which it emerges, confirms what Socrates often emphasizes:[64] in a hostile or competitive environment, the warm glow of human wisdom is outshined by the bright lights of victory and success.

NOTES

1. See, for example, Marina McCoy, *Plato on the Rhetoric of Philosophers and Sophists* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 23ff; David Leibowitz, *The Ironic Defense of Socrates* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2010), esp. ch. 2; Josiah Ober, *Political Dissent in Democratic Athens: Intellectual Critics of Popular Rule* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998), 166ff; R. E. Allen, "Irony and Rhetoric in *Plato's Apology*," *Paideia* 5 (1976): 32–42; James Riddell, *The* Apology *of Plato with a Revised Text and English Notes, and a Digest of Platonic Idioms* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1877. Reprint: New York: Arno Press, 1973). Cf. also Steven Nadler, "Probability and Truth in the *Apology*," *Philosophy and Literature* 9, no. 2 (1985); Kenneth Seeskin, "Poverty and Sincerity in the *Apology*: A Reply to Lewis," *Philosophy and Literature* 16, no. 1 (1992); James Coulter, "The Relation of the *Apology of Socrates* to Gorgias' *Defense of Palamedes* and Plato's Critique of Gorgianic Rhetoric," *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 68 (1964).

2. So Riddell, *The* Apology *of Plato*, xxi; John Burnet, ed., *Plato: Euthyphro, Apology of Socrates, Crito* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1924), 67. For discussion, see Thomas Brickhouse and Nicholas D. Smith, *Socrates on Trial* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989), 49; Leibowitz, *The Ironic Defense of Socrates*, esp. 25ff.

3. See Leibowitz, *The Ironic Defense of Socrates*, 14f. Plato explicitly discusses lies in *Euthyphr*. 3d6-9; *Rep*. 414b–c; *Alc. II*. 143e-144d; *Hipp. min*., passim. For discussion of lies in Plato, see Malcolm Schofield, "The Noble Lie," in *The Cambridge Companion to Plato's Republic*, ed. G. R. F. Ferrari (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2007); Malcolm, Schofield, *Plato: Political Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006) and Jon Hesk, *Deception and Democracy in Classical Athens* (West Nyack, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

4. Leibowitz, *The Ironic Defense of Socrates*, 11.

5. Leibowitz, *The Ironic Defense of Socrates*, 12.

6. McCoy, *Plato on the Rhetoric of Philosophers and Sophists*, 23. For lucid discussion of Plato's debts to the forensic tradition, see Hayden Ausland, "Forensic Characteristics of Socratic Argumentation," in *Does Socrates Have a Method? Rethinking the Elenchus in Plato's Dialogues and Beyond*, ed. Gary Alan Scott (University Park, PA: Penn State University Press, 2002).

7. See also C. D. C. Reeve, *Socrates in the* Apology*: An Essay on Plato's* Apology of Socrates (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1989), 7–8, who has a list of similarities.

8. McCoy, *Plato on the Rhetoric of Philosophers and Sophists*, 26.

9. Brickhouse and Smith, *Socrates on Trial*, 49.

10. Brickhouse and Smith, *Socrates on Trial*, 49.

11. Brickhouse and Smith, *Socrates on Trial*, 55. Cf. Reeve, *Socrates in the* Apology, 6.

12. Cf. Leibowitz, *The Ironic Defense of Socrates*, 46.

13. This term is only used three times in Plato, here, in *Rep.* 520c8–9 and in *Laws* 830c.

14. Brickhouse and Smith, *Socrates on Trial*, esp. ch.1; cf. Reeve, *Socrates in the* Apology; Riddell, *The* Apology *of Plato*, xxii.

15. James Colaiaco, *Socrates Against Athens: Philosophy on Trial* (New York: Routledge, 2001); Kazutaka Kondo, "Socrates' Rhetorical Strategy in Plato's *Apology*," *Athens Journal of Humanities & Arts* 1, no. 4 (October, 2014); cf. Reeve, *Socrates in the Apology*, 6n4.

16. Cf. Brickhouse and Smith, *Socrates on Trial*, 52f.

17. There has been some debate regarding who was the actual instigator, and who wrote and presented the case at the court. Here, I follow Brickhouse and Smith, *Socrates on Trial*, 24, 24n75, and 27, in taking it to be Meletus.

18. Josiah Ober, "Socrates and Democratic Athens," in *The Cambridge Companion to Socrates*, ed. Donald R. Morrison (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 141 notes that there was no official definition of impiety, and concludes that "it is not possible to answer the question 'was Socrates guilty or innocent' [. . .] in any straightforward way—other than to assert, tautologically, that after the judgment he was certainly guilty."

19. Translation by W. R. M. Lamb, in *Plato. Lysis, Symposium, Gorgias*, Loeb Classical Library 166 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1925), slightly modified.

20. Paul Woodruff makes a point of the difference between probability understood as the mechanism that guides coin-tossing, and probability understood as the basis for good judgment. In the first case probability is a matter of chance; in the second, of reasonable expectations. According to Woodruff, "*Euboulia* as the Skill Protagoras Taught," in *Protagoras of Abdera, The Man, His Measure*, eds. Johannes M. van Ophuijsen, Marlein van Raalte and Peter Stork (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 188, one of the unsung triumphs of the fifth-century enlightenment was the development of the latter at the expense of the former.

21. Except the first cause, that is. Cf. *Tim*. 28a.

22. Paul Woodruff, "Expert Knowledge in the *Apology* and *Laches:* What a General Needs to Know," *Proceedings of the Boston Area Colloquium in Ancient Philosophy* 3 (1987): 83.

23. This source is supposedly Apollo. For discussion, see Mark L. McPherran, *The Religion of Socrates* (University Park, PA: Penn State University Press, 1996) 111ff and Jacob Howland, *Kierkegaard and Socrates: A Study in Philosophy and Faith* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

24. According to McPherran, *The Religion of Socrates*, 224 this trust, as also developed in the *Rep.* 381e-382c, would go against a traditional understanding of divinity.

25. So McPherran, *The Religion of Socrates*, 114. The reference is *Crit*. 46b4-6: "Not now for the first time, but always, I am the sort of man who is persuaded by nothing except the argument that seems best to me when I reason about the matter." The literature is vast. For references and discussion, see McPherran, *The Religion of*

Socrates, 211n78 and Raphael Woolf, "Socratic Authority," *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* 90, no. 1 (2008):1–38.

26. Arlene Saxonhouse, *Free Speech and Democracy in Ancient Athens* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2006): 107.

27. Hegel quoted from Paul Woodruff, "Socrates and the Irrational," in *Reason and Religion in Socratic Philosophy*, eds. Nicholas D. Smith and Paul Woodruff (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000): 130ff.

28. For example, I. G. Kidd "Socrates," in *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Paul Edwards (New York: Macmillan, 1967): 482. For discussion, see Brickhouse and Smith, *Socrates on Trial*, 89.

29. For example, R. Hackforth, *The Composition of Plato's* Apology (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1933): 101–104.

30. For example, Brickhouse and Smith, *Socrates on Trial* and "The Paradox of Socrates' Ignorance in the *Apology,*" *History of Philosophy Quarterly* 1, no. 2 (1984): esp. 128.

31. Howland, *Kierkegaard and Socrates*, 65f. Cf. McPherran, *The Religion of Socrates*, for example, 185 and 220ff, who has a similar solution.

32. Fr. 93. Quoted from Howland, *Kierkegaard and Socrates*, 62.

33. Christopher Long, *Aristotle on the Nature of Truth* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 78. According to McPherran, *The Religion of Socrates*, 175n1, interpretation of signs (*sêmeion*) were not restricted to articulated human voices. A sign could be anything with an extra-rational meaning, such as thunder. In Xenophon's *Apology* (12.5) Socrates does not doubt that thunder has a voice.

34. *De Anima*, 420b32–421a1.

35. Woodruff, "Expert Knowledge in the *Apology* and *Laches*," 84.

36. *Pace* Brickhouse and Smith, *Socrates on Trial*, 96. For discussion, see Francisco Gonzalez, "Caring and Conversing about Virtue Every Day: Human Piety and Goodness in Plato's Apology," in *Reexamining Socrates in the Apology*, eds. Patricia Fagan and John Russon (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2009): 125ff.

37. Woodruff, "Expert Knowledge in the *Apology* and *Laches*," 84.

38. Woodruff, "Expert Knowledge in the *Apology* and *Laches*," 84.

39. According to McPherran, *The Religion of Socrates*, 177n6, referring to Jean-Pierre Vernant, *Mortals and Immortals* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991), 311, Socrates was not the first to use reason to understand the extra-rational: In a story recounted by Herodotus (7.140–145), McPherran explains, "Themistocles was able to convince the Athenian Assembly by means of secular deliberation that the Pythia's ambiguous reference to 'wooden walls' was a reference not to a previously existing thorn-hedge, but to a naval fleet."

40. Woodruff, "Expert Knowledge in the *Apology* and *Laches*, 85. This would also be in line with the inscriptions at the location of the oracle in Delphi. For discussion, see McPherran, *The Religion of Socrates*, 217 and n100.

41. Woodruff, "Expert Knowledge in the *Apology* and *Laches*," 89.

42. Although it is only implicit in the *Apology*, examination on the basis of the principle of the priority of definition is one of the most powerful of such strategies. In the light of the *Laches*, for example, it may also seem reasonable to suspect that Socrates's examination of the politicians, mentioned in the *Apology*, uses this approach.

43. "So to speak" translates *"hôs epos epei."* Cf. Sandra Peterson, *Socrates and Philosophy in the Dialogues of Plato* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 42n56.

44. Woodruff, "Expert Knowledge in the *Apology* and *Laches*" 83.

45. McCoy, *Plato on the Rhetoric of Philosophers and Sophists*, 33.

46. So also Gonzalez, "Caring and Conversing about Virtue Every Day: Human Piety and Goodness in Plato's *Apology*," 126ff.

47. Cf. Gregory Vlastos, *Socratic Studies* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1994) 65.

48. Nadler, "Probability and Truth in the *Apology*," 199ff.

49. In referring to Coulter, "The Relation of the *Apology of Socrates* to Gorgias' Defense of Palamedes and Plato's Critique of Gorgianic Rhetoric," 291, Thomas Lewis, "Parody and the Argument from Probability in the *Apology,*" *Philosophy and Literature* 14, no. 2 (1990) adds 31c to the list. Here, Socrates may seem to call attention to his poverty to show that it is improbable that he could have been guilty of teaching for money. Seeskin, "Poverty and Sincerity in the *Apology*: A Reply to Lewis," 129ff disagrees.

50. Brickhouse and Smith, *Socrates on Trial*, 130 argue that the idea that one should obey one's superiors is common sense and cannot therefore be counted on as big or valuable knowledge. Peterson, *Socrates and Philosophy*, 43f suggests that Socrates's claim of obedience is not big knowledge because it is "entirely obvious" or "an analytic" truth and does not really say anything. But if it is not big, it is small, and Socrates claims he knows nothing small either (cf. 21b4–5).

51. Reeve, *Socrates in the* Apology, 55.

52. For a fairly recent and good account, see Peterson, *Socrates and Philosophy*. See also Hugh Benson, *Socratic Wisdom: The Model of Knowledge in Plato's Early Dialogues* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000). Woodruff, "Expert Knowledge in the *Apology* and *Laches*," 89, and Brickhouse and Smith, *Socrates on Trial*, offer lucid discussion.

53. So Vlastos, *Socratic Studies*, 65.

54. Gregory Vlastos, *Socrates, Ironist and Moral Philosopher* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991): 196–197. Quoted from Mark Anderson, "Socrates as Hoplite," *Ancient Philosophy* 25, no. 2 (2005): 275.

55. Anderson, "Socrates as Hoplite," 276.

56. Anderson, "Socrates as Hoplite," 278.

57. Anderson, "Socrates as Hoplite," 279.

58. So also McPherran, *The Religion of Socrates*, 116ff.

59. Anderson, "Socrates as Hoplite," 287.

60. Brickhouse and Smith, *Socrates on Trial*, 53.

61. Hesk, *Deception and Democracy in Classical Athens*, 202–41; Ober, *Political Dissent.*

62. Cf. *Crat*. 408e5–d5.

63. In the *Laches*, however, Socrates does. Cf. Woodruff, "Expert Knowledge in the *Apology* and *Laches*," 86.

64. For example, *Men*. 75d; *Prot*. 337a–b; *Gorg*. 458a–e.

Chapter 9

Self-Images of Socrates

Respect for Tradition and Critical Examination in Plato's Apology

Elena Irrera

One of the most noticeable aspects of Plato's dramatization of Socrates in the *Apology* is that many themes of philosophical relevance emerge by way of a series of self-images that Socrates crafts throughout the defense speech he delivers at the trial held against him in 399 BCE. Coming to grips with such images may turn out to be a particularly baffling experience for the Platonic reader, especially when one attempts to draw a coherent picture of Socrates's personality and conduct at the trial in the light of the various forms of self-representation proposed in the text. In fact, one might entertain the impression that different voices and attitudinal approaches are unleashed from one and the same character, and also that these might not provide an internally consistent portrait of his own professed values, abilities, and epistemological limitations.

Tensions between different self-images of the Platonic Socrates may arise, for instance, in regard to his professed unfamiliarity with forensic language and lack of mastery concerning rhetorical persuasion (see *Apology* 17a1–18a6); for such assertions seem to heavily collide not only with his use of a vast array of rhetorical devices[1], but also with a good knowledge of the various stages through which a defense speech ought conventionally to be structured.

A second kind of tension might refer to the coexistence of two different (and, at face value, hardly reconcilable) inclinations on Socrates's part. On the one hand, he appears keen to reveal his own limits in matters of knowledge. Evidence of this attitude can be traced in *Apology* 20e1–3, where Socrates explicitly denies possession of wisdom, or in 22c9–e5 and 20c1–3, where he professes lack of specific expertises respectively in the field of productive crafts and in matters of human and political virtue. Also, in 19c8–e1 he claims that he does not possess any supposed ability to educate human beings

toward the virtues of man and the citizen. On the other hand, throughout his defense speech Socrates crafts a rich series of images of himself which, at least *prima facie*, point to an awareness of superiority in wisdom as well as in the performance of good deeds. Such images, as it has been suggested, seem to betray a boastful, self-aggrandizing attitude on his part.[2] For instance, at *Apology* 21d1–7 he reaches the conclusion that he is the wisest among the fellows he examined (politicians, poets and artisans), whereas at 30a5–7, c2, and 30d6–31a9 he presents himself as a benefactor for the Athenian citizens. To confirm the idea of a boastful Socrates, in 28b2–30a5 he seems to compare his own condition to the one experienced by the Homeric hero Achilles, and at 31a10–b5 he goes so far as to identify himself as a gift from god. Such images might be taken as appropriate exemplifications of an attitude which, as Xenophon reports in his *Apology of Socrates*, many authors who have written on Socrates's defense have identified as *megalêgoria* (Xenophon, *Apology* 1, 3–4)[3]; this attitude, besides referring to a proud manner of speech, betrays an excessive confidence in one's own abilities.

A third tension is deeply related to the one illustrated above (i.e., the one between a boastful and a "humble" Socrates), and concerns a possible clash between Socratic self-images that, at least *prima facie*, convey the idea of a "respectful" Socrates and others that, by contrast, present him as a shameless and irreverent person. Examples of a respectful attitude on Socrates's part can be found at *Apology* 21b5–6 and 23, where he seems to show reverence toward the god of the Delphic oracle by claiming that the oracle itself cannot speak falsely. In a similar vein, at *Apology* 31d6–e1 he offers a display of his respect not only for his own life and well-being, but also for the lives and well-being of others by claiming that he has run away from political activity on the grounds that, if he had tried long ago to take part in politics, he should long ago have been dead and would have done no service either to himself or to his fellow Athenians.

On the other hand, this attitude could be seen as deeply insulting to the Athenian city and its politicians, since Socrates is suggesting that anyone who is just will get killed if they enter into politics, thus implying that any politician who is alive is corrupt. Other passages of the dialogue, like the one above, suggest that the Socrates of the *Apology*, unlike the one represented in other Platonic dialogues,[4] behaves like a shameless, irreverent person. For instance, at *Apology* 17b8–d3 he appears to show a lack of respect toward forensic procedures and those who engage in them by refusing to use a suitable communicative style. Also, at *Apology* 21b8–c7 he seems to fall short of respect for the oracle by attempting to disclaim[5] the veracity of the oracular response offered by the Delphic god. He even seems to dishonor the value of life itself, as emerges from *Apology* 28b3–6, by pursuing a conduct which, at least in the way in which it is assessed by the judges, exposes him to the

risk of receiving a death penalty (i.e., the penalty which will eventually be inflicted on him). This chapter arises from the need to answer the following working questions:

1. Are the self-images provided by Socrates in Plato's *Apology* really at odds with each other? If not, what is the theoretical framework in the light of which the two clusters of images (i.e., the apparently "self-aggrandizing" and the "self-demeaning" ones) appear as different expressions of a consistent line of self-representation?
2. Why should Socrates present before his addressees (i.e., a number of jurors and some Athenian fellow-citizens who attended the trial merely as spectators) images of himself that risk to appear inconsistent with each other? Further, why should he perform an act of self-sabotage and supply representations of himself which, instead of dismantling negative prejudices against him, inevitably end up fuelling them? Finally, why should Plato give his Socrates the licence to offer a negative view of himself?

To provide an answer to the questions at stake, I shall refer to the goals of Plato as a philosophical writer. By assuming that, throughout his written dialogues, Plato seeks to enable his readers to engage in a true dialogical experience with his texts,[6] I will suggest that the author invites the readers of his *Apology* virtually to join the trial and express in full autonomy a rationally informed verdict.[7] As I will propose, far from willingly offering an inconsistent rendition of Socrates's character and values, Plato's use of contrasting self-images of Socrates in the *Apology* is specifically designed to give his readers the opportunity to read specific claims as ambivalent, and to interpret them in such a way that these do not appear incompatible with other images offered in the text. If this hypothesis is plausible, what Socrates's accusers and most members of the jury regard as inappropriate outbursts of boastfulness and shamelessness on his part might rather turn out to be expressions of the relevance of critical examination in the lives of human beings.

In this chapter I will focus on Socrates's description of his confrontation with the god of the Delphic oracle at *Apology* 20e5 ff. In the first place, I will claim that Socrates's profession of knowledge ought not to be interpreted as the expression of a self-aggrandizing attitude, but as the outcome of a well-conducted path of critical examination of himself and his interlocutors. Such an examination, as we will see, makes use of supposedly epistemic strategies like the *elenchos*,[8] and is premised on the idea that the search for the truth ought to win over a sense of shame toward authoritative subjects (i.e., a feeling which might prevent the investigator from advancing in his search). In the same vein, with regard to the contradiction between respect and lack of respect for the oracle, I shall propose that the contradiction at stake is just

apparent and that the image that Socrates means to convey of himself is one of a person who pursues a distinctive kind of reverential respect for the oracle: one that is constantly informed by the use of human rational faculties and inspired by the need to advance in the search for truth and justice.

A REPLY TO THE OPPONENTS' CHARGES. SOCRATES'S APPARENT BOASTFULNESS

Plato's *Apology of Socrates* can be confidently situated within a group of ancient Greek writings[9] committed to a literary characterization of Socrates[10] against the backdrop of the trial held against him in 399 BCE on the initiative of three Athenian citizens: Meletus, Anytus, and Lycon. As Socrates declares in the opening lines of his speech, his opponents have previously stressed the idea that he is extraordinarily clever at speaking by alerting both the jurors and the Athenian citizens who attended the trial to the risk of being deceived by him (17a6–b1). Being well aware of the possible implications of such a charge, he immediately attempts to disclaim it, so holding on to a practice—that is, the denial of cleverness in speaking (*deinos legein*)—that appears to be well-entrenched in traditional oratory.[11]

Still, what Socrates means to deny is not the idea that he has *any* expertise in the art of speech. It is not by chance that, after professing an utter lack of cleverness in speaking, he proposes a way of saving the view endorsed by his accusers regarding his supposed skill: "unless after all my opponents give the title of 'clever speaker' to one who tells the truth (*talêthê*)" (17b4–5).

Although some scholars have stressed that Socrates might simply be parodying forensic rhetoric here,[12] it is possible that, by pursuing the possibility of a different conception of "clever speaking," he is seriously proposing a view of rhetoric alternative to the traditional one: one in which the attention to the formal order of words and sentences in a speech is minimized in favor of the urge to communicate the truth. As Socrates explains in 17b5–6, only in that case would he agree to be a *rhêtôr*.

It might be wondered whether Socrates's view of himself as a clever speaker betrays a display of boasftulness on his part. In my opinion, it would not seem so. For the Platonic Socrates, the virtue of the good speaker consists neither in a supposed capacity to persuade people irrespectively of the nature of the conveyed message nor in the ability to defend oneself by exposing sheer facts concerning one's own life and activities.[13] Rather, excellent speaking presupposes the capacity to supply one's audience with justifying reasons that might prove functional to an understanding of the truth of what one says. In Socrates's own case, the reasons supplied involve an examination of various kinds of charges that have been addressed to him throughout his life, that

is, charges that go over and above the ones formalized in the indictment sworn by Meletus.[14] According to the formal charges, Socrates allegedly disbelieved in the gods of the city, introduced new divinities, and was guilty of corrupting the young (24b8–c2). According to the older charges, levelled by unspecified accusers,[15] Socrates appears as " a wise man and investigator of things both above and below the earth, and one who made the weaker argument the stronger" (18b6–c1). The latter accusations will subsequently be formalized into the following indictment: Socrates is an offender and a meddler, in studying things below the earth and in the sky, and making the weaker argument into the stronger and in instructing other people in these same things (19b3–c2).

Socrates does not confine himself to illustrating the bulk of such charges, but offers his addressees the opportunity to come to grips with possible conceptual relations between them. For the "old charges" are illustrated and refuted with a view not only to dismantling entrenched prejudices, but also to help the audience (as well as Plato's readers) to understand some of the mistaken assumptions from which the "new" charges get shaped.[16]

Notably, the characterization that Socrates provides of himself is one which expressly rejects the image of a over-humanly wise person.[17] In *Apology* 20d ff. he provides a description of himself as a person in possession of a distinctively human wisdom (see "*anthrôpinê sophia*" at *Apology* 20d8). The self-representation at stake is outlined against the backdrop of a well-known anecdote (one reported not only in Plato, but also in Xenophon's *Apology*[18]) in which Socrates figures as the addressee of a message delivered by the Oracle at Delphi. The abovementioned oracle, a well-known religious[19] institution across the Greek world and beyond, declares through the Pythia (the priestess of the God of the Oracle, i.e., Apollo[20]) that no one is superior to Socrates in wisdom.[21]

The idea of a "humanly wise" Socrates represents in the last analysis a strategy that Socrates himself adopts for successfully dismantling a cluster of accusations that have been forwarded against him. For activities like investigating the things beneath the earth and in the heavens, teaching, and persuading the young on matters concerning the virtue of man and the citizen convey an ideal of wisdom which, if successfully performed, may prove not only outstanding, but also extremely destabilizing for the city and its professed traditional values.[22]

It is worth noting that some of the details about Socrates's life and activities that emerge from the old charges enable the audience at the trial to sketch out the image of a man equipped with some sort of superior wisdom, that is, one the public recognition of which might produce further accusations. The charge of investigating under the earth and the heavens, if confirmed, would expose Socrates to the risk of being accused of atheism, just as it happened to the philosopher Anaxagoras[23] and all those "new scientists" who, by affecting

in their turn other people, have caused the latter to assert that the sun, the moon, and the other stars are simply earth and stone.[24] As for the charge of possessing the art of persuasion (an attack that, as it has been stressed by McPherran, is generally directed against naturalistic thinkers[25]), such an art might be disengaged not only from knowledge and truth, but also from a defense of the religious, political, and cultural values traditionally championed by the *polis*. This is why those who are in possession of persuasive skills risk corrupting the young and undermining the authoritativeness of the same principles on which the identity and stability of the city itself hinges.

As a response to the first accusation, the Platonic Socrates declares his contempt for such studies by denying the pursuit of naturalistic investigations (*Apol.* 19c3–d8), although his denial is not necessarily incompatible with the possibility that he shows respect for such studies.[26] In a similar fashion, while replying to the second accusation, he denies possessing human virtue and any skill at educating others in this matter. It is worth noting, however, that despite his ironical address to Gorgias, Prodicus and Hippias, whom he describes as persons "able to educate people," Socrates does not discredit the idea that education is a fine thing; rather, he claims that it would be fine to possess a *technê* for making other people fine and good. Further, while declaring that he has no knowledge (20c5–7) of the virtue of the man and the citizen, he seems to establish a conceptual link between this kind of knowledge and a sense of pride and respect for himself. For, as he claims with reference to the supposed science of Evenus from Parus:

> I congratulated Evenus if he truly possessed this skill, and teaches it so reasonably. I at least for my part would actually be priding myself (*autos ekallunomên*) and putting on airs if I knew these things; but indeed I don't know them, Athenians. (20b9–c4)[27]

Socrates seems to imply that a reaction of pride would be a legitimate response to (and, as we might suppose, an appropriate attitudinal correlate of) one's awareness of one's own deserts and talents.[28] By resorting to a widely used *topos* in forensic oratory, that is, a plea to avoid noise (*thorubos*) among the audience before he starts to speak,[29] he foresees a negative response from the addressees of his speech. In so doing, he seems to realize that the statements he is going to issue in the remainder of his speech with reference to his professed wisdom might appear to be out of place; this is why a preliminary observation about the legitimacy of some expressions of self-pride might be useful.

Viewing the issue in the light of Plato's aims and argumentative strategies, the possibility of a justified pride can be read as a methodological indication that Plato himself makes available to his readers, to the effect of directing

them to a correct understanding of the argument that Socrates is about to undertake. If we assume that Socrates's own profession of wisdom is crafted by Plato to the effect of making it amenable to different readings, we might hypothesize that what some may interpret as an arrogant display of Socrates's own superiority, if read from another perspective, conceals a radically different message. As I will try to show in the next section of this chapter with reference to the episode of the Delphic oracle and the idea that Socrates possesses a distinctively human wisdom, Socrates does not wish to present himself as the one and the only person who has proved able to achieve it. If this is the case, to state (as the Pythia does on behalf of the Delphic god) that no one is wiser than Socrates would not be tantamount to claiming that no other human being is (or can be) equal to him in wisdom. Rather, *any* person who, like Socrates, follows specific principles of conduct in his or her search for truth and justice, can come to achieve human wisdom and, as a consequence, distinguish himself or herself as superior to those who erroneously cultivate an image of themselves as wise people (either absolutely or with reference to a specific science/craft).

The working hypothesis sketched above finds support in the final section of the narrative concerning the oracle. For at *Apology* 22e6–c1 the Platonic Socrates concludes that what the god means to convey by way of the oracular pronouncement is the idea that only the god is truly wise, and that human wisdom has little or even no value at all compared to him. That Socrates is not the real focus of the god's message emerges in the following claim:

> He [i.e. the Delphic god] seems, moreover, to be talking about this Socrates, and to be using my name in addition, by way of constituting me an example, as if he were to say: "That one of you, mortal men, is wisest who, just like Socrates, has realised that in truth he is worth nothing in respect of wisdom." (23b2–b4)

Just as the Delphic oracle, which, being generally regarded as the "navel" of the world, became a religious reference point not only for the Athenians, but also for the inhabitants of other Greek *poleis* and for people coming from all over the Mediterranean and beyond,[30] human wisdom is an ideal that is by no means a sheer prerogative of Socrates, nor of his Athenian fellows. What is more, Socrates's interpretation of the oracular pronouncement (i.e., an interpretation which, as we shall see, proceeds alongside an examination of specific types of individuals, opinions and attitudes), points to the idea that wisdom can be achieved irrespectively of the context of provenance. That in Socrates's view even non-Greek persons can be or seek to become like him, appears evident from the following passage, in which Socrates, having interpreted the message of the oracle, declares that he will not stop investigating if there are other wise men, even outside the *polis*: "These, then,

as I go about, are the inquiries and explorations I am still even now, as I go around, putting in accordance with the god to any (*an tina*) fellow-townsman or foreigner (*xenôn*) that I think wise" (23b4–6). The image of himself that Socrates wishes to convey by means of the anecdote of the oracle appears to be paradigmatic of a pattern of wisdom with which (as we will see) any person with awareness of one's own abilities and limits as a human being can identify himself or herself.

Throughout his defense, the Platonic Socrates provides significant clues to the effect that the boastfulness which some may attach to him becomes just apparent. One such clue is represented by his engagement with the oracle's response without having consulted it *in propria persona*. The initiative of interrogating the oracle is rather taken by his friend Chaerephon, who, being described as an extremely impetuous man, was so bold to ask if there were anyone wiser than Socrates. As it seems, Socrates has well-grounded reasons to insist on the fact that Chaerephon was the one responsible for the oracle's consultation. Had Socrates posed that question himself, he would probably have been regarded by his fellow-citizens not only as a bold person (as Chaerephon himself appears to Socrates's eyes), but also as a self-important one, that is, a person eager to seek confirmation of his supposed personal superiority in wisdom over other people.

Evidence of Socrates's fear of being seen as a self-aggrandizing person can be found at *Apol.* 20e3–5, where he addresses his fellow Athenians by claiming; "Now please, [Athenians,] don't barrack me, even if I strike you as boasting (*kai moi, hô andres Athênaioi, mê thorubêsête, mêd'ean doxô ti humin mega legein*)." As he explains, the things he is about to say do not come from him, but from the Delphic god, who addresses him as the repository of some kind of wisdom. Socrates is well aware that his own assent to the oracular message might be viewed as conveying an inappropriate sense of self-pride. This is why he appears seriously keen to shift the attention of his audience to the meaning of the divine revelation and, in particular, to the way in which he proceeds to test its validity.

SOCRATES'S HUMAN WISDOM: CRITICAL EXAMINATION, SHAME, AND RESPECT FOR TRUTH

After hearing the content of the divine utterance, Socrates ventures himself into a search for evidence that, once identified and rationally re-elaborated, will help him to ratify the validity of the oracular response in a critical fashion. His reluctance to accept a dogmatically revealed truth runs parallel to his inclination to trace possible confirmations of his suspicions in human experience and in one's dialogical interaction with other people. The message

delivered by the god through the priestess brings Socrates to conduct a critical examination of the persons whom people generally regard as most authoritative in matters of knowledge, and to examine himself by way of a comparison with the examined subjects. Although Socrates does not illustrate in detail the epistemic devices deployed in the course of his inquiry, it seems that the examination (*zêtêsis*; cf. 21b8) he pursues is grounded in the practice of *dialegestshai* (21c5), a method of discussion with selected interlocutors in which Socrates himself finds an opportunity to look through their opinions and lifestyles[31] with a view to sifting out and amending the incorrect views. While confronting himself with the first interlocutor, a politician, Socrates declares that he was "struck by him as being thought to be wise by many other people and especially by himself, but not as being wise" (21d6–8).

The discrepancy perceived by Socrates between the politician's appearance of wisdom and his effective lack of wisdom compels the former to address the latter so as to show him that "though he thought he was wise, he wasn't" (21c8–d1).

As the following lines of Socrates's speech appear to suggest, his attempt at having the politician come to grips with the inconsistency of his view of himself as a wise man does not prove successful. Also, it is not clear whether the politician has displayed an initial inclination to collaborate with Socrates in a joint investigation of truth, and equally uncertain is the way in which Socrates has conducted his dialogical practice. However, it is highly plausible to suppose that Socrates has made use of his well-known *elenchos*, a procedure of philosophical cross-examination which, being generally adopted by Socrates in the course of his dialogical engagement with selected persons, aims to test the knowledge, wisdom or expertise of the individuals who have some claim to it.[32] It seems that such a procedure, as Socrates conceives of it, does not aim by itself to inflict shame on the interlocutor. For the ultimate goal of the *elenchos* is to promote a joint advancement in the direction of truth, and this requires a refutation of the validity of those opinions which prove themselves inconsistent with beliefs regarded as unquestionably correct.[33]

It is worth noting that Socrates's practice of examination of others and the search for his own epistemic limits and possibilities are inextricably intertwined.[34] For, as he will conclude out of his examination of the politician,

> but I thought to myself as I went off that I was wiser than this person at least: probably indeed neither of us knew anything fine and good, but he thought he knew something he didn't know, whereas I, just as I didn't know, didn't think I knew. I *seemed* likely therefore to be wiser than him by virtue of a small thing, this very point, that what I didn't know I didn't think I knew either (*hoti ha mê oida oude oiomai eidenai*). (21d2–8)

Rather than conveying an idea of boastfulness, Socrates's profession of wisdom seems to point to the idea that awareness of one's own ignorance is, in a way, a constitutive ingredient of human wisdom.

A second requirement of knowledge and wisdom (one which Socrates himself denies to possess) emerges out of his encounter with the poets. Despite their good fame as wise persons, the poets seem to lack an understanding of the reasons of what they say. In fact, the truths they reveal generally spring from some sort of natural gift (22b9–c1) and are uttered under divine inspiration, just like those professed by the prophets and the interpreters of oracles; for the latter, although saying many fine things, do not know anything of what they say (22c1–2). In a similar way, the poets' capacity to utter many fine words is not sufficient to make them wise. What is more, their ability to produce poems causes them to illegitimately claim that they are the wisest of men in other subjects too. It is in this respect that, once again, Socrates gives a demonstration of superiority by recognizing his own lack of wisdom.

On a different note, it is worth stressing that, while expounding the view that the poets are not wise, Socrates openly exhibits a feeling of shame: "I blush (*aischunomai*), therefore, to tell you, gentlemen, the truth (*talêthê*) of the matter"(22b5–6). Such a declaration might be viewed as a case of "simple irony"[35] on Socrates's part, given that the feeling of uneasiness that he tries to convey by words does not seem to affect in any way his inclination to address cricitism against the poets. On closer inspection, however, it might be hypothesized that Socrates's feeling of shame is a "real" one. If this is true, we should try to understand what kind of shame it is he expresses. For shame seems to play a variety of active roles, in achieving as well as in communicating a given truth.

In Plato's dialogues, the Greek word *aischunê*, the semantic spectrum of which incorporates feelings of shame and a sense of one's violated honor, appears deeply intertwined to the concept of *aidôs*. The latter word, being generally translated as "shame" or "reverence," refers to the sense of one's own decency[36] which specific situations and activities can put at risk. In Plato's *Euthyphro*, for instance, Socrates describes *aidôs* as a specific form of fear, that is, the fear of achieving a reputation for wickedness (*doxan ponêrias*); as he claims, this is the fear experienced by everyone who has a feeling of *aidôs* and *aischunê* with respect to a specific action (see *Euthyphro* 12b8–c1 and, in particular, the phrase "*hostis aidoumenos ti pragma kai aischunomenos."*[37])

Shame might direct individual agency not only by encouraging people to behave in accordance with the rules established in their community[38] and/or the ethical principles endorsed by reputable persons, but also by inhibiting paths of agency that might not be well received by a given audience.[39] If preserving one's sense of shame can, on some occasions, help in avoiding

unjust actions (i.e., actions that might have negative consequences for oneself and the life of one's own community), there are instead cases in which shame represents an obstacle for human advancement toward truth and goodness. As the Platonic Socrates declares both in the *Laches* (201b3–4) and in the *Charmides* (161a2–3) by appealing to a Homeric quote (*Odyssey* XVII 347), "shame is not a good comrade in any circumstance" (*aidô kechrêmenôi andri pareinai*).

In the section of the *Apology* under scrutiny, Socrates's sense of shame does not prevent him from revealing what he has come to understand through his examination of the poets. However, his decision to overcome his shame seems to be nourished by contrasting tendencies: on the one hand, a sense of discomfort at the prospect of exhibiting a lack of respect for the good fame traditionally enjoyed by the poets among his fellow Athenians; on the other, the awareness that this reputation does not reflect, and is in this sense not respectful of, the truth, and a related desire to challenge the established view. This sort of attitude seems to exemplify a conceptual category that Christina H. Tarnopolsky has called "respectful shame." The shame at stake (which Tarnopolsky attributes to Socrates, especially in Plato's *Gorgias*) incorporates a feeling of respect which, nevertheless, remains open to the possibility of undertaking untraditional paths of investigation and agency in the name of the need for truth.[40]

The conclusions which Socrates cannot avoid to declare in the name of his respect for truth, then, are the following: (1) the mastery displayed by many poets is not a true *epistêmê*; (2) their capacity does not cover every field of science. The same accusation he addresses against the craftsmen. Despite being credited with possession of a real form of knowledge (i.e., a *technê*), these cannot be rightly said to be wise in an absolute sense, not only because they have just a sectorial competence, but also for their mistaken assumption that each of them is very wise (*sophôtatos*) in other—and the most important—matters too (22d6–8).

Socrates's achieved awareness of the ignorance of the examined persons, alongside his view of himself as a man who lacks wisdom, supplies him with good evidence to hypothesize that the oracle has issued the truth. His avowed possession of a "human wisdom" can coexist with the idea that there is a wisdom he denies to possess, that is, a divine one. For it is precisely in relation to the god's wisdom that Socrates's own wisdom is worth little or nothing (23a6–7), and the one he possesses does not enable him to know something other than the sheer fact that he does not have knowledge.

Socrates does not make it clear what makes the wisdom of the god superior to the human one.[41] However, as it might be inferred from his examination of the people generally regarded to be wise, it seems that the wisdom that human beings lack is an absolute one, that is, one that encompasses every sphere

of knowledge. By denying such knowledge, Socrates shows that he is not boastfully exhibiting a supposed possession of superiority in wisdom, but he simply means to put into a correct light the superior wisdom of the god. What is even more important is the idea that the response issued by the god of the oracle does not offer an encomiastic representation of Socrates, but presents him merely as an exemplificative case of a human being who interrogates himself on his own epistemic limits and possibilities.

CONCLUSION: DOES SOCRATES RESPECT THE GOD OF THE ORACLE?

As we have already seen, Socrates's dialogical interaction with persons who are generally regarded as wise finds its sense within his attempt to investigate the meaning of the oracular pronouncement. As Socrates admits at *Apol.* 21b3–6, the divine utterance is not immediately reconcilable with his conviction that he is not wise at all, and this is a source of amazement for him: "Now when I heard the story my thoughts ran like this: 'What on earth is the god saying, and what on earth lies behind his riddle? In nothing, great or small, do I know that I am wise. What on earth, then, is he saying when he claims that I am the wisest?'"

As the following line of the passage reveals (21b6), despite his initial reaction of amazement, Socrates refuses to question the validity of the divine message and exhibits respect for the god of the oracle: He can't be speaking falsely; that's not permissible for him. Compatible to the belief expressed above, in 21e3–4 he states that it seemed necessary to him to consider the god's matter of the highest importance,[42] and in 22a8 he sets up to explain his wanderings as aiming to find the oracle unrefuted (*anelenktos*).

This given, it might appear surprising that, on more than one occasion, Socrates seems to express the willingness to refute the oracle. In the first place, at *Apology* 21b9–c2 he recalls the attempts he made to question the validity of the oracular message and, with reference to the politician he chooses to examine, he says: "I went to see one of those who appear to be wise, on the grounds that there, if indeed anywhere, I should refute (*elenchein*) the prophecy and show the Oracle, 'This man here is wiser than me, but you said I was.'"

In the abovementioned passage, the verb *elenchein* does not refer to a simple inquiry into the meaning of the oracular utterance, that is, one the outcomes of which are still unpredictable. The verb at issue rather evokes Socrates's intention to prove that the oracle is wrong, and that there are people wiser than him. Further, uncertainties about the reliability of the oracle emerge in *Apology* 23b4–7, where Socrates claims that his examination of the

oracle's response does not end after his conversation with the handcraftsmen, but it is still in progress:

> These, then, as I go about, are the inquiries and explorations *I am still even now*, as I go around, putting in accordance with the god (*kata ton theon*) to any fellow-townsman or foreigner that I think wise. And when he does not strike me thus, I come to the god's aid and demonstrate that he is not wise.

Should we infer that Socrates is contradicting himself, or even that he provides an image of himself as an inconsistent person, that is, one torn between his respect for the god and the inclination to challenge him? I believe that Plato offers his readers the possibility to avoid such a conclusion, and that he does so by providing the evidence needed to reconstruct a conceptual framework in the light of which Socrates's respect for the oracular institution does not turn out to be incompatible with his pursuit of a free critical examination. In the case at issue, a divine declaration, although unable to produce knowledge by itself, seems even to offer a decisive contribution to the initiation of a path of philosophical examination of both oneself and others.

The nature of the contribution at issue has been widely interpreted by scholars. In fact, the god speaking through the oracle is only one of many extra-rational subjects which Socrates takes into account throughout his philosophical undertakings. The most well-known of these is the so-called Socratic *daimonion,*[43] that is, an internal, private admonitory sign (*sêmeion*)[44] and voice (*phônê*)[45] which—without prior notice—warns Socrates not to pursue a given course of action (see *Apology* 31d3–4; cf. *Phaedrus* 242b8–c3; *Theages* 128d4–6). Also, many god-given messages are found in human experiences like dreams and divinations.[46] With regard to the abovementioned extra-rational factors, Gregory Vlastos maintains that they do not act as proper sources of knowledge or as channels of information, but only as *occasions* for more properly rational tasks like the elenctic examinations.[47] Mark L. McPherran, instead, credits extra-rational subjects with a genuine epistemological role in Socratic thought, regarding them as sources which, rather than being apart from reason, cooperate with it in the construction of specific paths of (moral) knowledge.[48]

In agreement with McPherran, I believe that the revelation of the Delphic oracle is to be accepted as an authentic source of knowledge, and also that the respect that Socrates owes to the god is not purely reverential, but is one informed by a rational recognition of his amenability to critical examination.[49] Viewed in this light, then, Socrates's attempt to refute the oracular pronouncement is not to be understood as evidence of the god's unreliability. To the contrary, the idea of a refutable god would confirm the idea that he is credited with the authority of a subject involved in a genuine philosophical

examination. The god's credibility, in other words, would be enforced, and not weakened, by the possibility of issuing statements amenable to refutation. In this respect, Socrates would seem to follow a principle which, in the modern age, will be elucidated by Karl Popper: "Every genuine test of a theory is an attempt to falsify it, or to refute it. *Testability* is falsifiability."[50]

Further evidence of Socrates's inclination to take the god and his message in a non-dogmatic way comes from the already mentioned 22e1–5. Here Socrates, after examining the craftsmen, states that he asked himself a question on the oracle's behalf, namely whether he would accept his being just the way he is, that is, in no respect wise in the way in which the craftsmen are, nor ignorant with their ignorance. As he claims: "The answer I gave myself and the oracle was that I was better off just the way I am." Through that statement, Socrates does not interpret the Delphic oracle in a conventional sense, that is, as a mere source of revelatory responses. For by formulating questions on his behalf and in responding to it, Socrates attaches to the oracle the power to enter into a philosophical conversation and, as it is likely, even the authority to propose an answer.

To conclude, the sort of respect that Socrates shows for the god of the oracle is not only one which is not incompatible with his philosophical activity, but also a form of devotion that gets progressively intensified throughout the pursuit of his critical examinations. Respect for traditional institutions as such, as well as respect for the values embedded in one's culture, is not a duty to observe with no exception, especially when such forms of respect enter into conflict with the requirements and the methods of philosophical activity. We have already seen, for instance, that Socrates does not hesitate to reveal the truth about the poets, even at the cost of appearing disrespectful of the cultural values endorsed and praised by his fellow Athenians. In a similar fashion, he would probably disclaim the authority of the god, if the god himself issued orders that forbade the free exercise of one's search for truth. After all, the source of knowledge which in the ultimate analysis he never disclaims is the *logos*. His unceasing adhesion to reason emerges for instance in the *Crito*, where he states that: "not now for the first time, but always, I [Socrates] am the sort of man who is persuaded by nothing in me except the reason (*tôi logôi*) that appears to me the best when I reason (*logizomenôi*) about the matter" (*Crito* 46b4–6; cf. 48d8–e5).[51] The passage at issue underscores a potential conflict between the authority of the *logos* and the possible influence that public opinion can exert in the individual decisional process. Neither in the *Crito* nor in the *Apology* does Socrates seem to supply his readers with clues that might point to a hypothetical conflict between divine orders and the inclination to pursue a philosophical activity.

A tension to which Plato gives particular prominence in the *Apology*, instead, is the one between one's commitment to critical examination and

specific human commands. At *Apology* 29d2–e3 he hypothesizes that the judges would acquit him only on condition that he does no longer spend his time on his inquiries nor do philosophy, and that if he were caught still doing that, he would die. The nonnegotiable value of critical examination emerges in the answer he imagines to give them:

> I greet you, Athenians, with affection, but I shall obey the god rather than you (*peisomai de mallon tôi theôi ê humin*), and so long as I am alive and capable I will not stop doing philosophy and advising you and showing any one of you I meet on any occasion, in my usual words, this: "You best of men, as an Athenian, belonging to the greatest and most famous city for wisdom and strength, aren't you ashamed of concerning yourself with the acquisition of as much money as possible, and reputation and honours, but not concerning yourself with or devoting thought to prudence and truth and the best possible condition in future of your soul?"

Socrates seems to interpret the human commitment to philosophy not only as a way to pursue theoretical knowledge in itself, but also as a possibility for human beings to improve the condition of their own soul. In particular, he presents his own activity of cross-examination of other people as beneficial for those who display the willigness to take part in a genuine dialogical conversation. Were Socrates prevented from practicing a search for truth and human goodness, his own life would be turned into one which is no longer worth living. This is why, as he hypothesizes in *Apology* 28b3–6, if he were asked by someone if he is not really ashamed of having practiced the kind of activity that puts his own life in danger, he would reply that what people should be really ashamed of is an exclusive search for money, reputation and honor.

Rather than suggesting a form of arrogance on Socrates's part, his address to the hypothetical accusers might be taken to refer to the respect he feels for truth and justice, that is, the same values that his critical inquiry seeks to pursue for himself and for those who accept to be examined by him. One's tendency to philosophize, as it emerges in *Apol.* 29d2–e3, is not only an inclination which one can freely cultivate, but also one which the god himself would recommend as worth cultivating. For Socrates declares his intention to obey the god without expressing either feelings of constraint or any opposition to what the god himself indicates as good. In fact, frequent are the occasions in which Socrates reveals that some of his life choices are affected by the god's expectations. In *Apol.* 23b6–7, for instance, he suggests that his demonstration of the false wisdom of some people is a way to come to the god's aid (cf. *tôi theôi boêthôn*). That such an aid is not simply an occasional initiative on Socrates's part emerges more clearly in the following lines (b7–c1), where he explains that he is in deep poverty because of his activity

of examination, that is, on account of his service of the god (*dia tên tou theou latreian*). Further evidence of Socrates's commitment to the god is found in *Apol.* 30e–31a2, where he claims that the god has sent him to the city as a man able able to wake up his fellow-citizens. Not even in this case, however, does he seem to show aversion for this duty.

In the passages at issue, the god to which Socrates refers is not necessarily to be identified with Apollo, that is, the Delphic god traditionally worshipped by his fellow-citizens,[52] especially if we consider that oracular messages in ancient Greek culture were not commands, but simply sources of indications that people were free not to follow. The absence of specifications on the nature and the identity of the god in Plato's *Apology* might not be casual. Unlike his fellow-citizens, who are prone to immediately identify the Delphic god with Apollo by uncritically subscribing to well-entrenched forms of his worship in the city and to the imagery of the god traditionally offered by the poets, Socrates seems to shape his personal view of the god in a critical way. Plato himself, on his part, might want to stimulate the reader to reconstruct an image of Socrates as a man whose devotion for traditional gods like Apollo is shaped by his personal commitment to values like the search for truth, that is, values that go over and above tradition.[53]

Indeed, Socrates attaches special emphasis to the values which are generally believed to be championed by the god; for these appear to be the same values that any man possessing a distinctively human wisdom would consider truly worth pursuing. His strenuous search for truth and self-knowledge and, all the same, his moderate habits,[54] betrays possession of a robust sense of measure which the Delphic god and the oracular institution itself seem to perfectly exemplify (see the inspiring principles expressed by some inscriptions at the sanctuary of Delphi, such as "know thyself," "nothing in excess,"[55] "hate *hubris*" and "curb my spirit").[56]

Socrates appears to have understood the righteousness of such principles of conduct and the importance of integrating them into one's own life a long time before his coming to terms with the words uttered by the Pythia. His view of the Delphic god comes to integrate, supplement and support a philosophical search to which other extra-rational subjects contribute (such as the traditionally recognized *daimônes,*[57] the already mentioned Socratic *daimônion*, and "the god" who, on Socrates's imagination, commands him to keep philosophizing). In Socrates's view, these subjects appear to be different expressions of a single need: to craft a view of the divine based on a well-balanced coexistence betwen respect for tradition and the value of a free critical examination.

In inviting his readers to understand the conceptual presupposition of the relevance that Socrates attaches to a critically informed respect for the divine, Plato suggests at the same time the possibility that Socrates is not as boastful

and shameless as he may appear in the *Apology*, and that the apparently negative self-images he presents, if read in a different light, can consistently coexist with those in which he is uncontroversially thought to avoid hubristic attitudes.[58] Declarations that seem to convey a sense of superiority on Socrates's part can rather be taken as a way of highlighting the relevance of that search for truth and justice which his life conduct admirably exemplifies. The language of *hubris* is well known to Socrates's fellow Athenians, and the Platonic Socrates, by giving an apparent display of arrogance, might be willing to offer an image of himself that, in a way, seems to mirror a negative attitude so widely adopted in his time. All the same, Plato gives his readers the possibility to delve under the surface, and discover that the real message Socrates means to convey is that human wisdom, even Socrates's own, is worthless in comparison to the divine one, and that hubristic behavior is not typical of persons well placed to make progressions in self-knowledge. Plato, then, might be thought to supply his readers with some conceptual tools for understanding that the Socrates of his *Apology* does not aim to present himself either as a boastful or as an irreverent character, but seeks to express the nonnegotiable value of truth and philosophical examination, that is, ideals he endorses and exemplifies in his own life.

NOTES

1. See, for instance, the use of rhetorical *topoi* like the denial of outstanding speaking skills, the plea of unfamiliarity with a forensic environment, the deprecation of noise among the audience, and frequent reference to the envy and propensity for slander exhibited by his accusers. For a more detailed list of such *topoi* see John Burnet, ed. *Plato: Euthyphro, Apology of Socrates, Crito* (Oxford: Clarendon Paperbacks, 1991), 146–47.

2. See Thomas G. West, *Plato's* Apology of Socrates. *An Interpretation, with a New Translation* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1979). See also Mark L. McPherran, *The Religion of Socrates* (University Park, PA: Penn State University Press, 1996), 2, who cites Allen and Taylor as proponents of this view.

3. In *Apology* 1, 4–7 Xenophon criticizes such a view on the ground that what Socrates's words mean to convey is simply the conclusion that for him death was more to be desired than life.

4. In the *Crito*, for instance, Socrates is depicted as a man who faces his destiny without resorting to recriminations or charging his accusers with slander or envy. See also *Euthyphro* 2b1–2, where Euthyphro himself refers to the fact that Socrates would never accuse anyone. Even more, in *Phaedo* 88e4–89a6 he is described by Phaedo as an admirable man for the pleasant, gentle and respectful manner (see the adverbs "*hêdeôs*," "*eumenôs*," and "*agamenôs"*) in which he listened to the criticism offered by his young interlocutors, for the skill with which he took care of his friends, and for his warm encouragement to join in his examination of the argument.

5. The Greek verb "*elenchein*" has an articulate spectrum of meanings, such as "refuting," "cross-examining" and even "shaming" (cf. Liddell-Scott Jones dictionary). As we will see in this chapter, in *Apology* 21c1 Socrates refers to the possibility of showing that the oracle's revelation is false.

6. Well-known proponents of this view are Christopher J. Rowe, *Plato and the Art of Philosophical Writing* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2007) and Kenneth M. Sayre, *Plato's Literary Garden. How to Read a Platonic Dialogue* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995).

7. See, for instance, Myles F. Burnyeat, "The Impiety of Socrates," *Ancient Philosophy* 17 (1997): 1–29, who argues that Plato is challenging his readers, whether ancient or contemporaries, to pronounce a different verdict.

8. It is worth noting that several scholars have expressed doubts about the idea of the Socratic *elenchos* as a proper "method of knowledge." See, for instance, Hugh H. Benson, *Socratic Wisdom. The Model of Knowledge in Plato's Early Dialogues* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), chapters III and IV, who maintains that "individual Socratic elenctic episodes neither can nor do establish anything more than the inconsistency of the interlocutor's beliefs" (pp. 12–13). See also Gregory Vlastos, "The Socratic Elenchus," in *Gregory Vlastos. Socratic Studies*, ed. Burnyeat (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 1–37, who argues that the Socratic *elenchos* is aimed at examining lives. Vlastos also denies that Socrates is concerned with problems in the theory of knowledge. See in particular Gregory Vlastos, *Socrates: Ironist and Moral Philosopher* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 15, who claims that "no epistemological theory at all can be ascribed to Socrates." Cf. Norman Gulley, *The Philosophy of* Socrates (Toronto: The Macmillan Company of Canada Ltd, 1968), 12; Richard Kraut, *Socrates and the State* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984), 273. Different opinions are expressed by Terry H. Penner, *The Ascent from Nominalism: Some Existence Arguments in Plato's Middle Dialogues* (Dordrecht & Boston: Reidel, 1987), and Thomas C. Brickhouse and Nicholas D. Smith, *Plato's Socrates* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 30–73.

9. See, for instance, Xenophon, who, in the opening lines of his *Apology* (*Apology* 1), claims that "others have written on this theme," still without mentioning any specific author. Edgar C. Marchant and Todd, Otis J., eds., *Xenophon IV: Memorabilia, Oeconimicus, Symposium, Apology*, Loeb Classical Liberary 168 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1923). Cf. Aristotle, who speaks generically of the "Socratic literature" at *Rhetoric* 1417a20 and *Poetics* 1447b10. For a more accurate discussion of the topic, see Brickhouse and Smith, *Socrates on Trial* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989), 14. 13. See also Albin Lesky, *A History of Greek Literature*, trans. J. Willis and C. de Heer (New York: Thomas Crowell, 1966), 499 and William A. Oldfather, "Socrates in Court," *Classical World* 31 (1938): 204, who offered a complete list of authors who wrote "Socratic defences."

10. In this chapter, I shall not deal with the widely debated issue of the possible relationships between the historical Socrates and the Socrates portrayed in literature. Although I believe that Plato's Socrates (as well as the Socrates portrayed by other Socratic authors) reflects the fundamental values, attitudes and philosophical methodology endorsed by the historical one, in this chapter I will confine myself to exploring

some philosophical premises and theoretical implications of Plato's literary portrait of Socrates. For a detailed discussion of the relationship between the historical Socrates and the literary Socrates and a list of scholars who have expressed their own view on the matter (mainly subscribing to the view that Plato's Socrates is essentially faithful to the historical one), I refer the reader to Brickhouse and Smith, *Socrates on Trial*, 2–10. For the possibility of an entirely fictional Socrates in the Socratic literature (a possibility that cannot be dismissed *a priori*) see Burnyeat, "The Impiety of Socrates," *Ancient Philosophy* 17 (1997); cf. Benson, *Socratic Wisdom,*7, n. 16.

11. See James Riddell, *The* Apology *of Plato with a Revised Text and English Notes, and a Digest of Platonic Idioms* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1877), xxi; cf. Burnet, *Apology of Socrates*, 146, who quotes Lysias' *On the Property of Aristophanes* xix, 1 and Isaeus' *On the Estate of Aristarchus* x, 1 as speeches in which such a *topos* is employed.

12. See McPherran, *The Religion of Socrates* McPherran, *The Religion of Socrates*, 86.

13. The importance of a defense built on facts rather than on arguments is stressed in paragraphs 2–3 of Xenophon's *Apology*. Here Xenophon recounts a discussion entertained between Socrates and his friend and disciple Hermogenes. Being accused by Hermogenes of discoursing on every topic but his impending trial, thus failing to set up a line of defense, Socrates replies: "Why, do I not seem to you to have spent my whole life in preparing to defend myself? […] Because all my life I have been guiltless of wrong-doing; and that I consider the finest preparation for a defence."

14. See Plato, *Apology* 24b3–6; cf. Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers* II, 5.40.

15. Among this group of accusers, the only person who is specifically mentioned by Socrates is "a comedy writer." Although scholars have generally tended to identify him with Aristophanes, others have hypothesized that Socrates might be referring to a different author, such as Eupolis or Amipsias. See Manara Valgimigli, ed. *Platone. Opere complete. Apologia di Socrate*, vol. I. (Roma and Bari: Laterza, 1984), 33–34, n.8.

16. An examle of the possible influences of the old accusers on the new ones is represented by the fact that, although Socrates is formally accused of not believing in the gods of the city, Meletus pushes himself so far as to maintain that Socrates is an atheist *tout court* (*Apology* 26c–27a).

17. Cf. Xenophon's *Apology* 15, in which it is reported that, in Socrates's view, Apollo did not even think of comparing him to a God, differently from what happened with regard to Lycurgus: "For there is a legend that, as Lycurgus entered the temple, the god thus addressed him: 'I am pondering whether to call you god or man.' Now Apollo did not compare me to a god; he did, however, judge that I far excelled the rest of mankind."

18. See Xenophon, *Apology* 14.

19. As McPherran, *The Religion of Socrates*, 20 explains, the ancient Greeks used to cultivate a complex tangle of practices and attitudes often disconnected from each other, which cannot be easily assimilated to the modern concept of religion. Further, the Greeks did not have a set of revealed religious texts and systematic set

of doctrines, nor was there any organized Church (at footnote 50 McPherran quotes the works of scholars like Walter Burkert, E. R. Dodds, P. E. Easterling, and W. K. C. Guthrie).

20. It is worth noting that, in Plato's *Apology*, Socrates never mentions the name of Apollo, although he unequivocally refers to the "god at Delphi." On this point cf. Burnyeat, "Cracking the Socrates Case," *The New York Review of Books*, March 31, 1988, 18, and C. D. C. Reeve, "Socrates the Apollonian," in *Reason and Religion in Socratic Philosophy*, edited by Nicholas D. Smith, and Paul Woodruff (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 24–25.

21. See "*sophôteros*" in Plato's *Apology* 21a7. It is worth noting that, unlike Plato, Xenophon does not confine himself to claiming that, according to the oracle, no one was wiser than Socrates, but introduces in the discussion the properties of *eleutheria* and *dikaiosunê*: "Once on a time when Chaerephon made inquiry at the Delphic oracle concerning me, in the presence of many people Apollo answered that no man was more free (*eleutheriôteron*) than I, or more just (*dikaioteron*), or more prudent (*sôphronesteron*)."

22. See James A. Colaiaco, *Socrates Against Athens: Philosophy on Trial* (New York: Routledge, 2001), 4–6. Colaiaco, however, stresses that the Athens that condemned Socrates is a city that cherishes freedom of thought, not one which represses it. On this aspect cf. Smith and Woodruff, *Reason and Religion in Socratic Philosophy*, 3–5. The authors also state that, given the tendency of the restored Athenian democracy to benevolently re-integrate political opponents after the regime of the Thirty Tyrants, the main reason for putting Socrates on trial might not be political. It might rather refer to the possibility that Socrates's activity and beliefs undermine the religious stability of the city.

23. Cf. Plato, *Apology* 26d6–e4.

24. Cf. the phrase "*tôn neôn sophôn*" employed by Plato in *Laws* X 886d6.

25. See McPherran, *The Religion of Socrates*, 88.

26. See, for instance, *Apology* 19c5 and e3, where Socrates points out that he does not mean to cast dishonor upon this knowledge. It is also interesting that in the *Phaedo* (96a5–99d2) he does not deny having pursued naturalistic investigations during his youth (a different version is offered instead by Xenophon, who in *Memorabilia* I, 1.11 suggests that Socrates never committed himself to such investigations). I believe that Socrates's respectful attitude toward these investigations is not ironical; for they may simply be irrelevant to the pursuit of self-knowledge (as he suggests in the *Phaedo*).

27. Unless differently specified, the translation of the passages of Plato's *Apology* quoted in this chapter is by Michael C. Stokes, trans., *Plato. Apology of Socrates, Aris & Phillips Classical Texts* (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 1997).

28. In my opinion, a form of justified boastfulness is presented by Xenophon in *Apology* 5: "Do you not know that I would refuse to concede that any man has lived a better life than I have up to now? For I have realized that my whole life has been spent in righteousness toward God and man—a fact that affords the greatest satisfaction; and so I have felt a deep self-respect (*hôste ischurôs agamenos emauton*) and have discovered that my associates hold corresponding sentiments toward me."

29. See Burnet, ed. *Plato. Euthyphro, Apology of Socrates, Crito*, 146.

30. See Joseph Fontenrose, *The Delphic Oracle. Its Responses and Operations with a Catalogue of Responses* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), and Mike Scott, *Delphi. A History of the Center of the Ancient World* (Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2014). Far before the rise of the Greek *polis*, the oracle was run by the "Amphictyonic League," that is, a religious association of Greek tribes founded somewhat after the Trojan War for the protection and administration of the temple of Apollo in Delphi and the temple of Demeter in Anthele. A list of the founders of the Delphic Amphyctiony is provided by Aeschines, *On the Embassy* 115; cf. Strabo, ix, 3.7, and Pausanias, x, 8.2–5.

31. See the Greek verbs "*diaskopein*" in 21c3 and "*skopein*" in 21c4.

32. On the idea of *elenchos* as a way of "testing" someone cf. Benson, *Socratic Wisdom*, 57.

33. On the nature of the *elenchos* and its distinctive steps see Benson, *Socratic Wisdom*, 33: "The general form of an individual elenctic episode is reasonably clear. First, Socrates gets the interlocutor (the indvidual whose claim to knowledge or expertise is being tested) to express some belief *p*, usually, but not always, concerning the definition of some moral concept (I will refer to this initial belief *p* as the apparent refutand). Next (2) Socrates gets the interlocutor to express some other beliefs, q, r, and s (I will refer to these beliefs as the premises of the *elenchos*). Third (3) Socrates goes on to show that these premises entail the negation of the original belief, that is, the apparent refutand *p*. Thus (4) the conjunction: *p* and *q* and *r* is false." For a different view see Vlastos, "The Socratic Elenchus", who maintains that, given the refutand *p*, if *q* and *r* entail not-*p*, then *p* (and not simply the conjunction betwen *p*, *q* and *r*) is false.

34. See Benson, *Socratic Wisdom*, 20. Benson maintains that Socrates's investigation of the opinions entertained by his interlocutors and his self-examination are two ways of understanding one and the same search. A passage that might support the idea of a deep relation between examination of others and self-examination is found in Plato, *Protagoras* 333 c7–9: "For although my first object is to test the argument, the result perhaps will be that both I, the questioner, and my respondent are brought to the test" (trans. R. M. Lamb, in *Plato. Laches; Protagoras; Meno; Euthydemus,* Loeb Classical Library 165 [Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1924]).

35. "Simple" irony is a mode of speaking that indicates a way of engaging with one's interlocutors in which one simply means the opposite of what he says. A form of simple irony is "mocking" irony, which appears in the compliments and flattery of others' supposed abilities (Cf. Brickhouse and Smith, "Socrates' Gods and the *Daimonion*," in Smith and Woodruff, *Reason and Religion in Socratic Philosophy*, 63).

36. Cf. the latin word "pudor." For a detailed discussion of *aidôs* in terms of "concern for one's own honour" (in both competitive and cooperative contexts), see Douglas L. Cairns, *Aidôs. The Psychology and Ethics of Honour and Shame in Ancient Greek Literature* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), especially ch. I ("*Aidôs* in Homer").

37. See Cairns, *Aidôs*, 140, who claims that the verbs *aideomai* and *aischunomai* are frequently used as synonyms, especially with reference to Homer.

38. See Cairns, *Aidôs*, 355. The author speaks of shame as a concept which, especially in Plato and the sophists, appears to be often associated (although not exclusively) with fear of punishment and sensitivity to external sanctions.

39. On the inhibitory power of shame and the sense of emotional restraint it carries see Cairns, *Aidôs*, 48–49.

40. See Christina H. Tarnopolsky, *Perverts, and Tyrants: Plato's Gorgias and the Politics of Shame* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010), 19. Cf. Dana Villa, *Socratic Citizenship* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001), 3, who stresses Socrates's openness to a change of the traditional patterns of thought and morality.

41. A possible clue can be found in *Apology* 29b2–5, where Socrates claims that he does not adequately know about the next world. Knowledge of the things of the Hades might be a prerogative of the god's wisdom.

42. *Anagkaion edokei einai to tou theou peri pleistou poiesthai*.

43. The nature of the Socratic *daimônion* has been widely and differently interpreted by scholars, most of whom have regarded it as a prophetic sign. A different view is offered by Martha C. Nussbaum's "Commentary on Edmunds," in *Proceedings of the Boston Area Colloquium in Ancient Philosophy* 1 (1985), who propounds the view that the *daimônion* is an ironic way of alluding to Socrates's own reason. For a treatment of the debate see Reeve, "Socrates the Apollonian," 32–33 and Brickhouse and Smith, "Socrates' Gods and the *Daimonion*," 81–84.

44. See Plato, *Apology* 40b1, c3–4; *Euthydemus* 272e4; *Phaedrus* 242b9; *Republic* 496c4; cf. Xenophon *Memorabilia* 1.1.3–5. For a detailed treatment of the nature of the Socratic *daimônion* and its properties, see, for instance, McPherran, *The Religion of Socrates*, 185–190. The author (at p. 186) stresses the fact that the *daimônion* occurred to few or none before Socrates (*Republic* 406c3–5) and that it has been his companion since childhood (*Apology* 31d2–4; cf. *Theages* 128d3), intervening on matters both great and small (*Apology* 40 a 4–6).

45. See Plato, *Apology* 31d1–3; cf. *Phaedrus* 242c2; see also Xenophon, *Apology* 12 (cf. McPherran, *The Religion of Socrates* 185, n. 24).

46. See McPherran, *The Religion of* Socrates, 175–76, especially n. 1.

47. See Gregory Vlastos, "Socratic Piety," in *Plato 2: Ethics, Politics, Religion, and the Soul*, ed. Gail Fine (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 66–73.

48. See McPherran, *The Religion of Socrates*, 190–91; cf. Brickhouse and Smith, *Socrates on Trial*, 107 and 241 (with particular reference to the Socratic *daimôn*).

49. A similar point is made by McPherran, *The Religion of Socrates*, ch. 4. At p. 177, in particular, he claims that "Socrates does not endorse an intellectualist rejection of divination's efficacy, but also does not merely take the operations of traditional divinatory practices at face value."

50. Karl Popper, *Conjectures and Refutations. The Growth of Scientific Knowledge* (New York: Basic Book Publishers, 1962), 96.

51. Trans. Burnet, ed. *Plato. Euthyphro, Apology of Socrates, Crito*.

52. Cf. Reeve, "Socrates the Apollonian," 26. Cf. Burnyeat, "Cracking the Socrates Case," 18.

53. Cf. Richard Kraut, "Socrates, Politics, and Religion," in Smith and Woodruff, *Reason and Religion in Socratic Philosophy*, See also Smith and Woodruff, *Reason and Religion in Socratic Philosophy*, introduction, 5–6. The authors speak about interpretations of Socrates's religious view which they call "coherence arguments." According to such readings, the arguments at stake would reject all the myths which clash with moral conceptions of the gods.

54. Cf. Xenophon's *Memorabilia*, for instance I, 2.1–5; I, 2.10; II, 1.1–6.

55. The first two mottos are reported in Pausanias, *Description of Greece* X, 24.1–2.

56. See McPherran, *The Religion of Socrates*, 271. On the connection between the values championed by Socrates and the antihybristic message of Delphi see Reeve, *Socrates in the* Apology. *An Essay on Plato's* Apology of Socrates (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1989), 28–32.

57. In *Apology* 27c10–d3 Socrates states that they are either gods or children of gods.

58. Against the view of an unduly self-congratulatory Socrates see also Xenophon, *Memorabilia* I, 1.5: "And yet who would not agree that he wished to appear to his companions as neither a simpleton nor a boaster (*alazôn*)?" Trans. Amy L. Bonnette, *Xenophon*, *Memorabilia* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1994).

Chapter 10

Socrates's Mission

Paul Woodruff

According to Plato's Socrates in the *Apology,* the god (probably Apollo) gave him a special mission. The mission is to wake up the people of Athens to the need to examine their lives and care for their souls—as if he were a fly stinging a lazy horse, napping at pasture. This mission, he says, is hugely beneficial to Athens. If he had to give it up, Athens would be the worse for it. Three questions about this claim leap to mind:[1]

What does the metaphor of sleeping and waking mean? Waking, I will suggest, is becoming self-aware through self-examination. Sleeping is the state in which we do not know ourselves well enough—for example, when we think we are wise but are only humanly wise.

Why is it beneficial to all Athenians to wake them up? I will suggest that being awake is essential to moral health. Do Plato's dialogues show Socrates carrying out this mission? Specifically, does even the *Apology* show Socrates carrying out the mission he describes in it? Does the rhetorical aim of this artful speech include the awakening of the Athenians from their sleep? All of the dialogues show Socrates at work; his life is a paradigm of awakeness. In what follows, I will say more about these questions.

THE AWAKENING

T1. If you do as I say, you'll spare my life. But you might easily be annoyed, like people awakened from a nap, and slap me, and, if you do as Anytus says, you could very well kill me, and then you'd stay asleep to the end of your days unless the god sent someone else to look after you.[2] (31a3–7)

Without Socrates, or someone like him, the Athenians will remain asleep. Apparently, in context, this means they will not be examining themselves and others on subjects such as excellence and virtue. That is they will not be living as Socrates does. Does Socrates mean to spur the people of Athens into following his example? Living as he does, passing their days as he passes his? All Athens would grind to a halt, commerce and empire frozen until Socrates's questions could be answered—and, for all we know from the dialogues, his questions might never be answered to his satisfaction. He knows very well they would not believe him if he told them that this was his aim, and that it was for their own good:

> T2. If I tell you that the greatest good for a human being turns out to be really this: to hold reasoned conversations every day about virtue and the other topics you hear me discussing when I examine myself and others—an unexamined life is not to be lived by a human being—you'll believe me even less. (38a1–6)

If he cannot say this and be believed, how can he hope to wake them up? Plainly, he thinks he is already a gadfly. He is in some way already stinging them; that, after all, is why some of them want to swat him dead. But what is it that Socrates has been doing that stings them? He shames them, he says, relentlessly, and this he does on orders from the god. If asked by the court to cease his activities, he says:

> T3. You are my friends, men of Athens, and I salute you, but I owe greater obedience to the god than to you. So long as I have breath and am able I will never leave off philosophizing and exhorting you and setting an example[3] for anyone of you I happen to meet, saying what I usually say: "You are the best of men, an Athenian from the greatest city, most famous for skill and strength—are you not ashamed that you care more for money—to have the most you can—and reputation and honor, while you have no thought or care for wisdom or truth or how your soul might be in the best possible condition?"

Specifically, Socrates is asking the Athenians to turn their values upside down. As it is (he implies) they care most for their bodies and their wealth:

> T4. I go around doing nothing, you see, but urging you, young and old, to care deeply—not about your body or your money—but about your soul, that it may be the best it can be. (30a7–b2)

Apparently he meets stiff resistance on the point. His fellow citizens do not like being told that their values are upside down. No doubt some simply ignore him, but others fight back, and for them Socrates has a systematic response;

T5. And if one of you fights back and says he does care, I won't leave him or let him get away, but I will question him and examine him and test him, and if I don't find that he has virtue, although he says he does, I will rebuke him for making the least of the most valuable things, and the most of what is worthless. (29d2–30a2)

CARE OF THE SOUL

They should be caring about their souls. To care about wealth, of course, is to make money and then make it grow. To care about the body, for Socrates's compatriots, was to train for beauty, strength, endurance, and health—qualities desirable in themselves or necessary for the bodies of effective soldiers. Care of the soul must be analogous to that of the body—some sort of training of the soul for the soul-analogues of health, strength, endurance, and beauty. We must ask what these analogues might be in a soul. Physical strength and endurance have obvious analogues in specific virtues, such as *sophrosune*.

Beauty is an overarching concept. The beauty of the body, I suppose, must be more than skin deep—it must be visible evidence of genuine strength and endurance, that is, of genuine goodness in the body. With this in mind, I propose the following hypothesis about the relation between beauty and goodness in Socratic thought: Beauty is goodness made evident. In the case of the soul, I suppose that beauty is goodness made evident in one's way of life—and that, I suggest, is roughly what Socrates means by virtue. The soul's goodness is analogous to health. Health may be evident as beauty and may of course be faked by means of cosmetics. As in body, so in soul. We may expect some people to practice painting their moral appearance with virtues they do not have. Moral cosmetics make diagnosis all the more difficult.

Let's agree that Socrates is asking the Athenians to care most about cultivating virtue in their way of life. What specifically is he asking them to do? How does one cultivate virtue? The best clue is in my T2: " to hold reasoned conversations every day about virtue and the other topics you hear me discussing when I examine myself and others." This he says is the greatest good for a human being, since "an unexamined life is not to be lived by a human being." The interpretation of this famous clause is challenging. Why should a human life not be worth living unless subjected to the discomfort of Socratic examination? Even the great scholar and admirer of Socrates, Gregory Vlastos, thought the claim too strong.[4] Surely if everyone followed Socrates's example, no one would have time for the work that fed the city, decorated it, and kept it powerful.[5] But we must do our best to find a plausible interpretation, as Socrates takes this quite seriously a mission he says was given him by the god. I will try to resolve two problems about this matter:

First, the method Socrates proposes—questioning people to find out whether they have virtue—is absurd on its face. Can we make sense of this? I will suggest that the method makes sense only when applied to self-examination.

Second, Plato shows Socrates doing something quite different from this in the dialogues of search. Can we read the *Apology* and the *Euthyphro* as consistent in representing Socrates's way of questioning people? I think we can, if we use Socrates's questioning of Euthyphro as a model to follow in our own self-questioning.

EXAMINING SELF AND OTHERS

We must ask what (in Socrates's view) it is to examine someone, why examining is good, and why it is good specifically for humans. The word examination (*exetasis*) is used for military review,[6] and also for the testing of slaves under torture to ensure that their testimony is accurate. Socrates cannot have either of these in the front of his mind. He insists that the unexamined life is not worth living *for a human being*. The claim is general—not merely for soldiers or slaves. Soldiers are rightly reviewed for their fitness to serve, and Socrates may have something analogous in mind for everyone. Everyone, after all, is called to serve the cause of virtue—the one cause Socrates cares about, and so everyone's virtue-fitness is important to him. That is why I suggest that Socrates has something like a medical examination in mind: for the body, an examination assesses health; for the soul, virtue. This is the sense of T5: "If one of you [. . .] says he does care, I won't leave him or let him get away, but I will question him and examine him and test him, and if I don't find that he has virtue, although he says he does, I will rebuke him."

Why would Socrates think that such examinations are necessary and valuable? We know that human beings are likely to judge their own moral health incorrectly, and this (I suspect) is a particularly human weakness: most of us think we are better than we are. Gods (in Socrates's theology) are good and know it. Humans are liable to think they are good when they are not. So that is why it is *human* beings who require such examining. Let's start with other people.

What good is examining the souls of other people for virtue? The analogy with physical health is useful. If you think you are in good health, when you are really in bad health, but do not know it, you will not do what you need to do in order to get better. The first step in improvement is an accurate diagnosis that is convincing to the patient: patients must fully accept the news that they are in a dangerous condition; otherwise they are unlikely to be willing to take steps toward a cure. Care of the body requires expert physical examination

by someone who knows what it is to be healthy. Expert physicians know how to ask questions that will elicit answers they can use in diagnosis. They can do this (Socrates supposes) because they know what health is—and, more important, what health is not.

Care of the soul should require someone with analogous knowledge—someone who knows what virtue is, someone who will not be taken in by any deceptive false image of a virtue. Who could that be? Who knows enough about virtue to conduct such an examination? Socrates implies elsewhere that he does not know what virtue is—that he cannot answer the sorts of question he asks Euthyphro. So it can't be Socrates who is the soul-doctor. Even if we could find a qualified doctor of the soul, how would she conduct such an examination? What questions could a soul-doctor ask me that would call for answers revealing whether or not I am really putting goodness in the center in my way of life? How would the soul-doctor see through my deceptions on this score?

A philosopher would observe that Socrates is testing people to see whether they satisfy a necessary condition for having virtue. What does Socrates suppose is necessary for virtue—as the basis for his questioning? Might it be knowledge of virtue? No. This at least is clear: the necessary condition for virtue cannot be the sort of knowledge Socrates says he does not have; that is the knowledge that is a necessary condition for being able to *teach* virtue, not for having it. Socrates is confident of his personal virtue, but he knows he is not qualified to teach virtue. He does not have that knowledge (*Apology* 20c). So knowledge of virtue (so understood) is not a necessary condition for virtue. So what sort of question *should* I ask to determine whether or not someone has a virtue?

Mê thorubesete. Please be patient with me, and do not make a disturbance, if I say that after more than fifty years reading and re-reading Socratic texts I have no idea how to answer this. After almost twenty-five years of hiring and firing people for administrative jobs, I have no idea what questions I might ask job candidates that would help me judge their virtue. I can judge their knowledge of facts, but I cannot judge their ability to do things—their practical skills—on the basis of question and answer. And I certainly cannot judge their practical *virtue*. I might be able to judge the virtue they apply to answering my questions. But how would I know whether they could transfer virtue-in-answering to virtue-on-the-job?

Consider the use of my favorite wood-working tool, the lathe: you may answer every question about the use of the lathe correctly but still not know how to hold the chisel at the right angle, with the right pressure against the turning stock. On the other hand, you might have the skill but nevertheless stumble over the answers to my questions. It is hard to put a skill into words. Turning a block of wood into a bowl is difficult enough, but it is even more difficult to turn words into a skill.

Take this as a judgment involving adverbs. Although I may be able to tell whether or not applicants answer my questions in a virtuous manner, I cannot be sure that they will do what they do *on the job* in a virtuous manner. I have hired people who were good actors, and could play the part of virtue in an *interview*, but behaved dreadfully when out of my sight.

Wisdom and the other virtues are more like practical skills, since they must be exercised in action in a variety of circumstances, and I have no idea how to test for such skills by question and answer. All I know to do is to give candidates a chance to demonstrate their skills or virtues in action. Of course I could study a candidate's past life in detail, given enough evidence, and then, if she consents, I could test her by putting her in situations that could strain her commitment to living with virtue. To do that, in general, I would have to hire the candidate and wait and see.

In the *Apology*, Socrates appears to be claiming an ability that no human being could have—to assess people's virtue by asking them questions. I am reluctant to attribute to him a doctrine that is false or stupid, and that, I'm afraid, is where the argument has been leading us so far. Socrates would fail his own test for wisdom, his only superiority lying in his knowing that he would fail the test (23b, T9). He is persuaded that he has done no wrong—at least not willingly (37b, T10). (This cannot be simply an instance of the Socratic view that no one errs willingly; Socrates is confident he has done good by the city.)

If so, at least *Socrates* can avoid doing injustice without being able to pass the knowledge test for justice. How does he do that? By being conscious of his own ignorance? Perhaps, indirectly, but how? What actions can you take without presupposing knowledge of virtue?

In his assessment of Meletus in the *Apology,* Socrates concludes that Meletus has never cared about the subject on which he prosecutes Socrates. There Socrates neither states nor explains what appears to be his assumed premise—that if you care about something, you will be able to answer Socratic questions about it. That is preposterous: Socrates cares about virtue, but he cannot answer such questions. Vlastos famously wrote that the bravest man he knew could not have answered Socrates about courage.[7] But neither Socrates's nor Vlastos' bravest man thought he knew what virtue is.

A better reconstruction of the argument with Meletus would use a more plausible premise: if you take actions that presuppose knowledge of virtue (as Meletus does) then either you can answer Socratic questions or you do not care about virtue. What is crucially missing from Meletus, then, is not knowledge of virtue, but the human wisdom to recognize the absence of that knowledge and to act with appropriate reverence—not presupposing such knowledge.

Meletus believes that the community supports and teaches its values, so that people who question those values do harm to the community. The people of Athens generally share this belief, so that in challenging Meletus, Socrates is challenging moral assumptions that are basic to Athenians. Meletus—foolish as he seems to be here—is proxy for the mainstream of Athenian opinion. In this short passage, Socrates shows that Athens itself flunks the test for caring about virtue.[8]

THE DIALOGUES OF SEARCH

Still, we have not come near an answer to our question. Granted, Meletus does not care about virtue in the way Socrates wants. But what questions can Socrates ask to show that any Athenian he might meet does not have virtue? Socrates implied that he could do that in T3, which I am trying to understand. It applies to anyone in Athens, not only to one who, like Meletus, is implicitly claiming knowledge he does not have.

Plato shows Socrates in the dialogues of search asking people to tell him what a virtue is. The most frequently discussed example is in the *Euthyphro:*

> T6. Socrates: So [. . .] do you really think you know with such precision (*houtosí akribôs*) about the divine and about what is reverent or irreverent that, in view of the actions you describe, you have no fear that in prosecuting your father you may turn out to be committing an act of irreverence? (*Euthyphro* 4e3–8)

> T7. Then teach me what this visible form is, so that looking at it (*apoblepôn*) and using it as a model (*paradeigma*) I may affirm that any action, if it is such as it is, is reverent (whether you or someone else does it) and deny this for any action which is not such as it. (*Euthyphro* 6e3–6)

Notice that these questions do not bear directly on what Socrates says in the *Apology.* In the *Euthyphro*, Socrates is not proposing to assess his partner's *virtue* by means of questions of search. By such questions, here and in similar dialogues, he assesses the *knowledge* of his partners—or at least their willingness to convey that knowledge. Knowledge in these contexts is the knowledge one would need to have in order to teach virtue, as his partners in search all too often claim to do. So these questions do not test for virtue; they test for the ability to *teach* virtue. Having virtue plainly does not entail having the ability to teach virtue, if (as seems likely) Socrates has the first but not the second.

If people appear to fail the test for virtue, then we would expect—on the basis of T3—that Socrates would rebuke them for their ignorance and urge

them to start caring for their souls. But, in the dialogues of search, Plato does not show Socrates rebuking people for failing to have or to care about virtue. Nor does he urge them to turn their values upside down, not as a result of his what-is-X questioning process. The dialogues of search do not show Socrates doing what he claims to do in the *Apology*—at least as we usually read them.

Socrates says his mission is to all the citizens of Athens. But in the dialogues of search, he rarely questions common citizens. He often engages with foreign experts, or with citizens who stand out in one way or another, such as Euthyphro or Meletus, who have made themselves targets by presuming to do something Socrates would never do—launching a prosecution on ethical grounds. This makes sense; after all, few common citizens (here or in ancient Athens) would claim to be teachers of virtue who know what virtue is. So it is hard to see how questioning teachers from abroad or odd citizens like Euthyphro could serve as Socrates's mission to the *whole* city of Athens.

Questioning in the *Apology* seems to be about one thing—assessing virtue in Athenian citizens—and in the dialogues of search about another—assessing knowledge in self-proclaimed experts. These are not the same, and, to his credit, Socrates does not represent them as the same.

Suppose that Socrates's real unstated mission had been to examine the explicit or implicit knowledge claims of others. What benefit to Athens would arise from that? Plato shows us a number of such examinations in the dialogues of search. None of these does any good to the person examined, who grows angry, digs into his position more firmly, or walks away. Perhaps these examinations benefit the audience of young men, who—if they are rich—have leisure and can set out to follow his example (23c2–5). But in general the dialogues of search do not show that the questioning is beneficial to those questioned or to anyone else.

Simply by asking questions, a Socratic teacher cannot change anyone's character; but a Socrates—or a follower of Socrates—can hope to change himself. One person is clearly shown to reap benefits from Socratic examination of this kind, and that is Socrates himself. With a measure of irony he tells one of his partners about his experience under examination:

> T8. When I'm convinced by you and say what you say, that it's much the most excellent and powerful thing to be able to present a speech well and finely, and prevail in court or get things done in any gathering, I hear every insult from that man (among others around here) who has always been refuting me. He happens to be a close relative of mine, and he lives in the same house. So when I go home to my own place and he hears me saying those things, he asks if I am not ashamed that I dare discuss fine ways of life when it's clear I don't even know at all what *that* is itself? "Look," he will say. "How will you know whose speech—or any other action—is finely presented or not, when you are ignorant of the fine? The state you're in! Can you really believe it's better for you to live than die?" (*Hippias Major* 304c6–d8)

The examiner is of course Socrates himself. This self-diagnosis is painful of course, but it is also beneficial. This is our clue to the benefit of Socratic questioning: Socrates by himself won't change you, but you may start changing yourself under the influence of his example—as Socrates has spent his life in quest of self-transformation.[9]

SELF-EXAMINATION

Here we are on more promising ground. Self-examination does seem essential to living well. I may not know what to ask other people in order to assess their character, but I do know what to ask myself about my actions and intentions—questions that press me toward more accurate self-assessments than I can achieve while unexamined. For a given action, what did I think I was doing when I did it? Why was I doing it? Was I really doing it for the reason I thought I was? Was my action in accord with what I thought I believed about living well? Had I taken into account all the relevant considerations before acting? Perhaps I had a reason that applies in some cases; did it apply in the present instance? The answers I give myself, if I am honest, are often disturbing, and they prompt me to try to be a better person. Such is *moral* self-assessment. Socrates probably practiced something like this, but he does not lay out a method for it.

On the other hand, Socrates explicitly pursued *epistemological* self-assessment. This is relevant to moral issues in this way: believing that you know things you do not know represents a lapse in self-knowledge that may have serious consequences for virtue. In ignorance, you may act badly and do so repeatedly, building bad habits—that is to say, building vices—if you act in the conceit of moral knowledge.

In the same way, I could do my body serious damage if I thought I knew that certain activities were good for my body when they are not. In the case of my body, I can consult an expert, a doctor or a physical trainer, who will tell me I am developing bad habits. As for my moral health, a qualified soul-doctor might well find that I thought I had a virtue which I do not have, and so diagnose a serious lapse in self-knowledge. But I have no qualified soul-doctor to consult; I must do this for myself. Therefore, a lapse in self-knowledge reflects a failure of *self*-examination. The heart of *epimeleia tes psychês* (care of the soul) must be self-examination aiming for self-knowledge. You are the only soul-doctor for your own case; there is no other. Socrates or another questioner can stimulate you or set an example for you, but not do the work for you.

My proposal is this: Socrates's mission is to set an example of self-questioning that ordinary Athenians can apply to themselves. This is highly

speculative, I admit, but it promises to account for both the mission statement and the questioning in the dialogues of search.

When Socrates states what it is he will never cease doing, he uses three participles which are linked in such a way that they evidently refer to a single type of action: *philosophôn* and *parakeleuomenos* and *endeiknumenos* (29d, T3). The first means "doing philosophy," a new concept at the time, to which Socrates is now giving a special meaning. The second, *parakeleuomenos,* is used for exhortation and encouragement, such as a commander gives troops before a battle. The third, *endeiknumenos,* contains an echo of *endeixis*, a legal term for laying information against someone who takes on an office for which he was legally disqualified.[10] Reeve translates it "showing them the way," which he explains in a footnote as meaning "showing them their ignorance."[11] But this is reading a great deal into one word, and it is not at all supported by the context. In the middle voice, *endeiknumenos* means simply to show or display, to set an example. On that reading, Socrates is setting an example for the people of Athens. An example of what? Does he want each citizen to take on his role of questioning *others*? Perhaps so, but that would be asking a lot of ordinary people who are not Socratic philosophers, and who have jobs and work to do.

What is it, then, that *every* citizen could do following Socrates's example? I suggest that people listening to Socrates could start asking themselves questions such as Socrates is asking others—with this important difference: Socrates examines people who claim to know enough to teach virtue, but he examines *himself* in order to reinforce his human wisdom, which he defines through his interpretation of the oracle:

> T9. That man is wisest, O humans, who, like Socrates, has recognized that, in truth, he is worth nothing with respect to wisdom. (*Ap.* 23b2–4)

Seeking human wisdom, he does not tackle himself in quite the same way as he tackles a self-proclaimed teacher such as Euthyphro. What would happen if he did? Euthyphro is confident that he has done nothing irreverent (*Euthyphro* 4e4–5a2); Socrates is confident that he has done no injustice (*Apology* 37b). If his confidence were supposedly knowledge-based, like the confidence Euthyphro shows, then Socrates might reasonably ask himself how he knows that he is innocent. So the *Euthyphro* line of questions would seem to require that Socrates's confidence depends on knowledge: he would have to know a model (*paradeigma*) of justice (as he insists Euthyphro must have—T6 and T7), and he would have to know that his actions have all been "such as" the model.[12]

The *Apology* does not allow Socrates such precise knowledge, however, nor does Socrates claim it.[13] He is, simply, persuaded (*pepeismenos*, 37b) of his innocence. That does not mean that he thinks he might never be wrong;

indeed, he recognizes his potential for going wrong whenever he asks for teaching from someone who might know better. This is not irony but true Socratic wisdom; to act as if he had nothing to learn from others would be to lose his hard-won human wisdom.

How then can Socrates be confident that he has done no injustice? To answer this, we must appeal not to knowledge of the sort Socrates assesses in others, but to the god. At 30d5 he states the rhetorical aim of his defense speech:

> T10. My defense is not on my own behalf, as one might expect, but on yours, so that you will not commit some sin regarding the gift of the god to you (*mê ti examártête perí tên toû theoû dósin humîn*). (30d5–e1)

Socrates believes he has done no wrong for the same reason he believes the Athenians would do wrong by condemning him: that his mission is from the god. Socrates may still believe this and be conscious of his own ignorance. His attitude is one of reverence on both counts: respect for a mission he believes was given him by the god, and a reverent recognition of his own human—and therefore not godlike—status with respect to knowledge and virtue.[14]

I have written elsewhere of the Greek tragic concept of reverence as a felt recognition of the gap between human and divine.[15] Maintaining this reverent attitude toward his human status appears to be a lifelong project for Socrates. The human wisdom he works so hard to maintain through self-questioning is a positive virtue in itself—not merely the privation of perfect wisdom. I have identified it here with reverence; another scholar identifies it rightly with *sophrosune,* sound-mindedness or moderation.[16] Indeed, I would argue that it is an essential component in every virtue at the human level according to Socrates, including justice.[17]

If the *Hippias Major* is a proper witness, we must imagine Socrates living with the discomfort of perpetual self-examination (see T8). Socrates lives with an alter ego who would shame him if he carried on like Hippias. I used to think he shames Socrates for being ignorant, but I no longer believe that this could be right. Socrates is not ashamed of his human limitations; he expresses no shame about those in the *Apology.* He is saying here that he *would* be ashamed if he *were* engaged in the business of the courtroom or the assembly despite his human limitations. Euthyphro and Hippias and Meletus have set themselves up as special targets by overlooking their human limitations.

SOCRATES'S MESSAGE TO THE ATHENIANS

Socrates's mission is traditionally reverent in this respect: it is to influence the Athenians by exhortation and example to examine themselves and to live in accordance with human limitations. Evidently, the Athenian people do

not know what it would be to corrupt the youth; this ignorance is especially culpable in Socrates's prosecutors, who are acting as if they knew things they do not. A similar point is made in *Crito:*

> T11. As it is the many are not able to do the greatest good or the greatest bad, since they lack the power to make anyone wise or foolish, but whatever they do comes out as it does by accident. (*Crito* 44d8–10)

The many do not know how to harm Socrates, and, indeed, in condemning him they are probably not harming him, as death is probably not a bad thing. This must be a major part of Socrates's message. If he thought death were the worst thing that could happen to him, he might think it permissible do use any means to prevent it. But he does not think so about death, and he will not resort to actions he thinks wrong in order to prevent it.

> T12. You may well think, Athenians, that I have been taken for lack (*aporia*) of the sort of argument (*logoi*) I could have used to persuade you, had I thought it right to do or say whatever it took to save me from justice. Far from it. Indeed I was taken for lack of something—but not arguments. What I lacked was daring and shamelessness and a willingness to tell you the sort of thing that most pleases you. [. . .] I'd much rather die after such a defense [as I gave] than live on that basis [i.e., of the defense the jury would like to hear]. (38d3–8, e4–5)

So he does not give a traditional defense. But that does not mean he is inviting them to condemn him. For their sake he does not want them to treat the god's gift so badly as to kill its bearer, and for their sake he does not want them to commit any injustice. But in giving this defense, he will not set aside his mission. In giving the speech as he does, he is teaching them, by *example*, that their values are wrong—that it is more important to avoid *wrongdoing* than to avoid death. In the course of setting this example, he does give a defense, but it is not a defense of Socrates from death. It is a defense of Athens against evil—an attempt to save Athens from violating the god's will and from executing an innocent man. It is also a last-ditch attempt to rescue the prosecutors from their failures of self-knowledge. These two together—violating the god's will and failing to be conscious of their ignorance—probably constitute the badness he attributes to them:

> T13. And now because I am slow and old, I have been taken by the slower one [by death], while my prosecutors, because they are clever and sharp, have been taken by the faster—by badness (*kakia*). (*Apology* 39b1–4)

That he thinks he is the victim of an injustice is evident toward the end of the *Crito*:

T14. As it is, if you leave this place, you will leave as a victim of injustice not from us, the laws, but from human beings. (*Crito* 54b9–c1)

Socrates has excellent reasons in his own terms for trying to win his case in court. But winning his case is secondary to his mission of setting an example. In all things, in court and in prison, Socrates remains true to his word. He will never stop exhorting the Athenians and setting an example, with the aim of turning their values on their heads and illustrating the enormous value of human self-knowledge. His goal is not to save his own life but to save the souls of the Athenians—incidentally by saving his life. They have put their souls in jeopardy by threatening him with a great injustice—an injustice he believes they can prevent only by letting him live.[18]

NOTES

1. Scholars have dwelt much on a question that I do not take on in this chapter: Why did Socrates think he had this mission from the god? I agree with Brickhouse and Smith that there is a double explanation for this: (1) Socrates believed that the gods wanted us to promote virtues among ourselves, especially the virtues that flow from knowing one's limitations; it follows that his mission is one that is required by the gods of all of us. (2) The oracle showed that Socrates was preeminent in knowing his limitations with respect to wisdom; this puts him in an especially good position to carry out his general duty to the gods. Thomas C. Brickhouse and Nicholas Smith. *Socrates on Trial* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989), 88–100. See also George Rudebusch, *Socrates* (Chichester: Wiley Blackwell, 2009), 17–29.

2. This and all translations are my own, made for this chapter.

3. *Philosophôn kai parakeleuomenos te kai endeiknumenos.*

4. Gregory Vlastos, "The Paradox of Socrates," in *The Philosophy of Socrates: A Collection of Critical Essays,* edited by Gregory Vlastos (New York: Anchor Books, 1971), quoting from 21.

5. Reeve tries to defend Socrates on this point. Since, on Socrates's view, nothing has value if not conjoined with virtue, maintaining virtue is the most important human activity, and it must by conjoined with any other activities we undertake. C.D.C. Reeve, *Socrates in the* Apology: *An Essay on Plato's* Apology of Socrates (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1989), 112–13. This is part way to a defense of Socrates. But why should one have to spend every day philosophizing, as Socrates does, in order to do this? It cannot be that everyone should model their lives on Socrates's life, but, rather, on some part of what he does.

6. In an impressively scholarly article, Harvey S. Goldman has argued that Socrates must have the military usage in mind: "Socrates is reviewing himself as a kind of soldier"; he is reviewing others "as in putting them in their 'station,' or examining them to see whether they are in their station or not. His 'examination' is to put them in 'order'." Harvey S. Goldman, "Reexamining the 'Examined Life' in Plato's

Apology of Socrates," *The Philosophical Forum* 35 (2004): 32. As Goldman points out, this limits Socrates's claim to citizens of a fifth-century Greek city-state, and so we can answer that there *are* lives worth living that are not examined in Socrates's sense. But Socrates did not say "for an Athenian" or "for a Greek." He said "for a human being (*anthropos*)." If he meant to allude to military review, I think it more likely he was referring to fitness for the kind of service that is incumbent on all of us. Alexander Nehamas allows that Socrates does not offer rational grounds for insisting that everyone adopt his mode of life; his speech is protreptic rather than dogmatic. Plato, on the other hand, applies his project to everyone without exception. Alexander Nehamas, *The Art of Living: Socratic Reflections from Plato to Foucault* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 97. I am suggesting a middle way: Socrates wants everyone in Athens to change, but not to live as he lives; the change he asks for is for everyone to engage in self-examination on his model.

7. Vlastos, "Paradox of Socrates," 15.

8. Such a challenge will not change the majority view of Athenians, as we can see from the vote in Socrates's case. I owe the point to Knut Ågotnes.

9. "I believe that many kinds of life are worth living by man. But I do believe that the best of all is the one in which every man does his own examining." Vlastos, "Paradox of Socrates," 21.

10. Liddell-Scott-Jones, Greek-English Lexicon, s.v. *endeixis*.

11. C. D. C. Reeve, ed. and trans., *The Trials of Socrates: Six Classic Texts: Plato, Aristophanes, Xenophon* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 2002)*, ad loc.,* 44, n. 64.

12. In a yet unpublished paper ("What is the Question in the *Euthyphro*?") I have argued that Socrates is not committed in the *Euthyphro* to the claim that such a model exists. Indeed, I think we have excellent reasons for thinking that there can be no such model. When Plato introduces the Forms in the *Republic,* he makes it clear that they do not function as Euthyphronean models or paradigms. None of the things that participate in the Forms participate precisely: all of the many reverent things and the many just things are such that, under different qualifications, they are not reverent or just (479a).

13. Reeve makes the point clearly: Socrates nowhere claims to have what Reeve calls "craft-knowledge" of virtue—what he would need to be a teacher of virtue. Anyone can have merely human virtue by means of elenchus. Reeve, *Socrates in the* Apology, 150, 178–79, with note 84.

14. Is Socrates reverent in claiming that his mission is a gift of the god? He would not have seemed so to his audience. A fully competent defense on this score would require him to give better evidence than he does on this point. He has done nothing in the *Apology* to substantiate the claim other than cite private experiences and his personal, rather extravagant, interpretation of a simple oracular response. West notes that Socrates allows that his audience will suppose he is ironizing–flat out lying–when he claims his mission is from the god (*Apology* 38a1), and that Socrates does nothing to refute the charge. In effect, West implies, Socrates here admits the claim is false. Thomas G. West, *Plato's* Apology of Socrates: *An Interpretation, with a New Translation* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1979), 217. On the other hand, Reeve gives

a cogent argument to the effect that Socrates would have good reason to think he was serving Apollo in carrying out his mission through elenchus. Reeve, *Socrates in the* Apology*,* 21–28.

15. Paul Woodruff, *Reverence: Renewing a Forgotten Virtue,* 2nd edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014).

16. "Elenchus is the practice of virtue qua moderation. Insofar as this claim is true, elenchus represents a positive wisdom that humans may exercise, and the character of Socrates is its exemplar." Christopher S. King, "Wisdom, Moderation, and Elenchus in Plato's *Apology*," *Metaphilosophy* 39 (2008): 346–62.

17. Woodruff, "Growing towards Justice," in *Becoming Just,* edited by Mark LeBar (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018).

18. I have benefited from the examinations of audiences at three conferences to which I presented this chapter: The Symposium on Poetry and Philosophy in the Light of Plato's *Apology* (University of Bergen, June 12, 2015), the Conference in honor of Mark McPherran (Lewis and Clark College, September 12, 2015), and the Conference in honor of Alexander Nehamas (Princeton University, October 21, 2016). I am especially grateful to Knut Ågotnes for his advice on this chapter and for his fine friendship over the years.

Chapter 11

The Philosophical Force of Negativity

Elenchos *and Socratic Conversation in Plato's* Apology

Vivil Valvik Haraldsen

The *Apology of Socrates* contains one of the rare instances in the Platonic corpus where we find Socrates himself describing his practice of questioning and examining through conversation, and not only a depiction of him performing it. This practice is commonly known as the practice of *elenchos*, standardly translated "cross-examination" or "refutation."[1] In this chapter we will be looking at Socrates's description of his practice, as well as at comments he makes about manners of persuasion and argument and their effects. We will also look at some statements that cast light on Socrates's view of how our opinions are formed and changed and how we are moved to act. Against this background the question will be posed whether a widespread understanding of *elenchos*, according to which it is regarded as a method and placed within the framework of what is standardly called Socratic intellectualism,[2] can be easily reconciled with Socrates's statements in the *Apology*. Along the way we will also consider some passages relevant to the understanding of Socrates's practice of conversational questioning from other dialogues.

It will be argued that what Socrates says in the *Apology* about his practice of examining through conversation implies views about the way human beings are moved to act and about the role opinions of what is good and just play therein that seem more complex than the position traditionally labeled Socratic intellectualism should allow. In particular, with regard to opinion Socrates has more to say about the way opinions may be formed and changed than about their function in an inner mechanism resulting in action, although the latter seems to be taken as a central feature of Socratic intellectualism.[3] Moreover, Socrates seems to suggest that emotions such as anger and shame and desires for things such as honor and wealth may decide how we act, without making it clear that such emotions and desires are reducible to, or effect their motivational force by way of, beliefs about what is good or

just. His statements on these issues will give us reason to ask what function Socrates ascribes to his manner of conversing in the *Apology*. This question will lead to the further question what consequences the understanding of this function should have for our understanding of the examined life that Socrates famously contrasts with the unexamined life (*anexetastos bios*), which is said not to be livable (*ou biôtos*) for a human being (38a5–6).

Here a short explanatory note is in place: The question whether the *Apology* and other supposedly early dialogues represent views close to or identical to those of the historical Socrates, and if so, whether they also represent the views of Plato at the time he wrote, will not be treated of here. In what follows, "Socrates" will refer to the Socrates of the Platonic works, and the exact relation of the words put into the mouth of Socrates by Plato to the thought of the historical Socrates and to the thought of Plato will be left open.

This chapter is divided into five sections. The first gives a brief presentation of a widespread view of the function of *elenchos* and of the position termed Socratic intellectualism in which this view of *elenchos* is embedded. In the second section we will review the occurrences of *elenchos*, the cognate verb *elenchein* and cognate adjectives found in the *Apology*. In the third section we will look at the way Socrates describes his practice of refutative conversation in the *Apology* as well as the example of this practice the text provides, namely the exchange with Meletus, and consider whether the manner and effect of these conversations fit the intellectualist interpretation. The fourth section includes some observations about the view of motivation that is implied by relevant statements Socrates makes in his speech. The final, fifth section confronts the question, in what the benefit that Socrates claims his practice of refutative conversation confers really consists in, in case it is not the one assumed in the widespread, intellectualist interpretation, namely that of dispelling false belief, which the preceding sections will have argued is implausible in the light of Socrates's description in the *Apology* itself. A different explanation of the benefit of Socrates's questioning is offered, one pointing to the importance of the negative dimension of the philosophical, examined life.

ELENCHOS AND SOCRATIC INTELLECTUALISM IN THE SECONDARY LITERATURE

Ever since the interest of Platonic scholars of the nineteenth century came to center on deciding the order of production of the dialogues, the *Apology* has been placed among Plato's earliest works. Since the mid-twentieth century many scholars have regarded the central role Socrates accords to his practice of examination through conversation in the work as an important corroboration for this placement, identifying this practice as the Socratic method,

elenchos.[4] We can note that scholars' implication of a set methodological category by way of the articulated English phrase "the elenchus" has no basis in Socrates's Greek usage in the dialogues. He does speak of *elenchos,* most often translated as "refutation" or "cross-examination,"[5] but more often, however, Socrates employs the cognate verbal infinitive *elenchein*.[6] The primary meaning of the verb *elenchein* is "to impugn the honor of" a person or of his actions or words.[7] The convention of treating of *the elenchus* as an isolable method, analyzing its argumentative form or enumerating its various forms, became standard in the secondary literature in the twentieth century after Richard Robinson's influential *Plato's Earlier Dialectic*, first published in 1941.[8] Here Robinson argues that the elenchus is "the outstanding method in Plato's earlier dialogues" (7). In accordance with an understanding of Socratic views and of the function of *elenchos* that became standard during the latter half of the twentieth century, the *Apology* has come to be read as exemplifying the position called Socratic intellectualism, the essence of which is often taken to be expressed in the phrase "virtue is knowledge."[9] For example, when Robinson, in *Plato's Earlier Dialectic*, explains that the *Apology* portrays Socrates expressing his faith in *elenchos* as an "instrument of moral education"(14), he calls this "an aspect of the paradoxical intellectualism of the practical philosophy of Plato," which "hangs together with the proposition that virtue is knowledge" (14).

The details of interpretations along these lines may be complicated by the distinction between opinion and knowledge, since some commentators—who see this as a vital distinction in the Socratic account of virtue—regard *elenchos* as one preparatory step, where false opinion is eradicated,[10] in a process that leads to the knowledge that is virtue.[11] Although it is not always made explicit what conceptions of opinion and knowledge are in play, scholars who follow this line of interpretation seem to understand both opinion and knowledge as concerned with propositional content, but as differing in respect of their stability and justification. For Socrates's questioning is regarded as seeking definitions, and it is assumed that Socrates's position includes the view that the ability to give such definitions is a requisite for virtue. We can again turn to Robinson for an example: in the same passage from which the last quotation is taken, he proceeds to claim that the outlook of the Platonic Socrates includes the view that "he who does not know the definition of virtue will not behave in a virtuous manner" (14).[12] According to this interpretative tradition, the Socratic position implies the view that knowledge or opinion what is best, which gives rise to a rational desire, is the only factor determining action, which leads, in turn, to the paradoxical belief that no one errs willingly and that acting contrary to what one believes to be best, *akrasia*, weakness of will or incontinence, is impossible.[13]

The function and form of *elenchos* have been the subjects of a vast amount of discussion, and it will not be possible, nor will it be attempted, to give a record of this here. We will instead take as our starting point a quick sketch of a widespread understanding,[14] according to which *elenchos*, understood as Socratic refutative conversation, is meant to have a beneficial effect on people on the very general level of making those who answer to an *elenchos* better able to lead their lives well. This understanding of the function of *elenchos* has, as we will see, support in the comments Socrates makes in the *Apology*. This beneficial effect is obtained, it is supposed, by making those who answer see that they hold opinions that are incompatible, and by thereby making them see that some of their opinions are false. Gregory Vlastos in particular holds *elenchos* to be "a search for moral truth by adversary argument,"[15] wherein he means only moral truth, as opposed to truths in other domains. This points to an issue under dispute in the interpretation of Socrates's manner of refutative conversation. Is it negative only, as maintained for example by George Grote, or is it also aimed at establishing positive views, as argued by Vlastos and several scholars influenced by him?[16] Here we may simply note that Vlastos, along with many other commentators, understands the benefit of the process of *elenchos* to reside, at least in part, in the fact that the man who answers to an *elenchos* is rid of false opinions, thereby getting closer to obtaining knowledge or at least true opinion, and in the fact that this experience will have an impact on that man's actions.

We will see below that this description of the function of *elenchos* does not fit very well with Socrates's description of his practice in the *Apology*. It bears some resemblance, however, to various statements in other dialogues. Here we will consider two especially striking examples: an explicit description of the effect of *elenchos* by the Eleatic stranger in the *Sophist*, and a passage in the *Meno*. These passages give reasons to wonder whether this understanding of *elenchos* is based as much on passages such as these as it is on those dialogues supposed early, in which *elenchos* according to this view is the Socratic method.

The passage from the *Sophist* (229e–230e) is in fact explicitly referred to by Robinson as support for his understanding of *elenchos*.[17] This passage and the one immediately following it, running up to 231b8, introduces two kinds of education (*paideia*, 230a9), of which the one involves *elenchos* (231b6). It is made clear that *elenchos* here consists in a specific kind of questioning; those who educate in this way "ask questions on whatever someone thinks he's talking sense about when in fact he's talking nonsense" (230b4–5),[18] in a way that demonstrates to the one questioned that he holds contradictory beliefs (230b5–8). The effect is described as follows: "[T]hose who are being examined, on seeing this, are harsh on themselves and grow tame [or gentle, *hêmeraisthai*] before everyone else" (230b8–c1).[19] We should note

that the Eleatic stranger describes this kind of education as a purification of the soul (230d7–9) consisting in a taking out of the soul the opinions that are an impediment to learning (230d2–3). It is clear that these impeding opinions are opinions that one is wise or "terribly clever" (*deinos*) in certain things (230a6–9). The Eleatic stranger emphasizes that the purification will not be achieved, and so a soul will not be able to benefit from learning, "before one puts, by way of refutation (*elenchein*), the one examined into a state of shame (*aischynê*) [. . .] and shows him forth pure and believing he knows just the things he does know and no more" (230d1–4). When summing up the description of the kind of educational art they have considered, the Eleatic stranger states that the *elenchos* it performs "deals with [. . .] vain seeming-wisdom (*doxosophia*)" (231b5–6).[20]

In the *Meno* there is a conversation the effect of which is subsequently described by Socrates in strikingly similar terms, which therefore seems to qualify as a case of *elenchos* according to the description in the *Sophist* although it is not so termed in the text. The passage in question is the famous conversation with the slave, where Socrates, having asked the slave to construct a square double the size of a given square, leads him to discover that he did not know how to construct it although he at first thought he did (82b–84a). Socrates describes the effect on the slave as his being perplexed (*aporein*, 84a7, b1, 5, c5, 10) and discovering that he did not know what he thought he knew, and this effect as beneficial; it makes him better off because being rid of the assumption that he knows the solution to the mathematical problem makes him more able and eager to discover the correct solution (84a–d).[21]

In addition to emphasizing the beneficial effect of *elenchos*, discussions of its function often emphasize that Socrates in several places stresses the importance of the interlocutor's offering his own, sincerely held view.[22] This has been regarded as a "requirement" for *elenchos* to have its beneficial effect, termed the "say what you believe"-rule by Vlastos,[23] a view typically supported with reference to statements Socrates makes to Callicles in the *Gorgias* (500b5–c1), to Laches in the *Laches* (193c6–8), to Protagoras in the *Protagoras* (331c4-d1) and to Thrasymachus in the first book of the *Republic* (346a, 349a, 350e).

To this may be added that, although the length of the conversations in which we see Socrates examining interlocutors in this manner vary, they are often not very long. So commentators who see *elenchos* as Socrates's central "instrument" of moral improvement clearly assume that its supposed moral effect can be achieved in a relatively short time, and is achieved through the argument it involves. That it should be possible to make people change their beliefs in a short time by way of argument, and so have an effect on their actions and their lives, does of course make good sense against the background of an intellectualistic position according to which the forming of

belief is a matter of information and argument, and beliefs about what is best are the sole motivating force in human life.

Finally, several scholars, including Robinson and Vlastos, have on a critical note discussed why Socrates (and perhaps also Plato) assumes that the interlocutors answering to an *elenchos* will be benefited in this way, that is, in being purified of false opinions, for in an *elenchos* itself it is not thoroughly examined which opinions are false and which true, and why. The cross-examination usually ends in *aporia*, an impasse, out of which the interlocutors do not readily see where to proceed in order to give a satisfactory account of the issue at hand. So how can one guarantee that a person going through this process does not end up discarding the true opinions and holding on to false ones? Some points relevant to this question will be considered later.

ELENCHOS AND COGNATE TERMS IN THE *APOLOGY*

We need go no further into the several issues discussed in connection with *elenchos*, but will now turn to the text of the *Apology*. For, when we go on to look at Socrates's description of his practice, which he in some cases explicitly states involves *elenchein*, as well as at the examples of this practice, among them the interchange with Meletus (24d–27e), it will become clear that these do not seem to fit the understanding of *elenchos* just sketched.

Rather, the use of *elenchein* in forensic contexts appears to provide a more useful framework for understanding not only refutations found in the text of the *Apology*, which are themselves set in a forensic context, but also the account Socrates gives of his practice of refuting those of his fellow Athenians who are considered wise. In any event it is worth keeping in mind that *elenchein* has several meanings in addition to the primary meaning, "to impugn the honor of."[24] Although it can also signify "to refute" or "to confute," it often signifies "to examine" and "to put to the test" in a general sense, and, in forensic contexts, "to cross-examine." In neither of the two latter senses is refutation in the sense of demonstrating the falsity of a statement necessarily involved, although it might be. The most fruitful approach for coming to grips with what is implied when Socrates uses the term *elenchein* seems, therefore, to set aside presuppositions about its meaning and to let the context of each instance guide our understanding. The translation employed here translates *elenchein* by "refute" in most cases, which is useful for the purpose of making the reader aware that the same term occurs in the text, but we will see that in each instance we must consider whether this translation is the most suitable.[25] We will now go through the instances of the term found in the text of the *Apology*.[26]

The first instance of the verb *elenchein* is in fact found only a few lines into the text of the *Apology*, in the compound form *exelenchein* (17b2). When Socrates has opened his speech with a statement how dazed he became listening to his accusers, almost to the point of being persuaded himself, although they spoke nothing true, he identifies what he found most amazing in their statements, namely the claim that he, Socrates, is clever at speaking. It seems most shameful (*anaischynotaton*) to Socrates that his accusers are not ashamed (*mê aischynthênai*) to claim this, since they will, he contends, be immediately refuted by him in deed (*hyp' emou exelenchthêsontai ergôi*, 17b2). Here the kind of refutation he has in mind is obviously one relevant in the forensic context; the refutation of the claim of his accusers, by way of demonstrating that their claim is false. But this refutation is effected in deed, *ergôi/ergon*, not in words; there is no suggestion of a display of a contradiction between different statements of the accusers, only an anticipation of the contradiction of their statement by way of *action*.[27] Whether this contradiction is in fact realized by the speech Socrates goes on to give is a question we need not pursue here.[28]

Nevertheless, we should consider a couple of points concerning the setting of this anticipated refutation. Socrates surely expects the refutation to reject the truth of the initial claim, but it also seems clear that Socrates assumes that his accusers are quite aware of their falsehood—and in this sense are not stating what they believe—for why should it otherwise be shameless of them to present it, in the light of the fact that they will immediately be refuted? We can also note that Socrates does not seem to have much hope of actually making his accusers feel ashamed even when they are shown to have presented a falsehood.

The verb *elenchein* is found again at 18d5 and 18d7: Socrates has distinguished his first and most dangerous accusers, who have been slandering him for a long time, from his present accusers, and states that the former "are most difficult to get at" (18d3–4). The reason is that "it is [. . .] not possible to have any one of them come forward here and to refute (*elenchein*) him, but it is a necessity for me simply to speak in my defense as though fighting with shadows and refuting (*elenchein*) with no one to answer" (18d4–7, tr. West). The first instance is most plausibly understood as carrying the forensic meaning, "to cross-examine," a process to which Socrates can obviously not submit someone who is not present. In the second instance Socrates is perhaps trading on the nuances in the term's meaning, for while it seems plausible here too that *elenchein* should be translated "to cross-examine," Socrates's aim is clearly to refute in the sense of arguing and presenting proof against the claim of the absent accusers. In both instances, however, the act denoted by the verb *elenchein*, although it quite probably could also be understood as impugning the honor of his accusers, clearly aims at rejecting the truth of the

accusations brought forth. So should these examples be taken as counting in favor of Vlastos' view that *elenchos* is simply search for truth, carried out by seeking to establish the falsity of a thesis? We should perhaps wait until we have considered more examples before we come to grips with this question.

The next instances, of *elenchein* and of the derivative adjective *anelenkton*, are more puzzling. They are found in the tale of Chaerephon's question to the Delphic oracle, the answer to which, namely that no one is wiser than Socrates, Socrates says he set out to "refute" (*elenchein*, 21c1, tr. West). On the one hand Socrates says that upon learning the answer he saw it as certain that the god was "not saying something false; for that is not lawful for him" (21b6–7).[29] On the other hand, he says that he turned to an investigation of it, and went "to one of those reputed wise," supposing that there, if anywhere, he would "refute (*elenchein*) the divination and show to the oracle, 'This man is wiser than I, but you declared that I was'" (21b9–c2, tr. West). A little further on in his speech, Socrates will state that his wanderings among the citizens of Athens, conversing with those reputed to be wise, were certain labors[30] undertaken for the sake of the oracle's becoming "irrefutable" (*anelenktos*, 22a7–8, tr. West).

Here it seems that translating *elenchein* and *anelenktos* by "to refute" and "irrefutable" will not work very well: If the god cannot speak falsely, the aim of the act denoted by *elenchein* cannot be simply to reject the truth of the divination. Rather, its aim is perhaps to discover something about the meaning of the riddle Socrates takes the divination to imply (21b3–4), by demonstrating that its apparent meaning amounts to a claim that is not true, so that it cannot be the real meaning. A better translation of Socrates's statement would be that "he set out to examine (*elenchein*)" the divination. This translation also makes good sense in the light of the fact that it is only after Socrates tried to understand the divination, but failed and was perplexed (*aporeuein*, 21b7) that he turns to this task.[31] Moreover, when Socrates relates that he felt he had to continue conversing with those considered to be wise even after he saw that his practice incurred hatred, his explanation is as follows: "[I]t seemed to be necessary to regard the matter of the god as most important. So I had to go, in seeking what the oracle was saying (*skopounti ton chrêsmon ti legei*), to all those reputed to know something" (21e3–22a1).

Further, if Socrates's labors are to be understood as aiming to refute the divination, his statement that these labors were for the sake of making the oracle "irrefutable" does not really make sense—how can you make something irrefutable by attempting to refute it? If he should succeed in refuting it, the oracle will be refuted. If he does not succeed, it will stand not yet refuted, but will not have been shown to be irrefutable. One may further ask why attempting to refute the oracle is a service to the god, and how the oracle can be refuted at all, if it never speaks falsely.[32] But if we accept that *elenchein* should most plausibly be read as "to examine" a few sentences above, the

adjective *anelenktos* should perhaps accordingly by read as "unexamined." At 33c8 it is clear that "examined" or "tested" is the meaning of the adjective *elenktos*: Socrates here says that the things he has said to disprove the accusation that he has corrupted the young is *euelenkta*, "easily examined" or "easily tested," since those with whom he has associated as well as their relatives are present in court. If we read *anelenktos* as "unexamined" or "untested," however, Socrates is saying that he undertook his labors "in order that the oracle come to be unexamined too," which does not seem to make much sense either.

There is in fact an alternative manuscript reading that seems to give a more intelligible meaning. Burnet's apparatus reports *mê moi* as a variant for *moi kai.*[33] On this manuscript reading, Socrates would be saying that he undertook his labors so that the oracle should *not* come to be unexamined. Socrates's tale makes sense, and is in keeping with his emphasis of his service to the god, if his purpose is to be understood as aiming to *examine* the divination, in order that the oracle shall not be *unexamined* (*anelenktos*). In any event, the standard reading of Burnet's text has a problem, since it leaves the sentence in which Socrates states the purpose of his labors hard to understand both in itself and in its context, but whether one keeps Burnet's text or not, it is not evident that Socrates is at any point speaking of *refuting* the oracle rather than of examining it. As we have seen, the preceding instances of the simple form of *elenchein* is not most plausibly read as meaning "to refute," and we will see that this is also the case with the remaining instances.

The next instance of *elenchein* is found in Socrates's description of the labors he engaged in to serve the god after he had heard the divination. Socrates says he sought out those who were thought wise, discovered that they were not, and attempted to show them that they were not wise. At 23a5 he states that in these conversations he is "refuting" those with whom he speaks about certain matters, presumably the matters concerning which they are reputed to be wise. Here again the term is *exelenchein*, the compound form, as in the first instance we considered, where Socrates said that his accusers will be refuted by him in deed. Again the context suggests that the term might be used with the intention of evoking its different meanings, including the primary meaning, "to impugn the honor of," as this effect is clearly the result of the process, whether or not *exelenchein* here involves a negation of a statement pronounced by those reputed wise.

It remains to consider two further instances of the simple form, *elenchein*. At 29c6–30c2, Socrates is explaining why he cannot accept being acquitted on the condition that he give up his questioning activity. The god enjoins him to exhort anyone he meets to care for virtue, and challenge anyone who says he does: "And if one of you disputes it and asserts that he does care, I will not immediately let him go, nor will I go away, but I will speak to him, and examine and test (*elenchein*) him" (29e3–5, cf. 29d2–e3, 30a5–6). This

testing might result in the conclusion that Socrates's interlocutor does not possess virtue, but only says he does, in which case Socrates will reproach him (29e4–30a2). Here it is clear that *elenchein* does not refer to the accomplishment of a specific result but to a process that is prior to the conclusion whether the interlocutor possesses virtue or not. Therefore it cannot consist in a refutation in the sense of catching the interlocutor in a contradiction that is regarded as somehow demonstrating his lack of virtue. The meaning must rather be that of testing or putting to the proof in the sense of examining whether the interlocutor actually lives up to his claim of caring for virtue.

Finally, at 39d1 we find *elenchein* as a substantivized participle, *hoi elenchontes*. This occurs in Socrates's speech to the jurors who condemned him, in which he prophesies that they will not be rid of the nuisance of being subject to examination. Immediately preceding this prophesy we find the dialogue's only instance of the noun *elenchos*: "You have done this now supposing that you will be let off from giving an *elenchos* of your life" (*didonai elenchon tou biou*) (39c6–7). Here *elenchos* clearly does not mean refutation, for it is something one is challenged to present to another, rather than something one is subjected to, and the usual translation, "account," seems reasonable. Socrates's prophesy is that the people who condemned him will experience the opposite of what they supposed: "There will be more who will put you to the test" (*pleious esonta hymas hoi elenchontes*). The people who Socrates here predicts will be the *elenchontes* will be demanding such an account or *elenchos*. One can reasonably assume that such an account will then be examined and tested by way of comparison with their claims to virtue and wisdom, in a manner similar to that in which Socrates describes himself as having engaged. Nevertheless, Socrates makes clear that the test or examination will not primarily pertain to statements or opinions, but to ways of life: "For if you think that by killing human beings you will keep someone from reproaching you for not living correctly, then you do not think finely" (39d).

On the basis of the preceding investigation of the use of *elenchos* and cognate terms in the *Apology*, we may conclude that only two instances, both of which are of the compound form *exelenchein*, can straightforwardly be understood as involving refutation. The first is at the very start of the dialogue, where Socrates predicts that his accusers' claim that he is a clever speaker will be refuted, and the second is his description of his practice of conversing with those considered wise, but who are refuted by him.

SOCRATIC CONVERSATIONS AND THEIR EFFECT IN THE *APOLOGY*

If we now compare further details of the description Socrates gives of his practice of conversation in the *Apology* with the understanding of the function

of *elenchos* sketched earlier, it is striking how they fail to fit into the pattern suggested in modern scholarship. First, there is no mention whatsoever of any requirement in these discussions that the people with whom Socrates converses state only views they actually hold. Second, it is not made explicit how the refutations are effected. There is of course nothing in the text to preclude that the conversations have at least sometimes followed roughly the same pattern as that which we see in other dialogues, including the pattern of *elenchos* as described in the *Sophist* (230b4–8), that is, a questioning through conversation which ends with the interlocutor contradicting himself or being unable to answer. Nevertheless, it is not specified that the refutations take the form of refutations of particular beliefs.

True enough, in the case of Socrates's conversations with the craftsmen it is made clear that the pretensions to wisdom that are refuted concern other fields than their craft, including "the greatest matters," which would plausibly involve what Vlastos would call moral matters. But Socrates invariably presents the main point of the conversations to be a refutation of a general claim to be wise, rather than of specific beliefs thereby found to be false. The refutation in question could perhaps better be described as a kind of refutation in *deed*, similar to the one Socrates predicted would befall his accusers in the beginning of the speech: those with whom he converses are refuted because they demonstrate by their answers or lack of answers that their claim to wisdom is false.

Third, the aim of his conversations is said to be to show his interlocutors that they do not know what they think they know. The aim is thus described in terms parallel to the beneficial result of *elenchos* postulated in the *Sophist* as well as of the conversation with the slave in the *Meno* mentioned earlier. But it is also clear that this aim is not attained. There is no sign that Socrates's interlocutors actually acknowledge that they hold incompatible opinions. They do not appear to be "purified" of any false opinions, and certainly not of the opinion that they are wise. The result of Socrates's conversations is not that those who are opined to be wise come to acknowledge that they are not wise in the way they thought they were. For, the reason Socrates comes to agree with the Oracle that he is in one way wiser than those he has been examining is that he does not think he is wise about things about which he is not wise, while his interlocutors continue to think that they are (21d, 22c, 22d–e). The immediate effect of the refutations is rather that the people with whom he has been conversing become angry with Socrates—which means that the effect of Socratic conversation on these people is quite the opposite of the result of *elenchos* described by the Eleatic stranger in the *Sophist*. Becoming harsher with oneself and gentler toward others is clearly only a possible, and not a necessary outcome of *elenchos*. A point worthy of notice is that Socrates does not express any surprise that this is so.

The description in the *Apology* of refutative conversations that obviously fail to result in the benefit described in the cited passages from the *Sophist*

and the *Meno* may remind us of another passage from the *Meno* relevant to the present discussion. Socrates's description of the beneficial effect of his conversation with the slave follows upon and refers to a preceding passage in which the dialogue's namesake offers an image of the effect of his conversing with Socrates. For Meno has also been party to an *elenchos* as this is described in the *Sophist*, since Socrates has shown that his suggestions for an account of virtue are contradictory, and he subsequently compares Socrates to a stingray because, just as the stingray numbs anyone who comes near it, he feels that Socrates has done "some such thing" to him (80a). But Meno, although he admits to having become greatly perplexed (*meston aporias gegonenai*, 80a3–4), does not really seem to have acknowledged that he does not know what he thought he knew, since he points out that he has "countless times [. . .] made a great many speeches about virtue before many—and very well too," in his own opinion (80b2–3). This opinion does not seem to have been affected by his present inability to answer Socrates about virtue. Moreover, although he claims to be numb both in soul and tongue as a result of Socrates's refutative conversation (80b), this numbness is not so serious as to prevent his readily coming up with both an insult and an implicit threat. For he compares Socrates to a stingray not only with regard to the effect of his conversation, but also with regard to his looks, and it is difficult not to sense a sinister tone in his commendation of Socrates's decision not to leave Athens; had he come to Meno's homeland, Socrates would perhaps be treated as Meno predicts he might outside his own city, namely being "carted off to jail as a sorcerer" (80b).[34] Meno does not appear to have acknowledged his lack of knowledge, nor does he appear to have become gentler toward others as a result of being refuted by Socrates.

In Socrates's exchange in his defense speech with one of his accusers, Meletus, we see the same point illustrated. Here we also see Socrates refuting an adversary in a manner typical of forensic contexts; as Hayden Ausland points out,[35] such refutation is often achieved by reducing the opponent to silence, the litigant drawing attention to the opponent's silence and demanding an answer. So at 24d3, Socrates demands an answer of Meletus to the question who improves the young: "Do you see, Meletus, that you are silent and have nothing to say?" (24d7) Meletus eventually coughs up some answers, which Socrates proceeds to show untenable, but not by having Meletus affirm a premise that implies or leads to contradiction. Rather, Meletus' silence is taken as a sign that he has not given any thought to the question what really harms and improves the young. In this way Socrates makes clear that Meletus' claim to care about these matters, as implied in his charging Socrates of corrupting the young, is the main target of the refutation; Meletus' apparent care for the education of the young is exposed as mere pretense. In the last part of the examination of Meletus, where Socrates treats

of the second part of the accusation, that of not believing in the gods in which the city believes, but in others (26b8–c5), Meletus is also reduced to silence. When Socrates has argued that Meletus contradicts himself in the indictment, and concludes that he cannot convince anyone that the same man believes there are things related to *daimons* and gods and again that he believes in neither *daimons*, nor gods nor heroes, he has no reply (28a1). Still, even if Socrates here does seem to arrive at a refutation of the charge against him, Meletus shows no signs of acknowledging ignorance or of becoming gentle; he is not in any way moved to withdraw his accusation. One may suggest that the interlocutors in Socrates's refutative conversations in the *Apology* are gentle, or rather too gentle, only with themselves.[36]

Although both the insight into one's own ignorance and conversion to gentleness are conspicuously missing as effects of Socrates's refutative conversations with the interlocutors featured in the *Apology*—both in those described as the target of his previous refutations and in the one subjected to cross-examination during the actual defense—Socrates still holds his practice to have been greatly beneficial, to the degree that it will be a great loss for the people of Athens if he does not continue it (30a, 30d–e). It seems clear that this benefit cannot be taken to be primarily an expulsion of false opinions, with the possible addition of the consequent establishment of positive views. This fact, along with the absence of other supposed characteristics of *elenchos*, can be said to call into question the traditional interpretation of the *Apology* within the framework of the general interpretation founded on the notion of a Socratic intellectualism.

OPINIONS, ACTIONS, AND HUMAN MOTIVATION

From these considerations about the depiction of Socrates's refutative conversations in the *Apology* we will now turn to some passages that tell us something about Socrates's assumptions about the way our actions are guided and the way opinions are formed, influenced and changed. For these too seem difficult to reconcile with the intellectualist interpretation, but may on the other hand provide good grounds for understanding why Socrates is not surprised that his refutative conversations often do not achieve the intended results of making people realize their lack of wisdom and so care more for virtue.

The very first thing Socrates says in his defense speech is that he almost forgot himself while his accusers were speaking, and was almost himself persuaded by them. What causes this effect on Socrates is obviously not the truthfulness of their speeches, since he immediately declares that they have said nothing true, nor have they moved him toward changing his view of himself by showing him a contradiction in his opinions. The cause that

Socrates suggests is the *beauty* of their speeches; they were *kekalliepêmenoi logoi*, beautified speeches (17b9). The question of Socratic irony is always a complicating factor when one is interpreting a Platonic text, but it seems safe to say that Socrates, however ironic his remark may be, in the opening of the *Apology* clearly acknowledges the possibility of beauty in speech defeating truth in the attempt to persuade the judges in a courtroom. This is, then, an explicit acknowledgment of the force of speeches, of the power of persuasion, by rhetorical devices and beauty in the form of words, to shape or change people's views, the equivalent of which we find in several dialogues, notably the *Gorgias* and the *Phaedrus*.

In the opening of the speech Socrates speaks of his first accusers (18a7–e4), who came long before the ones he is now facing, and he must therefore first speak in defense against these. Thus, when Socrates declares that a defense speech is necessary, he adds that "an attempt must be made in this short time to take away your prejudice, which you got during a long time" (18e5–19a1). What he must attempt is, then, what is commonly taken to be the aim of *elenchos*, to remove an opinion that is false in a short time. Socrates goes on to say that he regards this as hard (*chalepon*, 19a5). It is also striking that he describes the first accusers as the more fearsome or harder to tackle (*deinoteroi*, 18b4) because they have been able to influence the judges over so long a time, beginning when they were young. He repeats at 24a2–4 that he would be amazed if he should in fact be able to remove the prejudice against him in so short a time. But why should the short time available count against Socrates if he, as he claims, will speak the truth? Why does not the truth appear just as true however long one has held a false opinion before one comes to hear the truth?

The assumption Socrates is making is clearly that both the shaping and the changing of opinions are not simply matters of information and argument, but more complex affairs. In fact, his statements about the way one may influence the young are similar to comments made by the Socrates of the *Republic* (377a11–b2, 378d6–e2). There he states that what is taken into one's opinions when young "has a tendency to become hard to eradicate" (378d7–e2). In the *Apology*, after the verdict has been announced, Socrates acknowledges that he has not succeeded in persuading the judges. Socrates explains that the reason is that they have conversed with each other for only a short time, and voices his faith that the judges would have been persuaded had he had more time (37a6–b2). Time and timing, as well as beauty and rhetoric, are clearly essential to forming and changing someone's opinions.

Let us consider another point that does not seem to count in favor of the interpretation within the traditional framework. According to that interpretation Socrates's outlook is taken to include the view that virtue is knowledge and that acting against one's view of what is best, often termed *akrasia* or

weakness of will in the secondary literature, is impossible. The basis for the view mentioned is first of all the *Protagoras*, but other statements to the effect that no one errs, does wrong, or is bad willingly are also taken to support it.[37]

Whether such statements should be read as implying the denial that it is possible to act against one's judgment what is best is a question for discussion. But however the matter may stand it is unclear whether the *Apology* suggests this picture of the motivation for our actions. When Socrates at 28b3–29a2 explains why he is not ashamed of having engaged in the pursuit from which he is now in danger of dying, he proclaims: "Wherever someone stations himself, holding that it is best, or wherever he is stationed by a ruler, there he must remain and run the risk, as it seems to me, and not take into account death or anything else before what is shameful" (28d5–9). This certainly implies that it would be possible not to do so and instead leave one's station—for instance because of fear—even though one holds it best to remain. Whether or not Socrates would say that a person who does this has failed *willingly*, the *Apology* does not tell us. But he does appear to hold such a person as deserving of reproach, since he deems that he himself would have committed "terrible deeds" ("*egô oun deina an eiên eirgasmenos"*) (28d9) had he left his "station" when the god ordered him "to live philosophizing and examining myself and others" because he feared death or anything else (28e).

Further, when Socrates is finishing his defense speech by explaining why he does not bring forth his family and beg to be acquitted, he warns the jurors against getting angered by this, because they themselves have employed this tactic in less serious trials, lest they cast their vote in anger. The point of this warning is evidently to remind the jurors that anger may cause them to vote otherwise than they would have voted if they were not angry. This seems to imply the view that anger might make someone behave contrary to one's opinion what is best, in this case what is just. Surely, Socrates does not make explicit what the relation between anger and the opinion what is just would be in such a case. This means, however, that neither is there any support in the text for the intellectualist interpretation that assumes that this relation is necessarily that of anger causing one's opinion what is best or just to change, as assumed by commentators who attempt to explain this warning within the intellectualist framework.[38]

On these points, then, Socrates's outlook does not quite seem to fit the view of human motivation and virtue according to which argument and opinion or knowledge what is best are the only determining factors, the view that offers support for the understanding of Socrates's refutative conversation that has been called into question. It is interesting to note that Socrates in the *Apology* acknowledges three kinds of motivation or direction of interest strikingly similar to the ones attributed to the three elements of the soul introduced in a passage in Book 4 of the *Republic* (436a8–444a3, cf. 580d2–581e3). This

passage, however, is often regarded as marking the break with Socratic intellectualism by introducing non-rational desires that can motivate us to act independently of and even contrary to our opinion of what is best.

The three kinds of interest are, respectively, in money and material wealth, in honor and reputation, and in wisdom, knowledge and truth. At 23d9–e1 in the *Apology* Socrates suggests that the many nameless accusers who have suffered refutation by the youths who imitate him and try to examine others are *philotimoi*, lovers of honor (23e1).[39] He claims that this is one reason for their persistent and vehement slandering of him, because they are not willing to admit the truth; that it has become manifest that they pretend to know while not knowing. At 29c6–e3, when he explains why he cannot agree to being acquitted on the condition of giving up philosophizing, he describes his practice by help of an example of the things he usually says, which runs as follows:

> Best of men, you who are an Athenian, from the city that is greatest and best reputed (*eudokimos*) for wisdom and strength, are you not ashamed that you care for having as much money as possible, and reputation (*doxa*), and honour (*timê*), but that you neither care nor think about prudence (*phronêsis*) and truth, and how your soul will be the best possible? (29d7–e3)[40]

These three kinds of drive or interest are mentioned or implied in the *Symposium* (205d1–8, 208c1–d2) and the *Phaedo* (82b10–c8, cf. 68b8–c3) as well,[41] and thus seem to be part of a continuing outlook on human motivation and interest on the part of Socrates in the Platonic dialogues, rather than an innovation of the *Republic*, as is claimed by those who believe that these different kinds of motivation are introduced specifically as non-rational forces of motivation in order to argue against Socratic intellectualism.[42]

Further, in the passage in the *Apology* immediately following Socrates's example of his practice of questioning at 29d7–e3, he makes a point that seems significant for his understanding of virtue, and that also seems to fit badly with the intellectualistic interpretation. If anyone disputes him and claims that he does care about prudence, truth, and the soul, Socrates will respond as follows:

> I shall then not let him go and I will not depart, but will speak to him and question him and test him. And if he does not seem to me to possess virtue, but only says he does, I will reproach him, saying that he regards the things worth the most the least important, and the paltrier things as more important. (29e3–30a3)

Virtue seems here to Socrates to be relative to the object of one's cares and to lie in the way one's different interests are balanced, rather than simply dependent on one's knowledge or beliefs. As we have seen, the term translated as

"test" in the quotation is none other than *elenchein*, and this is clearly a use of the term that seems to be more closely connected to the forensic context than to a search for truth through the investigation of the relation between different statements. The one who claims to care for virtue will be put to the proof, but not necessarily by being shown that he holds incompatible opinions.

This description of his questioning of the Athenians seems to have a parallel in an account of Socrates's questioning in the *Laches*. Here Nicias remarks that whoever comes into close contact with Socrates must

> even if he began by conversing about something quite different in the first place, keep on being led about by the man's arguments until he submits to answering questions about himself (or: to giving an account of himself, *to didonai peri hautou logon*) concerning both his present manner of life and the life he has lived hitherto." (187e-188a) (trans. Rosamond Kent Sprague)[43]

He adds that when one submits to this questioning, "Socrates will not let him go before he has well and truly tested every last detail." Nicias suggests that the result of the conversation may be that it is brought to one's attention that one has done or is doing wrong, and that the answerer who does not run away from this treatment, but is willing to value learning, "will necessarily pay more attention to the rest of his life" (188b). Here again we see a description where the forensic aspect of Socrates's questioning seems more prominent than the logical: like the person who claimed to care for truth and virtue in the *Apology*, the answerer to Socrates's questioning in the *Laches* is depicted as in a sense on trial, challenged to answer for his life. And again, the beneficial lesson drawn from the process is in no explicit way connected to a demonstration of the falsity of a belief concerning that about which one first started conversing.

APORIA AND THE PHILOSOPHICAL FORCE OF NEGATIVITY

Let us recapitulate the points that have resulted from the inquiry so far. First, Socrates's use of the term *elenchos* and its corresponding verb and adjectives provides no support for the view that this term is used to designate a Socratic method that aims at dispelling false beliefs through refutation in the *Apology*. Second, Socrates's statements about the way opinions are formed and changed, on the one hand, and the way we are moved to act, on the other, do not suggest the intellectualistic view of virtue and motivation that would serve to explain why Socrates should have faith in such a method as a means to improving people's situation with regard to virtue and happiness. If these conclusions are along the right lines, it is implausible that Socrates holds that

the result of his conversations as described in the *Apology* is that his interlocutors are brought closer to the truth by being rid of specific false beliefs that have been refuted in the course of these conversations. We should then ask wherein the benefit in fact consists that Socrates so confidently maintains to have bestowed upon Athens through his refutative practice. What have all the people he has been refuting experienced, even without acknowledging a lack of wisdom? Could the benefit also consist in some effect, not in the one who has been refuted, but in the community in which the refutation has taken place?

Apparently all the people who have been refuted have to some degree experienced *aporia*, being at a loss what to answer, without way or passage, or at an impasse.[44] And perhaps some of the people who were not themselves the ones being refuted, but who witnessed the refutations, have also experienced some degree of *aporia*, or perplexity, when those whom they thought wise suddenly appeared less wise. Is it this experience of *aporia* that is in itself beneficial—and if so, why? We can note that Socrates states that when he had heard the answer from the oracle in Delphi, he was at a loss (*aporeuein,* 21b7) for a long time, and this experience was in fact the beginning of his practice of questioning through conversation; he started out to examine or test the oracle, in order to find out what its divination could mean. So in Socrates himself, an instance of *aporia* was central in initiating his conversational practice, itself undeniably an important part of his philosophical, examined life. But what is it about an *aporia* that can have so beneficial an effect—at first sight it does seem like a contradiction in terms. How can an impasse, a blind alley, lead anywhere?

We have seen that in the *Meno*, the *aporia* or perplexity of the slave is said to be that from which he can proceed to find the correct solution. In the *Republic*'s Book 7 there is a passage where Socrates and Glaucon discuss which studies are apt to summon thought and turn the soul toward true being. Socrates points to experiences where the soul would be at a loss (*aporein*, 524a6) to say what a sensation indicates, and says it is likely that in such cases the soul will summon the intellect to decide. In the simile of the cave, too, the prisoner who is let free is described as at first being at a loss to know what is appearance and what is true (515d6). In all these cases, then, *aporia* is described as the beginning of a process that may lead the soul toward greater insight. Plato's pupil, Aristotle, later famously takes the impasses, the *aporiai*, arising within a given field as a useful starting point for further studies (e.g., *Metaph* 3.995a24–995b4). If the beneficial effect of *aporia* in the *Apology* is something similar, how should we understand this?

When trying to answer this question, we can consider what the *aporia* resulting from Socrates's questioning really is. In one sense it is a negation, but a negation that has the special feature of having no clear reference. This

is exactly what lands Socrates's faith in his practice of questioning in trouble on the traditional interpretation we have been considering. For this is what occasions, among other things, Vlastos' identification of what he calls "the problem of the Socratic elenchus," namely the question why Socrates takes *elenchos*, as Vlastos argues he does, to demonstrate that an initial statement is false. Vlastos holds that this problem calls for explanation by help of additional premises.[45] In any event, it is clear that an *elenchos,* in the sense of a refutation, does not in itself demonstrate what has been denied, only that something *is* in fact not as the interlocutor in this particular conversation *thought* it was.

In this sense we can suggest that the negation is in one way the negation of appearance, of the way things appeared or seemed to be to Socrates's interlocutor. And exactly because Socrates's refutative questioning does not make clear to what the negation pertained, the *aporia* can be said to invite reflection on the fact that what appears to be true may not be true, but must be subjected to closer inspection. In the *Apology* Socrates presents a list of appearances that have become common opinion, *doxa*, for inspection and reflection, most of which he denies to have any basis in truth. That the beneficial effect of his refutative questioning could be seen as an awakening to the importance of such reflection seems to fit with Socrates's comparison of himself to a gadfly that awakens the sluggish horse of Athens, which he describes as in need of awakening (30e5).

If we pass for a moment from considering how to understand Socrates's practice as described in the *Apology*, internal to the work itself, to asking what Plato may have intended with this depiction, and this account, of the practice in the *Apology*, we may suggest that at this level too the effect of *aporia* or perplexity seems relevant. For although the *Apology* has obviously made very different impressions on different readers, the secondary literature makes plain that several readers have found the *Apology* in one sense perplexing. On the one hand it presents Socrates as boastful and insolent in this most serious setting and under these most serious circumstances, to the point of making us half-understand why he was condemned rather than acquitted. Whether or not we agree with Nietzsche's appraisal of Socrates, we can recognize that he is onto something when he writes the following in the "Problem of Socrates": "not Athens, *he* gave himself the chalice with poison, he forced Athens to the chalice" (KSA 6, 73, my translation). On the other hand, the work portrays a Socrates who impresses and moves many readers with his courage and determination to stand by his conviction what is best, not allowing himself to be overcome by fear of death or anything else. The resulting case of *aporia* or perplexity is not one where it is obvious that one of the two sides giving rise to the confusion is to be refuted in the sense of being shown false. We can perhaps rather suspect that one intended effect is

to encourage us to reconsider and perhaps reject the appearance of Socrates that results from the first impression of the work, whether this first appearance presents us with Socrates as a villain or as a saint. The next step can then be to reconsider the assumption that there is a simple question whether he was a villain or a saint, and a simple answer, whether affirmative or negative. And again, the depiction of a Socrates who is courageous and composed in the face of death, and in this posture commanding respect and admiration, yet insolently demanding of people that they answer for their lives, may be regarded as inviting us to reflect on the way we ourselves might respond to such a demand. Should we ourselves reconsider and perhaps reject our impression that we care for what is most worth caring for? Or would we too have preferred to silence Socrates instead?

It is interesting that when Plato's Socrates refers to his daimonic sign or voice in explanation of his abstention from politics, he states that it always holds him back, and never urges him on. His daimonic sign, then, is in a sense a big "no." And what Socrates seems to encourage, as well as exemplify, in the *Apology* is in a sense a continuous "no." Let us look at the examples: Is not his defense speech really a long list of no's, denials and rejections? Socrates begins by denying that his accusers are right about his competence in speaking, he denies that he is guilty of the old as well as the new accusations, he denies that Meletus even cares about the matters concerning which he has accused Socrates. He rejects the opinion of the Athenians—about themselves as caring for wisdom, and about Socrates and his philosophical practice, and about Athens as a city of justice and law. When he brings up examples of his own just deeds, these are also instances of his saying no; he said no to what seemed best to the ruling forces of the city under democracy as well as under the Thirty, apparently because it did not, on reflection, seem best to him. And in the end he invites the men of Athens to consider the negation of what seems most obvious of all: that it is better to live than to die.

Is this willingness to negate also what Socrates encourages? Is this what the examined, philosophical life involves? Socrates certainly seems to be implying that the attitude of the ordinary Athenian does not lead him to care about what is really worth caring about. Is not what he urges a willingness to say no to common opinion and appearance, in the sense of reflecting on the fact that what immediately appears best to oneself and others is not necessarily so, because such reflection is necessary to discover what is most worth caring about? If it is, we can suggest a reason the *aporia* that results from examination and refutation may be regarded as beneficial even when it does not immediately result in the human wisdom about one's own ignorance that Socrates claims to possess. For the *aporia* is at any rate a negation that invites reflection on the fact that things are not as one thought they were—even the angry man who still believes himself wise after being refuted by Socrates

must have perceived that his views could not be stated in the way he thought they could. Maybe this will not take him very far, but it might also be the beginning of a process that may eventually turn him toward an—at least more—philosophical way of life.

Nietzsche claimed in *Beyond Good and Evil* (1885), very briefly stated, that Plato and thus his Socrates got it wrong about truth and appearance and turned things upside down. It is tempting to suggest by way of conclusion that Socrates would have thought that it was Nietzsche who turned things upside down, for in place of the latter's life-affirming yes, Plato through his Socrates seems to encourage a life-affirming no, without which we in his view will not come closer to the truth, and so we will not find out how things really are, how to live well and what things one should make the object of one's care.[46]

NOTES

1. It has, however, become standard in the secondary literature to use the Latinized transcription with the definite article, "the *elenchus*," to refer to *elenchos* as a supposed Socratic method (Richard Robinson, *Plato's Earlier Dialectic* [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1941/2nd ed. 1953, references are to the 1953 edition], 1, Gregory Vlastos, "The Socratic Elenchus," *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* 1 [1983]: 27). Whether there is a Socratic method to be found in the dialogues, and if so, in what it consists, has been widely discussed, see Gary Allen Scott, ed., *Does Socrates have a Method?* (University Park, PA: Penn State University Press, 2002). This larger question will not be the main concern here; we will focus on Socrates's own description of his practice in the *Apology* and, comparing with some relevant passages from other dialogues, consider what this tells us about his view of how human beings can be benefited with regard to virtue, and so, of how human motivation is shaped and influenced.

2. Cf. for example, Robinson, *Plato's Earlier Dialectic*, 14, and Vlastos, "The Socratic Elenchus," 43. This phraseology arose in the nineteenth century and was probably rooted in a distinction Kant draws between "Sensualphilosophen" and "Intellektualphilosophen," pointing to Plato as among the most prominent of the latter (*Critique of Pure Reason* B 881), although Kant's distinction was not concerned with motivation. In recent times commentators have drawn a distinction between different aspects of Socratic intellectualism, typically between virtue intellectualism, according to which virtue is entirely a question of knowledge or otherwise cognitive factors, and motivational intellectualism, according to which only cognitive factors, in the sense of beliefs or knowledge about what is best to do, motivate action (see Thomas C. Brickhouse and Nicholas D. Smith, *Socratic Moral Psychology* [Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2010]).

3. Cf. the widespread view that the Socrates of the early dialogues denies the possibility of *akrasia*, incontinence or weakness of will, for example, in Vlastos, *Socrates: Ironist and Moral Philosopher* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University

Press, 1991), Terence Irwin, *Plato's Moral Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977) and *Plato's Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), Terry Penner, "Socrates and the Early Dialogues," in *The Cambridge Companion to Plato*, ed. Richard Kraut (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1992) and "The Historical Socrates and Plato's Early Dialogues: Some Philosophical Questions," in *New Perspectives on Plato, Modern and Ancient*, ed. Julia Annas and Christopher Rowe (Cambridge, MA: Center for Hellenistic Studies, Harvard University Press, 2002), Christopher Bobonich, *Plato's Utopia Recast* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2002), Brickhouse and Smith, *Socratic Moral Psychology*. Cf. also Aristotle, *Nichomachean Ethics* VII.ii.1145b22–27.

4. For example in Robinson, *Plato's Earlier Dialectic*, Vlastos, "The Socratic Elenchus," Irwin, *Plato's Ethics*, and C. D. C. Reeve, *Philosopher-kings* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988). The status of Plato's *Apology of Socrates* has been much discussed in the secondary literature (see W. K. C. Guthrie, *A History of Greek Philosophy* vol. 4 [Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1975], 72–80); in 1804 Schleiermacher forwarded the thesis that it represented a historically correct rendering of Socrates's defense speech at his trial. This view, although it was challenged by James Riddell, ed., *The* Apology *of Plato with a Revised Text and English Notes* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1877) and Martin Schanz, ed., *Sammlung ausgewälter Dialoge Platons, vol. 3 Apologia* (Leipzig: Tauchnitz, 1893), largely prevailed in the nineteenth century (see George Grote, *Plato and Other Companions of Socrates*, vol. 1 [London: John Murray, 1865]), and was also held by several scholars in the twentieth century (Burnet, ed., *Plato: Euthyphro, Apology of Socrates, Crito. Edited with notes* [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1924], A. E. Taylor, *Plato, The Man and His Works* [London: Methuen, 1926], Guthrie, *History*, 78, cf. Charles Kahn, *Plato and the Socratic Dialogue* [Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1996], 88–9). At present, the prevailing view seems to be that the work is not, and is not intended to be, a historically faithful report, while opinions of the extent to which it is close to the defense presented by the historical Socrates and the extent to which it presents an accurate picture of the historical Socrates vary. Cf. the discussions in Brickhouse and Smith, *Socrates on Trial* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989), 10, who write that "though we cannot assume accuracy on any given point, we believe that the burden of proof must be borne by those who deny it"; in E. de Stryker and S. R. Slings, *Plato's Apology of Socrates: A Literary and Philosophical Study with Running Commentary* (Leiden: Brill,1994), 6–8, who conclude that the literary quality of the work proves that Plato "did not feel bound to stick as closely as possible to the main lines of what Socrates had actually said"; and in Myles F. Burnyeat, "The Impiety of Socrates," in *Explorations in Ancient and Modern Philosophy,* vol. 2 (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2012), Ch. 11, 224, who writes that "[t]he scholarly literature on this topic is a paradise of inconclusive guesswork," and refrains from offering a new guess.

5. Here the noun "*elenchos*" will be used alone to refer to the process, and "the *elenchos*" only when referring to some particular case under discussion.

6. In the *Apology* the noun *elenchos* occurs only once, at 39c, where, as we will see, it does not signify a cross-examining or refutative conversation, but an account. The verb *elenchein* occurs several times, five times in the simple form (18d5, 18d7,

21c1, 29e5, 39d1), and two times in the compound form *exelenchein* (17b2, 23a5). As we will see, it is not obvious that it means an act of refuting in all these instances; in each instance the meaning must be determined in the light of the context.

7. As pointed out by Hayden Ausland, "Forensic Characteristics of Socratic Argumentation," in Scott, *Does Socrates have a Method?* Ausland also elucidates the specific technical use in forensic context of the term *elenchos* as a background for understanding the use of the term in Socratic literature, a point to which we will return.

8. Although the notion was, as Vlastos, "The Socratic Elenchus," 28 notes, evident earlier, in Grote, *Plato and Other Companions* vol. 1, 292 and Lewis Campbell, ed., *The Theaetetus of Plato: A Revised Text and English Notes* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1861), xvi and *The Sophistes and Politicus of Plato with a Revised Text and English Notes* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1867), lxi.

9. Cf. Aristotle's *Eudemian Ethics* 1216b.

10. Not without reason, as we will see below, cf. also *Alcibicades* I, 106c–116e.

11. Cf. Vlastos, "The Socratic Elenchus" and Brickhouse and Smith, *Socrates on Trial*, who, like several commentators who take this line, also hold that Socratic intellectualism includes the view that such knowledge, and thus virtue, is in fact unattainable for human beings, so that all one can aim at is true convictions. Cf. also Irwin, *Plato's Moral Theory* and *Plato's Ethics* and Richard Kraut, "Comments on Gregory Vlastos' 'The Socratic Elenchus'," *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* 1 (1983): 69, although there are differences in the details between the interpretations of all these scholars.

12. It is not obvious exactly what "knowing a definition" entails according to Robinson's interpretation. He evidently regards it as some kind of philosophical, understood as theoretical, understanding: "The Platonic Socrates believes that you cannot really be virtuous unless you have a philosophical understanding of the definition of virtue. The practice of virtue is identical with the theory of it" (14). He further regards *elenchos* as an instrument to set people on the path toward such understanding: "The aim of the elenchus is to wake men out of their dogmatic slumbers into genuine intellectual curiosity" (17). But Robinson adds that "the notion of elenchus contains a germ of the Platonic conception of knowledge as absolutely distinct from opinion" and continues: "The elenchus does not directly give a man any positive knowledge; but it gives him for the first time the *idea* of real knowledge, without which he can never have any positive knowledge even if he has all the propositions that express it" (17). In a more recent example, James Doyle has argued explicitly that the description of *elenchos* in the *Apology* suggests a view of virtue as knowledge and of this knowledge as propositional, in an unpublished article entitled "Intellectualism and the elenchus," presented at Copenhagen University in May 2014. Cf. also Irwin, *Plato's Ethics,* 27–8.

13. An influential example of this line of interpretation is found in Terry Penner, "Socrates and the Early Dialogues" and "The Historical Socrates and Plato's Early Dialogues." As the latter article makes clear, his interpretation differs on several points from that of Vlastos. Brickhouse and Smith, although their interpretation differs from that of Penner on various details, have also defended a view of what they call Socratic moral psychology along similar lines in several works, most recently

in *Socratic Moral Psychology*, where they adjust their earlier view by allowing that appetites and passions play a role by way of influencing beliefs and reasoning.

14. Robinson and Vlastos can be said to be the most influential proponents of this overall line of interpretation of *elenchos*. The view that *elenchos* constitutes the Socratic method, functioning roughly along the lines they set out, is still found as a premise in recent publications (Julia Annas; *Platonic Ethics, Old and New* [Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1999], 168, Raphael Woolf, "Consistency and *Akrasia* in Plato's *Protagoras*," *Phronesis* 47 (2002): 227–28, Brickhouse and Smith, *Socratic Moral Psychology*), although both Robinson and Vlastos have certainly had their critics (for example, Vlastos, "The Socratic Elenchus," criticizes parts of Robinson's interpretation of the structure of "the standard elenchus," and Kahn, "Vlastos' Socrates," review of *Socrates: Ironist and Moral Philosopher*, by Gregory Vlastos, *Phronesis* 37, no. 2 [1992], develops a thoroughgoing criticism of Vlastos' understanding of *elenchos*, along with his criticism of Vlastos' identification of a Socratic position opposed to a Platonic one. Cf. also Kahn, *Plato and the Socratic Dialogue* and Hugh H. Benson, "The Dissolution of the Problem of the Elenchus," *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* 13 (1995).

15. Vlastos, "The Socratic Elenchus," 30.

16. Vlastos changed his view on this point; he had agreed with Grote in his introduction to the *Protagoras* from 1956 in *Plato: Protagoras*. *Benjamin Jowett's translation revised by Martin Ostwald*, ed. Gregory Vlastos (Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1956), as he explains in "The Socratic Elenchus," where he proposes a new interpretation. Cf. also Kraut, "Comments."

17. This, notwithstanding the fact that the *Sophist*, on Robinson's reading, is late, whereas the *elenchos* presumably is first and foremost the method of the early works. Vlastos, "The Socratic Elenchus," 45, n. 50, likewise makes clear that this description has influenced his interpretation of "the elenchus"; he sees the passage from the *Sophist* as presenting *elenchos* as the purely negative procedure that Grote, and he himself earlier had taken it to be, and makes the following remark in regard to it: "No one would doubt that this is an authentic, if partial representation of Socrates: this is the Socrates who destroys the conceit of wisdom (*Ap.* 21b–23b). But Plato never says this is all Socrates was, as he would have been, if the account of the elenchus I have given at that time were correct."

18. Translation by Christopher Rowe, ed. and trans., *Plato:* Theaetetus *and* Sophist. *Cambridge Texts in the History of Philosophy* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

19. This and the following quotations from the *Sophist* are from the translation of Seth Benardete, trans., *Plato's* Sophist: *Part II of The Being of the Beautiful* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984). Benardete uses the traditional translations of *elenchos* and *elenchein*, "refutation" and "to refute," respectively, while Rowe translates these terms by "challenge" and "to challenge" in this passage.

20. The target of the refutation is thus not described as one specific opinion among the opinions that are shown to be contradictory, but the opinion that one is wise when one is not (230a5–b2).

21. Vlastos interestingly excludes this passage from the examples of Socratic *elenchos* on the ground that it involves reference to "the doctrine of 'recollection',"

which he takes to signify that "[i]n the 'Socrates' of this passage Plato has already taken a giant step [. . .] in transforming the moralist of the earlier dialogues into the metaphysician of the middle ones" (Vlastos, "The Socratic Elenchus," 32).

22. Robinson, *Plato's Earlier Dialectic,* Vlastos, "The Socratic Elenchus," Reeve, *Philosopher-Kings*, 4, Irwin, *Plato's Ethics*, 20, J. M. Carvalho, "Socrates' Refutation of Apollo—A note on *Apology* 21b7–c2," *Journal of Ancient Philosophy* 8, no. 2 (2014): 52.

23. Vlastos, "The Socratic Elenchus," 35.

24. This is also the case with the noun *elenchos*, as we will see below. See the entries in Liddel-Scott-Jones: *A Greek-English Lexicon*. For discussion of use of *elenchos* and *elenchein* before Plato, see James H. Lesher, "Parmenidean *Elenchos*," in Scott, *Does Socrates have a Method?*.

25. Translations of the *Apology* are by Thomas G. West, *Plato's* Apology of Socrates: *An Interpretation, with a New Translation* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1979), occasionally slightly modified. References to the Greek text is from *Platonis Opera*, vol. 1, eds. E. A. Duke, W. F. Hicken, W. S. M. Nicoll, D. B. Robinson, and J. C. G. Strachan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995).

26. Harold Tarrant, "*Elenchos* and *Exetasis*: Capturing the Purpose of Socratic Interrogation," in Scott, *Does Socrates have a Method?*, gives an overview of and discusses the use of the terms *elenchos*, *elenchein* and cognates in dialogues that "are generally agreed to be prior to the *Republic* and either are or could be authentic" (63), and shows that the terms are often used in ways that do not fit with the interpretation given by Vlastos. Tarrant's interpretation of *elenchos* and of Socrates's conversing, however, is different from the one presented here.

27. We find this use of the compound form in cases where refutation is effected by deed as opposed to argument or speech also in Aristotle, cf. *Politics* 1333b14–16, where the simple form, *euelenkta*, is used in reference to verbal argumentation ("easily cross-examined in accord with *logos*").

28. Cf. David Leibowitz, *The Ironic Defence of Socrates* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), who argues that Socrates will demonstrate that he is a most clever speaker and that his prediction of this refutation is one of a series of lies in the defense speech.

29. West, *Apology*, has the following note to the translation: "The word for 'lawful' here is *themis*, a somewhat exalted term with overtones of divine sanction" (56, n. 42).

30. The expression here, "certain labors" (*ponous tinas*), is apt to recall the labors of Heracles. This is one among several examples in the defense speech of literary allusions in which Socrates compares himself with heroes; see Jacob Howland's contribution to this volume.

31. *Pace* Burnet, *Apology of Socrates*, who states that Socrates "set out with the idea of refuting the oracle (21b9), at least in its obvious sense; it was only when he had discovered its hidden meaning (21b3 *ti pote ainittetai*) that he felt disposed to champion the god" (note to 22a7, 174). But as Burnet's own references show, the sequence of events Socrates gives in the text is the opposite; it was in order to discover what the oracle meant that Socrates started his quest.

32. Several commentators have recognized the interpretive challenge Socrates's statements about the oracle pose when refutation is supposed to be his reported purpose (cf. Lesher, "Parmenidean Elenchos," 27, n. 10), but many embark on attempts at explaining this as a special case within the framework of the traditional view of "the elenchus," rather than considering the possibility that Socrates is not saying that he set out to refute the oracle (see Carvalho, "Socrates' Refutation of Apollo."). Others pass it over in silence, cf. Irwin, *Plato's Ethics*, 27.

33. I am grateful to Hayden Ausland for bringing this alternative reading to my attention. The evidence for this reading is found in an Armenian translation of the early Christian era as well as in various later manuscripts. Burnet's conclusion, that "[t]here is no reason, then, to tamper with the text" and that the clause about the purpose of Socrates's labors should be read as ironical: "only to find the oracle prove quite irrefutable," follows from his view that Socrates is initially saying that he set out "to prove the god a liar" (note to 21b8). Burnet's explanation why Socrates does not fear that the Athenians will regard this as impious, that "the ordinary Athenian had no great respect for the Pythian Apollo," makes it difficult to understand the purpose of this section of the speech: If Socrates was counting on this sentiment, why would he include in his defense speech a description of his practice as a service to this god?

34. Although in the *Crito*, Crito says that he has friends in Thessaly, Meno's home city, who will protect Socrates there (*Crito* 45c2–4). Later in the *Meno* Socrates involves Anytus, who was to become one of his accusers, in the conversation (89e–95a), and this interchange too ends with a refutation, upon which Anytus likewise responds by making an implicit threat, suggesting that in Athens too it is easy to harm people as well as benefit them (94e).

35. Ausland, "Forensic Characteristics of Socratic Argumentation."

36. Vlastos, "The Socratic Elenchus," apparently excludes the exchange with Meletus too from his list of examples of *elenchos* (see 56, n. 63).

37. Such statements are found in several of the dialogues considered to belong to the "early group," and are prominent in the *Gorgias* as well as the *Protagoras*, but are also found in dialogues not supposed to belong to the early group, for example the *Republic* and the *Sophist*.

38. It is interesting that Brickhouse and Smith, *Socratic Moral Psychology*, acknowledge and emphasize that this and other passages in the *Apology* attest to Socrates's recognition of the role of appetites and passions; concerning the present passage they even write that Socrates's point is to warn the jurors that "anger could lead them to vote against Socrates despite their better judgement" (61). Still, since they hold that Socrates's position involves what they call motivational intellectualism, that is, the view that we always act in accordance with what we believe is best, they argue that the role of appetites of passions in motivation is merely to "affect cognition," although they admit that "Socrates fails to tell us just how the passions work to affect behaviour" (53). They argue against what they call the standard view of Socratic intellectualism, which allows no or only a diminutive, informational role for non-cognitive factors in motivation, the interpretation of which Penner is the most prominent proponent. Their argument that Socrates recognizes other than cognitive factors can, however, be regarded as a challenge to the distinction between Socratic and Platonic psychology they wish to uphold, and thus as threatening their project of

defending Socratic studies as a research program (see 39), as noted by Christopher Rowe, "Socrates on Reason, Appetite and Passion: A Response to Thomas C. Brickhouse and Nicholas D. Smith, *Socratic Moral Psychology*," *Journal of Ethics* 16, no. 3 (2012): 305–24.

39. The element of the soul termed *to thymoeides* in Book 4 of the *Republic* (441a2), often translated "spirit," that is characterized as the seat of anger and courage as well as of love of honor, reputation and victory, is called *philotimos*, honor-loving, at 581b3.

40. Cf. also 36b6–c8 where Socrates contrasts what the many care about, namely money-making, household management (*oikonomia*), generalships, public oratory and public office, with what he has tried to persuade them to care for; for oneself rather than for one's things and affairs, for the way in which one "will be the best and most prudent possible" (*phronimôtatos*) (36c7).

41. Cf. Hendrik Lorenz, *The Brute Within* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2006), 18, who also draws a parallel between three kinds of motive or interest attributed to the three elements of the soul in the *Republic* and passages in the *Phaedo* and the present passage in the *Apology:* "The idea of these three kinds of motive already appears to be in play in Plato' *Apology*."

42. Cf. Burnet's note to 29d8: "This enumeration implies the doctrine of the 'tripartite soul': for it gives the objects of t*o epithymêtikon*, *to thymoeides* and *to logistikon*." He also notes the parallel to the *Phaedo*, adding the following remark: "We have the authority of Posidonius for saying that the doctrine in question was really Pythagorean. See *Phaedo* 68c2 n." The notion of three interests and three corresponding lives is found also in Aristotle (*NE* I, 5, 1095b14–19). Examples of scholars who regard the introduction of three elements in the soul in the *Republic* as Plato's explicit break with Socratic intellectualism are Reeve, *Philosopher-Kings*, Penner, "Socrates and the Early Dialogues," Irwin, *Plato's Ethics,* John M. Cooper, "Plato's Theory of Human Motivation," in Cooper, *Reason and Emotion* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press), 118–137, and Christopher Bobonich, *Plato's Utopia Recast* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2002).

43. Rosamund Kent Sprague, trans., *Laches*, in *Plato. Complete Works*, ed. John M. Cooper (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1997).

44. Cf. Kahn, "Vlastos' Socrates," 252, who contends, in criticism of Vlastos' account of *elenchos*, that in several dialogues, including the *Meno*, the *Protagoras* and the *Gorgias*, "the elenchus is not so much a device by which Socrates seeks moral truth for himself as a gadfly-sting designed to instill *aporia* in his interlocutors," and calls this a "genuinely Socratic function of the elenchus" with reference to the *Apology*.

45. Vlastos, "The Socratic Elenchus," 52–55.

46. I wish to thank the participants at the conference "Poetry and Philosophy in the light of Plato's *Apology*" at the University of Bergen, June 10–12, 2015, for fruitful questions and comments to an early presentation of this chapter. I also thank Kristian Larsen, who read and made valuable comments to an early version. Great thanks are due to Hayden Ausland, who has read and commented on several versions of the chapter and made innumerable corrections and helpful suggestions.

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