

DRAMATIC STRUCTURE AND CULTURAL CONTEXT IN PLATO'S *LACHES*¹

The characters in Plato's Socratic Dialogues and the sociocultural beliefs and assumptions they present have a historical dramatic setting which ranges over the last quarter of the fifth century B.C.—the period of activity of the historical Socrates.² That this context is to an extent fictional is undeniable; yet this leaves open the question what the dramatic interplay of (mostly) dead politicians, sophists, and other Socratic associates—not forgetting Socrates himself—signifies for the overall meaning and purpose of individual Dialogues. Are we to assume, with a recent study,³ that Plato is entirely concerned with his contemporary world and is, as it were, borrowing his characters from the fifth century, or does the fiction reveal something of his real involvement in the values and debates of the recent past? The aim of this paper is to argue that a detailed study of the characterization and dramatic structure of one particular Dialogue, *Laches*, strongly suggests that Plato is using a perceived tension between past and present to generate not only a philosophical argument but also a commentary on the cultural and political world of late fifth-century Athens and in particular Socrates' position within it.

I

Laches contains features that both conform to and diverge from expectations of form and dramatic structure in the genre. It is a 'definition' Dialogue (like, for example, *Charmides*, *Euthyphro*, or *Lysis*), in this case the goal being *andreia* (courage). Socrates and the other participants examine a number of possible definitions of *andreia* as part of a quest to discover what *arete* (excellence) is as a preliminary to an enquiry into how it might be taught and who might be qualified to teach it. These latter stages are never reached, however, because, as in a number of other Socratic Dialogues, the definitions all fail and the discussion ends in *aporia* (impasse, perplexity) accompanied by an expressed willingness, on Socrates' part at least, to continue on another occasion. There is also an extensive 'introduction', one of the functions of which is to explore a social/cultural problem which motivates and underlies the dialectical search (cf. *Euth.* 2a–5c). The conceptual refocusing of this problem by Socrates is accompanied by a change in mode of discourse; *epideixis* (set speech) gives way to dialectic.

These common generic features highlight distinctive elements. The so-called introduction (i.e. the material which precedes the *elenchos*—the 'testing of the argument') extends, in *Laches*, to almost one half of the Dialogue (178a1–189d3), which has a

¹ I would like to thank Lorna Hardwick and an anonymous CQ referee for helpful criticism of an earlier draft of this paper.

² Mention of 'Socratic Dialogues' here assumes the distinctions in structure and content between early and middle Platonic Dialogues drawn by, for example, G. Vlastos, *Socrates: Ironist and Moral Philosopher* (Cambridge, 1991), pp. 45–80, without at this stage making any of Vlastos's assumptions about the relationship between the historical Socrates and the Socrates of the early Dialogues.

³ C. H. Kahn, *Plato and the Socratic Dialogues: The Philosophical Use of a Literary Form* (Cambridge, 1996), pp. 2ff.

number of consequences for the dramatic structure: there is a leisurely development of the 'problem'—the need to find a suitable education for potentially idle youths (179a1ff.), and, considering the comparative brevity of the Dialogue as a whole, an extended rehearsal of common Socratic concerns: the importance of consulting technical and moral experts (introduced via the 'craft analogy'), and the need to be aware of the psychological and emotional aspects of Socrates' questioning method of enquiry. The length of the introduction also allows extended development of the roles of Socrates' main partners, Nicias and Laches, who as late fifth-century-Athenian generals are to play a key part in Plato's exploration of the past.

The most distinctive formal feature of the Dialogue, however, is the late 'entry' of Socrates (181d1), followed by a yet further postponed active contribution to the discussion (184d5). In the absence of the early guiding presence of Socrates, as, for example, in the introductory exchanges of 'direct speech' Dialogues (e.g. *Ion*, *Euthyphro*, *Gorgias*) or in 'framed' Dialogues with Socrates as narrator (e.g. *Lysis*, *Charmides*, *Protagoras*), *Laches* begins with a long speech by one of the minor characters, Lysimachus; this choice of opening is a dramatic structure unique in the Platonic corpus, and one that allows the agenda for the Dialogue to be initiated before Socrates speaks a word.⁴

Lysimachus feels compelled to speak confidentially to Nicias and Laches on a socially delicate matter—his concern, and that of his friend Melesias, about the education of their adolescent sons. He and Melesias are both sons of famous fathers, respectively Aristides 'The Just' (of Persian Wars fame) and Thucydides the mid-fifth-century conservative politician. As a result of their fathers' preoccupation with public affairs, Lysimachus claims, their own education was neglected, an omission he is anxious to avoid in this generation.⁵ They have all just been watching a demonstration of *hoplomachia* (a military exercise involving tactics and strategy); would Nicias and Laches, parents themselves, recommend it as a suitable education?

At first sight this long-winded, repetitive speech, far removed from the lively exchanges which mark the start of, for example, *Lysis* or *Euthyphro*, strikes the reader as singularly inept for a verbal artist of the calibre of Plato. Lysimachus takes time to get to the point and, when he does so, repeatedly labours it.⁶ It quickly becomes obvious, however, that the stylistic features constitute a humorous characterization amounting to thoroughgoing parody of a formal address. Lysimachus is in some respects a 'Polonius figure' whose elaborate, repetitive syntax and stylistic awkwardness paint a picture of a pedantic, elderly man, anxiously aware of being out of touch with his children's generation and contemporary life generally, to the extent of not even being personally acquainted with Socrates, though a long-standing friend of his father (180c5ff.). On this latter point, one might conjecture that Plato intended the

⁴ It is not made clear by Plato exactly when Socrates is presumed to have joined the group; for discussion of this issue, see C. Emlyn-Jones, *Plato's Laches: Edited with Introduction and Commentary* (Bristol, 1996), notes on *La.* 178a2, 180c1 and summary, pp. 63–4. In *Laches*, Socrates' relationship to the ostensible subject of the Dialogue is only gradually allowed to emerge; contrast, for example, *Euthyphro*, where the sociocultural 'problem' is taken up by Socrates and shaped for his purposes right from the beginning of the Dialogue.

⁵ For Plato's view elsewhere of the shortcomings of the education of Lysimachus and Melesias, see *Meno* 94a–e.

⁶ Lysimachus self-consciously makes a formal 'proem' (179a1) and fills the space by continually reiterating ideas connected with *epimeleia* and *therapeia* ('care' and 'nurture') of his sons, awkwardly presented in an exaggerated imitation of formal rhetoric (see esp. 180a1–5). For stylistic analysis of the speech, see Emlyn-Jones (n. 4), pp. 52–7.

dramatic date of *Laches* (c. 421–418 B.C.) to be significant; it falls shortly after the date of production of Aristophanes' *Clouds* (423), a play that Plato's Socrates, in *Apology* (19c ff.), regarded as having had a powerful and long-standing negative influence on public attitudes towards him. Plato's presentation of Lysimachus as ignorant of who the son of his friend is and what he is popularly perceived to stand for *at this particular time* may seem too pointed to be coincidental.⁷

Lysimachus also functions, rather like Cephalus in *Republic I* (there are close verbal reminiscences of *Laches*⁸), as a minor participant from the older generation who does not really grasp what is going on in the philosophical discussion. Like others of his type, his character and situation can be interpreted as a means of launching the Dialogue on its path, only to give way to the more searching intellects of Socrates and the other speakers. However, unlike Cephalus, who retires before the discussion of *Republic* gets going, Lysimachus is concerned with the outcome; he regularly intervenes throughout *Laches* and, following the general admission of failure, concludes with a willingness to meet Socrates again. Lysimachus' sporadic contributions actually mark the transitions in the argument of the Dialogue; his naïve assumption (184d1) that a solution will be found if they acquire an umpire (τοῦ ἐπιδιακρινούντος) to adjudicate between the *epideixeis* of Nicias and Laches on *hoplomachia* generates the major conceptual shift of the Dialogue: Socrates counters with an abrupt question concerning the need for 'expertise', rather than simply voting for one side or the other (184d5 ff.). Again, Lysimachus' engaging pleas of old age and forgetfulness as an excuse for non-participation in the argument (189c6–d1) mark the start of the *elenchos* proper at d4 ff., and he concludes with sublime confidence in the post-*aporia* section by asking Socrates to act as teacher for his and Melesias' children (200d5 ff.) and, for himself, suggesting a *tête-à-tête* with Socrates on the morrow (201b6 ff.).

A significant feature of Lysimachus' beliefs is that they appear to undergo little or no change in the course of the Dialogue; at the end, in his enthusiastic endorsement of Socrates as an eminently suitable teacher for his and Melesias' sons, he seems oblivious of the intellectual distance travelled: of the implications of what has been established about the need for expertise in the care of the *psyche* (soul) and the failure of any of the assembled company, Socrates apparently included, to qualify. Yet the combination of his ignorance and reappearance at critical points in the Dialogue suggests a further function for Lysimachus: Plato is using him to mark the widening gap between his unchanging perceptions and the developing positions explored by Socrates and the others. The divide which opens up between Lysimachus and Socrates in the course of the Dialogue is ironically underlined by shared language: Lysimachus professes that he will enjoy his friends 'being questioned and offering explanation' (ἐρωτᾶσθαί τε καὶ διδόναι λόγον, 187c1–2), while clearly having no conception of what is involved in doing this with Socrates;⁹ at the end he asks Socrates if he is prepared 'to join eagerly in helping to make the best of the lads' (συμπροθυμήσῃ ὡς βελτίστοις γενέσθαι

⁷ For the dramatic date of *Laches*, see R. G. Hoerber, 'Plato's *Laches*', *CPh* 63 (1968), 95–105. The fact that it is the partially revised version of *Clouds* which we have (see K. J. Dover, Aristophanes, *The Clouds* [Oxford, 1968], pp. xxx–xcviii) does not substantially affect the point made here (on which see further below, p. 134).

⁸ *La.* 181c4, compare *R.* I.328d4–5, where Socrates is urged by Cephalus, with striking similarity of phrase (μὴ . . . ἄλλως ποίει, ἀλλὰ . . . σύνισθι is a literal verbal reminiscence of *Laches*), to visit him and his sons more often.

⁹ P. Vicaire, *Lachés et Lysis: Introduction, Greek Text and Commentary* (Paris, 1963), note on 187c, considerably overinterprets the phrase in arguing that 'Lysimaque va accepter et recommander . . . la méthode socratique.'

τοῖς μειρακίοις, 200d7–8 and e2); and Socrates wishes to ‘join in consulting’ (συμβουλευέιν, 201a2: an idea introduced and repeated *ad nauseam* by Lysimachus in his opening speech). The crowning irony is Plato’s choice of Lysimachus rather than either of Socrates’ more aware partners to take the initiative in securing a further appointment with Socrates. One wonders what on earth Socrates and Lysimachus would have to say to each other on the following day!

Yet Lysimachus’ lack of awareness is not just a comic foil for the serious business of the Dialogue. It has been noted that his earnest but unfocused use of popular social value-terms of high aspiration, e.g. for all their children to be ‘the best’ (ἄριστοι, 179b2; cf. 200d7–8) and not end up, as he and Melesias are, ‘without reputation’ (ἀκλειεῖς, d4), foreshadows the dilemma of the unity or separateness of virtues which is central to the final part of the argument of the Dialogue.¹⁰ Secondly, his tediously repetitive insistence on the educational need for *epimeleia* and *therapeia* (‘care’ and ‘nurture’) links him, despite the intellectual distance between them, with the seriousness of Socrates’ central concerns, possibly in implied contrast, as we shall suggest below (pp. 129ff.), with the more sophisticated Nicias. Finally, his willingness to be ‘frank’ (παρρησιάζεσθαι, 178a4–5, repeated at 179c1–2), in exposing himself to potential ridicule and sacrificing his social prestige in making a revelation of paternal incompetence is a practical demonstration of his reiterated desire for cooperation, which, as we shall see, firmly sets the tone for the conduct of the entire Dialogue.¹¹ All this suggests a degree of ambivalence in Lysimachus’ role: Plato’s tongue-in-cheek characterization overlies a contribution to the serious practical agenda.

With Laches and Nicias, Plato provides Socrates with his main conversational partners in what are ostensibly the two chief aims of the Dialogue, the moral validation of Socrates and the enquiry into *andreia*. In the case of the latter the Dialogue conforms structurally to generic expectations: there is a characteristic progression in the *elenchos* from less to more searching attempts at definition, represented by a movement from the less intellectually experienced Laches to the more sophisticated Nicias (cf. the movement Gorgias–Polus–Callicles in *Gorgias* or Charmides–Critias in *Charmides*). Looked at philosophically, a strong linear development is evident: an unsuccessful attempt at a definition of *andreia* in dispositional terms as ‘a kind of endurance of the soul’ (καρτερία τις . . . τῆς ψυχῆς, Laches, at 192b9), is followed by Nicias’ more successful definition in terms of a certain kind of knowledge (*episteme*): for Nicias, courage is ‘knowledge of what is fearful and what is encouraging in war and in all other situations’ (τὴν τῶν δεινῶν καὶ θαρραλέων ἐπιστήμην καὶ ἐν πολέμῳ καὶ ἐν τοῖς ἄλλοις ἄπασιν, 194e11–95a1). Yet the ultimate failure of this latter definition results from Socrates’ successful (or at least unchallenged) attempt to conflate it with *andreia* as ‘knowledge of all good and evil’ (199c6–d1), i.e. the whole of *arete* and not, as the original definition implied, a part. So the linear movement is arrested by the equivocal ending; the apparent dissolution of boundaries between virtues in the definition of *andreia* at the end of the Dialogue (198b2ff.) is a result which appears to eliminate the object of the search altogether and leave ambiguity: does Plato, in *Laches*, intend us to conclude that *andreia* has actually been defined or

¹⁰ For discussion of the significance of the unreflective use of value terms for the philosophical investigation of *arete* in *Laches*, see M. C. Stokes, *Plato’s Socratic Conversations* (London, 1986), pp. 41ff.

¹¹ For verbose overemphasis, to the point of parody, of *epimeleia*, *therapeia* (and cognates), and *sumboule* (and cognates) in Lysimachus’ first speech see Emlyn-Jones (n. 4), notes on 179a5 and e5, and for the extension of the ‘co-operative’ idea to the whole Dialogue, see note on 178b5.

not? Or, in terms of the ostensible aim of the discussion, is Lysimachus any nearer obtaining a suitable education for his sons, as he certainly seems finally to believe (200d5–8)?¹²

The early scenes of the Dialogue strike a strongly positive note. The 'retardation' of Socrates' entry allows the offering, before he has uttered a word, of a range of testimonials to his intellectual sophistication (Nicias, at 180c8ff.), his 'respectable' family connections (Lysimachus, at 181b5–c9), and, most elaborately, his physical bravery, introduced appropriately enough by the soldier Laches, who experienced Socrates' courage when they shared a retreat from Delium (424 B.C.) (181a7–b4, and e.g. 188e6f.). Yet Socrates' apparent embodiment, according to others, of a virtue which, it ultimately appears, he is no more successful than the others at defining, highlights a tension which permeates the Dialogue, between words and actions. Laches sets this up at 188c4ff., when, praising harmony of speech and action in a 'Doric mode' (δωριστὶ, d6), he announces himself prepared to put his trust in Socrates' words on the evidence of the latter's actions, only to find, at the end of his *elenchos*, that they have conspicuously failed to define *andreia*, a conclusion that Socrates underlines by recalling Laches' earlier words but reversing their significance (193d11–e4): they have both (ἐγὼ τε καὶ σύ—Socrates emphasizes his own personal involvement here) failed to make a 'Doric harmony'; 'for our deeds do not harmonize with our words' (τὰ γὰρ ἔργα οὐ συμφωνεῖ ἡμῖν τοῖς λόγοις, e1–2).

Plato sets the stage for this tension in the earlier speeches of Nicias and Laches, the 'mini-*epideixeis*' which answer Lysimachus' call for an opinion from each of them on the value of *hoplomachia* as an education for his and Melesias' sons. These resemble sophistic or legal *Antilogiai* in their formal structure and diametrically opposed positions, often explicitly recognized as such by the speakers.¹³ Plato here uses delicate stylistic parody to suggest intellectual allegiances: Nicias, in a speech which echoes the language of the sophists,¹⁴ argues for the value of *hoplomachia* as a theoretical teachable skill embodying *episteme* (knowledge). Content resembles form: *hoplomachia* is presented as just part of an extended hierarchy of topics of sophistic instruction which form an 'education' for the aspiring youth of the hoplite and cavalry class.¹⁵ The form of Laches' answering speech also mirrors content: Laches' lack of Nicias' verbal skills reflects his ignorance of intellectual movements and mistrust of theory in favour of the proof of *erga* (deeds). Nevertheless, in answer to Nicias' polished performance, Plato gives to Laches the longer speech and the more memorable images, notably the ignominious 'exhibition' of the 'miles gloriosus' Stesilaus (183c8–84a7), who once made a fool of himself in front of the enemy on board ship (an *epideixis* indeed!);¹⁶ one needs to remember that Stesilaus' *hoplomachia*

¹² For different views on whether or not Plato is to be understood as implying the 'unity of virtue' thesis by the end of the *Laches*, see T. Irwin, *Plato's Moral Theory: The Early and Middle Dialogues* (Oxford, 1977), pp. 54ff. and 89, n. 62; R. Kraut, *Socrates and the State* (Princeton, 1984), pp. 258–62. At 197e10–98a9 Plato appears to be choosing Socrates' language quite carefully to avoid the latter's explicit endorsement of *andreia* as a *part of arete* (see Emlyn-Jones [n. 4], note on 198a4).

¹³ NB Laches' point-by-point refutation of Nicias at 182d6ff.

¹⁴ 182c5 (προσθήσομεν δ' αὐτῷ οὐ μικρὰν προσθήκην) sounds like a possible parody of Gorgias DK82B11(5); note also the verbosity and stylized syntax of 182c1–7.

¹⁵ Mentioned specifically by Nicias at 182a2–4. Whatever the historical reality, Nicias wishes here to emphasize the social exclusiveness of *hoplomachia* in order to boost his recommendation. For *hoplomachia* as an area of sophistic instruction, see Plato, *Euthd.* 271d; Xen. *Mem.* III.1.6–7.

¹⁶ For Plato's *double entendre* on *epideixis*, see Emlyn-Jones (n. 4), note on 183d2–3.

demonstration, which they have all just been watching (179a1–2), is the event which has generated the present discussion.

In terms of the forward movement of the Dialogue these speeches by Nicias and Laches have no sequel; invited by Lysimachus to vote on them (*he* clearly thinks this will settle the matter), Socrates immediately dismisses the whole basis of the discussion (184d5ff.); *hoplomachia* disappears in favour of a move to a more basic question—the ultimate moral aim of this or any other activity claiming educational value. Yet the *epideixeis* have dramatic significance in setting an intellectually confident tone which Plato subsequently proceeds to undermine. *Laches* is unusual, in generic terms, in presenting Socrates' intellectual partners as getting irritated or angry not with Socrates (cf. *Protagoras*, *Gorgias*, *Meno*, or *Republic I*) but with each other. Under the veil of conventional politeness, Nicias and Laches engage in a barely concealed competitive relationship, practising a form of verbal 'one-upmanship', characterized by the literal repetition and capping of each other's words at the 'take-over' point of speeches. This starts under the surface at 180c8–d3, where Nicias is clearly anxious to improve on Laches' rather vague introduction of Socrates by asserting his own more knowledgeable acquaintance (τοῦτο μὲν σοι κἂν ἐγὼ εἴχοιμι εἰπεῖν οὐ χεῖρον Λάχης), and finally comes right out into the open with angry exchanges near the end of the Dialogue following Nicias' failure in the *elenchos* (199e13ff.: see below, p. 129).¹⁷

This competitive relationship cuts sharply across the ostensibly co-operative ethos of the Dialogue, and signals Nicias' and Laches' unwillingness to be bound by the tone of Lysimachus' original request. This is particularly clear in the case of Nicias, who is very conscious of his position as someone *au fait* with Socrates' methods and aims (187e6ff.), and quite effectively takes on the 'Socratic role' in the later and more developed arguments in the second main *elenchos* section of the Dialogue, successfully deflecting spirited but ill-directed attacks by Laches (194c7ff.). Yet his intellectual self-confidence is not matched by his personal attitude: while recognizing that conversations with Socrates will involve not just answering questions but 'giving an account of how [one] lives and has lived one's life' (he purports to correct a naïve Lysimachus on this point: 187e6ff.), he goes on to betray his lack of real involvement by describing the process as one he finds 'not unpleasant' (οὐδ' . . . ἀηδές, 188b5) and one to which he has 'no objection' (οὐδὲν κωλύει, c1)—an attitude not borne out by his later reaction to personal intellectual failure in the final *elenchos* (see below, p. 129). Laches, likewise, not only reacts abusively to Nicias' patronizing handling of the 'Socrates role' (196a4–b7), but also displays his own failure to embody *karteria* (endurance) in his own behaviour by his rather irritable 'resignations' from the discussion (e.g. 196c5–6, 197e5), when the going gets tough.

In philosophical terms the structure of *Laches* is, as usual in a Socratic Dialogue, progressive, allowing the participants to proceed, under the guidance of Socrates, from less to more sophisticated definitions: *andreia* defined as an activity—not retreating in the face of the enemy (*La.* 190e4ff.)—progresses to *andreia* as something internal to the individual—a disposition (*La.* 192b9ff.) or intellectual capacity (194d1ff.). So, Nicias' final definition of *andreia* in terms of a specific kind of knowledge 'of what is fearful and encouraging in war etc.' (194e11–95a1) implicitly recognizes the weakness in the Laches *elenchos* and its refutation (a definition in dispositional terms failing properly to clarify the role of knowledge [*episteme*]), but

¹⁷ For verbal one-upmanship in *Laches*, see Emlyn-Jones (n. 4), note on 197a6.

also goes one step further in introducing explicitly an element of *value* into the discussion of *andreia*; this move implies that *andreia* is more than knowledge defined merely as a technique, but has to be concerned with outcomes: whether the application of a given technical skill, e.g. that of a doctor, will ultimately be better (*ἄμεινον*, 195c12) for the recipient. This idea of intellectual progression has suggested the notion that Plato is also presenting the one-sided personalities of Nicias and Laches (the 'intellectual' and the 'man of action') as contributing to some kind of synthesis in Socrates himself: 'The inconclusive ending invites the reader to supply the missing piece of the jigsaw, and if it is to match Socrates' character, that piece must also be a combination of the strengths to be found in the definitions of both Nicias and Laches.'¹⁸ This interpretation implies that, whatever degree of autonomy may be allowed to Socrates' partners, what they say, and the way that they say it, must be seen essentially as a contribution to the intellectual position and personality of Socrates, and that the point of the Dialogue lies in the implied ending. In Socrates, despite what he himself may say, words and deeds have been 'harmonized', and the *aporia* conceals a positive conclusion which is, by implication, the Socratic position.

However, it is worth looking for a moment at how this 'inconclusive ending' actually works in dramatic terms. Immediately following the final confession of *aporia* by Nicias and Socrates (199e12), the latent antagonism between Nicias and Laches comes to the surface and they openly quarrel. There are mutual reproaches of incompetence (199e13–200c2), during which exchanges Socrates is markedly silent. Nicias' reaction to Laches' sarcastically expressed disappointment that he has not succeeded, despite being backed by 'the wisdom of Damon' (a sophist with expertise in musical and social theory with whom Nicias claims close acquaintance [see 180c9ff.]) is strange: having implicated both himself and Laches in a counter-accusation of being ignorant of what 'any self-respecting man ought to know' (*μηδὲν εἰδέναι ὧν προσήκει ἐπιστήμην ἔχειν ἀνδρὶ οἰομένῳ τί εἶναι*, 200a7–8), Nicias then proceeds to claim that he has just 'spoken tolerably' (*ἐπιεικῶς εἰρήσθαι*, b3) and that, if there are any shortcomings in the discussion, he will 'amend them later' (*ὕστερον ἐπανορθώσεσθαι*, b4) with Damon's help. Once it has all been settled he will explain it to the ignorant Laches (b6–8). Giving the usually sophisticated Nicias an admission of ignorance and competence in the same short speech is perhaps a subtle way of portraying his discomposure in the face of Laches' jibe; but the reference to Damon and mysterious other contacts (*καὶ μετ' ἄλλων*, b6) with whose help he will have no great trouble in rescuing the *aporia* from any inadequacies in the argument (presumably what *τι αὐτῶν* is referring to at b4) suggests more than bravado or wounded pride; Nicias, in marked contrast to his earlier sophistication, seems here not really to appreciate the implications of what has been going on in the argument, and his Damon citation in reaction to Laches' provocation (and Socrates' earlier teasing about the relationship with Damon and Prodicus: 197d1–5) simply serves to emphasize the irrelevance of his reactions.¹⁹

The impression of Nicias' general non-engagement is reinforced a moment later when, rather like Lysimachus, he urges Socrates to take charge of the boys. This may well be an obvious way of allowing Socrates to make his customary disclaimer of any

¹⁸ I. Lane, *Laches: Introduction and Translation* in T. Saunders (ed.), *Plato: Early Socratic Dialogues* (Harmondsworth, 1987), pp. 69–115 at p. 77. See also M. J. O'Brien, 'The unity of the *Laches*', *YCS* 18 (1963), 133–47.

¹⁹ Nicias has already shown himself keen that others should appreciate the status the Damon relationship might give him: see *La.* 180c8–d3.

greater competence than the others in the field of education (200e1ff.). Yet the very comprehensive nature of this particular Socratic disclaimer throws into ironic relief the confident reversion of not just Nicias, but all the other speakers to the very attitudes from which they apparently started out. Not just Lysimachus but all the speakers seem to believe that Socrates is the ideal teacher, thus throwing into doubt their appreciation of what the *aporia* has really signified. The verbally close repetition of themes familiar from the beginning of the discussion suggests that, for them at least, progress may be illusory. They may well retain the broadly based popular moral aspirations with which they entered the debate, but Plato is indicating by dramatic means how unfit they all are, intellectually and emotionally, to pursue the subject. The hope of further progress is subverted—surely deliberately—by the choice of Lysimachus as prospective partner. And absence of narrative ‘frame’ leaves the ostensibly confident conclusion hanging in the air with a substantial question-mark.

II

Discussion of the *aporia* goes to the heart of any attempt to relate philosophical, dramatic, and cultural elements in *Laches*. The question arises, in common with other Socratic Dialogues: what is its purpose? In terms of Plato’s philosophical development this has not been considered such a difficult question to answer: through the impossibility of adequately confining definition to a single part of *arete*, the Socratic ‘unity of virtue’ thesis is implicitly outlined; furthermore, the discussion of *andreia* may already suggest a distinction between cognitive and non-cognitive elements associated with *arete* which points forward to *Republic IV*, where courage is presented in terms of a tripartite division of the *psyche*, in which reason and spirit are allied (as Laches might more successfully have argued at *La.* 192e6ff.).²⁰ On the other hand, an early place in the chronology of Plato’s Socratic Dialogues may be indicated by the brief exploration of themes dealt with in more detail in the longer of the earlier Socratic Dialogues, such as: the difficulty of finding teachers of *arete* (186a3ff., cf. *Protagoras*, *Meno*), Socrates’ professed ignorance (186b8ff., cf. *Charmides*), Socrates’ attitude to Sophists (186c2ff., cf. *Protagoras*), the issue of fathers as teachers of their sons (178aff., cf. *Meno*), the ‘craft analogy’ (184d8ff., cf. *Gorgias*, *Meno*), the social stigma of adults studying philosophy (201a3ff., cf. *Gorgias*). This, of course, assumes that brevity of treatment might indicate chronological priority, which is by no means certain.²¹

In *Laches*, the post-execution ‘hagiography’ of Socrates, in contrast to many Dialogues (e.g. *Protagoras*, *Charmides*, and in particular *Gorgias* and the latter stages of *Meno*) contains no hint of disapproval or social or political opposition—and indeed goes out of its way to portray a man whose all-round ability and probity is much admired by public figures such as Nicias and Laches, and who is firmly

²⁰ See *R.* IV.429aff. The suggestion that in *Laches* Plato introduces knowledge of value as something distinct from technical knowledge is argued by G. Vlastos in M. Burnyeat (ed.), *Socratic Studies* (Cambridge, 1994), pp. 115–17; for a view of *andreia* as essentially technical knowledge, see T. Irwin, *Plato’s Moral Theory: The Early and Middle Dialogues* (Oxford, 1977), p. 47, n. 11 (295), and also recently, T. Irwin, *Plato’s Ethics* (Oxford, 1995), pp. 18ff.

²¹ NB the recent radical suggestions of Kahn (n. 3) concerning the reordering of the chronology of the Socratic Dialogues (and new discussion of the ethical doctrines in Plato which might be termed ‘Socratic’). Kahn ([n. 3], pp. 42ff.) nevertheless sees *Laches* as the first of his ‘threshold Dialogues’, i.e. the initiation of a programme of philosophical investigation culminating in the *Republic*.

established in Athenian society through his father's family friendships and his own exemplary military service. Plato is creating a dramatic context for a middle-aged Socrates (he is about 47 at the dramatic date of *Laches*) whose personality and teaching are not as yet perceived by anybody as a threat to the *polis*.

The establishment of this context, however, involves suppression as well as creation. Far from causing resentment by taking the initiative in probing questions (which is part of Plato's Socrates' explanation of the *diabole* (prejudice) against him at, for example, *Apology* 23a ff.) the Socrates of *Laches* has to be 'called in' to give an opinion; moreover his 'respectability' is reinforced by the absence of any reference, direct or oblique, not only to *Clouds* (see above p. 125), but also to other comic representations of Socrates in the late 420s as a poverty-stricken, ill-dressed, and loquacious subversive.²²

This apparently deliberate ignoring of a distinct strand in the Socratic persona needs to be put in context. The trial and execution of Socrates were events which generated a genre of Socratic literature consisting of polarized reconstructions, of which we have Plato and Xenophon for the defence and we know of at least one work on the opposite side, the *Accusation of Socrates* by the Athenian teacher of rhetoric, Polycrates, whose adversarial stance has been reconstructed, largely from Xenophon and Isocrates.²³ The nature of the burgeoning and long-lived Socratic 'myth', and especially its early manifestations in Plato and Xenophon, suggest that Socrates' defenders and accusers did not confine themselves to the trial, but ranged quite widely over his life and alleged conduct; a large number of 'Socratics', most of whom are only names to us, created a genre of literature in which the life of the master was celebrated; at this early stage in his philosophical career there is no reason to suppose that Plato had yet attained his later pre-eminence in this field.²⁴

In this context it is tempting to see *Laches* as an early part (early in both dramatic terms and, possibly, date of composition) of a deliberate re-creation and justification of a Socratic *Vita* in which there is a progression from general social acceptance by the Athenian political establishment to sharp antagonism; this latter is clearly visible in, for example, *Gorgias* and the later sections of *Meno*, where Calicles and Anytus form a sharp contrast with Laches and Nicias in their attitudes to Socrates and his beliefs.

The position is, however, not that simple. The chronology of composition within the early period of Platonic Dialogues has never been (and probably never will be) firmly established,²⁵ and, in any case, there is no obvious relationship between this and the dramatic/biographical development of the Platonic/Socratic *Vita*. Moreover, Plato's Socrates became, at a point which cannot really be established for certain, a mouthpiece for his commemorator's own philosophical innovations;²⁶ this is the main

²² Eupolis, fr. 352E; Ameipsias, *Connus*, fr. 9E; cf. Aristophanes, *Birds* (414 B.C.), 1280, 1553.

²³ See, for example, T. C. Brickhouse and N. D. Smith, *Socrates on Trial* (Oxford, 1989), pp. 71 ff.

²⁴ The remains of the Socratics are collected in G. Giannantoni, *Socratis et Socraticorum Reliquiae*, 2nd edn (Naples, 1991). For Plato's position as a 'Socratic', see D. Clay, 'The origins of the Socratic dialogue', in P. A. Vander Waerdt (ed.), *The Socratic Movement* (Ithaca/London, 1994), pp. 23–47; Kahn (n. 3), pp. 1–35.

²⁵ The Platonic Dialogues of the early period are notoriously difficult to place in order of composition: see L. Brandwood, 'Stylometry and chronology', in R. Kraut (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Plato* (Cambridge, 1992), pp. 90–120 at p. 115 on the stylometric evidence, and the radical reordering by Kahn (n. 3), pp. 48–59.

²⁶ On this, contrast Vlastos (n. 2), pp. 45 ff. and M. C. Stokes, 'Socrates' mission', in B. Gower and M. C. Stokes (edd.), *Socratic Questions* (London, 1992), pp. 26–81 at pp. 77–79.

distinction between Plato and the other biographers, for whom the main impetus was to create rhetorically appropriate models for the ideal philosophic life or attribute to Socrates maxims supporting one or other of a number of ethical positions on, for example, self-sufficiency or the primacy of virtue. Furthermore, creation of a Socratic 'myth' does not explain another major aspect of the difference between Plato and the other Socratic writers, namely the complexity and subtlety of the dramatic structure of Plato's Dialogues. Xenophon, the only other Socratic commentator of whom we possess extended works, features himself as recorder of the achievements of Socrates in the genre of explicit celebration/*apologia* of the *ἔργα τῶν καλῶν ἀγαθῶν ἀνδρῶν* (the deeds of great and good men), a standard biographical introduction²⁷ which invariably leads even in his liveliest work, e.g. the *Symposium*, to an episodic structure in which the author-as-narrator links a simple series of conversations between Socrates and individual friends—a kind of Socratic 'table-talk'; these episodes are usually each designed to lead up to Socratic *gnomai*, at which point a further topic is introduced. And this procedure is followed even when the discussion touches on what we know from Plato to be important debating topics, e.g. whether *arete* can be taught (Xen. *Symp.* II.7, *Mem.* III.9).²⁸

As we have seen, Plato's Dialogue form is quite the reverse of episodic; themes develop organically, with the articulations in the structure carefully concealed by interplay of character and theme. Plato's Socrates does not deliver *gnomai*—indeed he usually claims ignorance about the topics under discussion—and the total absence of the author-as-narrator allows a high degree of flexibility in presentation of the central player in the drama. The most obvious difference, however, between Plato and other examples of the genre lies in the presentation of Socrates' partners; instead of an essentially two-dimensional dialogue between a discursive Socrates and largely passive interlocutors (a not unfair description of most of the *Memorabilia* of Xenophon and all but one or two sections of the *Symposium*), Plato's characters are carefully chosen and developed to function actively and interact at a number of levels of participation and comprehension within the Dialogue, as the earlier analysis of *Laches* has shown. Plato uses the dramatic structure to create what is presented as an open exploration of ideas and attitudes in which the active participation of the reader/listener is implicitly invited.

Plato's *Laches*, therefore, does not fit the conventional mould of Socratic commemoration. At the same time, it is this very uniqueness of literary conception which suggests a purpose beyond the purely philosophical. Could Plato be using an exploration of the character of the main speakers to hint at a possible tension between his presentation and historical reality?

To take an example: *La.* 195e1ff. has often been interpreted as a reference to the historical Nicias' excessive respect for soothsayers, as presented by Thucydides, which led to his own death and the destruction of the Athenian army at Syracuse in the summer of 413 B.C.²⁹ Yet if the point of the reference is supposed to lie in any connection between Plato's Nicias and historical reality, a *simple* correspondence is

²⁷ Xen. *Symp.* I.1. Xenophon records his own presence at, for example, the occasion of *The Symposium* (I.1) which, at a dramatic date of 422 B.C., is clearly chronologically impossible, and reveals the claim as a literary convention strongly suggesting at least the semi-fictional nature of the conversation presented; see Kahn (n. 3), p. 32.

²⁸ On the late, i.e. post-Plato *Symposium*, date of Xenophon's *Symposium*, see Kahn (n. 3), pp.400–1.

²⁹ Thuc. 7.50. See, for example, Lane (n. 18), p. 112, n.1 and Vlastos (n. 2), p. 160, n.17.

impossible to glean from the text; in *Laches*, in repudiating the position into which the combative Laches tries to force him, Plato's Nicias, far from what we might infer from the Thucydidean presentation of his character in Thuc. Book 7 ('rather over-inclined to divination and suchlike', Thuc. 7.50.4), clearly wishes to counter strongly the idea that knowledge of the future associated with the skill of prophecy is adequate as a definition of *andreia*; on the contrary, Plato's Nicias argues, *manteia* is simply a skill (like other *technai*), which is restricted to predicting the future (τὰ σημεῖα μόνον . . . γιγνώσκειν τῶν ἐσομένων, 195e9), but without any knowledge of the *value* of future events, such as a general might possess (*La.* 195e8–96a3, an idea repeated by Socrates himself at 198e2ff.). Why would Plato use his Nicias to attack a position which, if we believe Thucydides, the historical Nicias would undoubtedly have held? Is it possible that Plato wishes to add to his subtly unfavourable portrait of Nicias by implying an ironic disjunction between *his* words and deeds (underlined by his failure, along with everybody else, in the attempt at definition)?³⁰

To take a further example: we have no way of testing the historicity of the often-repeated Platonic mention of the involvement of Socrates in the retreat with Laches after the Athenian defeat at the battle of Delium (424 B.C.), but the great importance given to Socrates' part in this episode is underlined by Plato's use of language: Socrates' 'raising up his native land' (τὴν πατρίδα ὀρθοῦντα, 181b1) is connected by word-association with his family ties (πατέρα, a5, a8) and, at b3, with ὀρθή ἢ πόλις; the play on the literal and metaphorical sense of the words ὀρθή/ὀρθοῦντα suggests, and, arguably, exaggerates³¹ Socrates' military and civic importance: just as Socrates 'maintains the "uprightness" of his family, so he would have enabled the "righted" fatherland and city to hold its head high (ὀρθή) and not fall into so terrible a state (τοιούτου πτώμα, b4)'.³² In such ways Plato depicts (invents?)³³ an important public remedial role for Socrates in a national crisis (see also *Ap.* 28e2–3, *Symp.* 221a.) and binds him into the major events of his time as an ideal against which the subsequent moral and cultural decline of Athens should be measured.

This particular word-play emphasizes Socrates as a man who has successfully combined obligations to family and *polis*: he is a credit to his father and his country, which enables him to function as the resolution of two tensions which dominate the first part of the Dialogue: that between public and private life and the relationship between fathers and sons. Plato uses Lysimachus to present a failure in upbringing, the neglect he and his friend Melesias feel they have suffered at the hands of their famous fathers, an omission which Laches suggests is widespread among families where fathers have public careers and neglect their private obligations (180b1ff.);³⁴ by implication it has its origins way back in the post-Persian war period and is in danger of producing a further 'lost generation'. The children in *Laches* are duly obedient:

³⁰ For a detailed attempt to extend the idea of ironic disjunction between literary and historical context to the whole Dialogue, suffering, unfortunately, from inaccuracy and overinterpretation, see W. T. Schmid, *On Manly Courage: A Study of Plato's Laches* (Carbondale and Edwardsville, 1992).

³¹ Lane ([n. 18], p. 86) plays down the magnification of Socrates' role by mistranslating τὴν πατρίδα ὀρθοῦντα (181b1) as 'proving a credit . . . to his country'.

³² Emlyn-Jones (n. 4), pp. 61–2.

³³ It may be significant that the professional soldier Xenophon fails to give Socrates' military distinction any prominence in contexts where it would be expected, e.g. *Mem.* III.9.1, IV.6.10–11.

³⁴ At *Ap.* 23b, Socrates admits to having neglected both civic and private affairs for the service of the god, referring to his divinely inspired mission to spend his life questioning his fellow Athenians concerning the conduct of their lives.

Aristeides, Lysimachus' son, speaks only when spoken to (181a3), but the implication that they might easily run wild is clear in Lysimachus' speech (179d6ff.).³⁵

The dramatic placing of *Laches* in the late 420s may be, as suggested earlier (p. 125), no accident; a number of Aristophanic comedies composed at about this time emphasize the theme of father/son antagonism (*Wasps*, *Knights*), and in *Clouds* itself this is related to the attraction for Athenian youth of non-traditional educational instruction. Rather like a latter-day Strepsiades, but with honourable intention, Lysimachus, who lacks any inner intellectual resources of his own (a character trait intended as a practical demonstration of his father Aristeides' educational neglect?) is clearly prepared to restore the situation with any *mathema* his friends consider suitable.

Plato uses Lysimachus' (and Melesias') lack of intellectual initiative in order to mirror their social vulnerability: they are *apragmones* ('quietists'), part of a significant group of (mainly) aristocratic Athenians who took little or no part in the political affairs of the city (having no *kala erga* [fine deeds] to recount to their sons, 179c6ff.).³⁶ They are also susceptible, Plato observes with a touch of satire, to the socially somewhat ambivalent claims of *hoplomachia*, a military exercise with, Nicias would have us believe, exclusive social connotations (182a1–2), but also favoured by the sophists, and embracing such comically presented figures as the teacher Stesilaus.³⁷ It is one of the underlying ironies of the presentation of *hoplomachia* in *Laches* that, while supposedly directed towards a co-operative form of fighting in the hoplite phalanx (see 182a5–7), this claim actually undermines itself through the alternative appeal to social exclusiveness.

This ambivalence about *hoplomachia* reflects the presentation of a more generally equivocal attitude to fifth-century democracy among Socrates' partners.³⁸ Nicias and Laches were, as generals, not in the same position as Lysimachus but, as we know from other evidence, stood at some distance from the radical democracy of the 420s. Laches' dislike of theory and his definite, if indirectly expressed, acknowledgement of the Spartan qualities of innate courage (*La.* 182e2ff.) suggests an oligarchic tradition which runs as a strand through the political history of the fifth-century Athenian polis.³⁹

Nicias is more difficult to pin down; Plato presents him as someone who spans a

³⁵ On the tension between the generations in the late fifth century, see M. Ostwald, *From Popular Sovereignty to the Sovereignty of Law* (Berkeley/Los Angeles/London, 1986), pp. 229–38, and W. G. Forrest, 'An Athenian generation gap', *YCS*, 24 (1975), 37–52. Respect for the views of their elders is not a quality attributed to the aristocratic youth of Athens in Plato's *Apology*, e.g. 23c6ff.

³⁶ On *apragmones*, Thuc. 2.40. See also L. B. Carter, *The Quiet Athenian* (Oxford, 1986), pp. 117ff. Pride in ancestry and 'great deeds' goes back to the Homeric aristocratic tradition: see B. S. Strauss, *Fathers and Sons in Athens: Ideology and Society in the Era of the Peloponnesian War* (London, 1993), pp. 72ff., who is sceptical about the historical reality of Plato's picture of upper-class parental neglect, as far as the fifth century is concerned (pp. 87–9).

³⁷ In *Meno* 94c, Plato's Socrates represents Melesias as having been, together with his brother Stephanus, one of the best wrestlers in Athens. For the social connotations of wrestling and horsemanship in the fifth century, see J. K. Davies, *Wealth and the Power of Wealth in Classical Athens* (New York, 1981; repr. of Oxford, 1965 edn), p. 176.

³⁸ It is notable that Socrates' essentially anti-democratic development of the 'craft analogy' is accepted without argument, as usual in the Socratic Dialogues; the absence of reservation or counter-argument is perhaps particularly noteworthy in *Laches* in view of the identity, and presumably at least nominal political allegiance of the public figures taking part.

³⁹ The historical Laches had, as a general, been active in attempts to make peace with Sparta in 423 B.C., see Thuc. 4.118.

number of different groups: as a general he is part of the establishment elite (he praises *hoplomachia* as an exercise fitting for hoplites and cavalry: 182a1–5) and he is also friendly with prominent intellectuals such as Damon, friend of Prodicus, and shows himself well able to produce a rhetorical *epideixis* in the style of the sophists (see above n. 14). At the same time he is, unlike Laches, closely acquainted with Socrates and his methods (187d6ff., 194d1ff.) and is chosen by Plato to introduce, with fair success, knowledge as the key aspect of the definition of *andreia* (194e11ff.). Nicias' 'Athenian' championship of intellect and skill as the main components of *andreia*, strongly contrasted with Laches' *karteria*, clearly suggests a key element in Athenian cultural definition as expressed in, for example, the Periclean Funeral speech of Thucydides.⁴⁰

It can perhaps be argued that Nicias' multiple roles detract from his dramatic credibility: sophisticated one minute, yet elsewhere improbably slow to perceive Socrates' decisive shift in the basis of the argument at, for example, 185c1ff. and, as we have seen (above pp. 129–30) apparently unable at the end of the Dialogue to grasp, or at least cope with, the extent of his own failure. However, from a cultural perspective, the character of Nicias embodies what might be seen as a Periclean overlap between groups: the political establishment, the sophists and Socrates' own following. In his juxtaposition of Nicias' intellectual strengths with his personal and emotional shortcomings, Plato may therefore be expressing a view about the collective deficiencies of the relationship between power and intellect over a broad spectrum of cultural influences in the late fifth century.⁴¹ Likewise Laches' intellectual slowness and especially his failure to persevere in the argument (see above p. 128) suggests a judgement, albeit more sympathetic, on the failure of Athenian conservatism to take a moral lead.

The courteous, largely co-operative ethos of the Dialogue and its provisional ending tend to disguise the completeness of Socrates' rejection of the proposed educational alternatives; *hoplomachia* disappears with as little notice as the *epideixeis* which support and oppose it (184d5ff.). Socrates' emphasis on the seriousness of undertaking to educate and his insistence on strict criteria of expertise in those who attempt it not only represent the customary defence against the charge (established as historical fact in the *antomosia* at the trial of Socrates⁴²) of corrupting the youth of Athens but also signal the beginning of Plato's own educational search.

III

The unchallenged abruptness of the transition in *Laches* from *epideixis* to dialectic (184d5ff.)⁴³ demonstrates perhaps even more than some of the other Dialogues of the early period how, even at an early stage in his development, Plato regarded the

⁴⁰ Thuc. 2. 39–40. On this comparison, see R. Sharples, 'Knowledge and courage in Thucydides and Plato', *LCM* 8.9 (1983), 139–40.

⁴¹ NB the contrast in Thucydides' portrait between Nicias the politician and Nicias the general, e.g. Thuc. 5.16.1, 6.24.1, and 7.42. ff., possibly, as seen above pp. 132–3, mirrored implicitly in Plato's treatment of Nicias' attitude to *manteia*.

⁴² ἀδικεῖ δὲ καὶ τοὺς νέους διαφθείρων: Diogenes Laertius II.40, quoting the second-century A.D. orator and philosopher Favorinus; a paraphrase of the indictment is quoted by Plato in *Ap.* 24b8ff..

⁴³ Contrast, for example, *Grg.* 463e2 and *Prt.* 328dff., where Polus and Protagoras respectively show considerable resistance to Socrates' attempts to alter the mode of procedure.

cultural traditions and value-systems of the immediate past, and the literary forms used to express them, as essentially dead-ends. The subsequent failure of eminent generals to define *andreia*, a quality automatically required of the humblest hoplite and central to the functioning of the *polis*, serves as a symbol of a rejection of the intellectual and moral basis of the conventional *polis* itself. Likewise the unifying of *arete* in terms of expert knowledge, here merely hinted at, marks the beginning of Plato's radical refocusing of conservative thought, in explicit contrast to educational rivals such as Isokrates, outside the public cultural and political life of Athens.⁴⁴ Why, then, give so much attention and creative energy to the presentation of beliefs so radically rejected and the personalities of those who held them?

A number of solutions of this apparent paradox have traditionally been offered: the dramatization of intellectual conflict recalls fifth-century tragedy; Plato is taking over the medium, and hence the role, of serious cultural debate. The dialogue form also performs a protreptic role which may be related to the part the Dialogues may have been intended to perform for students in the early Academy. And, of course, we cannot entirely exclude the possibility that Plato wishes to recall conversations of the historical Socrates which he doubtless heard and in which he may have participated.

Moreover dramatic form mirrors content: Socrates' disclaimer of the possession of knowledge dictates the method of enquiry, the *elenchos*, a procedure which requires not exposition and polarized argument, but co-operative exchange between partners.⁴⁵ The procedure has further consequences: the initiative is apparently with Socrates' partners to attempt definitions, which entails giving prominence to what they think and believe. Furthermore, the goal of the investigation, the cultivation of the *psyche*, is of a seriousness which demands emotional commitment and total sincerity—hence the emphasis not only on what Socrates' partners say but the way that they say it and, ultimately, the kind of people they are.⁴⁶

The late entry of Socrates into the dialogue in *Laches* makes him, initially at any rate, a co-operator in, rather than an initiator of discussion; he expresses his willingness to help if he can (181d2ff.), and continually presents himself as 'representing' the others (e.g. 186d5ff.). The imagery with which he reflects on their progress at the 'interlude' (194b5–c6) is of *co-operative* endeavour (the hunt) or *shared* plight (shipwreck)—in marked contrast to the 'interludes' of, for example, *Euthyphro* or *Meno*.⁴⁷ It is also, obviously, Socrates who provides the impetus for the progressive movement of the philosophical argument.

Yet, as we have seen, Socrates' progress is brought up short at the *aporia*, his partners' reactions to which throw emphasis on their lack of understanding; it is not a fortuitous detail, it has been argued (see above p. 130), that it is Lysimachus, the least intellectually able of Socrates' partners, whom Plato brings back at the end as

⁴⁴ See, in general, C. Eucken, *Isokrates. Seine Positionen in der Auseinandersetzung mit den zeitgenössischen Philosophen* (Berlin, 1983), and, more recently, A. W. Nightingale, *Genres in Dialogue: Plato and the Construct of Philosophy* (Cambridge, 1995), pp. 13–59.

⁴⁵ For polarized argument as a standard mode of intellectual discourse in the sixth and fifth centuries B.C., see G. E. R. Lloyd, *Polarity and Analogy: Two Types of Argumentation in Greek Thought* (Cambridge, 1966), pp. 86–171.

⁴⁶ See, for example, R. Rutherford, *The Art of Plato* (London, 1995), pp. 8–10.

⁴⁷ The Interlude in the Socratic Dialogue is typically the point at which the methodology of communal enquiry is discussed: contrast *Euth.* 11b6ff., where Socrates and Euthyphro reflect on the 'mobility of λόγοι' and Socrates ironically reproaches Euthyphro for 'not teaching' him; and *Meno* 80a, where Socrates is a 'numbing wizard' responsible for the dilemma in which the speakers find themselves.

Socrates' prospective collaborator. Yet Lysimachus does share with Socrates one important quality which, arguably, the others do not fully possess—an awareness of the importance of the issue of education as *therapeia* or *epimeleia*, an emphasis which he alone introduces right at the beginning of the Dialogue. He also, perhaps, epitomizes the essential first stage in the Socratic search—consciousness of his own ignorance and the courage (in marked contrast to, for example, Nicias) to admit it.

It is precisely this close examination of the various personalities of the Dialogue which implies that Plato is concerned not just with radical philosophical goals and how to reach them, but also with the nature of what he is leaving behind—a nuanced perspective on the cultural world of the late fifth century and Socrates' place within it. Socrates' interlocutors do not function simply as undifferentiated representatives of a rejected 'popular view' but, through their beliefs and behaviour, suggest subtle distinctions in the Platonic/Socratic attitude towards them. Part of the function of Plato's dramatic presentations is therefore to put his own development in a rich, albeit fictively constructed, historical perspective.

And the attitudes go both ways; the Dialogue reveals in depth the reactions to Socrates' questioning of a variety of social/cultural groups through their representatives: *apragmones*, 'Periclean' politician/intellectuals and conservatives. In this particular Dialogue Plato is ostensibly projecting an 'early' Socrates who receives glowing testimonials from all of these different groups as a model of *arete* as they conceive it.⁴⁸ Yet this consensual, almost bland, surface, conceals vital differences of perspective and attitude which give strength to the ironic undertone of the apparently conciliatory closure.

Other Socratic Dialogues suggest a 'later' Socrates who was, to a greater or lesser degree, alienated from his interlocutors. The obvious comparison and contrast with *Laches* in this respect is *Gorgias*. This Dialogue, like *Laches*, (re)creates the socio-political world of the late fifth century, but instead of co-operation with statesmen there is confrontation with professional rhetoricians and sophists. Socrates initiates the argument, controls its progress very tightly, and is particularly adversarial and unusually dogmatic; we are left in no doubt what his beliefs are in this Dialogue (e.g. *Grg.* 507c ff.). Comparison of closures is instructive: both Dialogues are 'unframed', but whereas *Laches* concludes, as we have seen, with agreement to continue the discussion at another time, *Gorgias* ends with Socrates talking at, rather than with, a long-since silenced but hardly acquiescent Callicles.

On this interpretation, far from placing Socrates outside the dramatic presentation as some kind of privileged representative of his own views, at least part of Plato's purpose is to use the Socrates *persona* to suggest a variety of stages in the fictive Socratic *Vita*.⁵⁰ In this 'Life', the largely alienated Socrates of *Gorgias* is generally taken to represent the typically Platonic radical opposition to fifth-century Athenian society and politics which has its culmination in the *Republic*, and which is prominently featured in Plato's version of Socrates' trial (*Apology*)—the Socrates of the overwhelming bulk of the later, post-Platonic tradition. However, what the

⁴⁸ Socrates is well connected and respectable (Lysimachus, 180d ff.), brave (Laches, e.g. 181a–b), and well-versed in intellectual matters (Nicias, 180c–d).

⁴⁹ See Rutherford (n. 46), p. 171. See also the end of *Charmides* (176c–d).

⁵⁰ This point can be made independently of an argument which places *Laches* in date of composition before *Gorgias* (see, for example, W. K. C. Guthrie, *A History of Greek Philosophy*, vol. IV: *Plato, the Man and his Dialogues: Earlier Period* [Cambridge, 1975], pp. 284–5) or after, (see Kahn [n. 3], pp. 48 ff.).

Socrates of *Laches* represents is rather different. Plato here presents a Socrates who is less defensive, more prepared to engage with the complexity of the viewpoints which he ultimately rejects, and to identify himself fully with the potentially embarrassing failure to define *andreia*. This, it can be argued, gives Plato's version of the *Vita* a richness and sense of development which the remains of the historical record for Socrates so conspicuously lack.

The Open University

C. EMLYN-JONES
<c.emlyn-jones@open.ac.uk>