

TRADITIONAL FORMS OF WISDOM AND POLITICS IN PLATO'S *APOLOGY*

When someone invokes the notion of 'wisdom literature', we in the Western world usually think of the books of the Hebrew Bible that are most associated with wisdom: Job, Proverbs, Koheleth, the apocryphal Ben Sirach and so forth, some of which were produced in the Hellenistic period, though clearly indebted primarily to the wisdom traditions of Egypt, Babylonia and elsewhere in the Middle East, rather than to Greek thought. Ancient Greece does not have a wisdom literature properly so called, self-consciously developed and transmitted, until the forms of Platonism developed in the later Academies, although some stories about Pythagoras have him learning from Egyptian wise men, Persian magi or Indian sages.¹ Aristophanes mocks the notion of professional 'thinkers', and thus of any kind of wisdom tradition associated with 'philosophers', in the *φροντιστήριον* in the *Clouds*, and criticizes Socratic 'chatter' (*Frogs* 1491–2) as well.² In a sense, wisdom was a concern of all, not just of one group of intellectuals. At the same time, the tradition of the 'Seven Sages', in so far as it can be demonstrated to go very far into the past, is spoken of by Herodotus and dramatized by Solon's conversation there with Croesus.³

Socrates, in his particular way of stating and of approaching the problem of wisdom, is usually taken to mark a great substantive rupture or break with earlier Greek thought and expression. Indeed, the concept of 'pre-Socratic', rather than that of 'pre-Platonic', is already an interpretation of ancient philosophy from this point of view, putting Socrates together with Plato, in contrast to those who precede Socrates, as of somehow a qualitatively different stripe. The first great edition of the Pre-

¹ See W. Burkert, *Lore and Science in Ancient Pythagoreanism*, tr. E.L. Minar Jr. (Cambridge, MA, 1972). M. Hengel, *Judaism and Hellenism. Studies in their Encounter in Palestine during the Early Hellenistic Period* (Philadelphia, 1974), vol. 2, 75 n. 9, believes that 'The narrative cycle about the fortune and misfortune of the wise Croesus in Herodotus could also be included among the "wisdom narratives"; it comes from the milieu of Asia Minor and Persia'.

² Yet, observes R. Pfeiffer, *History of Classical Scholarship. From the Beginnings to the End of the Hellenistic Age* (Oxford, 1968), 48, Aristophanes 'regarded the earlier poetry as the most important part of *ἀρχαία παιδεία*. Greek poetry was quite naturally "ethical" from epic times onwards; it was only in the great crisis towards the end of the fifth century that a consciousness arose of this innate tendency as a problem. The documentary evidence for the new reflection on it is given by Aristophanes, especially in the *Frogs*'. See also A.A. Bryant, 'Boyhood and youth in the days of Aristophanes', *HSP* 18 (1907), 73–122.

³ On the appearance of a wisdom literature in Herodotus, see H-P Stahl, 'Learning through suffering? Croesus' conversations in the history of Herodotus', *YClS* 24 (1975): *Studies in the Greek Historians*, 1–36. On the Seven Sages, see *Leben und Meinungen der Sieben Weisen. Griechische und lateinische Quellen*, 4th ed., erläutert und übertragen von B. Snell (Munich, 1971 [1938]); B. Snell, *Die Ausdrücke für den Begriff des Wissens in der vorplatonischen Philosophie (sophia, gnome, sunesis, historia, mathema, episteme)* (Berlin, 1924); D. Fehling, *Die sieben Weisen und die frühgriechische Chronologie. Eine traditionsgeschichtliche Studie* (Bern, 1985); R.P. Martin, 'The Seven Sages as performers of wisdom', in C. Dougherty and L. Kurke (edd.), *Cultural Poetics in Archaic Greece. Cult, Performance, Politics*, (Cambridge, 1993), 108–28; M. Tziatzi-Papagianni, 'Eine gekürzte Fassung der delphischen Sprüche der sieben Weisen', *Hermes* 125 (1997), 309–29. See also M. Delcourt, *L'Oracle de Delphes* (Paris, 1955), 207–14; and J. Defradas, *Les Thèmes de la propagande delphique* (Paris, 1972), 216–28, 268–83.

socratics by Hermann Diels at the turn of the twentieth century solidified this division.⁴ Yet, since Socrates did not write, one might have thought that he best belonged precisely with those earlier figures, known largely through doxographical testimony or quotation in the writings of others. On the other hand, since a historical Socrates is so difficult to separate from Plato's Socrates, placing him among earlier thinkers does present its own problems.⁵ Hence the use of every bit of evidence that can be located in the effort to determine the features of the historical Socrates or to discover whether a Socrates can actually be found, whom one could in principle separate from Plato and include among Plato's precursors.⁶

Complicating the understanding of Socrates' position for some time has been the tendency, not only among philosophers like Hegel, Kierkegaard, and Nietzsche, but also among scholars like Burnet, Nestlé, and Nilsson,⁷ to see intellectual developments during the fifth century in Athens as the embodiment of a development from *μῦθος* to *λόγος* – whether they prized this 'development' or not – that is, from explanation and understanding through myth to the pre-eminence of some kind of rationality as the means for self-understanding and understanding of the world. In Nietzsche's case, for example, this was linked directly to what he saw as the displacement of the political, social and cultural pre-eminence of an aristocratic ruling class by democratic forces whose cultural avant-garde was represented by Euripides and Socrates. And, in a much more rigorous effort to point up further how Presocratic thinkers who speculated on nature and the heavens were not forerunners of 'rational' Western science, even Werner Jaeger underscores the Aristotelian classification of their work as 'theology'.⁸ At the same time, Francis Cornford, George Thomson, Michael Frede and others have argued that such a division between forms or modes of thought does not reasonably describe ancient thought, which, in their view, reveals the presence of 'rational' reflection long before Socrates and of mythic thought from Plato until long afterwards.⁹ Even Max Weber, who argued that rationality had been present in religions and societies at all times and all epochs of

⁴ See H. Diels, *Fragmente der Vorsokratiker* (Berlin, 1903). On Diels's decision and its influence, see the outstanding essay of W. Burkert, 'Diels' *Vorsokratiker*. Rückschau und Ausblick', in W. Calder III and J. Mansfeld (edd.), *Herman Diels (1848–1922) et la science de l'antiquité*, Fondation Hardt Entretiens 45 (Geneva, 1999), 169–97. The concept of pre-Platonic has been used by others more recently, as for example C. Kahn, 'Pre-Platonic conceptions of human nature', in P. P. Wiener (ed.), *Dictionary of the History of Ideas: Studies of Selected Pivotal Ideas*, vol. 3, (New York, 1973–74).

⁵ For some recent views, see J. Annas and C. Rowe (edd.), *New Perspectives on Plato, Modern and Ancient*, (Cambridge, MA, 2002), especially the essay by Terry Penner.

⁶ See the remarkable collection, *Socratis et Socraticorum Reliquiae, collegit, disposuit, apparatus notisque instruxit Gabriele Giannantoni*, 4 vols., Centro di studio del pensiero antico (Naples, 1990).

⁷ J. Burnet, *Greek Philosophy* (London, 1914); W. Nestlé, *Vom Mythos zum Logos. Die Selbstentfaltung des griechischen Denkens von Homer bis auf die Sophistik und Sokrates* (Stuttgart, 1942); M. Nilsson, *Geschichte der griechischen Religion*, vol. 1 (Munich, 1941).

⁸ W. Jaeger, *The Theology of the Early Greek Philosophers*, tr. E. S. Robinson (Oxford, 1947).

⁹ F. M. Cornford, *Principium Sapientiae. The Origins of Greek Philosophical Thought*, ed. W. K. C. Guthrie (Cambridge, 1952); G. D. Thomson, *Studies in Ancient Greek Society* (London, 1961); M. Frede and G. Striker (edd.), *Rationality in Greek Thought* (Oxford, 1996). B. Frischer, *The Sculpted Word: Epicureanism and Philosophical Recruitment in Ancient Greece* (Berkeley, 1982), 87–118, is critical of Nilsson's view of the rationalism of Greek religion. For an overview of the problem, see R. Buxton, 'Introduction', in id. (ed.), *From Myth to Reason? Studies in the Development of Greek Thought* (Oxford, 1995), 1–21; also K. Morgan, *Myth and Philosophy from the Presocratics to Plato* (Cambridge, 2000).

human history, counter-posed the rationality of modern culture to those attitudes and dispositions toward the world that he called 'traditional' and characterized as 'enchanted', that is, permeated by myth, as opposed to 'disenchanted' rational societies.¹⁰ In fact, the distinction between *μύθος* and *λόγος* is not an ancient conceptual distinction in this form, and neither it nor the distinction between 'traditional' and 'modern' should be taken as descriptive of two historically separable forms of thought, but as a hermeneutic device, an analytical distinction, or in Weber's terms, an 'ideal type', whose 'mix' in concrete cases can alone do justice to the empirical complexity we confront.

What is missed by so sharply dividing the development of ancient thought and by classifying Socrates as such a break with the Athenian or Greek past, is a more complex understanding of the relationship between the Socratic approach to wisdom and the kinds of practices of uttering or searching for wisdom embodied in more traditional Greek forms, whether in inscriptions,¹¹ legends, religious celebrations or oral apophthegms, as well as in prose writings and poetry. I will argue that Socrates was in many ways the continuation of that culture, and particularly of a culture of 'wisdom.' Only by specifying more thoroughly the ways in which Socrates was very deeply an Athenian, a product of the whole development of Athenian and Greek culture as it was embodied and expressed in language and in practices, someone who had very strong relationships and complex ties to that culture, can we fully and more precisely characterize the ways in which Socrates did, indeed, also inaugurate something new.

I do not intend to investigate the question of the historical Socrates in the usual sense, however, but only to take a closer look at the practices and claims of Socrates as Plato has Socrates present himself in the *Apology*, with a side glance at some other dialogues from time to time.¹² As Arnaldo Momigliano cautions about both Plato's and Xenophon's courtroom speeches for Socrates, they are 'biographical sketches disguised as autobiographical sketches ... [nonetheless] both pictures have their limits fixed by the true terms of the indictment against Socrates. The fiction is anchored to truth.'¹³ Still, among most of the ancient and modern commentators on Socrates, the

¹⁰ See M. Weber, 'Social psychology of the world religions', in H.H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills (edd. and tr.), *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, (New York, 1958); and id, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, tr. T. Parsons, intro. by R.H. Tawney (New York, 1958).

¹¹ R. Parker, *Athenian Religion. A History* (Oxford., 1996), 200–1, points out that even some herms were inscribed with moral maxims, like 'Think just thoughts as you journey' and 'Do not deceive a friend'. Cf. R.W. Wallace, 'The sophists in Athens', in D. Boedeker and K. Raaflaub (edd.), *Democracy, Empire, and the Arts* (Cambridge, MA, 1998), 203–22, at 216.

¹² On the rhetorical theory that requires a speaker in a text to utter 'words and thoughts appropriate to his character', see V.J. Gray, 'Xenophon's defence of Socrates: the rhetorical background to the Socratic problem', *CQ* NS 39 (1989), 136–40. Gray uses particularly Dionysus of Halicarnassus.

¹³ A. Momigliano, *The Development of Greek Biography* (Cambridge, MA, 1971), 59. Momigliano also says (46–7): 'biography acquired a new meaning when the Socratics moved to that zone between truth and fiction ... With a man like Plato, and even with a smaller but by no means simpler man like Xenophon, this is a consciously chosen ambiguity ... the experiments were directed towards capturing the potentialities rather than the realities of individual lives. Socrates ... was not so much the real Socrates as the potential Socrates. He was not a dead man whose life could be recounted. He was the guide to territories as yet unexplored ... In Socratic biography we meet for the first time the conflict between the superior and the inferior truth which has remained a major problem for the student of the Gospels or of the lives of Saints ... If philosophy introduced the search for the soul, rhetoric introduced the search for the improving word: anything can appear better or more than it is, if the right word is used.'

Apology has very often been taken to be the fullest expression of Socratic character, and it has, thereby, exercised so enormous an influence on the reception of Socrates as a 'sage' or wise man and exemplary thinker in Western thought, that clarifying aspects of it should contribute to greater self-reflection about the appropriation of Socrates as exemplar and of Plato as a radical thinker.¹⁴ Just imagine what the contemporary view of Socrates would be if the *Apology* had never come down to us, or what the nature of Western thought and culture would have been if the Thebans had succeeded in persuading the Spartans to kill all the Athenian men and enslave all of the women and children after the Athenian defeat in 404 B.C.

Thus, I want to discuss certain features of Plato's Socrates as a determinate figure in the Greek cultural horizon, that is, in terms of what we can infer about his relationship to Greek culture in his own time and before, rather than in terms of his relationship to the many schools of thought and the many individuals who either adopted him as a 'wise man' or 'sage' for themselves in the centuries following his death – which is the comparison Foucault used to evaluate him in his last lectures on frank speech – or who self-consciously opposed such a view of him.¹⁵ But although Socrates claimed that he generally avoided politics because of the expectation that he would be killed by the city for his outspokenness, he was certainly not the first Greek to 'speak truth to power.' Indeed, in the gnomic wisdom of Solon and Bacchylides, of Sophocles and Euripides, poetry and tragedy performed this function as well, with an honesty that is even more clear in the productions of Old Comedy, or in what Thucydides tells us of the speeches of Pericles, where the 'power' lay with the δῆμος.

Nietzsche clearly linked Socrates to that past. 'We must designate these three as the purest paradigms: Pythagoras, Heraclitus, and Socrates – the wise man as religious reformer; the wise man as proud, solitary searcher after truth; and the wise man as the eternal investigator of all things. All other philosophers are, as representatives of a way of life (βίος), less pure and original.'¹⁶ It is in the context of the traditions of ethical teaching, moral exhortation, and gnomic wisdom that preceded Plato's writing of his dialogues that I want to place Socrates. These earlier traditions, though they take quite different forms, can be seen not only in sages like Pythagoras and Heraclitus, but also in archaic figures as diverse as Hesiod and Solon, as well as in classical poets like Pindar and Aeschylus, among others.¹⁷ It is certainly true that

¹⁴ As H. Tarrant observes (*Plato's First Interpreters* [Ithaca, 2000], 8–9), since Albinus' evaluation of the *Phaedo* in the second century A.D., and even perhaps since the arrangement in the first century by Thrasyllus, who included the *Euthyphro*, *Apology* and *Crito*, Plato's 'early dialogues' have been taken to give 'an exemplar of what the philosophic life would be like'. Interestingly, the *Apology* none the less usually does not occupy a central place in the many commentaries on Plato that followed in the millennium after his death. See Tarrant, 100–2.

¹⁵ The literature on this subject is enormous. The best brief presentation of Socrates' reception is A.A. Long, 'Socrates in Hellenistic philosophy', *CQ* 38 (1988), 150–71. See also J. Annas, 'The heirs of Socrates', *Phronesis* 33 (1988), 100–12. John Dillon observes that Pythagoras is 'the archetype of the Sage' in the Platonic-Plotinian tradition. See Iamblichus, *On the Pythagorean Way of Life*, text, translation, and notes by J. Dillon and J. Hershbell (Atlanta, 1991), 14. See also J. Dillon, 'An ethic for the Late Antique sage', in L. Gerson (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Plotinus* (Cambridge, 1996), 315–35. On Foucault's analysis of Socrates and the *Apology*, see A. Szakolczai, *The Genesis of Modernity* (London, 2003), 170–209.

¹⁶ F. Nietzsche, *The Pre-Platonic Philosophers*, tr. and ed. G. Whitlock (Urbana and Chicago, 1995), 58.

¹⁷ On Hesiod: F. Solmsen, *Hesiod and Aeschylus* (Ithaca, 1949); on Solon: G.F. Else, *The Origin and Early Form of Greek Tragedy* (Cambridge, MA, 1965); on Pindar and Aeschylus: J.H. Finley, Jr., *Pindar and Aeschylus* (Cambridge, MA, 1955). See also A.P.M.H. Lardinois, 'Wisdom in context: the use of gnomic statements in Archaic Greek poetry' (Ph.D. thesis, Princeton, 1995).

many sages we know of, in addition to the Seven, were involved in politics: Pythagoras, Heraclitus, Parmenides and Philolaus, as well as sophists like Protagoras. But that is also why the *Republic*, heir to a period of colonization, comes across so well as an 'exercise' in imaginary founding for which a constitution needs to be thought through, a practical activity that very often involved consultation with 'sage' individuals like the virtually or actually mythic founders Lycurgus and Solon.¹⁸

Elsewhere I have made a preliminary effort to relate the style and form of Socrates' gnomic utterances to those of the 'sages' of the past. I have argued that these tropes have substantive implications for the understanding of Socrates' 'project' as Plato's *Apology* announces it.¹⁹ Indeed, precisely through their gnomic form, many of Socrates' utterances make claims remarkably similar to the aphoristic exhortations and intuitions of the Greek tradition of the sage, seer and prophet,²⁰ many of whose philosophical heirs tended to write or speak in what look like carefully formulated opinions or 'oral apophthegms' like those archetypically written by Heraclitus.²¹ The form of the gnomic pronouncement remained remarkably consistent over time, from the sayings attributed to the early lawgivers and to a seer like Pythagoras, to the very particular exhortations in the *Apology*.²² At the same time, in the *Apology* we find a form of speaking rooted in an interactive social role that Socrates took up in public and in the marketplace, at a time and in a city where the older 'proverbial' thinkers and actors had largely disappeared, although tragic wisdom remained especially vital. Yet it is not only in their linguistic or expressive form that Socrates' utterances link him to the sages and thinkers of the Greek past, but also in much of their substance. While his distinctive 'method' of conversing largely in public and challenging the views of individuals and bystanders may have been unique – he was, after all, a citizen of Athens, the greatest centre of public discussion in Greek democracy and the home of tragedy, not an Ionian or Sicilian or a citizen of any other mainland city – that method alone does not hold the key to understanding him.

What role, then, do 'traditional' tropes and expressions of wisdom, to which Socrates often appeals, have in the *Apology*? Whether in the formal characteristics or

¹⁸ Cf. Arist. *Pol.* 1291b39 ff., 1292b25 ff., 1318b6 ff. on Solon's use of the mean (*μεσότης*) in politics. See also R. Weil, 'Aristotle's view of history', *Fondation Hardt Entretiens* 11 (1964), 161–89.

¹⁹ See H. Goldman, 'Reexamining the "examined life" in Plato's *Apology of Socrates*', *The Philosophical Forum* 35 (2004), 1–33.

²⁰ N.P. White, *Individual and Conflict in Greek Ethics* (Oxford, 2002), has an extremely interesting analysis of the imperative form of Greek ethical pronouncements. B.L. Gildersleeve, *Syntax of Classical Greek*, pt. I: *From Homer to Demosthenes* (Groningen, 1980; New York, n.d.), §§ 83–6, 303, has a useful collection of different forms of Greek proverbs.

²¹ J. Moravcsik, 'Appearance and reality in Heraclitus' philosophy', *The Monist* 74 (1991), 551–67, at 559, observes of Heraclitus' 'dark sayings', that they 'fall into the tradition of the oracular, the myth, and other forms suited primarily to introduce divine messages. This mode of communication is also used by Parmenides and Plato, among others, when they are about to introduce radical conceptual change. In all of these cases, form and content support each other'. See also Cornford, *Principium Sapientiae* (above, n. 9); and M. Detienne, *The Masters of Truth in Archaic Greece*, tr. J. Lloyd (New York, 1996 [1979]).

²² Indeed, Michael Stokes even maintains that 'the idea of a life in certain circumstances not worth living is a Greek literary cliché'. See M.C. Stokes, *Plato, Apology of Socrates* (Warminster, 1997), 177. He cites, among others, Gorgias, Mimnermus, Aristophanes, Antiphon and Euripides. The tragic form of the unliveable life can be seen in Soph. *Ant.* 1687, and its comic form in Ar. *Plut.* 197. Yet the various non-Platonic authors who use such a trope invoke very particular, usually very personal or private, senses of loss – of trust, love, a son or wife, a lover – but not the definition of a 'way' or form of life.

the substantive content of these expressions, their rhetorical power or their expressions of morality, the echoes of traditional wisdom in Plato's *Apology* link Socrates strongly to earlier social, political and intellectual practices and roles.²³ Indeed, the evidence of traditional wisdom points to ways in which Socrates is also an heir of older forms of character, as pictured in Greek writing about the roles played both by earlier sage-like wisdom in the public life of Archaic Greece and by specifically political intelligence in fifth-century Athens.²⁴ At the same time, one cannot simply look at words, no matter how important for Greek thought and practice, used by different thinkers at different times. One has to think in terms of the broader historical context of their use, as well as and in terms of pragmatics, and examine sentences, syntactical relations and groupings of words, what Marcel Detienne refers to as a 'semantic field', rather than just lexicographical matters.²⁵ To do this thoroughly, of course, one would have to look also at the range of uses of key concepts like *ἀρετή* and *δίκη* in the orators, tragic and comic poets, historians and other intellectual and cultural producers of Socrates' time. Even this would not be enough, for one should also examine the forms of wisdom and the uses of key concepts, as far as can be determined, in inscriptions, political and economic organizations, and any other popular practices and institutions for which there is written or archaeological evidence. These aspects must unfortunately be left aside here.

OLD AND NEW WISDOM

Socratic 'practice', as dramatized by Plato in the *Apology* and *Crito*, shows the strong influence of traditional Greek forms of inquiring and of pronouncing wisdom, whether taken from poetry or more popular sources. However, at the same time that the continuities between Socrates and older practices and forms of Greek culture prove to be stronger than is normally thought, so too the break that Socrates makes with Greek cultural practices is greater than it is normally taken to be, even apart from the issues of religion and politics that are normally considered. Yet, in the

²³ Cf. B. Snell, *The Discovery of the Mind in Greek Philosophy and Literature*, tr.T.G. Rosenmeyer (New York, 1982), 153–5.

²⁴ Cf. Pl. *Grg.* 501E, where Socrates demands that the poet make his fellow citizens better; and R. Harriott, *Poetry and Criticism before Plato* (London, 1969). See also G. Kerferd, 'The first Greek sophists', *CR* 64 (1950), 8–10, at 8: *σοφιστής* denoted 'those who in one way or another function as the sages, the exponents of knowledge in early communities'. On wisdom and the sophists, see the excellent account of Wallace, 'The sophists in Athens' (above, n. 11), 203–22. Typical expressions of the understanding of Plato's Socrates as, in fact, much more like a sophist in Athenian understanding, and perhaps in reality, can be found, for example, in J.P. Lynch, *Aristotle's School: A Study of a Greek Educational Institution* (Berkeley, 1972), 41: 'To many Athenians Socrates probably appeared to be only one of the many varieties of sophistic teacher. There is ample evidence that contemporaries considered Socrates (and for that matter, Plato and Aristotle) to be sophists and that many of the sophists, like Plato's Socrates, termed themselves *philosophoi*, rather than *sophistai*. In the fifth and fourth centuries B.C., there does not in fact appear to have been any commonly accepted dividing line between a sophist and a philosopher.' See also B. Snell, *Scenes from Greek Drama* (Berkeley, 1964), 66–7; and K.J. Dover, introduction to id. (ed.), *Aristophanes, Clouds* (Oxford, 1968), xxxix–xl, lii–liii. There is no end of opposite views; for example, A.B. Drachmann, *Atheism in Pagan Antiquity* (London, 1922), 64.

²⁵ Detienne, *Masters of Truth* (n. 21), 20, 147–8 n. 6. Werner Jaeger also cautions about focussing too much on language and not enough on deeper cultural changes governing the use of concepts. See W. Jaeger, *Five Essays*, tr. A.M. Fiske (Montreal, 1966). On the importance of this as applied in the study of religion, see J.Z. Smith, *Drudgery Divine. On the Comparison of Early Christianities and the Religions of Late Antiquity* (Chicago, 1990), 54–84.

Apology and certain other dialogues, traditional forms of claims, 'faiths' and affirmations are allowed to stand next to new ones, and not just to compete with them.

How does Plato's Socrates deal in the various dialogues with the issue of whether there existed anything that could be called wisdom or knowledge in the cultural or practical legacy of Greece that had been in existence, whether expressed in oral or written form, up to his own time and inquiries?²⁶ This problem is particularly important for the ongoing ethical situation of the interlocutors in the many aporetic dialogues, who are left with many of their illusions undermined, but without some positive wisdom, imparted from Socrates, in their place.²⁷ How are they to deliberate and to act, when their concepts of excellence or of piety or of courage have been challenged? Neither civic nor private life will stop to wait for them to find replacements for their former views. They are still obliged to make decisions about the education of their children, to vote in the assembly, to participate in war, to worship at religious festivals, to honour their friends. What are they to do 'in the meantime'?²⁸

Naturally, the answer to this question depends on which dialogues one looks at and whether one takes particular Socratic expressions within such dialogues as expressions of irony, or as claims in the service of a specific intellectual investigation, or as claims that one may reasonably ascribe to the particular 'Socrates' we are dealing with in a specific setting. If we confine ourselves to the *Apology*, which is not really a dialogue, we get a picture very different from what we can understand of Socrates' views from, say, the *Republic* or *Phaedo*, and concerning the views of Plato himself, we cannot always make much of an inference even from the *Republic* or *Laws*.

Socrates was not the first Greek to be interested in wisdom, of course, even if we construe the concept of *σοφία* in the much more flexible way that it was used in prior centuries, nor was he the first to be interested in forms of what could be called traditional wisdom.²⁹ The concept of 'wisdom' was applied over time to a wide range

²⁶ I will not take up the much-debated issue of Plato's attitude toward poetry. For an outstanding recent discussion of the educational value of traditional literature in Plato, see R. Blondell, 'Character and meaning in Plato's *Hippias Minor*', in J.C. Klagge and N.D. Smith (edd.), *Methods of Interpreting Plato and His Dialogues*, (Oxford, 1992), 131–72. For a recent discussion that makes the *Cratylus* central to understanding Plato's views in the *Phaedo* and *Republic*, and which discusses much of the secondary literature, see S.B. Levin, *The Ancient Quarrel between Philosophy and Poetry Revisited. Plato and the Greek Literary Tradition* (Oxford, 2001). See also C. Janaway, *Images of Excellence. Plato's critique of the arts* (Oxford, 1995).

²⁷ This feature of a number of the dialogues led some later Sceptics to raise the question of what Socrates believed and whether he was a Sceptic *avant la lettre*. See e.g. Tarrant, *Plato's First Interpreters* (n. 14), 52–6 and id., *Scepticism or Platonism? The Philosophy of the Fourth Academy* (Cambridge, 1985). In an excellent essay J. Annas, 'Plato the Sceptic', in *Methods of Interpreting Plato* (n. 26), 43–72, at 57, says 'Socrates constantly searches for truth, but does not claim to know any; he has strongly held views, but does not assert these as reasoned defensible theses ...'.

²⁸ On the changes in Greek values, from highly competitive ones toward more cooperative ones, see A.W.H. Adkins, *Merit and Responsibility: A Study in Greek Values* (Oxford, 1960); and id., *Moral Values and Political Behaviour in Ancient Greece. From Homer to the End of the Fifth Century* (New York, 1972). But see too the excellent critique of Adkins by A.A. Long, 'Morals and values in Homer', *JHS* 90 (1970), 121–39.

²⁹ See Snell, *Die Ausdrücke für den Begriff des Wissens* (n. 3). E.A. Havelock remarks, in *Preface to Plato* (New York, 1967 [1963]), 162–3 n. 28, that 'the words *sophos*, *sophia* at the end of the fifth century represented a set of prestige claims staked out in the culture. When a new variety of verbal skill began to emerge, its practitioners did not coin a new word for it. They preferred the old one, as offering a field-site already prepared, but one from which they had to eject the previous tenant'. See the remarks of M. Detienne and J.-P. Vernant, *Cunning Intelligence in Greek Culture and Society*, tr. J. Lloyd (Atlantic Highlands, NJ, 1978), 315, who believe that it was Plato and Aristotle who were responsible for this transformation: '*Sophia* becomes contemplative

of skills, capacities, perceptions and behaviour.³⁰ The search for ideals of how to live and for how to transmit them, for excellence, for what would later be called 'wisdom', particularly the kind of wisdom that could be possessed by humans, was a long-standing ideal, traceable in literary work as far back as Homer's presentation of the 'learning' of Achilles and as close to Socrates' own time as the forms of learning and the wisdom presented in tragedy.³¹ Despite his apparent defense in the *Apology* of expert knowledge for certain kinds of training, Socrates does not defend a more rigorous 'specialization of function', instead inviting all to care for their 'souls' or 'selves', and to care for their city, before caring for her wealth. Plato does seem to argue elsewhere on behalf of such expertise, and for the need to reject the claims of the traditional Greek claimants to wisdom as Pythagoras and others had done before him. Nonetheless, while Socrates tells us in the *Apology* that the works of Anaxagoras could be found very cheaply in the market-place, we also know that anthologies of apothegms were widely available and used as both educational and self-informative devices.³²

Recent scholarship has shown the widespread use of proverbs, apophthegms and *gnomai* in Greek poetry and prose writing, from the Seven Sages to Theognis and

wisdom and ceases to refer to the knowledge of the skillful craftsman as it had ever since Homer's writings where *sophia* was used of any organized body of knowledge with its own rules and methods handed on from one generation to another within professional groups such as those of the blacksmiths and carpenters.' E. de Strycker, 'The unity of knowledge and love in Socrates' conception of virtue', *International Philosophical Quarterly* 6 (1966), 428–44, argues for the effective equivalence for Plato of *σοφία*, *φρόνησις*, *νοῦς* and *ἐπιστήμη*.

³⁰ Yet Hesiod, *Op.* 649 spoke early of poets 'acting wisely' (*σοφίζομαι*) and others followed suit, speaking of their *σοφία*: Solon, Xenophanes, Pindar, Aristophanes, etc. J. Ober, *Political Dissent in Democratic Athens. Intellectual Critics of Popular Rule* (Princeton, 1998), 173 n. 33, remarks briefly that 'Socrates takes *sophos* ("wise person," "sage") to have to do with knowledge (albeit of ignorance), which is quite different from earlier and later interpretations (canonized in stories of the "Seven Sages") of the *sophos* as possessor of a certain political or religious *techné*'. D.B. Claus, *Toward the Soul. An Inquiry into the Meaning of ψυχή before Plato* (New Haven, 1981), 143 n. 6, says that *σοφός* meant 'intellectual' or 'skilled person' in the fifth century, and 'philosopher' only in the fourth. B. Snell, *Der Weg zum Denken und zur Wahrheit. Studien zur frühgriechischen Sprache, Hypomnemata*, vol. 57 (Göttingen, 1978), 34, discusses the difference between *σοφός* and *φιλόσοφος*; and see G.E.R. Lloyd, *The Revolutions of Wisdom* (Berkeley, 1987), 92–4, 152–4, on non-pejorative uses of *σοφιστής* to designate poets and sages. See also Havelock, *Preface to Plato* (n. 29), 162 n. 27, 287–8, 306 n. 8.

³¹ See F. Meier, *Der Sophos-Begriff: zur Bedeutung, Werte und Rolle des Begriffes von Homer zur Euripides* (Augsburg, 1970). K.J. Dover makes the unusual claim that 'we rarely predicate "wisdom" of poets and artists', which is why the argument between Dionysus and Heracles in *Frogs* is not about wisdom in tragedy, but instead about *δεξιός*, what is 'clever' or 'right.' This seems surprising, given how much of *Frogs* is concerned with the moral effect of tragedy and that 'the substantial and widely diffused corpus of didactic poetry available in the fifth century had long implanted the conventional idea that the poet is a teacher'. Hence the emphasis on *νοουθέτης*, admonition, and on making the city better (lines 1009–10). See Dover's Introduction to id., *Aristophanes, Frogs* (Oxford, 1993), 12, 14, 15. Dover does provide very illuminating reflections on what can be taken to be forms of literary criticism in fifth-century Athens, at 24–37.

³² Momigliano, *The Development of Greek Biography* (n. 13), 53, remarks that 'collections of sayings of philosophers and wise men had undoubtedly circulated in the fifth century'. For a short history of ancient proverb collecting, see Schneidewin's 'Praefatio' in E.L.A. Leutsch and F.G. Schneidewin (edd.), *Corpus Paroemiographorum Graecorum, tomus I* (Hildesheim, 1958), i–xxxix. There are essays in the supplementary volume (1961) on their transmission. On this passage in the *Apology*, see E.G. Turner, *Athenian Books of the Fifth and Fourth Centuries B.C.* (London, 1952), 20–1. Also F.G. Kenyon, *Books and Readers in Ancient Greece and Rome* (Oxford, 1932), 1–37.

Solon, from Hesiod to Herodotus and tragedy.³³ Indeed, even Aristotle included a collection of sayings in his lost *On the Pythagoreans*.³⁴ Jaeger argues, in fact, that Aristotle was motivated to collect proverbs by his conviction that ‘the same truths reappear in human history, not merely once or twice, but indefinitely often ... [and] that these laconic and striking empirical precepts are the survivals of a pre-literary philosophy, and have preserved themselves by word of mouth, through all the changes in the nation’s spirit, in virtue of their brevity and pregnancy. [Aristotle’s] keen eye perceived the value of proverbs and proverbial poetry in the study of the origins of ethical reflection’. Jaeger argues further that in his lost dialogue, *On Philosophy*, Aristotle situated not only the Persian Magi and the Presocratic thinkers, whom he called ‘the theologians’, in his history of philosophy, but also the doctrines of the Orphics and ‘the proverbial wisdom traditionally ascribed to the Seven Wise Men, the preservation of which was specially cared for by the God of Delphi’. In this process, Aristotle ‘rid himself of Plato’s contemptuous opinion of the Sophists’, restoring ‘the name to its rightful meaning as a title of honour; and he had the historical insight to put the Seven Wise Men at the head of this succession of commanding intellects, whose influence on the development of Greek thought seemed to him so important that he included it in the history of philosophical wisdom’. Indeed, Plutarch suggests that Aristotle even saw the old Delphic maxim ‘Know thyself’ as the stimulus to Socrates’ own investigations, thus making Socrates ‘the restorer of the ethical principle of Apolline religion’.³⁵

In Plato’s works, of course, many proverbs or quotations from older writers and thinkers, both poets and philosophers, appear in the mouths of different characters including Socrates. The *Republic* alone, for example, mentions at least thirteen different poets or sages, with numerous quotations as well. Some are used to begin a conversation about a specific theme; others become themselves the object of investigation. Even the Delphic maxim, ‘Know thyself’, appears in different forms numerous

³³ See the good bibliography in S.O. Shapiro, ‘Proverbial wisdom in Herodotus’, *TAPhA* 130 (2000), 89–118; also the discussion in J. Barns, ‘A new Gnomologium: with some remarks on gnomonic anthologies, II’, *CQ NS* 1 (1951), 1–19. G.R. Boys-Stones, *Post-Hellenistic Philosophy: A Study of its Development from the Stoics to Origen* (Oxford, 2001), 30–1, argues that a search for what he calls ‘primitive wisdom’ can be found in the ancient philosophical tradition, although it did not become systematic until the Stoics.

³⁴ See V. Rose (ed.), *Aristotelis fragmenta* (Leipzig, 1886), fr. 153–64, e.g. fr. 13: ‘Whether a “*παροιμία*” counts as something wise: Why not? Aristotle says about them that they are remnants of an ancient philosophy saved by their brevity and acuity when it was lost in the great destructions of mankind.’ See also J.A. Philip, ‘Aristotle’s monograph *On the Pythagoreans*’, *TAPhA* 94 (1963), 185–98. A number of these proverbs are preserved in Iamblichus, *De Vita Pythagorica* 82–6.

³⁵ W. Jaeger, *Aristotle. Fundamentals of the History of his Development*, 2nd ed. (Oxford, 1948 [1934]), 128–31. Wehrli agrees: see F. Wehrli, *Die Schule des Aristoteles. Texte und Kommentar*, Heft III (Basel, 1948), 68. To get a sense of the enormous number of references to proverbs in Aristotle, see H. Bonitz, *Index Aristotelicum*, 2nd ed. (Graz, 1955), s.v. *παροιμία*. Boys-Stones, *Post-Hellenistic Philosophy* (above, n. 33), 30 n. 5, disagrees with certain aspects of Jaeger’s views. Jaeger bases his arguments and reconstruction on Valentinus Rose’s other collection of fragments, *Aristoteles Pseudepigraphus* (Leipzig, 1863), which also served as the basis of the later collections by Walzer and by Ross. For a critique of Rose’s collection, see A.-H. Chröst, *Aristotle. New Light on his Life and on Some of his Lost Works*, vol. 2: *Observations on Some of Aristotle’s Lost Works* (Notre Dame, 1973), xi–xvii, and for Chröst’s overall evaluation of Jaeger’s reconstruction, see his Postscript, 231–69. See also Diog. Laert. 5.26. Other Peripatetics also made lists of proverbs. See e.g. Dicaearchus, fr. 49, 100–3 Wehrli, and Clearchus fr. 63–83 Wehrli. Also Wehrli ad loc.

times in the dialogues.³⁶ Although Plato is known to have favoured certain contemporary poets,³⁷ we also know that he does not credit ancient wisdom very far in the *Laws* (677A–679E), where he also criticizes the decline in the quality of poetry since the Persian Wars (700A–701B). We might expect Socrates to question each of these proverbs or claims to wisdom when they appear in the dialogues, as he seems to question conventional views of justice in *Republic* Book 1, or of friendship in *Lysis*, or of courage in *Laches*, etc. But he seems to affirm many of them, indeed, even to borrow language from some of the poets to speak about himself and the things he believes.³⁸ This seems particularly true of the *Apology*.³⁹ In fact, despite the criticism that poetry was oriented toward pleasure and not wisdom, much of Greek poetry seeks to distil knowledge or wisdom, based on particular experiences or on religious understanding, while later efforts in history and politics challenged these claims and insisted that such forms of knowledge could only be a product of deliberate ‘investigation’ or ‘examination’.⁴⁰ Indeed, Socrates makes an ‘empirical’ investigation of the claim of the oracle, to ‘test’ its truth, as part of his effort to interpret the meaning of its utterance by solving the ‘riddle’ of how it could be true. This kind of investigation was dramatized well before Socrates’ death by Sophocles in *Oedipus*. Though Plato rejected the possibility of claims to knowledge based on ἐμπειρία, favouring rather dialectic, Aristotle was more willing to give some credit to the claims of Presocratic thinkers like Empedocles and Anaxagoras, of whom he says (*Metaph.* 985a13–15) that they were often ‘like the untrained (οἱ ἀγύμναστοι) in a conflict: for they strike some good blows, moving around, but they are without knowledge (ἐπιστήμη)’.

THE *APOLOGY* AS A WISDOM BOOK

Socrates draws on many forms of ‘evidence’ or argument to make his case before the jury in the *Apology*, apart from the ‘rational’ or elenctic examination of one of his accusers. Among such evidence, we find: examples of his experiences, both private and public, as well as of the *polis*’s experiences, and conclusions drawn from them;

³⁶ For some examples of forms of γνώθι σαυτόν in Plato, see *Prt.* 343B; *Alc.* I, 124B, 133B–C; [*Hipparch.*] 28E; *Clit.* 408B; *Phlb.* 19C, 48C; *Leg.* 11. 923A; *Amat.* 138A; *Chrm.* 164D; *Phdr.* 229E–230A; and *Soph.* 229C–230C. Among the many works on the maxim itself, one may consult Defradas, *Les Thèmes de la propagande delphique*, (n. 3), 216–28, 268–83. See also M.J. O’Brien, *The Socratic Paradoxes and the Greek Mind* (Chapel Hill, 1967).

³⁷ Apart from his interest in Aristophanes, Plato is known to have favoured Antimachus of Colophon, whose work he sent Heraclides Ponticus to Colophon to collect for him (fr. 6 Wehrli). Cic. *Brut.* 191 tells the story of an audience that walked out of a reading by Antimachus, with Plato the only person to remain. See Pfeiffer, *History of Classical Scholarship* (n. 2), 93–4 and, further, V.J. Matthews, *Antimachus of Colophon. Text and Commentary* (Leiden, 1996).

³⁸ There are also excellent arguments that Thucydides, that other critic of poetic approaches to truth, may have shared influences with, or been strongly influenced by, both formal and substantive features of Attic tragedy and poetry. See F.M. Cornford, *Thucydides Mythistoricus* (London, 1965 [1907]); J.H. Finley, Jr., ‘Euripides and Thucydides’, *HSPH* 49 (1938), 23–68; S. Hornblower, *Thucydides and Pindar. Historical Narrative and the World of Epinikian Poetry* (Oxford, 2004). Indeed, Finley, *Pindar and Aeschylus* (n. 17), 284, says: ‘The Attic trait which, if present in Solon, first brilliantly shines in Aeschylus is faith in the moral cogency of reason. The spirit of his luminous *Athene* of the *Eumenides* descends to Pericles, Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle.’

³⁹ See G. Ledbetter, *Poetics before Plato. Interpretation and Authority in Early Greek Theories of Poetry* (Princeton, 2003), 114–18, who suggests that one can use Socrates’ method of interpreting the oracle in *Apology* as a guide to a more general Socratic ‘hermeneutics’ of poetry.

⁴⁰ On the importance of the theme of investigation in Sophocles, *Oedipus Tyrannus* and all of the linguistic evidence and variants, see B. Knox, *Oedipus at Thebes* (New Haven, 1957), 117–24.

professions of faith and declarations of moral principles, including some cases where he explains the reasons for his principles; accusations against his accusers and against the many and the city; examples of models of behaviour, both private and public, that he has learned from the city, from poetry, and from other Greek cultural traditions (cf. Plato, *Protagoras* 325E–326A); and legal, and rhetorically clever, arguments of the kind to be found among the orators or the sophists, many of which contradict what Athenians might take as traditional forms of wisdom. Indeed, Socrates presents himself in the *Apology* as having ‘learned’ almost everything, and thus having been able to use his reason to evaluate and generalize, from cultural transmission or experience: his experiences of the oracle, of examining various people, of service in war, as well as his concrete experiences of politics, justice and the law of Athens. He gives an ‘account’ of his ‘knowledge’ in his defence, an account that seems intended to reveal certain aspects of his form of ‘philosophizing’ (φιλοσοφούντα) as a highly social ‘practice’—Socrates never uses the substantive ‘philosophy’ here. However we understand this form of philosophizing in relation to what Plato develops elsewhere, the account of his experiences is certainly a kind of ‘account of his life’ (ἐλεγχον τοῦ βίου) (39c7).

Nor is Socrates shy about invoking his traditional cultural inspirations from ancient myth and song. He draws his model for courage and for staying in his station from the example of Achilles in Homer. He builds a picture of a possible afterlife from stories of the visits there of Odysseus, Orpheus and Pythagoras, and imagines himself before true judges in the underworld, the great figures Minos, Rhadamanthus and Aeacus, as well as Triptolemus, founder of the Eleusinian mysteries, and he knows all of this from ancient tales.⁴¹ He even reveals a fascination with the creators of these stories: ‘What would you not give to converse with Orpheus and Musaeus and Hesiod and Homer?’ (41A6–8)⁴²

At the same time, the *Apology* is in the form of a speech of defence in a law-court, and we must therefore take into consideration the possibility that the uses of traditional wisdom that Plato gives to Socrates should themselves be classed among the rhetorical devices that Socrates is mobilizing for his defence. And the speech is indeed full of rhetorical devices, whether they are used and adapted, inverted, or studiously ignored and refused. Yet the *Apology* was not actually written to be delivered in front of a jury, so that we may legitimately ask what its real purpose was. Since we cannot determine that from anything else that Plato has written, even though we know the *Apology* was later taken as a model for the life of the philosopher, we must make decisions about its purpose from the text alone and from the context of meanings and possibilities on which it is based and to which it refers.⁴³ Since other aspects of the speech do not fit easily among devices aimed at winning acquittal,

⁴¹ M.L. West, *The Orphic Poems* (Oxford, 1983), 6–12. It is likely that Socrates would have been too young to have learned more of Triptolemus from Sophocles’ play of that name.

⁴² Cf. Plato, *Prt.* 316D8, and *Resp.* 364E–365A, on ‘the crowd of books by Orpheus and Musaeus.’ Burnet believes that these collections of names are of Orphic inspiration. See Plato, *Euthyphro, Apology of Socrates, Crito*, ed. with notes by John Burnet (Oxford, 1924), ad loc. Aristophanes, *Frogs* 1032–35, produced just six years before Socrates’ death, discusses each of their ‘contributions’: Orpheus gave the Mysteries, Musaeus cures and prophecies, Hesiod explained agriculture, and Homer gave military instruction. See Dover, comments ad loc, in Aristophanes, *Frogs*. Cf. West, *The Orphic Poems* (n. 41), 40, and L.G. Westerink (ed.), *Anonymous Prolegomena to Platonic Philosophy* (Amsterdam, 1962), 14.

⁴³ See J. Annas, ‘What are Plato’s “middle dialogues” in the middle of?’ in *New Perspectives on Plato, Modern and Ancient* (n. 5), 1–23.

including Socrates' many statements in the first two sections of the speech that deliberately challenge, affront or criticize the jury and the rule of the many, it is reasonable to imagine that the invocations of traditional wisdom are similarly direct and are present as evidence for the authentic views of Socrates that Plato, at least, intends to convey. At the same time, we do not want to dismiss Socrates' statements as merely examples from a set of instances of his 'true belief' versus the kind of real 'knowledge' pursued in other dialogues. Let us examine a few examples of Socrates' traditional wisdom, as well as their Greek progenitors, in order to set the problem up more concretely.

As Gadamer has remarked, 'Socrates' guiding theme is ἀρετή', excellence.⁴⁴ In the *Apology*, Socrates poses a central question which had come to supplant, in fifth-century Athens, the earlier form of the question that had been framed primarily with respect to the individual alone (20B4–5): 'Who knows what that excellence is that is appropriate to a human being and a citizen' (τίς τῆς τοιαύτης ἀρετῆς, τῆς ἀνθρωπίνης τε καὶ πολιτικῆς, ἐπιστήμων ἐστίν)? For (30B2–4): 'It is not from wealth that excellence comes, but from excellence [comes] wealth and all other good things for men, both in private and in public' (Οὐκ ἐκ χρημάτων ἀρετὴ γίγνεται, ἀλλ' ἐξ ἀρετῆς χρήματα καὶ τὰ ἄλλα ἀγαθὰ τοῖς ἀνθρώποις ἅπαντα καὶ ἰδίᾳ καὶ δημοσίᾳ). Even in what might seem a relatively small matter in comparison with the grand abstraction of his question about excellence, Socrates affirms the link between ἀρετή and just action in directing the jurors to judge according to the law and their oaths (18A3–5): 'Direct your mind to whether I speak justly or not (εἰ δίκαια λέγω ἢ μὴ). For that is the excellence of a judge (δικαστοῦ μὲν γὰρ αὕτη ἀρετή).'

In his concern for ἀρετή, Socrates situates himself in a tradition going back to the struggles of Homer's heroes, and, in his concern for just speech and judgement, in a tradition going back to Hesiod's famous statement from *Works and Days* (225–7): '... they who do not depart from justice (δικαίου) – their city prospers and the people bloom in it', for (279–81) 'Zeus gives prosperity (ὄλβον) to anyone who knows what is just (δίκαι) and knows how to declare it'. Indeed, Hesiod is even the precursor of a crucial aspect of the 'new' wisdom that Socrates champions, namely, his claim that it is worse to do evil than to suffer it: 'He does evil to himself who does evil to another, and evils planned are most evil for the plotter' (*Works and Days* 265–6).⁴⁵ In the time between the eighth and the fourth centuries, numerous poets reformulated the notions of these ideals in their own voices, providing the link between excellence and justice. In the sixth century, for example, Theognis advises (144 ff.): 'Be resolved to live piously (εὐσεβέων) and manage with little, rather than be rich and partake of unjust wealth. The whole of ἀρετή is summed up in righteousness (δικαιοσύνη); every man ... is good (ἀγαθός) if he is just (δίκαιος)'.⁴⁶ Indeed (334 ff.): 'The middle way is best in all things (πάντων μέσ' ἄριστα), and in this way ... you will have ἀρετή, which is

⁴⁴ H.-G. Gadamer, *The Idea of the Good in Platonic-Aristotelian Philosophy*, tr. P.C. Smith (New Haven, 1986), 42.

⁴⁵ Martin West argues that there are not only parallels between the 'wisdom' literature of Greece and the Near East, but also lines of influence. See M.L. West, *Early Greek Philosophy and the Orient* (Oxford, 1971) and id., *The East Face of Helicon: West Asiatic Elements in Greek Poetry and Myth* (Oxford, 1997), 306, where he describes the *Works and Days* as a 'poem of exhortation and instruction, moral, ethical and practical ... [which] shows particular affinities with the long-established wisdom tradition of the Near East'. For other bibliography on this subject, see Hengel, *Judaism and Hellenism* (n. 1) 2.72 nn. 2, 3. See also C. Gordon, *Before the Bible: The Common Background of Greek and Hebrew Civilizations* (New York, 1962).

⁴⁶ Arist. *Eth. Nic.* 1129b29 terms this expression a 'proverb.'

difficult to reach (ἤντε λαβεῖν χαλεπόν).⁴⁷ Yet it is with Solon the ‘lawgiver’ that a ‘citizenly’ ἀρετή shows its significance for public, and not just for private, life. As he remarks of the Athenians he governed (4, 5 ff.): ‘The citizens themselves by their folly (ἀφραδίησιν) are willing to destroy this mighty city, persuaded by wealth (χρήμασι); and the mind of the leaders of the people is unjust (δήμου θ’ ἡγεμόνων ἄδικος νόος) and they are about to suffer many woes as a result of great outrage (ὕβριος); for they do not know how to restrain excess (κόρον).’ Consequently (15, 1–4): ‘Many evil people are rich, and many good people are poor. But we will not take wealth in exchange for our ἀρετή, for the one remains with a man always (τὸ μὲν ἔμπεδον αἰεῖ), but possessions pass from one to another.’⁴⁸

One aspect of Socrates’ understanding of excellence is piety, which appears in one of his comments on the oracle of Apollo (21B6–7): ‘I do not suppose that he is lying, for that is not lawful for him’ (οὐ γὰρ δέηπον ψεύδεται γε, οὐ γὰρ θέμις αὐτῷ), a statement that Burnet remarks is an almost direct echo of Pindar, *Pythian* 9.42, on Apollo: ‘you, for whom it is not lawful to touch falsehood’ (καὶ γὰρ σέ, τὸν οὐ θεμιτὸν ψεύδει θιγεῖν).⁴⁹ Indeed, Socrates’ central conclusion from all of his examinations seems itself to be a form of piety (23A5–7): ‘But in fact, gentlemen, the god seems really to be wise, and by this oracle to be saying something like this, that “human wisdom is worth little or nothing”’ (τὸ δὲ κινδυνεύει, ὦ ἄνδρες, τῷ ὄντι ὁ θεὸς σοφὸς εἶναι, καὶ ἐν τῷ χρησμῷ τούτῳ τοῦτο λέγειν, ὅτι ἡ ἀνθρωπίνη σοφία ὀλίγου τινὸς ἀξία ἐστὶν καὶ οὐδενός). It is the assumed task set by the god that is the reason for his continued examination of his fellows (29D2–3): ‘I will be persuaded by the god rather than by you’ (πείσομαι δὲ μάλλον τῷ θεῷ ἢ ὑμῖν). Interestingly, this is a sentiment already uttered by Bacchylides, fr. 57 Stobaeus: ‘Truth is from the same city as the gods; she alone lives with the gods’ (ἀλάθεια θεῶν ὁμόπολις μόνα θεοῖς συνδιαιωμένα), and it appears in a different form in Simonides: ‘No one ever attained excellence (ἀρετὰν λάβεν) without the gods, no city, no mortal.’⁵⁰

As for Socrates’ personal commitment to staying at his post, to which the god has ordered him, he claims (28D6–10): ‘Wherever a man’s station (τάξῃ) is, whether he has chosen it of his own will, or whether he has been placed at it by his commander (ἢ ὑπ’ ἄρχοντος ταχθῇ), there it is his duty to remain (ἐνταῦθα δεῖ) and face the danger without thinking of death or of any other thing except disgrace (μήτε θάνατον μήτε ἄλλο μηδὲν πρὸ τοῦ αἰσχροῦ).’ This is because (29B6–10): ‘the truth is, I know it is both evil and shameful to act unjustly and to disobey a superior, both god and man (τὸ δὲ ἀδικεῖν καὶ ἀπειθεῖν τῷ βελτίονι καὶ θεῷ καὶ ἀνθρώπῳ, ὅτι κακὸν καὶ αἰσχρόν ἐστιν οἶδα)’. But these are sentiments of courage that had been urged by many great poets,⁵¹ from Tyrtæus of Sparta to Ion of Chios, and not only in poetry, but also in the great funeral epigrams that many of them wrote for the dead, partic-

⁴⁷ Theognis, in D. Young (after E. Diehl), *Theognis*, 2nd ed. (Leipzig, 1971).

⁴⁸ Solon, in M.L. West, *Iambi et elegi Graeci*, vol. 2 (Oxford, 1972).

⁴⁹ See Burnet (n. 42) ad loc. And cf. *Resp.* 382C6. Also J.S. Hatch, ‘Elaborate wisdom: the use of gnomic statements in Pindar’s Epinikian Odes’ (M.A. thesis, Cincinnati, 2001). Jebb maintains that ‘An ode of victory was expected to contain maxims of life and conduct. With Pindar, this “gnomic” strain is almost always impressive by sheer force or beauty of expression, even when the thought is merely some commonplace of Greek belief or sentiment’. See R.C. Jebb, *Bacchylides, The Poems and Fragments* (Cambridge, 1905), Introduction, 59.

⁵⁰ Simon. fr. 653, in D.A. Campbell (tr.), *Greek Lyric* (Cambridge, MA, 1982) 3.363.

⁵¹ At the same time, it is worth mentioning that abandoning one’s station in the line of battle could mean disenfranchisement, ἀτιμία, for life. See Andoc. *Myst.* 74.

ularly in the Persian Wars.⁵² Even Socrates' refusal to leave Athens to wander as an exile from place to place is an option evaluated, and rejected, by Tyrtaeus, 10.2 ff.⁵³

When we invoke the sayings of Hesiod, Tyrtaeus, Theognis, Solon, Pindar or Bacchylides, we are, of course, bringing forward the words of men who spoke and wrote in radically different social, legal and political worlds from that of late fifth-century Athens. Hesiod was a farmer in a largely rural setting advising his brother on appropriate dealings with a family member, as well as in the law courts and with the powerful. Tyrtaeus was a nobleman writing to inspire and advise young Spartan soldiers (though he would later be 'adopted' by the Athenians).⁵⁴ Theognis was a person of aristocratic sympathies and some standing in Megara, while Solon wrote from an aristocratic standpoint about the consequences for excellence and the good in a period of great social conflict and unsettled economic change in Athens. Pindar and Bacchylides wrote encomia for the children of the rich and powerful, who had won in great athletic contests. The poetic work of all these men was usually performed orally, though it was never part of any 'examination' of others or of any systematic challenge made to their public, except in competitions between poets for prizes, although existing *testimonia* show all kinds of reactions to, and even many conflicts between, some poets and their patrons, particularly tyrants.⁵⁵

Despite the highly varied origins and audiences of the poets when they wrote, Socrates' own uses of poetry are hardly surprising, and he does not show towards it either the scepticism of Thucydides or the criticism of Plato. After all, in the *Apology*, Socrates criticizes those with high reputations only for their pretensions to knowledge, when even more 'common' people (*φαιλότεροι*) can understand things better than they. And while the poets too are challenged for their pretension, they are only otherwise criticized for not understanding the meaning of their own work, which, again, those 'standing around' (*οἱ παρόντες*) can explain better than they. Note, then, that in the *Apology* Socrates does not criticize the poets as 'creators', nor does he criticize the value of their 'creations' or the competitions in which their poems are set against one another. They are criticized only for their socially agonistic self-presentation and public claims to knowledge before their fellows. Socrates rules out no literary doctrine or literary form as false or misleading or inappropriately seductive, but criticizes and challenges only the social 'power' exerted by individuals through their pretension in face-to-face interactions outside their *τέχνη*. Thus, not only does Socrates attack individuals, and not poetry, for lack of wisdom, but, as we have seen,

⁵² Jaeger, *Five Essays* (n. 25), 136, says the constituents even of Pericles' funeral orations were 'borrowed, often literally, from the ancient code of warriors, as it appears especially in the poems of Tyrtaeus'.

⁵³ Despite debates over the meaning of the *Menexenus*, Plato is so far from abandoning the ideals noted in the *Apology* that he uses their language to speak about death, cowardice and station there. Socrates' own military service is mentioned not only in *Apology*, but also in *Symp.* 219E and 221A, *Lach.* 181B, and *Chrm.* 153A–B. On the question of the *Menexenus*, see N. Loraux, *The Invention of Athens: The Funeral Oration in the Classical City*, tr. A. Sheridan (Cambridge, MA:, 1986).

⁵⁴ On the importance of Tyrtaeus, see Jaeger, 'Tyrtaeus on true arete', in id., *Five Essays* (n. 25), 120–40, who remarks that the Athenians claimed Tyrtaeus as a good model for manly citizenship in the fifth century. Indeed, Lysias 2.25 transposes Tyrtaeus' ideal into prose. Pl. *Leg.* 629A–B criticizes Tyrtaeus' understanding of courage as the supreme *ἀρετή*, yet preserves this Spartan ideal for the warrior class in the just state. For Plato, Theognis' *dikaiousunē* is a higher ideal (*Leg.* 630A–C). Cf. *Resp.* 465D–466A.

⁵⁵ See B. Gentili, *Poetry and its Public in Ancient Greece: From Homer to the Fifth Century*, tr. A.T. Cole (Baltimore, 1988).

he also learns from poetry, or, at the least, often illustrates what he believes with references – sometimes directly quoted from poems, other times only alluded to – to some of the traditional principles that now serve as models for his actions.⁵⁶ The *Apology*, in fact, provides links between Socrates' own moral wisdom and what could be called poetic wisdoms of the past.

Yet Socrates also does not present the problem of believing that one is wiser than one is, as well as of acting on the basis of misguided desires, as a problem peculiar to the 'many' in Athens. Indeed, traditionally in Athens, it had been the few, the aristocrats and their pretensions to wisdom, that were the subjects of tragedy and of warnings about *ὑβρις* and *ἀμαρτία*: the great, who from a sense of their superiority, exceed what true knowledge or wisdom dictates, who claim, in effect, to know more than they possibly can, that is, to possess the wisdom of the gods and therefore to know what the gods will permit or not, and who are thereby and therefore destroyed. In this effort to curb the sense of one's wisdom and the social *ἀγών* of asserting it as a mark of one's superiority over one's fellow citizens, Socrates thus directly takes up a central concern of much tragedy – 'making people better in the cities' (Aristophanes, *Frogs* 1009–10) – not only in terms of its consequences for social interactions within the *polis*, but also in terms of its consequences for actions of every kind, private and public.

But, as Socrates observes, these forms of wisdom concern not only the *ἀρετή* of a 'man', but also that of a 'citizen'. What do these forms show? Consider Socrates' political critique of both the oligarchs and the democrats: though the oligarchs have been overthrown and though the democrats repented of their actions against the generals of Arginusae (Xenophon, *Hellenica* 1.7.35), wise respect for law in the city has been weakened overall, if not destroyed. This is just as tragedy had so often depicted crises of the city, yet it has not happened, in Socrates' view, through *ἄτη*, madness, but through a kind of self-deceptive arrogance, the belief that one possesses the wisdom about justice and excellence that only the gods can have and that the law exists to remind us of. It is true that Socrates accuses Meletus personally of bringing the indictment against him from *ὑβρις* and *ἀκολασία*, wanton violence and intemperance (26E), yet the more widespread lack of 'righteousness' or of a strong sense of 'limits' is due to ignorance. Socrates is shown here, in effect, as the heir of tragedy, who proposes another way of teaching lessons formerly upheld by religion and dramatized on stage or sung in poetry. And the 'therapy' that he undertakes through exhortation and examination is meant to be much less destructive than the paths shown in tragic drama.

WISDOM AND PSYCHĒ

At the same time, Socrates presents himself in terms of qualities that are strikingly similar to many qualities of character that Thucydides had used to distinguish Pericles from the multitude and from other political leaders. For example, Socrates remarks that he cannot be corrupted with money or any other object of ordinary desire: he has no 'secret' doctrine, nor does he claim to know anything that he will

⁵⁶ It is worth noting that Xenophon, *Mem.* 1.6.13–14, reports Socrates telling Antiphon how he actively studies the wisdom of the past as part of the broad approach to wisdom that he follows: 'And the treasures of the wise men (*σοφῶν ἀνδρῶν*) of old that they have left us in their books (*ἐν βιβλίῳις γράψαντες*) I open and explore with my friends. If we come on any good thing, we extract it, and we set much store on being useful to one another.'

communicate only for money. Indeed, he has never taken any money for 'teaching' and has lived in poverty, rather than give up his mission. He has also avoided all of the kinds of groups and activities that would have brought him political power or renown. He is completely honest, he says, and engages in 'frank speech' against the mood of the many (cf. *Gorgias* 482B). He tells the truth when he holds office or when he argues with the jury, and thus never flatters. He obeys the law in all things. Indeed, Socrates sees himself as serving and caring for the city better than others, especially the much-praised athletes. Xenophanes, writing a century before (B2.7–12 ff.), had already decried the fact that a successful athlete is fed at public expense, 'yet such a one is not so worthy as me: for greater than the strength of men or horses is our σοφία'.⁵⁷ Socrates echoes this complaint (*Apology* 36D5–37A1): 'There is no reward, Athenians, so suitable for [one who has done what I have done for you] as receiving free meals in the *prytaneum*. It is a much more suitable reward for him than for any of you who has won a victory at the Olympic games with his horse or his chariots. Such a man only makes you seem happy, but I make you really happy.'

There are at least two ways, therefore, in which the ongoing importance of traditional wisdom functions in the *Apology*. First, the man with a proper recognition of his lack of wisdom does indeed have alternatives when his pretensions to wisdom are shown to be false, or his understanding of fundamental concepts or truths is shown to be mistaken and without foundation. According to the *Apology*, Plato's Socrates shows, as part of his defence, that there continue to exist proverbs, insights and injunctions that are derived from 'traditional' ideals and values – ἀρετή to be cherished and sought above all things, justice to be the ground for all dealings, courage to be used in facing one's duty, etc. – and that can serve as guides for behaviour while the rest of the inquiry goes on, somewhat like Descartes's provisional code of morals. That does not imply, of course, that Socrates believes that traditional wisdom can adjudicate between competing claims in the wisdom that has been handed down, and we know how conflictual those 'wisdom sayers' can be. *Republic* Book I is an outstanding example of the problem presented when these conventional truths clash and are each challenged in turn. Yet there seems to be no Thrasymachus to argue with within the *Apology*: that is, there is no argument that rejects the importance of ἀρετή or δίκη or the need to understand their foundation, even though their exact parameters are the object of debate and discussion. That is why the inquiry continues without end.

Second, it is not only in terms of precepts that the tradition continues to have something to teach in the *Apology*. It also has something to teach in terms of character.⁵⁸ Socrates is not just shown as the heir of tragedy and of wisdom poetry.

⁵⁷ Xenophanes is cited after M.L. West, *Iambi et elegi Graeci*, vol. 2 (Oxford, 1972). A. Ford, *The Origins of Criticism. Literary Culture and Poetic Theory in Classical Greece* (Princeton, 2002), 48, describes Xenophanes' works as 'bids for authority by a late archaic wise man'.

⁵⁸ The question is what makes possible a certain kind of character and whether such a thing can be taught, an issue for the sophists as well as for others. N. Gulley, *The Philosophy of Socrates* (London, 1968), 145, remarks: 'It is Socrates' conviction that in the field of moral knowledge the dominance of the intellect is such that knowledge can effect a conversion of character. This conviction of the moral efficacy of the intellectual search for knowledge is most clearly marked in Plato's *Apology*. Here Socrates presents his method of cross-examination as a means of "purification" which will effect a moral improvement. He describes it with a moral fervour which condemns as "not worth living" a life which has not subjected itself to the intellectual self-searching, which will ultimately yield knowledge of the good (38a) ... He contends that coming to know the good is at the same time a process of becoming good.'

Despite being the son of a stonemason, he is shown as the heir of an aristocratic model of character as well, a model whose qualities may be drawn from a number of portraits of exceptional individuals, some of them immortalized in poetry – Socrates himself draws explicitly on Achilles and implicitly invokes Tyrtæus and Solon.⁵⁹ Other models were captured in prose, both positively and negatively – even as the qualities of individuals whose actions Socrates might, in other Platonic settings, criticize or even deplore.⁶⁰ Here I am speaking particularly of Thucydides' characterization of Pericles, and of Plutarch's characterization later, although there are negative models throughout their work as well. Indeed, Socrates is not at all 'anti-political' in the *Apology*; quite the contrary, if we understand 'political' as meaning oriented toward the well-being of the *polis*, and not just as a matter of holding office and playing a role in the public debates of the assembly. Indeed, it is precisely his very 'political' activities, that is, activities with great consequences for the *polis* – whether one believes these activities have to do with his political sympathies or his religious attitudes or his educational practices – that led to his indictment, judgment and execution. Socrates is a model of using traditional wisdom in the pursuit of civic values.⁶¹

We know that, in the *Republic* and elsewhere, Plato holds up the model of the aristocratic soul that cherishes honour as the best alternative, if the philosopher's soul that cherishes reason cannot be fabricated for the city or cannot model itself on the 'city laid up in heaven' (*Republic* 592B). While the philosopher's soul is the model for the just individual, there need to be other possibilities for those cities and individuals for whom the model is out of reach. At the same time, given the influence, and the restored democracy's condemnation, of aristocratic clubs (*ἐταίρειαι*), symposia and other forms of association, some of which Socrates refers to in the *Apology*, his reinvigoration of an aristocratic model even in the *Apology* – a model which may also have been a reason for his attractiveness to some aristocrats and persons of high wealth and status – could well have been counter-productive before a jury of the 'many', independently of his particular associations with men accused of treason or with members of the Thirty.

Scholarly opinion on the 'sage' has depicted its archaic models as primarily wise counsellors to political leaders, rather than philosophers.⁶² Not only does this claim

⁵⁹ On 'the common ground between theorists and manual workers' in Athens, see A. Burford, *Craftsmen in Greek and Roman Society* (Ithaca, 1972), 128–35.

⁶⁰ See M.T.W. Arnheim, *Aristocracy in Greek Society* (London, 1977); C.G. Starr, *The Aristocratic Temper of Greek Civilization* (New York, 1992).

⁶¹ In language that could describe Socrates, but which is meant to characterize an earlier time, see J.-P. Vernant, 'Some aspects of personal identity in Greek religion', in id., *Myth and Thought among the Greeks*, tr. J. Lloyd and J. Fort (London, 1983 [1965]), 323–40, at 358: 'In Greece the names of the sages are associated with the earliest form of legislation and the first attempts to provide a political constitution. Here again we see the philosopher taking over the functions of the priest-king in the days when nature and society were not distinguished and he was in charge of both at the same time.'

⁶² A.R. Burn, *The Lyric Age of Greece* (New York, 1960), 207, quotes Dicaearchus' characterization of the Sages as *συνετοὺς ... καὶ νομοθετικούς* from fr. 30 Wehrli. Plut. *Them.* 2.6, speaks of 'political skill and practical intelligence'. E. Havelock, 'The Socratic self as it is parodied in Aristophanes' *Clouds*', in *YClS* 22 (1972), 1–18, at 7, calls *σοφία* 'the skilled intelligence'. See also U. von Wilamowitz-Moellendorf, *Platon. Beilagen und Textkritik*, 3rd ed. (Berlin, 1962), 272; Vernant, *Myth and Thought* (n. 61), 352–8; Wallace, 'The sophists in Athens' (n. 11), 203–22, at 210–11. Pace H. Fränkel, *Early Greek Poetry and Philosophy*, tr. M. Hadas and J. Willis (Oxford, 1975), 239–40, there is an artificialness in the distinction between 'public' sages versus 'private' men, when religion was a public matter, especially in the Olympian period of state cults, so that

not do justice to the clear implications of the sayings that go beyond politics, as in 'Know thyself', and 'Moderation in all things', but it also does not recognize how 'practical' the 'wise' individual can be.⁶³ Although Plato's Socrates in *Gorgias* 503C and 519A, rejects the models provided by Themistocles, Cimon, Miltiades, Pericles and even Alcibiades, Socrates in the *Apology*, like Pericles in Thucydides 2.60.5 (τὰ δέοντα), makes the claim to know what is needful (22A2) – 'it is necessary (δεῖ) to speak the truth (τἀληθῆ)' – in the situation in which Athens finds herself. This makes him also, like Pericles, not only a patriot, but an honest one. His 'policy' recommendations include following the law, no matter what group holds power in the city, and in particular (36C8) caring for the city itself, before the affairs of the city (μῆτε τῶν τῆς πόλεως, πρὶν αὐτῆς τῆς πόλεως), because care for the soul and for the city become the sources of all good things for both the individual and the *polis*. Socrates is thus a defender of law and of thoughtful consideration, against actions based on anger or pleasure (ῥδονῆ). What Socrates portrays is a city that rejects what an independent citizen can offer to civic affairs, leading the citizen to withdraw into another sphere to accomplish his goals. What Socrates does lack, however, is the particular speaking skill that is needed for and suited for politics of whatever kind – not 'rhetoric' in the sense in which it is used as a condemnatory label for all kinds of political speaking by Plato, but the capacity for political speech uniquely appropriate for public deliberations. Here, the particular ἀγών of the speech-making of both the sophists and of the politicians is rejected as a means of getting to what is 'necessary', to the 'truth', or to anything resembling 'wisdom', to be replaced by the Socratic form of conversation and examination, which undermines the normal methods of achieving success through speeches, by refusing to submit to this form, and instead subjecting speech to a critique as it is uttered, something almost impossible to imagine in the Assembly.

It is important to remember that many members of the elite upper classes, philosophers included, and not only Socrates, withdrew from politics and civic activity after 430 B.C.⁶⁴ Socrates' reasons seem to be about the possibility of being killed if he had persisted in the conventional public arena. Yet Socrates willingly chooses death and a 'shorter life' in order, he says, to uphold his own sense of reputation and 'honour', once again implying his likeness to Achilles. So why would fear of death have kept him out of politics, when the threat of death does not stop him from pursuing his project of examining others and searching for wisdom and excellence? Only because the *daimôn* says no? Or because it is not his 'station' assigned by the god, not his place in the 'line' or *phalanx*? Why did he not just continue to play the role that most members of the *dêmos* played, and to which Pericles assigns an important place, of judging policy, rather than initiating or debating it?⁶⁵ Of course, we do not know how many

utterances about it had public import; when justice was both a public and private matter, not only for Solon and Plato, but also for Theognis; when the Delphic oracle mixed its political and religious roles quite thoroughly; when someone like Myson, who rejected all of the worldly involvement of the other sages, could still be considered a sage by some; and later when Socrates could ask about the excellence appropriate for both a human being and a citizen.

⁶³ Xenophanes (2.14–22) had already said that he, rather than those normally honoured by the city, possessed the σοφίη which could bring increased εὐνομίη (well-being) and treasure to the city.

⁶⁴ Wallace, 'The sophists in Athens' (n. 11), 203–22, at 219–21. For a different interpretation, see W.G. Forrest, 'An Athenian generation gap', *YClS* 24 (1975): *Studies in the Greek Historians*, 37–52; and I. Morris, *Death-Ritual and Social Structure in Classical Antiquity* (Cambridge, 1992), 128–55. See also L.B. Carter, *The Quiet Athenian* (Oxford, 1986).

⁶⁵ As E.R. Dodds remarks, in id., *Plato, Gorgias* (Oxford, 1959), 248, Socrates says, effectively, 'with people *en masse* I do not even attempt discussion'.

citizens actually spoke in any meeting of the assembly, as opposed to listening, yet there seems to have been no shame attached to just listening and judging. *Gorgias* 500B–C suggests that Socrates is simply not interested in what ‘politics’ is currently concerned with in Athens. At the same time, from one perspective, ‘domestic’ politics, in so far as it is concerned with justice and honest dealing about excellence between citizens and others, rather than ‘foreign’ policy, does matter to him. From another point of view, he is interested really only in ‘soulcraft’, not in statecraft, even though it is statecraft that may decide whether the city survives or not. Only the role of ‘educator’ seems to matter to him, though he forswears this role in the name of his ‘equality of condition’ with all those with whom he converses, but he carries it out despite this. Political persuasion of a traditional kind, even when undertaken in small groups, seems unacceptable to him, except on his own terms, or as an adviser to potential ‘wise rulers’ of the future.

‘SOLDIERING’ FOR WISDOM

But, appearances notwithstanding, Socrates does not withdraw from what, I would suggest, might have seemed to many of his fellow citizens a particularly aggressive form of civic intervention, and which he presented in the courtroom as the essence of his enterprise.⁶⁶ In this, his innovation and possible ‘break’ with Greek tradition is far greater than is normally understood. Here I can only sketch the basic features of that enterprise.

The most famous of Socrates’ ‘gnomic’ utterances is *Apology* 38A5–6: ‘the life without examination is not liveable for a man’ (ὁ δὲ ἀνεξέταστος βίος οὐ βιωτὸς ἀνθρώπῳ). The ‘break’ that Socrates introduces with his model for the ‘examination’ of lives is best located in the particular concept of ‘examination’ that Socrates has here borrowed from the language for reviewing troops on the parade ground and before battle. The particular word that Plato’s Socrates uses at that place in the *Apology* for ‘examination’ (ἐξέτασις) as the key to what is or is not βιωτός, is found quite infrequently in Plato. It derives primarily from the language of fifth- and fourth-century military activity and service and from the notion of a review, examination or mustering of troops, and it continues to carry this meaning and performative weight in the *Apology*. ἐξετάζω is the more common form of ἐτάζω, originally meaning to pass in (military) review or muster, scrutinize, then examine carefully or thoroughly. Burnet remarks, in a note at *Apology* 22E6, that ἐξετάσεως must certainly be seen to mean ‘“muster”, “review”, “scrutiny”’. The original military sense of the word is still felt. Socrates had “inspected” the three classes of politicians,

⁶⁶ R. Wardy, *The Birth of Rhetoric: Gorgias, Plato and their Successors* (London, 1998), 76, makes the brilliant claim that Socrates’ inability to converse with a group (*Gorgias* 474A) was not due to any ‘elitist attitude towards the many’, but to the fact that Socrates’ activities were ‘injurious to the deepest aspirations and central ideology of Athenian democracy’. Socrates insists, of his ‘mode of philosophical discourse’, that ‘everything worth having is accessible solely by its means. It is as if he were continually forming transient philosophical city-states in the marketplace or the Lyceum, intellectual communities whose membership cannot exceed two, rather than, as he claims in the *Apology* (31c5 ff.), not engaging in politics at all. How could Athens not regard itself as a host to philosophical parasites? ... in reality his dialectical activity fomented revolution.’ Lynch, *Aristotle’s School* (n. 24), 42, says, rather, that Socrates simply ‘wanted to make young men’s associations in city life more valuable for their moral development’. On intellectual circles, see J. Ober, *The Athenian Revolution: Essays on Ancient Greek Democracy and Political Theory* (Princeton, 1996), 26–9.

poets, and craftsmen'.⁶⁷ There are many military things that may be reviewed in this manner, and one of them is the order of battle, to see that every soldier is at his 'post' or 'station', his *τάξις*.⁶⁸ *ἐξετάζω* was also used to mean 'to post' or 'station' someone in a position or place.⁶⁹ Further, the word for 'exhort' or 'urge', *παρακελεύομαι*, which Socrates also makes a central part of his task, is largely used to describe the process of exhorting soldiers before battle. Thus, it is not its 'protreptic dimension' that is revealed in Socrates' exhortations,⁷⁰ but rather its role in military arousal and call to order.

Plato's choice of words here has enormous implications for understanding Socrates' enterprise. Socrates says (22E6): 'From this examination (*ἐκ ταυτηγὶ δὴ τῆς ἐξετάσεως*), Athenians, has arisen much fierce and grievous enmity towards me, therefore many prejudices from this.'⁷¹ On the one hand, Socrates draws metaphors from the citizen soldier, presumably as devices of rhetoric and as a bridge to the understanding and sympathy of his fellow citizens on the jury through the use of the common language of citizens. On the other hand, he proposes a new use for this language, drawn directly from the service language of military training and practice, which underscores Socrates' conception of the battle-like, soldier-like nature of his activity as an 'examiner' and the battle-like nature of the search for wisdom, the 'assault' or the 'training' of the citizens as soldiers of this search.

The significance of Socrates' use of *ἐξετάζειν* lies in its relation to military preparation and order in battle.⁷² Although Ober believes that Socrates' appeal to his

⁶⁷ Burnet (n. 42), 176. This military sense persists through the fourth and into the third century. See the evidence cited in W.K. Pritchett, *The Greek State at War*, Part II (Berkeley, 1974), 39 and n. 29.

⁶⁸ The noun *τάξις* derives from the verb *τάσσω*, Attic *τάττω*, and means to marshal or draw up troops or ships in order of battle. It is used by a number of writers of the fifth century; among other examples, see Aesch. *Ag.* 332, *Eum.* 279, *Sept.* 285, *Supp.* 986; Hdt. 3.13; Thuc. 1.140, 2.83, 3.13, 5.71; Eur. *IT* 1046; Xen. *Oec.* 4.5.

⁶⁹ See P. Vidal-Naquet, 'The tradition of the Athenian hoplite', in id., *The Black Hunter. Forms of Thought and Forms of Society in the Greek World*, tr.A. Szegedy-Maszak, (Baltimore, 1986), 85–105; J.K. Anderson, *Military Theory and Practice in the Age of Xenophon* (Berkeley, 1970), 97; A. Andrewes, *Greek Society* (Harmondsworth, 1971 [1967]), 86–9; and, on a range of military issues, especially in hoplite warfare, M.M. Sage, *Warfare in Ancient Greece. A Source-book* (London, 1996).

⁷⁰ This is Blondell's view, in R. Blondell, *The Play of Character in Plato's Dialogues* (Cambridge, 2002), 115. But the word is used 23 times in Thucydides, in giving military speeches; 5 times in Herodotus, in giving orders; and 32 times in Xenophon. In each case, the use fits with military metaphors. Otherwise, it is used by the orators Isocrates, Aeschines, Demosthenes, and Lysias, after Plato.

⁷¹ F.J. Weber, in id., *Plato, Apologia Sokratous* (Paderborn, 1971), 87, says that the verb *φιλοσοφείν* (*φιλοσοφούντα* in *Apology* 28E5) 'holds together all of the words with which Sokrates until then had described his activity: *ἐξετάζειν*, *ζητεῖν*, *ἐλέγχειν*'. Here, he says, 'the word *φιλοσοφείν* contains a new meaning'. See also pp. 6–10. F. Wolf, 'Être disciple de Socrate', in G. Giannantonio and M. Nancy (edd.), *Lexiconi Socratiche* (Rome, 1997), 31–79, at 64, says that *διαλέγεσθαι καὶ συνεῖναι καὶ ἐξετάζειν* ('to converse and to live with and to examine'), in *Apology* 41C3, are 'the three constituents of the practice of Socrates, and consequently the foundations of his ethical doctrine. This is clearly the *content* of the idea of the Good according to Socrates'.

⁷² P. Charon, in id. (ed. and tr.), *Pseudo-Aristote, Rhétorique à Alexandre*, Collection des Universités de France (Paris, 2002), 136 n. 231, says that later *ἐξέτασις* had a range of usages: among others, revising the list of citizens and auditing of finances. '[I]n its "pure" political form, it was probably used for the examination of magistrates before they took office, according to a procedure instituted by Solon to remedy the problems of choosing by lot. But its use for the auditing of accounts when leaving office, as well as in the judicial domain, is also probable.'

military record is a 'familiar rhetorical topos',⁷³ Socrates goes far beyond anything done by the orators (e.g. Aeschines 2.168–70). It is quite possible that Socrates' use of a practice of examination based on military review was influenced by the training and education of youth in Sparta, a city Socrates was reputed to have admired.⁷⁴ The use of Spartan militarized language would not be inconsistent with an appreciation of traditional wisdom, of course: the wisdom of courage, of keeping one's station, of regard for excellence, of subordination to law, etc., despite the irony of the ever-talking Socrates admiring the people who originated 'laconic' speech.⁷⁵ Whether Socrates had always admired Sparta, as Xenophon and the Old Oligarch did, or whether he came to do so as a consequence of the enormous changes that had overtaken Athens since the start of the Peloponnesian War, is impossible to determine.⁷⁶ Indeed, he may have been more directly influenced by the institution of the Athenian *ἐφηβεία*, the military training of young men.⁷⁷ In any case, Thucydides dramatizes how significantly language, character and basic convictions and practices in Athens had indeed changed due to the plague in 429 B.C., the revolutions that swept Greece, typified by Corcyra, and the final defeat in 404 B.C., with the heavy depopulation and impoverishment that were its direct results. It is hard to gauge precisely what public views at that time were of traditional wisdom. Social crises of such magnitude must have contributed to undermining its appeal in certain circles.⁷⁸ The threat to older pieties might then be blamed on specific groups, whether sophists, or foreigners, or oligarchic sympathizers or democratic sympathizers. We do know that the outspoken and challenging forms of Old Comedy and the grand lessons of traditional tragedy both disappeared or were transformed into other kinds of dramatic forms following the end of the war.

Any invocation of military metaphors to describe one's activities was always loaded in the Greek world, since 'in Greece political power went with military effectiveness', and the goal of military action was victory.⁷⁹ Socrates sees himself as

⁷³ Ober, *Political Dissent* (n. 30), 172.

⁷⁴ On Spartan *ἀγωγή*, warrior training, see W.G. Forrest, *A History of Sparta, 900–192 B.C.* (London, 1968), 50–5; on the *ρήτρα*, the constitution, 40–51; also A.J. Toynbee, 'The growth of Sparta', *JHS* 33 (1913), 246–75.

⁷⁵ Ar. *Av.* 1280–4. *Ran.* 1491–5 implicitly derides Euripides for sitting beside Socrates and 'babbling on' (*λαλεῖν*). See N.M. Kennell, *The Gymnasium of Virtue. Education & Culture in Ancient Sparta* (Chapel Hill, 1995).

⁷⁶ Plato, *Cri.* 52E5–6, has the laws say to Socrates 'you preferred neither Lacedaemon nor Crete, which you always say are well-governed'.

⁷⁷ [Arist.] *Ath. Pol.* 42 speaks of how the cadet groups are formed. On this practice, see Vidal-Naquet, 'The tradition of the Athenian hoplite' (n. 69). The standard work is C. Pelekides, *Histoire de l'éphébie attique, des origines à Jésus Christ* (Paris, 1962). It is not clear that there was any kind of cavalry training of the *ἐφηβοί*. On the training of cavalry and its relation to the hoplite ethos, see I.G. Spence, *The Cavalry of Classical Greece. A Social and Military History with Particular Reference to Athens* (Oxford, 1993), 65–79, 119, 164–79, 267–71. On the military service of Plato, who is said to have been in combat in 395 and 394 B.C. in Corinth, see A. Swift Riginos, *Platonica. The Anecdotes concerning the Life and Writings of Plato* (Leiden, 1976), 51–2; and U. von Wilamowitz-Moellendorf, *Platon. Sein Leben und Seine Werk*, 5th ed. (Berlin, 1959 [1918]), 136–7, who also remarks that there are no traces of his service in his work, except for the defence of 'military drill as the most useful training of the body'. The Athenian Stranger in *Laws* 706c–707b, praises infantry that hold their positions like hoplites, over the mobile actions of seamen.

⁷⁸ For an outstanding reflection on the consequences for a traditional wisdom literature of great social crisis, see B.L. Mack, *Wisdom and the Hebrew Epic. Ben Sira's Hymn in Praise of the Fathers* (Chicago, 1985), 139–59.

⁷⁹ A.R. Burn, *The World of Hesiod. A Study of the Greek Middle Ages, c. 900–700 B.C.*, 2nd ed. (New York, 1966 [1936]), 189. Spence, *The Cavalry of Classical Greece* (n. 77), 167, remarks that

dying, not only for the honour of his name, but 'for' the city as well. He has waged a battle from the station commanded for him by the god, battling for the 'souls' of the citizens, and in death, will either sleep or go to join the other heroes, with whom he identifies, in the afterlife where the righteous heroes dwell.⁸⁰ Thus, Socrates reviews himself as a kind of soldier, a review he proposes also to conduct with others as if they were 'troops' training for a similar duty, and as if he were reviewing them to see whether they are in their station or not and to put them in 'order.' Socrates' defence here focusses on his role, not only as someone at his own station who will not 'desert' it and who thus meets the standards of this examination, but also as someone who claims that the 'liveable' life consists of continual examination of precisely this kind and no other. It is this kind of examination that Socrates identifies with φιλοσοφείν, philosophizing, and with concentration on or care of the self, and he is calling others to become the same kinds of 'soldiers' who examine or review their own souls.⁸¹

If we are to understand what 'examination' means in the *Apology*, then we must understand, not the conventional words meaning 'examination' in Western languages, nor even primarily the meaning of ἐλεγχος, as a form of questioning designed to be the leading edge, so to speak, of an examination. What I am arguing is that the Socratic notion of 'examination' in the *Apology*, moving between ἐξέτασις and τάξις, draws its significance from the citizens' experience of military service, preparation and war. This notion is implicitly, connotatively, and inextricably linked to its military meaning, to station, service and review of troops. It cannot be accidental that Plato's Socrates associates the examination and the giving of an account of one's life with military review. Socrates means to turn the care for the self into an 'alternative service', to help others to find their 'station' and keep them in constant training so that they are always fit for the tasks for which they are being trained. In that sense, Socrates' proposal, as he makes it in the *Apology*, is a much greater challenge to

'the hoplite and the concept of the ἀγαθος or good man were strongly linked'. One must also consider the influence of the agonistic practices of Greek culture on Socratic forms of argument, a parallel that even some of Plato's characters remark. Note that they originate in aristocratic military training; see M. Weber, 'The city', in id., *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology*, ed. G. Roth and C. Wittich (Berkeley, 1978 [1968]), 1284, 1367–8; also P.W. Gooch, 'Socrates: devious or divine?' *G&R* NS 32 (1985), 32–41. Ober, *Political Dissent* (n. 30), 244, says: 'The historical Socrates had been regarded by many of his fellow citizens as a loudmouth, know-it-all, and potential troublemaker for at least twenty-five years before the trial of 399 B.C. ... he fulfilled his self-appointed mission by subjecting his fellows to the often humiliating ritual of the elenchus.' See the excellent treatment in Blondell, *The Play of Character* (n. 70), 121–5, and references ad loc. Both Clitophon (*Clit.* 410c) and Alcibiades (*Symp.* 216e, 220b) remark on Socrates' competitive style.

⁸⁰ On the 'Islands of the Blest', see Hes. *Op.* 171, Pind. *Ol.* 2.68 ff., and Pl. *Resp.* 363C–E. See also R. Garland, *The Greek Way of Death*, 2nd ed. (Ithaca, 2001 [1985]), ch. 5: 'Life in Hades'. On Homer's portrayal of the afterlife in the *Odyssey*, see C. Sourvinou-Inwood, 'Reading' *Greek Death to the End of the Classical Period* (Oxford, 1995), 70–107. On the theme of the heroic ideal in Plato, see A. Hobbs, *Plato and the Hero. Courage, Manliness and the Impersonal Good* (Cambridge, 2000). For an excellent critique, see the chapter on *Hippias Minor* in Blondell, *The Play of Character* (n. 70), esp. 157–8, 161.

⁸¹ Gulley, *The Philosophy of Socrates* (n. 58), 145, claims, I think mistakenly, that already in the *Apology* 'Socrates presents his method of cross-examination as a means of 'purification' which will effect a moral improvement'. This seems hard to square with the more military meaning of ἐξέτασις. H. North, *Sophrosyne. Self-Knowledge and Self-Restraint in Greek Literature* (Ithaca, 1966), 118, says: 'The result of [Plato's] dialogues is invariably negative, at most a kind of purgation of false ideas (as the *Sophist* suggests [230B]), which leaves the soul ready for the pursuit of knowledge.' Again, could this really be said of the use of ἐξέτασις in the *Apology*?

Athenian practices than were the original charges against him.⁸² Socrates proposes to train an army of seekers after wisdom, an association of enlistees in a mode of living devoted to the care of the soul, and which is kept in fit condition by daily questioning and examination in an agonistic spirit.⁸³ No wonder that the 'recruits' he selects for 'review' wither under his scrutiny. Giving up his task of ἐξέτασις would thus be not only disobedience toward the god, but also dereliction of military duty. No wonder, too, that Socrates takes pains to distinguish himself from the foreign-born sophists.

Those who willingly engage in conversation with Socrates become enrolled in 'Socrates' army', so to speak, taking up their rightful 'station', following their 'duty' by submitting to an 'examination' as if they were recruits on parade being put through their paces. This is an 'alternative duty' to the traditional 'citizenly' one expected of Athenians, yet it is recognizable and even bears a number of similarities to the traditional role. This makes it possible almost to describe Athens as 'two cities', the one that engages in traditional public and private practices, and the other a city within a city, which defends the pursuit of ἀρετή and δίκη, now understood as the true heirs of the warrior ideal of the past. These new duties are undertaken in a spirit of 'piety', in obedience to the moral obligation dictated by the god of the oracle, rather than in conformity with the demands of traditional ritual honour. This, at least, is Socrates' interpretation of the oracle.⁸⁴ Socrates affirms that his form of 'examination' modelled on the patriotic activity of reviewing the troops is, by analogy, just as important as the other kind of military activity undertaken for the campaigns and the well-being of the Athenians. It is the way of putting the care for the soul and the city before all other things. All citizens are potentially part of 'Socrates' army', of which he is a kind of drill instructor, and it is one's life, rather than one's old-style military readiness, that is subject to examination.

Like other sages, called upon for military and political advice, Socrates believes his advice is for the true well-being of the citizens, and thus for Athens, the *polis*, in the truest sense. Its object is not the normal objects of usual political concern – power, territory, wealth, fame – but the soul's well-being and care, for which the citizens must 'arm' themselves ethically, in a way appropriate to the struggle for these other objects.

⁸² At the same time, there is some reason to think that the notion of 'review' of the ἐφηβοί was incorporated into Greek tragedy. J.J. Winkler, 'The ephebes' song: *tragoidia* and *polis*', in id. and F.I. Zeitlin (edd.), *Nothing to Do with Dionysos? Athenian Drama in its Social Context* (Princeton, 1990), 20–62, at 22, argues that the tragic chorus may actually have been 'an esthetically elevated version of close-order drill', that a selection of ἐφηβοί, 'who marched in rectangular rank and file in the orchestra as second-year cadets, performing for the assembled citizenry, also marched and danced in rectangular formation at the City Dionysia, but did so wearing masks and costumes'. One piece of evidence is a red-figure column crater, c. 500–490 B.C., showing six choristers in rank and file formation (Basel, Antikenmuseum, inv. BS 415).

⁸³ For more discussion of this, see Goldman, 'Reexamining the "Examined Life"' (n. 20). Stokes, in *Plato, Apology of Socrates* (n. 22), 145, says: 'The language is military, appropriate to a hoplite battle where it was crucial for no man to break the line by giving way whatever the personal risk ... Such assimilation to the conditions of hoplite warfare of the period retained its rhetorical power through the fourth century – witness Demosthenes' liking for the expression "to place oneself in the ranks" ... and the orator Lycurgus' clearly fraudulent attempt to assimilate his opponent Leocrates' behaviour to leaving the ranks ...'. Cf. R. Leimbach, *Militärische Musterrhetorik. Eine Untersuchung zu den Felhherrenreden des Thukydides* (Stuttgart, 1985).

⁸⁴ Socrates' sanctified activity is found in his interpretation (προφητεία) of the oracle. Vidal Naquet, *The Black Hunter* (n. 69), 257, says: 'The oracle itself is not a command but a particularly solemn form of speech, rooted in ambiguity. It enters into the contentious debate about what decisions or laws should be made.' He cites Heraclitus, fr 93 D–K: 'The master to whom the oracle at Delphi belongs neither reveals nor conceals, he indicates (σημαίνει)'.

His form of preparedness training is inquiring, examining and pointing out, rather than marching and drilling. When he dies, Plato's Socrates will then perhaps go to the afterlife of the guiltless heroes, on whom he has modelled himself. At the same time, his example shows how it is possible to be concerned with justice and the good and still be as political as were the Seven Sages.⁸⁵

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⁸⁵ Socrates repeatedly emphasizes the moral imperative behind his activities, and in this he has again an impressive forebear. Jaeger, *Five Essays* (n. 25), 87–8, remarks that Solon's work reveals him to have undertaken an 'imperious inner mission', one in which he 'takes over the function of prophetic warner' from Hermes, emissary of Zeus. 'Not Zeus, but his own soul "commands" him to teach the Athenians what he knows.' In his 'dynamic didactic ethos', Solon emphasizes 'his "mission" as a prophetic warner so that the citizens, who in their folly are blindly rushing to destruction, may have a clear vision of the outcome of their deeds, and bear the responsibility for their coming ruin.' Yet D. Babut, *La religion des philosophes grecs, de Thalès aux Stoïciens* (Paris, 1974), 67, argues that Socrates breaks the 'essential tie between the god and the city' by saying that he will obey the god over the Athenians. He is implying a direct relation with the god, rather than the mediation through the city that had become normal since the institutionalization of the Olympian cults, and in this move Babut says, the city can find the justification for its condemnation of Socrates on religious grounds. Burnet, *Euthyphro, Apology of Socrates, Crito* (n. 42), 199, ad 28D7, says that the phrase ὑπ' ἀρχοντος – 'by his officer', shows that 'Socrates regards himself as a soldier of God, whose orders he must not disobey'.