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# THE INTERROGATION OF MELETUS: *APOLOGY* 24c4–28a1*

The interrogation of Meletus in the *Apology* at 24c4–28a1 is not infrequently seen as a typical case of all that is intellectually and artistically dissatisfying in Plato's practice of the genre of philosophical dialogue: not only are we presented with a philosopher who makes some claim to being committed to setting a particularly stringent standard for honesty in argumentation making sophistical arguments, but we are presented also with a cardboard interlocutor who is forced by the hand of Plato to acquiesce to those arguments in a fashion that is completely dissatisfying to the reader.[1] The best anyone seems to do to save Plato from these charges of artistic incompetence and intellectual dishonesty is to appeal to such a level of historical accuracy for the text that the stupidity of Meletus' responses can be attributed to the stupidity of Meletus himself, or to point out features of the political and legal situation that might prevent Meletus from answering the questions by drawing on his true motivation—which is presumably more coherent. Taylor says of this passage:

> The humour of the situation is that the prosecutor cannot venture to say what he means by either of his charges without betraying the fact that, owing to the 'amnesty', the matters complained of are outside of the competency of the court... Hence, when Meletus is pressed to explain what he means, he has to take refuge in puerile nonsense.[2]

And Smith and Brickhouse argue that Meletus, relying on prejudice, cannot but answer as he does, and answers in a self-contradictory fashion because

> Prejudice, as we know, does not work according to rational processes; so if the prosecutors were guilty of prejudice, then their critical faculties as regards Socrates' real character and beliefs were at their worst, and the charges they sought to bring may well have reflected that fact.[3]

In either case there seems to be nothing particularly *philosophically* interesting about the fact that Meletus answers as he does.

I am going to argue that the dialogue between Socrates and Meletus is indeed typical of the Platonic art—in the sense that Plato balances a masterful literary characterization of an encounter between two individuals with a philosophical portrayal of certain underlying themes with which he is concerned throughout his works. I shall first consider the way Plato characterizes Meletus and the situation that Socrates and Meletus find themselves in through the language that Meletus uses in answering Socrates' questions, with the aim of showing that Plato's artistic skills are

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[1] A list of the complaints is provided in Scott W. Calef's recent 'Does *Apology* 24c–25c contain an argument that Socrates is innocent?' *History of Philosophy Quarterly* 10 (1993), p. 293. [2] A. E. Taylor, *Plato: The Man and His Work* (London, 1960), p. 162.

[3] *Socrates on Trial* (Princeton, 1989), p. 124.

at work in that characterization. Then I shall consider the logic that underlies the content of Meletus' answers, with the aim of showing both that these responses are not as dramatically unconvincing as is sometimes thought, and that Plato's portrayal of Meletus serves to connect the drama of the events portrayed in the *Apology* to Plato's attempt to understand the nature of the sophist and what the success of sophistry teaches about the moral and political life of Athens, in particular, and, more generally, about the possibility of a form of human community in which justice and the good govern people's relations with one another.

The notion that Plato is artistically guilty of creating cardboard characters that exist only as a backdrop for Socrates' or his own ideas is on the face of it extremely implausible—or so it ought to be. Plato is as good a master as we have, in Greek or in any language, of the art of giving depth and vivid reality to his characters by means of a subtle portrayal of their manner of speaking. No one, from Gorgias himself down to this day,[4] disputes his mastery of the art of imitation and parody of the verbal habits of others; indeed, his 'parody' (if it is that) of Lysias in the *Phaedrus* is so good that scholars are divided on whether or not it is a speech of Lysias' own.[5] And no one disputes the mastery shown in the portraits he draws in the *Symposium*. We are, however, inclined to ignore this fact when we find the argument in a dialogue taking a turn we object to: convinced that *we* could have met Socrates' questioning in the court with devastating criticisms of his arguments' logic, we neglect the fact that as good a dramatist and philosopher as Plato thinks there is some artistic plausibility and philosophical point to having *these particular characters* respond as they do to Socrates' questioning, and we then make against Plato the familiar charge that his true didactic nature shows through the thin veneer of dialogue with which he attempts to disguise it. This charge is plausible because, as no on disputes, there are places in the dialogues where it is difficult to make any literary or philosophical defence for the compliance of the interlocutors, where the interlocutor seems to do little more than nod for Socrates.[6] However, such passages of flat conversation tend to occur some

[4] Gorgias is, probably apocryphally, reported to have said of Plato's dialogue *Gorgias*, ὡς καλῶς οἶδε Πλάτων ἰαμβίζειν (H. Diels, *Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker*, 6th ed. W. Kranz [ed.] [Berlin, 1952] vol. ii, 276 [15a]). The verb comes from 'iambos', the verse form used by the earliest writers of satire; an ἴαμβος is an invective (Aristotle *Poetics*, 1448b31–32). R. M. Rosen, in *Old Comedy and the Iambographic Tradition* (Atlanta, 1988), discusses the fifth-century Athenian understanding of the tradition in terms of the indiscriminate abuse of others (pp. 1–35, in particular, pp. 3–4 and 12–16). He cites another relevant anecdote from the passage in Athenaeus' *Deipnosophists* (505d) that DK quote from: in this anecdote, Gorgias is said to have called Plato a new Archilochus—Archilochus being one of the prime representatives of the iambographic tradition (p. 14 n. 20).

[5] Dover notes that settling the question would involve discovery of παίγνια that we can be certain are by Lysias himself (*Lysias and the Corpus Lysiacum* [Berkeley, 1968], pp. 69–71); G. J. de Vries, in his *Commentary on the* Phaedrus *of Plato* (Amsterdam, 1969), claims that the debate is at an impasse, since everything that can be said to support the thesis that the speech is Lysias' can equally well be said to be evidence for Plato's skill in the imitation of the style of others (pp. 11–14).

[6] The French absurdist Alfred Jarry, looking for a technique to break up the tedium of a long treatise revealing the truth of his science of pataphysics, quotes as a possibility these eternal words of approval from the pen of Plato: *'Αληθῆ λέγεις, ἔφη/ 'Αληθῆ/ 'Αληθέστατα/ Δῆλον γάρ, καὶ τυφλῷ*, and so on, for thirty-eight more response formulae. (*Gestes et opinions de docteur Faustroll, pataphysicien, suivi de l'Amour absolu* [Paris, 1980], pp. 36–7.) We need not suppose that such lapses into dry formulaic dialogue betray a deep-set tendency to didacticism that Plato sometimes successfully holds off, and sometimes doesn't. On the contrary, this feature of the dialogues can be seen as a natural feature of the written work of a philosopher who is nourished by the give-and-take of intimate dialogue and who is convinced of its superiority over written treatises, as Plato seems to be (*Phaedrus* 275d4–277a5).

distance into longer dialogues, particularly after an interlocutor has explicitly given up, as Callicles does in the *Gorgias* at 497, or Thrasymachus does in the *Republic* at 350, or they come in Plato's later works; here we are dealing with an early work, and one in which the dialogue is so short that there is no possibility that the conversation might have become stale. There is no reason on the face of it to expect Plato's portrait of Meletus to be anything but typically careful and pointed.

Several factors constrain Plato's characterization of Meletus. Meletus speaks a total of sixty-six words in eighteen lines: if Plato is going to employ his art of characterization, he must do so with great economy. What is a limit for Plato here is also one for his reader, since the brevity of the *erotesis* limits the confidence with which conclusions can be drawn about the voice of Meletus. Furthermore, the setting itself dictates what it is open to Meletus to say in these eighteen lines: this is a cross-examination in a law court and not a round of speeches at a banquet or a chat in the gymnasium. This means that Meletus will be doing no more than answering Socrates' questions, and so Plato must characterize Meletus by the way he says 'yes' and 'no' to what Socrates asks. It is fortunate that the Greek language possesses a great variety of ways of saying 'yes' and 'no', but not even all these resources will be at Plato's disposal: in this situation, it is reasonable to expect that Meletus will be speaking formally and briefly. In the scant evidence that survives about *erotesis* there is no indication that the answerer took or was permitted much latitude to engage in the kind of rhetoric that was expected from the questioner.[7]

One further feature of this dramatic setting will make itself felt in Meletus' responses. We expect Meletus to be on his guard when he is being questioned by a man famous for manoeuvring people into contradicting themselves; indeed, we know from Socrates' opening that the prosecution has warned the jurors to beware of Socrates' clever tricks (17b1). Not only does he have to be on guard for the trickery he expects from Socrates, but Socrates also introduces the conversation with an uncommonly harsh statement of his intentions: to show the jury that Meletus himself is a wrong-doer, that he cares nothing for those things that are the basis of his court case (24c4–9; see also 26e6–9). The interlocutor in a Socratic dialogue sometimes assumes—wrongly, perhaps—that Socrates harbours some such hostile intent towards him, as Thrasymachus does at *Republic* 341a7–9: Socrates asks, *Οἴει γάρ με ἐξ ἐπιβουλῆς ἐν τοῖς λόγοις κακουργοῦντά σε ἐρέσθαι ὡς ἠρόμην*; and Thrasymachus responds, *Εὖ μὲν οὖν οἶδα*. But it is an integral part of the portrait we have of Socrates that he always maintains at least an ironical pretence that the encounter he is engaged in is not a battle with his interlocutor but a search for the truth in which his interlocutor is invited to join. This is an attitude Plato portrays him as maintaining even with Callicles and Thrasymachus, his most hostile opponents, and its absence

[7] The evidence on this point is scant. There are two speeches of Lysias that actually contain *erotesis* of the accused (12.25 and 22.5), and one that contains indications that spaces are left for *erotesis* (13.30, 32). To submit to questioning was required of the prosecution and defendants, but not of witnesses, according to Demosthenes (46.10). One of the speeches in which *erotesis* is recorded is Lysias' *Against Eratosthenes*; it is interesting to note that while Eratosthenes' replies to Lysias' questions are as restrained as Meletus' to Socrates', Lysias addresses Eratosthenes harshly as *ὦ σχετλιώτατε πάντων* (26). The other is in the speech *Against the Grain-dealers*, and there the accused answers in a similarly restrained fashion. These are both cases of questioning the accused, and not the accuser. In Andocides' *On the Mysteries*, Andocides questions the man who reads the names of those charged in previous, related court cases, and he reports the questioning he underwent at the preliminary hearing (14, 47, and 101–2). E. M. Carawan, in his '*Erotesis*: Interrogation in the Courts of Fourth-Century Athens', *GRBS* 24 (1983), 209–26, speculates that many of the passages that have come down to us as series of rhetorical questions might have originally been cases of *erotesis*.

here is striking. The distinction between his usual attitude to his interlocutors and the one he seems to assume here is that between the attitudes appropriate to the two kinds of activity that he distinguishes in Book I of the *Republic*: the kind in which the measure of success is πλεονεκτεῖν, and the kind in which success is measured by some external standard—external in that it is a standard that any number of people might equally attain (349b–350c). Philosophy is the latter kind of activity; we might think that a trial would also be such a joint search for truth, but Socrates thinks that the Athenian system does not allow for this.[8] What *is* unusual about Socrates' opening to the *erotesis*, and what seems to set this interchange apart from the dialogues proper, is the way that it sets up the conversation with Meletus as an activity of πλεονεκτεῖν. It is, granted, a strange kind of πλεονεκτεῖν that Socrates is engaged in here: we are as struck as the ancients were, and as the jurors apparently were after Socrates proposed his penalty, by Socrates' strange disregard for the contest over his life and the terms of that contest. What is victory for Socrates is still consistent with Meletus and the accusers achieving what they want. Whatever contest it is that Socrates thinks of himself as engaged in here, his confrontational tone will in turn affect the tone of Meletus' responses. Indeed, Plato's ability to portray the appropriate guardedness and combativeness on Meletus' part is going to be one measure of how well he is plying his artistic craft.

Meletus' first response is Ἔγωγε standing alone (24d2), and the word also appears in a later response (25d7). We can see what this response suggests by looking at two different kinds of evidence: the word's etymology, and its use by Euthyphro, Crito, and the interlocutors in the *Gorgias*.[9] This use of the pronoun is, of course, emphatic in several different ways. To state the pronoun at all is to emphasize it, and to use the pronoun alone only emphasizes it further. Not content with that, Meletus adds to ἐγώ the limitative and emphatic particle γε. The range of γε prevents one from being able to conclude decisively what its significance is here, but a comparison with Crito's closely related use of ἔμοιγε will suggest that γε is more emphatic than limitative here. Its basic sense is, as Denniston puts it, 'to focus attention upon a single idea, and place it, as it were, in the limelight'.[10] This sense develops in different directions—it can be used to place emphasis on the word it is attached to, or it can be used to limit the statement to the range of that word. So, when it is attached to the first person pronoun, it can be either a self-deprecating expression or a self-important one. Crito

[8] He suggests after his conviction that the short time allotted to their discussion is responsible for it: οὐ ῥᾴδιον ἐν χρόνῳ ὀλίγῳ μεγάλας διαβολὰς ἀπολύεσθαι (37b1–2); he suggests that he might have been acquitted if the time allotted to trials involving a penalty of death were longer. This passage seems to say that Socrates is only contingently a fish out of water when he appears in the law-courts: Athens might, like other cities, give more time to cases like his. Plato has Socrates in the *Theaetetus* reflect on this problem and here it does not seem so superficial. Conflicting attitudes towards time are characteristic of the man of the law-courts and the philosopher: τοῖς μὲν τοῦτο ὃ σὺ εἶπες ἀεὶ πάρεστι, σχολή, καὶ τοὺς λόγους ἐν εἰρήνῃ ἐπὶ σχολῆς ποιοῦνται... καὶ διὰ μακρῶν ἢ βραχέων μέλει οὐδὲν λέγειν, ἂν μόνον τύχωσι τοῦ ὄντος· οἱ δὲ ἐν ἀσχολίᾳ τε ἀεὶ λέγουσι—κατεπείγει γὰρ ὕδωρ ῥέον (172d4–e1). This characteristic difference between the man of the law-courts and the philosopher is connected with the fundamental difficulty of the differences between what is required for the attainment of moral understanding and what is required for political action.

[9] The *Crito* and the *Euthyphro* will provide us with one dialogue in which the tone is intimate and friendly and the portrait Plato is drawing of the interlocutor a sympathetic one, and one dialogue in which the interlocutor is clearly portrayed as a man who thinks over-confidently that he is an expert in deep and important things. The *Gorgias* has the advantage of giving us a range of characters and a variety of dramatic developments.

[10] Denniston, *Greek Particles*, 2nd ed., p. 114 (see also pp. 114–15, 121–3, and 140–41).

uses οἶμαι ἔγωγε and δοκεῖ ἔμοιγε, but these two are importantly different from Meletus' and Euthyphro's use of ἔγωγε. In both kinds of case in which we see Crito use it, ἔμοιγε is in an unemphatic position, and the verb is one of thinking or seeming and not one of saying or acting; the unemphatic position supports the idea that the γε in ἔγωγε is limitative and has the modest sense of 'I, at any rate (for what *that's* worth), think so' (the first case), or 'It seems so to me, at any rate' (the second). Meletus' and Euthyphro's uses of ἔγωγε are on the contrary strongly emphatic, both because the pronoun (as the only word uttered) is by default in emphatic position, and because the verb implied is not one of thinking or seeming. So it would be unreasonable to take the γε as playing a limitative role and imparting modesty here. Meletus' and Euthyphro's use of ἔγωγε, then, can be seen to have the sense '*I* certainly think so'; indeed it would not be amiss to see here a combination of the limitative and the emphatic senses of γε—so that ἔγωγε in these cases has the further force of 'whatever anyone else might think, this is *my* claim'. In Meletus' case in particular, this has the force of emphasizing that Meletus is telling us what *he* affirms and is not merely agreeing with Socrates.

Still, these etymological observations are at best merely suggestive: the Greek reaching for ἔγωγε as an answer to a question that inquires after his own actions or thought might no more experience this force than an English speaker thinks of spatial metaphors when she says 'I understand.' It might not have been open to Meletus, for some reason known only to the ear of a native speaker, to answer Socrates' ποιεῖ; question with ποιοῦμαι. Any speculation about the force of ἔγωγε requires discussion of its actual use. Ἔγωγε as a sole response appears not once in Crito's mouth, but frequently in the mouth of the rather pompous and self-important Euthyphro,[11] the man who has the audacity to charge his father with murder and to claim that he is only doing the pious thing at that. This gives some reason for thinking that ἔγωγε serves to characterize the person using it, but there are features of the situation in each dialogue that suggest that the use of ἔγωγε characterizes situation as least as much as character. The questions in the *Crito* are generally framed in terms of the sort of joint investigation into the truth of the matter at hand that is foreign to the law courts. The questions asked of Meletus can hardly be that, by force of circumstances. The questions in the *Euthyphro* too are framed in terms of a virtual interrogation by Socrates of Euthyphro, with the goal of finding out why *he* believes what he believes and why *he* is doing what he is doing.[12] This suggests that ἔγωγε predominates where conversation is confrontational.

The *Gorgias* shows both these facets of the use of ἔγωγε. Its richness of dramatic development provides an opportunity for tracing the use of ἔγωγε both in particular situations and by particular characters. Gorgias, whom Socrates treats with extreme care and some measure of deference,[13] does not use ἔγωγε at all until the fifth time that Socrates forces him to clarify what it is he teaches,[14] when he finally defines what he teaches as the ability to persuade the many. When Socrates goes on to challenge even this fifth specification, Gorgias continues his use of ἔγωγε: he uses it twice in the

[11] At 6e2, 10c5, 13b6, 13d12, 14c7, 14d8, 15c4; not to mention numerous responses that consist in solitary versions of ἔμοιγε.

[12] This distinction cannot be pressed too hard: the question of what in fact Euthyphro is doing in pursuing his lawsuit involves inquiry into the nature of the things that Euthyphro is concerned with; and the discussion in all cases is aimed at getting at the truth of the matter. But still there is a noticeable difference in the way questions are framed in these two cases.

[13] See 453a6–454a6, 457c4–458b2.

[14] 452e1; after his initial statement at 449a5, clarified at 449e1, 450b6–c2, 451d7–8, and 452d5–8.

opening stages of the conversation concerning the difference between knowledge and belief (454d1, 3). Later, when he is describing the superior power that rhetoric enables him to have in comparison with his brother the doctor in his dealings with his patients, he uses ἔγωγε once (456a7), and his last use of it comes when he is affirming (for the second time) that he, like Socrates, is one of those who prefers to have his opinions corrected rather than to win (458b4).[15] This amounts to a relatively infrequent use of ἔγωγε in comparison with the use that Polus and Callicles make of it.[16]

Polus makes much more frequent use of ἔγωγε, in particular at moments when there is a struggle for control of the dialogue, and when the focus of the dialogue turns, often with some indignation or astonishment, to questions of why Socrates or Polus thinks as he does, and away from more impersonal questions. The conversation with Polus opens on a tendentious note: he accuses Socrates of merely having shamed Gorgias into claiming that he could teach justice (461b3–c4), and insists on taking control of the dialogue and questioning Socrates himself (462b3). The humour of this section of the dialogue arises from the fact that Polus is so dumbfounded by the views Socrates puts forward that he ultimately gives up on the role of asking questions, and lets Socrates take over, in order to find out what he is saying: Ἀλλ' ἐθέλω ἀποκρίνεσθαι, ἵνα καὶ εἰδῶ ὅτι λέγεις (467c3). In the course of questioning Socrates (462b3–467c3), five out of the nine answers he gives when Socrates challenges his questions or asks for clarification are solitary Ἔγωγε,[17] and two more involve ἔγωγε in longer answers,[18] both of which occur when Socrates challenges him on whether he is asking questions or making a speech. In this passage, Socrates also uses ἔγωγε an unusual number of times; this suggests that the situation affects the speech habits of both the participants in the dialogue.[19] After this point, the conversation turns into

[15] In passages of the *Gorgias* where Socrates raises this question, the use of ἐγώ and ἔγωγε are particularly frequent, since the question is often framed as 'Are you, like me, one of those who...' and the answer, 'I, like you...'. This more or less requires use of the first person pronoun.

[16] This comes to two response formula using ἔγωγε (one of them a lone Ἔγωγε), two uses of ἔγωγε in the course of longer statements out of approximately seventy answers to questions, and one in a speech. But note that the four that occur in answers all occur in the last two thirds of their conversation.

[17] 462a7, 462b7, 462d7, 466d4, and 467a7.

[18] 466b2 and 466c6.

[19] 462c3, 463d4, and 466a6. There is another possible explanation of Socrates' use of ἔγωγε here. It is interesting to note that Socrates uses the simple ἐγώ an unusual number of times in this dialogue when compared to the other speakers. He uses it most frequently in two kinds of situations. First, he uses it (as would follow naturally from the sorts of demands that this kind of statement make on its grammar) when he is comparing himself with his interlocutor in some fashion—either where he is setting out the fact that he is the sort of partner in conversation who likes nothing better than to be shown he is wrong about something rather than to win, and where he is inviting the interlocutor to join him in taking up this attitude (453a6–454a6, 457c4–458b2), or where he makes a comparison between Callicles' love of Demos (and the Athenian demos), and his own love of Alcibiades and philosophy (481c5–482c3, 492b5–c5). Second, he uses it frequently when he is (rather reluctantly) approaching a statement of his views of the nature of rhetoric as a branch of pandering, something he does with many apologetic asides to Gorgias, whom he appears to be at pains not to offend (463d4–466a8). For example, when he first states that rhetoric is a branch of pandering, he uses both ἔγωγε (these are the first two instances cited at the beginning of this note) and ἐγώ; when he lays out in quite general terms the taxonomy of pandering, after Gorgias assures him that he ought to speak freely, there is no instance of the first-person pronoun until he brings this account to bear on rhetoric (465d7, 466a1, and the third instance cited above, 466a6). This suggests that Socrates' ἔγωγε and ἐγώ have a note of deference to them. (Socrates also uses the pronoun fairly frequently in the speech in which he responds to Callicles' charge that philosophy is a fine pursuit for the young, but disgraceful in an older man [486e5–488b6]. The focus that is exhibited by this use of the first person pronoun

a disciplined Socratic discussion, with Polus following along, largely out of a fascination with the absurdity of Socrates' views. ἔγωγε appears occasionally as an answer formula in the remaining pages of the conversation with Polus; from 467c5 to 481b5, it appears a mere five times (out of approximately 130 answers that Polus gives), and there is no particular pattern to Polus' use of it. That is, ἔγωγε virtually disappears from Polus' vocabulary when Socrates distracts Polus' attention to a line of reasoning about something that is quite impersonal. We might even say, with reference to the discussion in the *Republic* mentioned above, that ἔγωγε is the first person singular pronoun of choice for the man who pursues the activity of πλεονεκτεῖν. It is fitting that in the case of Callicles—whom Socrates never succeeds in distracting to impersonal questions—the use of ἔγωγε is quite constant throughout the interchange—twelve ἔγωγε embedded in longer answers,[20] and fifteen solitary Ἔγωγε,[21] hardly varying in frequency from 481b6 to the end of the dialogue.[22]

Meletus' use of ἔγωγε, then, is consistent with two features of the conversation: the law court situation is of necessity a confrontational one, and the questioning of necessity focusses on Meletus' thoughts and beliefs; and, furthermore, there is the possibility that Plato wants to portray Meletus as the sort of man that Callicles, Euthyphro, or Polus is.

Meletus' responses are very terse and not at all lively in the opening line of questioning. Indeed, one of the interesting features of all of his eighteen responses is the limited range they display: they are either as terse and colourless as possible—both where he is choosing between two options and when he is affirming a hypothesis that Socrates puts forth, he replies by repeating one word from Socrates, without any use of particles—or, as the questioning continues, they overflow with confident intensifiers. There are indeed two extremes here, but given the rich resources available, to use two extremes on one scale *is* to use a limited range.

The blandness of Meletus' responses to the first line of questions comes out in comparison with Crito's manner of speech. Where Crito makes use of the same method of response (the selection of an offered option by repetition of a key word from the question), he varies his responses by sometimes making use of a particle that characterizes the tone of the exchange as a friendly and intimate one. At 48b7–10

is not surprising, since Socrates is responding to a rather personal attack, and doing so in such a way that he emphasizes his own good fortune in finding someone as honest and as concerned for what is best for him as Callicles is.)

[20] 482d7, 485a7, c3, 489e5, 491a7, c6, 496c8, 497e8, 498a4, 501c7, 501d6, and 503b4.

[21] 490d4, 494b9, 495b9, 495c4, e5, 496d6, 497d3, e3, e7, 498d4, e2, e9, 500a2, 505a11, and 520a1. There are two related kinds of clustering here: ἔγωγε is quite frequent in short question and answer sections framed in terms of 'Do you call...', and these sections occur less frequently as the dialogue progresses and Callicles gives up answering Socrates honestly. In the last section of the dialogue, Socrates gives him long statements with a question posed in the third person at the end, hardly offering an opportunity for the use of ἔγωγε. It might seem odd that Callicles should be using ἔγωγε at all when he is so clearly not speaking for himself or saying what he thinks, but this is explained by the sarcasm with which Callicles puts on the act of being an agreeable and impressed interlocutor. An exaggerated instance of this is at 496c4–5: Gorgias agrees with Socrates by saying Ἀλλ' ὑπερφυῶς ὡς ὁμολογῶ.

[22] Ἔγωγε is quite common throughout the *Meno*. There is an interesting point in this dialogue where the frequency of its use increases: in the interchange between Anytus and Socrates over the question of whether good men have been able to pass on their goodness to their sons, a full half of Anytus' answers employ ἔγωγε (93c2–95a1). Socrates deftly diagnoses the source of Anytus' bristling at the argument here: Ἄνυτος μέν μοι δοκεῖ χαλεπαίνειν, καὶ οὐδὲν θαυμάζω· οἴεται γάρ με πρῶτον μὲν κακηγορεῖν τούτους τοὺς ἄνδρας, ἔπειτα ἡγεῖται καὶ αὐτὸς εἶναι εἷς τούτων (95a2–4). His use of ἔγωγε increases at the point when he takes Socrates' general argument as having unflattering personal implications.

Crito is asked whether it still stands (with reference to many discussions they have had in the past) that one must attach more importance to living well than to living, and Crito doesn't just say μένει but ἀλλὰ μένει. To reply ἀλλά is to object to the question—to the words or the manner of the one asking it.[23] Where ἀλλά assents to a question, it has the sense of the French 'mais oui'—with its implication that the question hardly bears asking.[24] Plato favours this use, according to Denniston: here it is being used to confirm a hypothesis Socrates is putting forth when he asks whether their agreement of old still holds; Crito's response has the sense of 'Why, of course it does—how could you even doubt that?' The addition of this particle helps to characterize the conversation as one between two men who share a history of discussion and sympathy of conviction that is being affirmed and continued here. As one would expect, there is no such hint of intimacy in those responses of Meletus that are otherwise similar. There are indeed no extraneous particles used in these responses at all—the καί that appears in several is not an emphatic καί but merely an additive 'also' ('the jurors improve the youth *also*') that does little to colour his acceptance of options offered by Socrates.

Where Meletus does give Socrates lively answers, they are monotonously (insofar as there can be monotony in such a short space) of a piece with one another. He first allows himself a μάλιστα (24e6), when Socrates asks him to confirm his claim that the jurors improve the youth, and then a rather strong πάνυ σφόδρα ταῦτα λέγω (25a11) when he is emphasizing that all the Athenians except Socrates improve the youth; he then moves to an even more emphatic πάνυ μὲν οὖν σφόδρα ταῦτα λέγω (26b7) when the conversation returns to the topic of Socrates' corrupting the youth; here, the emphasizing adverbs and particles are piled on top of one another to almost comic effect. The particles μὲν οὖν fulfil their function of suggesting a correction in the direction of greater certainty than the questioner has allowed to be appropriate—the suggestion is 'not only is what you say true, but you ought to have put it in a far more definite and unqualified fashion!'[25] πάνυ μὲν οὖν also stands in contrast with πάνυ γε, a phrase that predominates over it in the earlier dialogues: C. H. Kahn points out that πάνυ γε is more tentative than πάνυ μὲν οὖν. While both are affirmations, the former has the more tentative sense of 'I agree—but what of it?'[26] This is borne out in the short dialogue at hand: the two occasions on which Meletus uses πάνυ γε are both occasions when Socrates' questioning takes a philosophical turn, and it cannot be clear to Meletus how Socrates is planning to use his answers (25c10, 27d3).

Meletus' use of σφόδρα as an intensifier is itself interesting. According to Holger Thesleff, in his *Studies on Intensification in Early and Classical Greek*,[27] the adjective σφοδρός loses its qualitative sense and becomes merely intensifying when it is used adverbially to reinforce other adverbs. But its appearance in answer formulae in the dialogues under discussion suggests that it might not entirely have lost this flavour to Plato's ear. The only other interlocutor in the dialogues under consideration who uses σφόδρα in combination with πάνυ like this in his response formulae is Callicles;[28] in

[23] Denniston, *Greek Particles*, pp. 7–20.

[24] Except where the answer to the question is wrung out by force and is reluctantly given—but that doesn't seem to be the case with Crito.

[25] Denniston, *Greek Particles*, pp. 475–80, and the addendum (p. 587) where Denniston opts for the view that the corrective sense of μὲν οὖν is really its only sense (though admittedly he says that little remains of it in such expressions as this).

[26] C. H. Kahn, 'Proleptic Composition in the *Republic*', *CQ* 43 (1993), 131–42, at p. 134.

[27] *Commentationes Humanarum Litterarum* 21.1 (1954), 102, 110.

[28] *Gorgias* 491e5 (this immediately precedes his description of the sort of man he admires), 495c2 (this seems to be an instance of his exaggerated sarcasm); πάνυ (γε) σφόδρα appears twice

the case of Callicles, his frequent use of σφόδρα in response formulae seems to have everything to do with Plato showing some harmony between the sort of man that Callicles admires—a σφοδρός man, as it happens, although Callicles doesn't call him that—and Callicles' own character. We first see Callicles' account of this man in his long speech accusing the philosophic life of doing harm to one's character and prospects if it goes on too long (482c–486d); he calls such men later τοὺς φρονίμους εἰς τὰ τῆς πόλεως πράγματα καὶ ἀνδρείους (491c6–7); he makes clear further that what he means is a man who fulfils the requirement that:

δεῖ τὸν ὀρθῶς βιωσόμενον τὰς μὲν ἐπιθυμίας τὰς ἑαυτοῦ ἐᾶν ὡς μεγίστας εἶναι καὶ μὴ κολάζειν, ταύταις δὲ ὡς μεγίσταις οὔσαις ἱκανὸν εἶναι ὑπηρετεῖν δι' ἀνδρείαν καὶ φρόνησιν, καὶ ἀποπιμπλάναι ὧν ἂν ἀεὶ ἡ ἐπιθυμία γίγνηται. (491e8–492a3)

The man he admires is the one who has strong desires and can take decisive and successful action to satisfy them. And Callicles is painted as a man who aspires to be such a character: his relatively frequent use of σφόδρα contributes to this characterization. The use twice within such a short dialogue as the one with Meletus of a locution that is rather rare in the other interlocutors would at least be consistent with a desire on Plato's part to suggest certain analogies between Meletus' character and a character like that of Callicles.

There are two kinds of response that are common in other dialogues but that Meletus never uses here: he never says that things *appear* to him to be so, or that he *thinks* things are or are not as Socrates suggests. Instead of saying that he thinks this or that or that they seem so to him, he says bluntly that he *says* or *affirms* (λέγω) this or that. He seems indeed at pains to sound like a man reporting his own antecedently held confident convictions, and not reporting on how Socrates' questions appear to him when he is first confronted with them by Socrates. And it is quite striking that Meletus never uses any of the response formulae that are so humorously (whether Plato means it so or not) present in all the dialogues—Meletus never responds with any variation on the ubiquitous 'you speak the truth, Socrates'. While agreeing with Socrates, he does this as much as possible in such a fashion as to play down the fact that it is *Socrates* he is agreeing with. The uses of λέγω and ἔγωγε noted above contribute to the sense that he is deliberately avoiding such an appearance.

Plato is drawing a portrait of a particular man reacting in a particular kind of situation: this is not a cardboard interlocutor. Meletus is a man who wants to be forceful but who expects that he is going to be tricked. He says little when he is unsure of the course of things, but he is anxious for something he can seize on and use to impress the jurors: when Socrates offers him something that appears to be safe, he speaks so as to make a strong impression of forceful self-confidence and so as to avoid giving the impression that his responses are mere echoes of or reactions to what Socrates has said. That is what one would expect from anyone attempting to prosecute a law-suit against a man as notorious for his skills at argument as Socrates

each in the responses of Meno and Cratylus in the dialogues named for them, and once each in the cases of Lysis, Phaedo, Ctesippus in the *Euthydemus* (though not until quite late in the dialogue, when he has reached a fever-pitch of fury with the two eristic brothers), and Laches. Callicles is also particularly fond of σφόδρα γε, which appears at 489e9, 495c7, 496b1, 496d3, 498b2. According to the *TLG*, the level of incidence of σφόδρα γε that we see in Callicles' mouth is matched only in the *Philebus* and the *Republic*. It is interesting that the occurrence of σφόδρα γε in the *Republic* is almost entirely confined to Book VIII and later. The *Philebus* is itself stylistically distant from all the dialogues under discussion, but there it occurs in the mouth of Protarchus, a young man who is defending for Socrates Philebus' thesis that pleasure is the proper aim of human action. It appears a few times in the *Theaetetus*, the *Sophist*, and the *Statesman*, and every incident but one is in the mouths of the young men.

is. But Meletus' manner of response is also consistent with an intention on Plato's part to portray him as akin to Callicles. Of course, no conclusive arguments can be offered, or secure conclusions drawn, on points such as these; but it is clear at least that Plato's portrait of Meletus is lively enough, and that Meletus is no mere cardboard man saying 'yes, Socrates' and 'of course, Socrates'. But what of the content of what he says? Isn't that unbearably contrived?

Several scholars have noted the significance of the *Gorgias* for solving puzzles about the *Apology*. R. E. Allen, in *Socrates and Legal Obligation*,[29] points to the conception in that dialogue of a distinction between sophistic rhetoric (the art of pandering) and a genuine rhetoric guided by a concern for the truth, a distinction that can clear up what we might find puzzling about Socrates' claim, at the beginning of what is one of the most masterfully written and carefully true-to-genre defence speeches of its era, that he is not going to give the jurors the truth in the form of κεκαλλιεπημένους γε λόγους, ὥσπερ οἱ τούτων, ῥήμασί τε καὶ ὀνόμασιν... κεκοσμημένους (17b9–c1). The *Apology* is, according to this reading, an ironic inversion of the practice of rhetoric insofar as the most careful and artful persuasive prose is put in service of the truth—an irony that subverts the opposition between persuasiveness and truthfulness.[30] I suggest that further use of the *Gorgias*, and of Plato's treatment of the relationship between sophist and audience in the *Republic*, offers one kind of answer to the puzzle of why Meletus makes the foolish answers he does.

The *Gorgias* provides us with an account of the sophist in two ways:[31] through the explicit definition given by Socrates of what the sophists teach, and through the line that the defenders of sophistry themselves take as Socrates forces them to specify its claims. Socrates' own definition is that what the sophists teach (ῥητορική) is something learned by experience (ἐμπειρία) and a kind of knack (τριβή) of being able to gratify (χαρίζεσθαι); it is a branch of pandering (κολακεία); it is related to the true art of dispensing justice as cookery is to medicine; the sophist himself is related to the true statesman as the one skilled in the art of personal adornment is to the gymnastic trainer (462c7–466a3). One feature of the four different knacks of pandering is that they can give no principled account of themselves, but that is not the particular feature that makes them disgraceful: what makes each one disgraceful is the fact that it τοῦ ἡδέος στοχάζεται ἄνευ τοῦ βελτίστου (465a2)—that it τοῦ μὲν βελτίστου οὐδὲν φροντίζει, τῷ δὲ ἀεὶ ἡδίστῳ θηρεύεται τὴν ἀνοίαν καὶ ἐξαπατᾷ, ὥστε δοκεῖν πλείστου ἀξία εἶναι (464d). It uses what is pleasant as a bait, with no concern for what is best.

The sophist would of course reject the notion that he shows no concern for human excellence; that is, after all, precisely what he claims to teach. But it is when the question of how to specify human excellence arises that Socrates constantly finds the sophist vulnerable to attack in the dialogues. The familiar pattern is played out more than once in the *Gorgias*:[32] Polus says that what the sophist has a share of is τῆς καλλίστης τῶν τεχνῶν (448c); Gorgias attempts to define his field of instruction with

[29] (Minneapolis, 1980), pp. 3–16.

[30] See also D. Feaver and J. Hare, 'The *Apology* as an Inverted Parody of Rhetoric', *Arethusa* 14 (1981), 205–16.

[31] I will not use the definitions offered in the *Sophist*, both because this dialogue is much later than the ones I am discussing, and because we have in the *Sophist* a discussion between Theaetetus and the 'Stranger', and I am convinced, along with Stanley Rosen (*Plato's* Sophist: *The Drama of Original and Image* [New Haven, 1983]), that we must not take the Stranger's opinions to be Plato's. There is undoubtedly light that can be shed on the *Apology* by the *Sophist*, but seeing this light would involve settling many difficult questions about the *Sophist* first.

[32] The same line is followed in the *Protagoras* at 318a–319a.

the claim that what he teaches is *τὰ μέγιστα τῶν ἀνθρωπείων πραγμάτων, ὦ Σώκρατες, καὶ ἄριστα* (451d), but, when pressed, he further defines what is the best area of achievement for human beings:

*τὸ πείθειν οἷόν τε εἶναι τοῖς λόγοις καὶ ἐν δικαστηρίῳ δικαστὰς καὶ ἐν βουλευτηρίῳ βουλευτὰς καὶ ἐν ἐκκλησίᾳ ἐκκλησιαστὰς καὶ ἐν ἄλλῳ συλλόγῳ παντί, ὅστις ἂν πολιτικὸς σύλλογος γίγνηται.* (452e1–4)

The promising thread of maintaining that the sophist teaches the art of persuasion about the just and the unjust is dropped when Socrates presses Gorgias on the question of whether the sophist aims at the introduction of true belief in these matters or mere opinion; here Gorgias changes his approach and appeals to the practical success of Pericles and Themistocles in convincing the Athenian people of their plans for the middle walls and the Piraeus. The attempt to specify what is best for human beings in moral terms (in terms of justice) is broken off, and in its place Gorgias offers examples of the practical success of particular rhetors in getting their way. This may not appear, in Gorgias' hands, to be a dangerous method for specifying the promises of the sophists: he is willing, after all, to throw in lessons in justice for those who happen to come to him without having mastered that topic already, and the examples he appeals to are of occasions when highly respected men brought Athens to make what are generally considered good decisions. But the picture is less comfortable in Callicles' version of things: what is good for a human being is to be the sort of strong man who is able to break the bonds of convention and get his way, whatever his way happens to be (484a–b). And Socrates not only argues with Polus that there is something dangerous about having this power for someone who has no understanding of what is good (466d–e), but he also suggests to Callicles that this life is not so manly after all: the one leading this life ends up, like Callicles in his love for Demos, son of Cleinias, and for the Athenian demos, forever pursuing the changeable tides of public opinion (481c–e) and, in doing this, doing no better than scratching where it itches (494c).

Why should the sophists whom Socrates questions in the dialogues have such difficulties in specifying what it is that their teachings promise? Plato's attack here is no mere *ad hominem*: Socrates does not simply show that the people he happens to have spoken to happen not to have thought very clearly about how to understand success. The difficulty of specifying a measure of success for the activity of persuasion is the difficulty of conceiving a life for human beings in which some measure other than *πλεονεκτεῖν* governs their relations. Plato explores this difficulty and its relation to sophistry more thoroughly in the *Republic*, where Glaucon presses the question of whether it is intelligible to speak of a form of human life that expresses a concern for something other than *πλεονεξία* (358e3–361d3). The fact that what the sophist teaches and what the rhetor practices is persuasion means, according to Socrates in the *Gorgias* and the *Republic*, that they are involved in a peculiar relationship to the public: the goal of persuasion is the goal of mastery of public opinion. This is fundamentally an activity of *πλεονεκτεῖν*: the goal is defined in terms of persuading more people than one's opponent persuades. But success at this can only be achieved through slavery to public opinion; and to become a slave to public opinion is, of course, to lose the battle for *πλεονεκτεῖν*.[33] The sophist, or the man trained by the

[33] *Gorgias* 510b2–511a3. In the *Republic* Plato describes something like this process happening when he discusses the nature of the success of a demagogic leader and how that transforms naturally into the kind of success that the tyrant enjoys. 563b4–564a8 describes the transitional period from democracy to tyranny, in which old men pander to young, and slave-holders have no more freedom than slaves; at 569b6–c4 Socrates describes tyranny as that

sophist, does not rule the city; the city rules him. This makes any attempt to specify the sophist as the agent of corruption in Athens untenable. Socrates brings home the impossibility of blaming the sophist for the moral corruption of society in the *Meno*, when he interrogates another of his accusers, Anytus: how could the sophists be so successful if they were not merely a natural development from and parasitic upon the needs and aspirations of their audience? (91c–92a) In the *Republic*, Plato develops this charge further: in the configuration of a society in which the sophist is successful, he claims, it becomes impossible to specify who in that configuration is actually guilty of sophistry; that is, who is responsible for the success the sophists are able to achieve. This comes out in Socrates' reflections in Book VI that lead up to the image of the great beast. He is discussing the corruption of the philosophical soul with Adeimantus, and is anxious to show that the sophist is not himself an example of that kind of corruption. He asks:

ἦ καὶ σὺ ἡγῇ, ὥσπερ οἱ πολλοί, διαφθειρομένους τινὰς εἶναι ὑπὸ σοφιστῶν νέους, διαφθείροντας δέ τινας σοφιστὰς ἰδιωτικούς, ὅτι καὶ ἄξιον λόγου, ἀλλ' οὐκ αὐτοὺς τοὺς ταῦτα λέγοντας μεγίστους μὲν εἶναι σοφιστάς, παιδεύειν δὲ τελεώτατα καὶ ἀπεργάζεσθαι οἵους βούλονται εἶναι καὶ νέους καὶ πρεσβυτέρους καὶ ἄνδρας καὶ γυναῖκας; (492a5–b3)

Not only are those who blame sophists themselves the greatest sophists, but there is also a suggestion in this passage that Socrates thinks that the loss of self engendered by sophistry is more radical yet:

Ὅταν, εἶπον, συγκαθεζόμενοι ἀθρόοι πολλοὶ εἰς ἐκκλησίας ἢ εἰς δικαστήρια ἢ θέατρα ἢ στρατόπεδα ἤ τινα ἄλλον κοινὸν πλήθους σύλλογον σὺν πολλῷ θορύβῳ τὰ μὲν ψέγωσι τῶν λεγομένων ἢ πραττομένων, τὰ δὲ ἐπαινῶσιν, ὑπερβαλλόντως ἑκάτερα, καὶ ἐκβοῶντες καὶ κροτοῦντες, πρὸς δ' αὐτοῖς αἵ τε πέτραι καὶ ὁ τόπος ἐν ᾧ ἂν ὦσιν ἐπηχοῦντες διπλάσιον θόρυβον παρέχωσι τοῦ ψόγου καὶ ἐπαίνου. (492b5–c2)

The very stones and physical setting of Athens form part of the configuration of sophistry.[34]

The *Gorgias* then provides the picture of sophistry as the skill of gratifying an audience with the aim of having one's way in public affairs. The *Republic* shows that the life of the society in which this skill—its teachers and its practitioners—flourishes is one in which all involved (and not just the sophist) are dangerously ignorant of the possibility of a human life that expresses an interest in something other than πλεονεκτεῖν; that is, a form of human encounter beyond the realm of legal and

system in which the democratic rulers who are slaves to the people in turn enslave the people, so that the people are slaves of slaves; and at 578e1–579d2 he gives the analogy of the wealthy slave-owner who, isolated from the protection ordinarily afforded him by society with other slave-owners, ends up fearing and fawning over his own slaves in order to protect himself from them. See Helen F. North, '"Swimming Upside Down in the Wrong Direction": Plato's Criticism of Sophistic Rhetoric on Technical and Stylistic Grounds', *Paradosis: Studies in Memory of Edwin A. Quain* (New York, 1976), pp. 11–29, especially p. 26.

[34] The breadth of application of the term 'sophist' here seems to have been encouraged by the sophists themselves, if we are to believe Plato's portrait of Protagoras, when in the *Protagoras* he claims that everyone who ever did anything great was in reality a sophist, but feared the persecution that goes with that name, and so kept his identity hidden (316c5–317c5). Plato must have this stand of Protagoras' in mind when he pays him the compliment of saying that every wise man but Parmenides agrees with his statement that man is the measure of all things (*Theaetetus* 152d2–e9). Another example of Plato's willingness to use the term 'sophist' very broadly is *Phaedrus* 257b7–258d5, where everyone who ever wrote a law in the standard Athenian formulae for laws stands charged. It is interesting to note that Socrates' own playful account of why the true wise men and sophists of the Greeks (the Spartans and Cretans) refuse to claim the title puts it down to the fact that they know that if the rest of the Greeks knew that they were *outdone* by the Spartans and Cretans in wisdom, they would all start practising (342a6–b6).

political battles, with their winners and losers. That ignorance (and the ultimate bankruptcy of that form of life) is shown in the very difficulty of identifying the sophist in the society in which he is successful. The point that Koyré sees Plato making in the *Meno*—that Athenian common sense differs in no significant way from the ideology of the sophists that so outrages it,[35] and hence, one might add, has no resources from which it can resist the power of that ideology—informs the *Apology* too, and can make sense of the way Plato portrays Meletus as behaving in court.

We can make sense of the content of the answers that Meletus gives when he is cross-examined by Plato if we see them as those answers that are dictated by the common logic of sophistry and political life governed by πλεονεκτεῖν, and if we consider the course of the argument as a portrayal of where this logic leads: pandering to your audience with the aim of achieving success in the battles of the law-courts and assembly might deliver what it promises, but it does so at the cost of unity of the soul. Socrates' treatment of his 'earlier accusers' places precisely these issues before his audience: the real danger in this trial is the reputation he has as a sophist, an identity closely associated in the public mind with that of the natural philosophers (18b1–c1, 19d8–20c3); furthermore, the real source of that slander is the anger that he has provoked by questioning his fellow Athenians as he has over the years, an activity that is anything but pandering (20c4–24b2). It would not be too far-fetched to say that Socrates finds himself here put on trial for being a sophist by people who themselves have no clear idea of what the sophists really stand for such that they are a threat to the moral life of the community. Those putting him on trial, furthermore, could hardly have a clear idea of this without undergoing the kind of difficult self-examination that Socrates has lived his life attempting to force on the Athenians, since at the heart of sophistry is its parasitic nature: the audience that the sophist exploits are implicated in sophistry themselves. It is this dangerous ignorance in his opponents that Plato is attacking in the *Apology*.[36] The real inversion in the *Apology* is that Plato, in describing the trial of Socrates on the charge of being a sophist, turns the tables on the accusers by portraying the structure of their response to Socrates' questioning as analogous to the structure of the practice of sophistry.

There are three points on which Socrates questions Meletus: whether it is plausible that Socrates should corrupt the youth; whether, even if he does so, Meletus ought to have brought him to trial; and whether Meletus takes him to be an atheist or a religious innovator.

The first series of questions is irresistible bait for the one caught up in the logic of sophistry as the art of pandering: Socrates asks who it is that improves the youth (given that Socrates is charged with corrupting them); the answer that Meletus gives, once he understands the question, is broad gesture to the men who must decide his success or failure in the endeavour he has undertaken in bringing Socrates to court: οὗτοι, ὦ Σώκρατες, οἱ δικασταί. His answer uses the word for jurors that Socrates himself very pointedly reserves throughout his speech for those who judge the truth, and therefore refuses to use when he addresses the entire jury. Meletus' use is not in itself something that would strike an Athenian as an attempt at flattery, any more than a parliamentarian who speaks of the Honourable Member for Kicking Horse

[35] 'Anytos, riche bourgeois d'Athènes, personnage considérable et «considéré», représente le conformisme social dans toute son horreur; Ménon représente l'intellectuel «affranchi»; Socrate estime que, dans le fond, ils s'accordent parfaitement.' (A. Koyré, *Introduction à la lecture de Platon* [New York, 1945], p. 37n.)

[36] This ignorance, and the ignorance in particular of his accusers, is dramatized in the *Meno*, where Plato has Anytus admit that he has never even met a sophist and is entirely unexperienced in them (92b6–9).

Pass is understood to be flattering him; but because Socrates makes a decision that is strikingly unsophistical in its lack of *politesse*, the two conventional uses of δικασταί from Meletus in the *Apology* are invested with some of the sense of flattery that Socrates thinks the word had hidden in itself all along. When Socrates asks Meletus for confirmation of his claim about the improving powers of the jury, we see Meletus' first emphatic answer: μάλιστα—it is very much the case that they are the ones who make the youth better. Meletus' first emphatic response, that is, comes precisely when he is given his first chance to emphasize the fact that he is flattering the jury. But of course once one starts pandering to those who have one's worldly success—the success the sophists promise—in their hands, there is no stopping. Meletus follows Socrates' bait and expands his praise to all the audience; and then, since it is not only the law-courts that invite sophistic pandering and that have power over one's success in the city, he expands his extravagant praise to the members of the βουλή and the ἐκκλησία. The list with which Socrates lures Meletus is identical to the list that Gorgias gives Socrates when he has to specify the realm of achievement promised by the training of the sophist (452e). When Socrates asks for a summary of what Meletus thinks—that everyone, as it turns out, makes the youth better, and Socrates alone makes them worse—Meletus responds with his first very emphatic πάνυ μὲν οὖν σφόδρα. After all, the logic of flattery is a dangerous one: there always remains the chance that one might close off some sources of power by flattering others. It is a logic that rarely offers an occasion where one can place full confidence in one side over another, and in this is different from the practice of virtue, where there is available a certain kind of confidence that is immune to the shifting fortunes of worldly battles, according to Socrates.[37] But here is one safe case—all the world is allied against Socrates, and surely Meletus cannot resist thinking that he has the good fortune now to find himself leading the winning side in one battle where he can be confident that he *is* on the winning side. What safer situation could the logic of flattery ask for than that in which vilifying one powerless man flatters all the rest of the city? What Meletus' answers to Socrates' first line of questioning show, particularly in contrast with the story Socrates has just told about how he became so unpopular with his unflattering questioning of conspicuous Athenians, is that it is he, and not Socrates, who is guilty of what is the true hallmark of sophistry: flattery and pandering.

The next line of questioning brings into the limelight the fact that the arena in which Meletus and the other accusers choose to pursue and define their goal is that of the law-courts. One theme of the *Apology* is Socrates' strange (to an Athenian)[38] form of participation (or lack thereof) in the life of the city. The time of this trial is an era framed by two assertions of the importance of civic involvement for the human being. In the 'golden era', the loss of which is a background to this trial, Pericles' funeral oration contained the assertion that μόνοι γὰρ τόν τε μηδὲν τῶνδε μετέχοντα οὐκ ἀπράγμονα, ἀλλ' ἀχρεῖον νομίζομεν (II.40). The sophists—who counted Pericles among their most important early friends in Athens[39]—were prepared to teach what it takes to excel in precisely that civic activity that keeps a man from being 'good for nothing'. And in another generation, Athens will see Aristotle, the empirical

[37] See *Apology* 41c8–d5, for example.

[38] But see Marina Barabas, 'The Strangeness of Socrates', *Philosophical Investigations* 9 (1986), 89–110: she asks us to imagine what Socrates would look like in a busy intellectual and economic capital of our day.

[39] E. Derenne, *Les procès d'impiété* (Liège, 1930), pp. 13–14; J. A. Davison, 'Protagoras, Democritus, and Anaxagoras', *CQ* N.S. 3 (1953) pp. 33–45, especially pp. 37 and 41; W. K. C. Guthrie, *The Sophists* (Cambridge, 1971), pp. 263–4.

ethicist,[40] say that the investigation of the good *is* a branch of political theory, since it is the political art that controls all other arts, by making laws that prescribe and forbid the pursuit of all other kinds of human knowledge (*Nichomachean Ethics* 1094a24–b11).[41] Socrates jokes in the *Gorgias* about his own ignorance of those things the knowledge of which Pericles makes a condition for a person's being worth something: he once made a laughing-stock of himself when it became clear that he did not know how to put a question to a vote. For, as he says, he himself only knows how to count one vote: the vote of the person with whom he is conversing (473e6–474b1). The contrast is not a trivial one: we can see this in the concern expressed in the *Republic* for the difficulty of imagining a form of human life that expresses a way of making sense of the person who cares only about counting the vote of the person he is talking to, and counting that vote only in the light of what is true. If doing better is accomplishing more, then concerning oneself with one vote alone is hardly a worthy approach to persuasion; if that vote is to be counted only with reference to what is true, then all the sophists' paradoxes of the *Theaetetus* seem to stand in the way of this.

What comes out in Meletus' answers to Socrates' questions here is that Meletus does not deign to confront Socrates in private conversation about his supposed wickedness (we are told that he is someone unknown to Socrates [*Euthyphro* 2b])—even though there he would have some real chance, if only he knew how to go about it, of improving a fellow-citizen. What he does is confront Socrates in public, in the sort of situation where success and failure are defined in terms of τὸ πείθειν τοὺς πολλούς. What Plato is portraying with Meletus' answers to this line of questioning is that it is Meletus and not Socrates who conducts his affairs in the sort of public realm and life of the community that is inextricably implicated in sophistry.

It is in the third round of questioning that Meletus' responses to Socrates' questioning seem most implausible to us. He is presented as letting himself be tricked into saying both that Socrates is an atheist and that he is guilty of introducing new gods to the city. How can he possibly fall for this? We need to distinguish two questions here: how Plato could have thought it a plausible dramatic characterization to have Meletus answer as he does, and what philosophical point Plato could have intended by having Meletus answer as he does.

Wide disagreement about what is and what is not artistically plausible is of course always possible. While there are no precise parallels for Meletus' self-contradiction, Socrates is asking Meletus here for evidence that he has thought clearly about an area

[40] I do not, of course, mean 'empirical' in the modern sense connected with philosophical empiricism. I am simply referring to the fact that Aristotle thinks it appropriate to start such an investigation by collecting the data of what people in general think about the question at hand. The contrast with Socrates that I am suggesting is between the moral philosopher who starts by canvassing current opinion and the one who starts by asking the opinion of the person he is speaking to. That both approaches can result in starting from what is in some respects 'the same opinion' on the topic does not change the fact that there is a contrast between these two approaches.

[41] I do not mean to suggest that Thucydides, Aristotle, and the entire sophistical movement together stand charged of holding unreflectively the same thesis: that the only goal worth having for a human being is political success, whatever that political success might require and whatever it might amount to. I take it that the people I am referring to here have various views about the relationship between political activity and the good, held as a result of various degrees of reflection. Socrates' criticisms are addressed both to those who have never thought carefully about the conflicts that can arise between the goal of success in public life and moral considerations, and to those who, having thought about it, have given pride of place in one way or another to success in the political sphere.

in which the language and concepts of the ancient Greeks overlap in such a way as to make it quite possible that someone might fall into apparent contradiction while trying to navigate them.[42] When Strepsiades first meets Socrates in the *Clouds*, Socrates warns him that the gods don't 'pass for currency' in the *phrontisterion*: *ποίους θεοὺς ὀμεῖ σύ; πρῶτον γὰρ θεοὶ/ἡμῖν νόμισμ' οὐκ ἔστι* (247–8). When Socrates invokes the Clouds with prayer (269–74) and explains that they are goddesses, Strepsiades is astonished, since he had always thought of them as *ὁμίχλην καὶ δρόσον... καὶ καπνόν* (330)—that is, as mere natural phenomena. When Strepsiades challenges him for an explanation of the rain and thunder that Zeus is responsible for, Socrates responds with rather naturalistic explanations of these phenomena (369–78); the vortex that he appeals to is not a straightforward natural entity, and indeed Strepsiades thinks of it as overthrowing Zeus, as Zeus himself overthrew his father (380–81, also 827–8); but Socrates' own explanations for the nature of that force are as profane as can be (385–94). Nonetheless, Aristophanes' Socrates himself takes these naturalistic explanations as leading to the conclusion that the clouds and the vortex really are gods (along with the tongue and chaos).[43] When Aristophanes ridicules Euripides' supposed atheism, he portrays him in the *Frogs* as holding to a list of gods that bears some resemblance to Socrates' in the *Clouds*: *αἰθήρ, ἐμὸν βόσκημα, καὶ γλώττης στρόφιγξ,/ καὶ ξύνεσι καὶ μυκτῆρες ὀσφραντήριοι* (892–3). But in the *Thesmophoriazusae* the charge is that he persuades people that there are no gods (889–94).[44] This suggests that it is artistically plausible for Plato to portray Meletus responding as he does: he is, after all, being forced by Socrates to follow out in an unusually rigorous fashion the rather tangled threads the language offers when it comes to the concepts involved in belief and disbelief in the gods.[45]

In what guise does sophistry appear in these responses? We can see again the same sophistic guiding principle in the options he chooses out of those offered him by Socrates: he repeatedly takes the stand (very emphatically—here we have our *πάνυ μὲν οὖν σφόδρα ταῦτα λέγω*, and two oaths 'by Zeus', as well as his most loquacious answers) that is calculated to incite the jury to the maximum degree. The one skilled in using or in teaching rhetoric is said in the *Republic* to have learned of the great

[42] The problem is, of course, not unique to the language and concepts of the Greeks. See Peter Winch, 'Darwin, *Genesis* and Contradiction', *Trying to Make Sense* (Oxford, 1987), pp. 132–9.

[43] He refers to them or treats them thus at 252–3, 264–5, 269–74, 365, 423–4, and 627.

[44] Richard Kannicht, in his commentary on Euripides' *Helen*, line 560 (*θεός γὰρ καὶ τὸ γιγνώσκειν φίλους*), says 'diese Formulierung ist dadurch möglich, daß *θεός* in 5. Jh. zu einem konventionellen Prädikat übermächtiger seelischen Zustände oder äußerer Umstände geworden ist'. It is not implausible (although this is not Kannicht's understanding of this tendency) to think of the tendency to use *θεός* so freely as a sign of irreligiousness.

[45] M. R. Lefkowitz discusses the professions of 'atheism' in the mouths of Euripides' characters as arising from his desire to portray realistically the despair of humans in the face of the horrendous things that happen to them and in the face of the hiddenness of divine purpose that might make sense of such horrors—not from the desire to portray a universe without gods. ('Impiety and Atheism in Euripides', *CQ* 39 (1989), 70–82; see also Christoph Riedweg, 'The "Atheistic" Fragment from Euripedes' *Bellerophontes* (286N²)', *ICS* 15 (1990), 39–53). M. Winiarczyk discusses briefly the problem of the sense of *ἄθεος* and related terms in 'Wer galt im Altertum als Atheist?', *Philologus* 128 (1984), 157–83 (in particular, pp. 182–3). The dominant use of *ἄθεος* in tragedy is in the sense of forsaken or hated by the gods, and it is used quite frequently of people who are gods, are related to the gods, or are in the process of dealing with the gods at the moment. In the *Eumenides* at 152, Orestes is called *ἄθεος* as he is in the process of supplicating Apollo; in the *Trachiniae* at 1038 Heracles' wife is called *ἄθεος*. In *Helen*, Euripides has the chorus focus on precisely this as a measure of the unreliability of the things human beings say: Helen, daughter of Zeus by Leda, is called *ἄθεος* by men (1148).

beast οἵας αὖ ἄλλου φθεγγομένου ἡμεροῦταί τε καὶ ἀγριαίνει (493b4–5)—both how to tame the beast, with the flattery of the first round of questioning, and how to make it wild, with the outrageous views of Socrates he reports in this last round of questioning. Plato's point in portraying Meletus' responses here is precisely that the attempt to rouse the 'great beast' can be undertaken only at the risk of sacrificing that kind of unity of soul that manifests itself in consistency of belief. Socrates warns Callicles that as long as he is driven by his infatuation with the Athenian people and with Demos he will never be at peace with himself, but will always be contradicting himself and changing his mind (481c5–482c3). Since the logic of Meletus' responses in this third line of questioning is 'say whatever you can to stir the crowd to your side', both the idea that Socrates is ἄθεος and the idea that he introduces new divinities are good sources for outrage, and there is nothing to choose between them: the variety offered is suitable, for there is a variety of people in the audience, and the one claim will outrage some of them, and the other others. As Socrates says in the discussion of the great beast, the many cannot be a philosopher: Φιλόσοφον μὲν ἄρα, ἣν δ' ἐγώ, πλῆθος ἀδύνατον εἶναι (494a4).[46]

In the *Apology*, Plato is turning the tables on the accusers of his teacher: they dragged Socrates into court on charges that essentially amount to the claim that he is a sophist, and Plato portrays Socrates as putting Meletus on trial on the same charge. Meletus' answers form a dramatic portrayal of the career that inevitably awaits the practitioner of sophistry. The power of sophistry is shown by the fact that even when it seems to make a poor showing—even when following the logic of sophistry leads to conclusions that we arm-chair observers think are blatantly absurd—sophistry can deliver at least a semblance of what it promises, or, indeed, that very semblance which it does promise: success in human affairs, by a vote of 280 to 220.

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[46] This is presumably why he denies that the sophist is the philosophical nature in a state of corruption: the philosopher in the state of corruption would be a person who had the unity of soul, belief and purpose that the philosopher has, but who turned away from the good. It is not clear that Plato thinks such a character possible.