

Apologizing for Socrates: Plato and Xenophon on Socrates' Behavior in Court^{*}

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SUMMARY: This paper argues that the accounts of Socrates' behavior in court given by both Plato and Xenophon stem from the need these authors felt to respond, in different ways, to the post-trial debate about Socrates. Plato's aim in the *Apology* was primarily to respond to specific charges of incompetence, arrogance, and failure in court. Central literary and philosophical difficulties in the composition can be explained on this basis, as can characteristic Platonic doctrines elaborated here and in other Socratic dialogues. Xenophon's treatment of Socrates in his *Apology* can be explained by a similar polemical motive. While Plato acknowledges that Socrates failed in conventional terms, and develops an alternative framework for evaluating success and failure, Xenophon makes the more outrageous claim that Socrates was a success in conventional terms.

RECENT YEARS HAVE SEEN A DRAMATIC GROWTH in the study of the philosophy of Socrates. These studies are usually based on the assumption that the "early" works of Plato provide insight into the thought of the historical Socrates.¹ One of the pillars of this theory is Plato's *Apology*: if it provides an accurate portrait of Socrates, then it makes some sense to think of other early dialogues as presenting at least the spirit of what Socrates might have said. Gregory Vlastos put it nicely: "[I]f this is conceded, our problem of sources is solved in principle. For we may then use the *Apology* as a touchstone of the like veracity of the thought and character of Socrates depicted in Plato's other

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¹ Recent books devoted to the theme include: Benson 1992 and 2000, Smith and Woodruff, Brickhouse and Smith 1994, Vlastos 1991 and 1994.

early dialogues.”² On the other hand, if it can be shown that even the *Apology* does not provide an accurate portrait of Socrates, it will be difficult to argue for accuracy in others.

The claim that the *Apology* provides an accurate portrait of the thought of Socrates is usually made on the grounds that it represents more or less what Socrates said in court, and that Socrates spoke openly and honestly about himself in this context.³ It could be defended alternatively on the grounds that Plato used the “courtroom speech” as an opportunity to present his own account of Socrates’ thought, once again aiming at producing an accurate intellectual biography of his teacher and succeeding in this aim. Either way, the argument is riddled with doubtful assumptions.

Those who regard the *Apology* as fiction tend to go to the opposite extreme, seeing the *Apology*, together with the other dialogues, as outlining Plato’s own personal vision of the essence of Socrates’ thought and way of life or that of the idealized philosopher.⁴ Some have gone so far as to claim that we can know almost nothing about the historical Socrates.⁵ The disagreement between these two views seems irresolvable, in large part because we do not know enough

² See Vlastos 1971. In his 1991 book Vlastos held that Plato followed a Thucydidean methodology in composing the speech (49 n. 15) and that, because he was present at the events he describes, he succeeded better than Thucydides in putting this Thucydidean historical methodology into practice (253). But Vlastos offered no arguments to support this interesting idea. He argued further (esp. chh. 2–3) that other dialogues, while not intended as faithful representations of Socrates’ words, are nevertheless true to Socrates’ thought. A more modest version of the thesis is maintained in Kahn 1996, esp. 88–95. For critical reviews of Vlastos’ theories see Kahn 1996 and Nails.

³ This view was made prominent by Burnet, Taylor, and Field (154), and it persists in Guthrie and Brickhouse and Smith 1989. The central argument for the first assumption is that the trial was a public event that could not have been seriously misrepresented. Hackforth had already pointed out that this would hold only if we could show that the Athenian public expected accuracy. Brickhouse and Smith argue (1989: 2–10) that it did. It is also urged that Plato mentions his own presence in order to attest to its accuracy. This of course is only one of many plausible reasons for Plato’s mentioning his presence; see further Brickhouse and Smith 1989: 3 n. 9.

⁴ E.g., Momigliano “Socrates ... was not so much the real Socrates as the potential Socrates ... [a] guide to territories as yet unexplored.” See also Chroust (1945: 42) Plato “in his early dialogues expresses the highest possible view of Socrates’ personality and thought—the maximum potentialities of Socrates.” Kahn, too, argues (1996: 34) that the Socratics wrote fiction, and, in fact, that Aeschines’ lost *Aspasia* was a bolder fiction than the works we have from Plato and Xenophon. Other scholars who endorse the fiction theory include Rutherford (30) and West.

⁵ See Joel, Chroust 1945 and 1957, Gigon, Montuori 1981 and 1988. But none of them said that we can know nothing at all.

about the historical circumstances in which the dialogues were produced. But we do know something. As I will try to show, this information, little though it may be, is of great value in assessing the character of the work, and even enables us to draw some conclusions about the historical Socrates.⁶

Progress can be made if we can identify accurately the rhetorical goals of the work. If it aims merely at defending the Socratic way of life or the life of philosophy, we are no closer to resolving the question of the historical character of the work. It is perfectly conceivable that Socrates himself would have used his courtroom speech to defend his way of life, or even to defend the life of philosophy in general. Only if the apologetic aims of the *Apology* are incompatible with a Socratic origin will we have confirmation of the “fiction” theory. I will try to show that the rhetorical aims of the work can be identified with the help of remarks made by Xenophon in his *Apology*. It turns out that Plato was primarily addressing the question of how Socrates behaved in court and defending him against post-trial charges of arrogance, foolishness, and failure, issues that the historical Socrates never had to grapple with.

Even if, however, the *Apology* does not provide anything like a window on Socrates’ actual speech, or on his thoughts about the philosophical life, this does not mean that we can learn from it nothing at all about the historical Socrates. At the very least, we can learn something about his behavior in court, not of course by accepting Plato’s account as veracious, but rather by using it as further evidence of criticisms of Socrates attested elsewhere. It will become clear that Socrates’ behavior in court was at odds with the portrait Plato aims to present both here and throughout his writings. Rather than confirming the historical veracity of the portrait of Socrates in “early” Plato, a close look at the *Apology* raises serious doubts about it.

We can also learn something from the *Apology* about the genesis of Plato’s thought. It would be futile to deny that there are connections between the *Apology* and many of the ideas in Plato’s other dialogues, or to deny that a similar origin should be postulated for similar ideas. But once we acknowledge that the *Apology* is essentially an apologetic work, addressing specific post-trial issues, we are compelled to see a similar intention in the other dialogues that present a similar portrait. This suggests that many of Plato’s most characteristic philosophic ideas are intimately connected with the effort to defend Socrates’ behavior, that Plato’s thought, especially in its so-called “Socratic” period, was born not in the time he may (or may not⁷) have spent

⁶ See de Strycker and Slings 16–21.

⁷ We have no reliable independent evidence of Plato’s contact with Socrates. Xenophon mentions Plato but once (*Memorabilia* 3.6.1) and this reference may have been derived from a reading of Plato’s works rather than personal acquaintance with him. While

with Socrates, but in the effort to defend his memory after the humiliating defeat in court. This does not mean that Plato's thought has no philosophic interest; some of the best philosophy was born in personal or political conflict. But it does mean that Plato's philosophy was his own doing.

Finally, the approach that I will develop below offers new solutions or explanations for some of the central literary and philosophical tensions and conundrums in the interpretation of the *Apology*.

I. THE POST-TRIAL CONTROVERSY

I will not review in detail the merits and demerits of the argument that the *Apology* is an accurate record of Socrates' speech, since this has been discussed recently by de Strycker and Slings.⁸ Their arguments show clearly that there are no good *a priori* grounds for the assumption that the *Apology* represents more or less what Socrates actually said in court. However there is a difference between refuting the assumption of historicity and demonstrating that the work is fiction. De Strycker and Slings conclude their discussion of the historicity issue by saying (8) that,

there is, on the one hand, no single sentence in the Platonic *Apology* that Socrates could not have actually pronounced, and on the other, ... the published work contains no passage so specifically un-Platonic that it cannot be Plato's work.

We are left in the dark. But this conclusion is overly pessimistic. In fact, the work *is* a fiction: there are many sentences that Socrates would almost certainly not have pronounced. Virtually everything in it is written with at least one eye on the post-trial controversy, of which Socrates was completely ignorant during his speech in court.

Few would doubt the existence of a public debate concerning Socrates in Athens in the 390s or later. Even those who prefer to see Socratic literature as purely philosophical and literary in nature would have to admit that Socrates'

Xenophon portrays himself as having had conversations with Socrates (*Mem.* 1.3.8–13, *An.* 3.1.4–7), neither he nor Plato portrays Plato as ever having conversed with him. In the dialogues and letters Plato creates the impression that Socrates was a family friend.

⁸ 1–8. These authors adopt Riddell's argument (xx) that the artistic structure of the *Apology* is evidence of its Platonic origin. They also follow Riddell (xxvi) in arguing that the very wide divergence between Plato's and Xenophon's *Apologies* argues against the assumption of historical accuracy for either one of them. New is the argument that claims for historicity within the text can be safely dismissed since stronger claims for historicity are made in the *Phaedo*, which is nevertheless not generally regarded as historical (despite Burnet). See further Stokes 1992. Important arguments against the historicity of the *Apology* have also been put forth by Morrison and Prior.

death played an important role in inspiring it. References to the trial and execution of Socrates abound in the Socratic writings of Plato and Xenophon, and Xenophon also manages to mention the subject, at least by implication, in his major non-Socratic writings: his *Cyropaedia* (3.1.38–40), his *Anabasis* (3.1.4–7), and even his *Hellenica* (1.7.15). In these instances, we note, Xenophon is not using the trial to illuminate some universal problem, but is contributing to the debate about the trial itself.

This debate extended beyond the writings of Plato and Xenophon. We know very little about the speech that Lysias is reported to have published,⁹ or about the *Socrates* of Theodectes,¹⁰ or about the much later *Apology* of Demetrius of Phaleron,¹¹ or other similar compositions. But we do know that in a pamphlet published after the rebuilding of the long walls by Conon about 394/3 Polycrates attacked Socrates, blaming him in part for the behavior of Alcibiades.¹² No one has argued that this pamphlet was an attack on a literary rather than an historical Socrates. But if Socrates' enemies were attacking him after his death, is it reasonable to imagine that his friends did not defend him? H. D. Rankin accepts Diogenes Laertius' statement that Socrates' friend Antisthenes was involved personally, and not merely through his writings, in the post-trial controversy.¹³ Many scholars would agree that Plato's *Gorgias*, at least, was a reply to Polycrates' accusations.¹⁴ And in Xenophon's writings we find explicit references to the post-trial controversy (*Ap.* 1, *Mem.* 1.2). If an atmosphere of controversy did exist, almost anything published about Socrates would unavoidably bear some relation to the debates about him. Certainly this is true of the *Apologies* of Xenophon and Plato.

The Evidence of Xenophon

Of all the works written about Socrates' trial, only three—Plato's *Apology*, Xenophon's *Apology*, and Xenophon's *Memorabilia*—have survived. Xenophon's writings are particularly important, since he offers comments that shed light on the nature of the public debate that surrounded this trial. Unlike Plato, Xenophon makes use of a narrator, which enables him to describe

⁹ Frr. 220–24 (Baiter 204). See D. L. 2.40 and Cic. *de Orat.* 1.54.

¹⁰ See Arist. *Rh.* 2.23.13.

¹¹ Frr. 91–98 in Wehrli. See also Fortenbaugh and Schutrumpf frr. 102–9, pp. 188–97.

¹² See D. L. 2.39 and Isocrates' reference to Polycrates' attack at *Busiris* 4–5. Elements of Polycrates' pamphlet may be preserved in Libanius' late (4th century A.D.) *Apology of Socrates*. See Chroust 1957 for a speculative reconstruction of the lost work.

¹³ See D. L. 6.9–10 and Rankin 6–7.

¹⁴ See, e.g., Chroust 1945: 42. Dodds 28–29 has reservations.

the public atmosphere at the time he was writing. One cannot of course presume that a statement made by Xenophon is necessarily true, and Michael Stokes has argued that even statements made by Xenophon's narrator might be part of a fiction.¹⁵ But while Xenophon may sometimes make authorial statements that are false (such as his claim to have been present at the conversations he records in his *Symposium*, when by most calculations he would have been only a few years old),¹⁶ he seems to avoid doing so in matters of public knowledge. It is presumably for this reason that he does not pretend to have been present at the trial of Socrates, but offers Hermogenes as the source for all his information (X. *Ap.* 2): enough people knew that he was not there that it would have been impossible to pretend otherwise. And the same may be said about his report of public attitudes at the time of writing: it would be pointless and self-defeating to make implausible statements about contemporary criticisms of Socrates and absurd to devote his work to responding to such non-existent criticisms.

There is good reason, then, to accept statements made by Xenophon's narrator on points of public knowledge. But one can be much more confident if one can find outside confirmation. Plato's *Apology* provides such confirmation, since it can be shown that virtually every statement in it bears a direct relationship to the criticisms that Xenophon's narrator claims were being made after the trial.¹⁷ This is not a circular argument: I take the truth of Xenophon's words as an hypothesis, which I test by comparing external evidence, and especially by attempting to see if Plato's *Apology* makes sense as a response to the kinds of attacks Xenophon claims were being made on Socrates' reputation.

According to Xenophon, others had written about Socrates' trial, all of them reporting that Socrates spoke proudly or arrogantly, from which, he says, it is safe to conclude that he really did so. He adds that the arrogance of which they speak seems extremely foolish, because no one makes it clear that Socrates thought death preferable to life (X. *Ap.* 1).¹⁸ Μεγαλληγορία, of which Socrates

¹⁵ Stokes (1997: 5 n. 10) argues that "it might *suit Xenophon's purpose* to pretend to accept as true, whether or not he believed them true, the portraits of Socrates' boastfulness" (italics original). Stokes does not deny that such portraits existed.

¹⁶ There is however no certainty about the date of Xenophon's birth, and so no way of knowing that this statement is in fact a false one; see Dillery 3–4.

¹⁷ Plato's evidence has independent value, since no one would claim that Plato relied exclusively on Xenophon's *Apology* in constructing his own.

¹⁸ Some scholars are certain that Xenophon did not read Plato's *Apology*, since he says that no one he read made it clear that Socrates wanted to die, which, according to them, Plato does do (see Hansen 32). Cooper, on the other hand, argues that Xenophon's point is that others did not make it clear that even before the trial Socrates had decided to die (11 n. 16).

was accused, is sometimes translated “lofty-speaking” rather than “arrogant speech,” but in this context arrogance is clearly the issue. There is no reason why lofty-speaking in itself should seem foolish, or should be the cause of Socrates’ death, unless it seemed an expression of arrogance. And in the body of his speech, as Xenophon reports it, Socrates manifestly speaks with outrageous arrogance on several occasions.

Xenophon’s short statement deserves close attention. Clearly the question at issue in his mind while he was writing his *Apology* was Socrates’ poor showing in court, which made him look foolish, not his guilt or innocence, which are discussed in the *Memorabilia*. Socrates’ failure was attributed to his incompetent defense speech, and in particular to the gratuitous and offensive arrogance he displayed on that occasion. Making fatally foolish mistakes like this would be just as damaging to one’s reputation as accusations of injustice, since failure in the Greek *polis* of the fourth century, as today, was perhaps the most powerful source of humiliation.¹⁹ We might even infer that it was widely thought that Socrates was innocent of the charges, for no one blames a guilty man for losing his case by making a poor presentation. This would help explain the lack of attention that both Plato and Xenophon pay to the question of Socrates’ guilt in their *Apologies*, and the rather incredulous attitude towards it that Xenophon exhibits when he does address it in his *Memorabilia* (1.1–2). It would also help explain the fact that both Xenophon and Plato seem to be concerned above all with refuting charges of failure and demonstrating that Socrates led a supremely happy, even enviable, life, and did not suffer in death.

On at least one point Xenophon’s narrator seems believable, the claim that Socrates spoke arrogantly. As far as I am aware, there is no evidence that contradicts this claim, and no good reason for an historian to deny its veracity.²⁰ On the contrary, we find confirmation of it in every report we have in our hands today. At the very least, Socrates was *thought* to have spoken arrogantly at his trial, and such perceptions are worth taking seriously. From this very small beginning we can already derive one valuable principle: we should be willing to grant *prima facie* plausibility to expressions of arrogance that are recorded for us in Plato’s *Apology*.

Xenophon responds to the criticisms by acknowledging the facts and disputing their interpretation: he acknowledges that Socrates spoke arrogantly and asserts that this, not any skill or justice in the arguments of the prosecu-

¹⁹ See Adkins 259–61.

²⁰ Although Brickhouse and Smith do deny Socratic arrogance (for example at 1989: 44), they do not make historical arguments, but rather rely on a carefully reconstructed account of the philosophical principles that in their view must have motivated Socrates.

tors, led to his conviction.²¹ He recognizes that Socrates' performance was not effective, explaining that Socrates did not spend a moment to prepare his defense speech (X. *Ap.* 2–5); Plato seems to imply something similar (17b–c). But he denies what must be in his mind the most offensive criticism, that Socrates failed in his objective: in Xenophon's view, death was Socrates' goal, and it was really the best thing for him, so the outcome was actually a success. For this very reason, the attack on Socrates as being incompetent in court is also nullified: Socrates wanted to "fail." His success in failing is all the more impressive when one reflects that the charges against him were not convincing.²²

It is worth noting that once he has explained Socrates' arrogance as aiming at his own conviction, Xenophon does not feel any further need to apologize for this arrogance: in itself arrogance is not a bad thing, and it may even be a good one. It only seems foolish if it leads to one's downfall and destruction. Once Xenophon points out that Socrates had no downfall, he has no motive to tone down the arrogance. As we will see, Plato, too, although toning down the arrogance, nevertheless seems to take delight in showing just how high an opinion of himself Socrates expressed throughout the trial.

It is important to bear in mind that the criticisms Xenophon is addressing here are completely different from any charges Socrates faced or could have faced in court. Socrates was not charged with mishandling his defense, with speaking arrogantly, or with suffering a miserable fate. He would therefore have been unlikely to address these subjects in his actual defense speech. To the extent that Xenophon's or Plato's Socrates does so he is speaking

²¹ A variation on this is that it was merely his upright unwillingness to beg in court that led to his conviction (*Mem.* 4.4.4), an explanation that, as we will see, is also found in Plato. Xenophon has another explanation as well: Socrates was convicted by parents who were jealous of the fact that their children thought Socrates a better person than they. His Meletus indicates this in X. *Ap.* 20, and Xenophon expands on it in *Mem.* 1.2.51–55. See also the role of envy in the story of Palamedes, *Memorabilia* 4.2.33. Even more significantly, the jealousy reappears in the *Cyropaedia*, in connection with another philosopher whose story is clearly modeled on that of Socrates (3.1.38–40). See also Plato's *Ap.* 28a and *Euthphr.* 3c–d, where contemporary jealousy is mentioned by Euthyphro and conspicuously not affirmed by Socrates.

²² In his *Symposium* Xenophon is at pains to point out that Socrates could have succeeded had he wanted to. There he makes Socrates a master of the art of self-presentation, portraying him as claiming expertise in the art of "pimping" (μαστροπεία), which he explains as the art of teaching self-presentation in relation to other individuals, and especially in relation to the city: see 3.10, 4.56–64, 5.1, 8.5, 8.42. As far as the actual charges are concerned, we do not know of any law against "corrupting the youth," and charges of impiety were usually brought only against those who had committed an act of sacrilege, which no one seems to have ascribed to Socrates.

anachronistically. These are “charges” that only arose as a reaction to the fact that Socrates lost in court and was executed. There was undoubtedly something ridiculous in the spectacle of the great master of persuasion failing on the one occasion when he really needed to persuade. Since the competitive values of fourth century Athens put a great premium on success, we should not be surprised if Socrates’ friends were even more shaken by the charge that he was a miserable failure than they were by the legal charges of heresy and corrupting the youth.

The Evidence of Plato

Does Plato address these criticisms in the *Apology*? We do not know when either Xenophon or Plato wrote his *Apology*, so it is impossible to know whether or not the works are contemporaneous.²³ We cannot use dates to argue that Plato in his *Apology* ought or ought not to be addressing the same issues that Xenophon addresses. But if we examine the work itself, it becomes clear that he does do so,²⁴ and this in turn may, or may not, imply that the works were written at more or less the same time: it is certainly conceivable that public attitudes did not change quickly, and that Plato and Xenophon addressed the same issues at different times.

As I will try to show, a concern with these criticisms is evident both in the basic structure of the *Apology* and in its systematic and well thought out response to them. Socrates himself cannot have known about, much less addressed, the post-trial “charges” while the trial was still in session.²⁵ Being less familiar than contemporary readers with the post-trial controversy, we do not always notice the anachronism. To the extent that this feature was obvious to the average fourth-century reader, the likelihood that we are dealing with fiction is increased. But even obvious anachronism would not have disfigured the speech for the contemporary reader, since it was designed to be received as a work of fiction, openly addressing post-trial concerns.

²³ Xenophon’s *Apology* appears to have been written a long time after the trial: it refers to Anytus, one of the prosecutors, as already dead (31). It is not inconceivable, however, that Xenophon added the reference to the death of Anytus after the rest of the *Apology* was written and published.

²⁴ He addresses some other charges as well, such as the charge that if Socrates were a good citizen he would have participated in public life (31c). See also X. *Mem.* 1.6.15, where Xenophon argues that Socrates did participate in politics (in a sense), that he was responsible for the bad behavior of some of his associates (33b), and that he said things in private that contradicted his public statements (33b).

²⁵ See also Stokes 1997: 98 on the dramatic irony in Socrates’ first speech.

It is clear from his other writings that Plato was aware of the great embarrassment that had been caused by the apparently incompetent and unmanly manner in which Socrates defended himself in court. In the *Crito*, Crito says (45d–e, my italics),

I am ashamed for you and for us, your friends, lest it seem that this whole episode concerning you happened because of some unmanliness on our part: the fact that the issue came to trial when it didn't have to, *the very conduct of the trial itself, as it happened*, and finally this, the most humiliating part, that we seem to have run away through some weakness and unmanliness on our part, since we did not save you—neither did you save yourself—which would have been possible if we were useful at all.²⁶

It can be argued that the *Crito* is less a philosophical work than an attempt to come to terms with the humiliation that Socrates' friends suffered as a result of the execution, arguing, among other things, that accepting the court's decision was the only honorable thing to do, and that it was also in Socrates' best interest.

Plato returns to this issue again and again,²⁷ most directly in the *Gorgias* (486a–b):

[Callicles:] If anyone should seize you or anyone like you and drag you off to prison, claiming you are guilty when you are not, you realize that you would not know what to do, but would wander open-mouthed without a word to say, and when you came before the court, even with an utterly worthless and wicked accuser, you would be put to death, if he chose to demand the death penalty.

This wildly anachronistic image of the trial and execution of the innocent but helpless Socrates shows Plato's continuing concern with the charge of failure arising from the trial and execution. It also shows how unconcerned he was to avoid anachronism. Similar images of impotence recur in the *Republic*: in the image of the ship's pilot (488a–89b), and of the philosopher who cannot make out the shadows on the wall (516e–17a). Concern with this issue may help explain Plato's efforts to show that the achievement of conventional political success is irrelevant to true human happiness, efforts that continue as late as the *Laws*.²⁸ This line of thought is traceable to the sorry spectacle of Socrates baffled in court by a few worthless fools.

²⁶ In this paper quotations from the *Apology* are from Stokes 1997; other translations are my own.

²⁷ See also *Phd.* 63b, 69e; *Euthphr.* 15e–16a.

²⁸ See for example 731c–32b, or 742e–43c where Plato argues that no rich man can be good.

Contemporary Polemic in the Guise of Historical Fiction

The chief evidence for this view of the *Apology* is found in the detailed interpretation of the text that I present below. This interpretation aims to be simple and consistent, and to explain virtually the entire text and some of its most difficult conundrums in accordance with a single historically plausible hypothesis. Before setting forth this evidence, however, I need to explain in greater detail what I mean by the claim that the *Apology* is an essentially polemical work.

Unlike Xenophon, who adopted a straightforward form of polemic, directly naming the issues he addresses in the opening chapters of the *Memorabilia*,²⁹ Plato wrote polemic in the guise of historical fiction. While this means incorporating a degree of historical verisimilitude, that concern is balanced by the need to address a contemporary debate. To a certain degree the author *wants* his audience to know that he is addressing a contemporary debate, and therefore he may try to make it obvious that what he writes is not what really happened, but a polemical account of it.

Plato offers us a model of contemporary polemic disguised as historical fiction in his *Symposium*. There, as part of his response to the previous speeches on love, Socrates recounts a conversation between himself and Diotima that took place years earlier. Diotima's ancient conversation concerned precisely the topic of conversation at the symposium in which Socrates was currently participating, and Diotima even managed to refer almost explicitly to the speech Aristophanes was destined to make years later at that occasion (*Smp.* 205e; cf. 191d–92a). When Aristophanes tries to take issue with Socrates on this point, however, he does not object to the “anachronism” in the portrait, but, like any normal person, simply assumes that the conversation with Diotima was a literary pretense, and that Socrates is the true author of her words (212c). The speech of Diotima, as used by Socrates, is not really historical fiction at all, but contemporary polemic in the (thin) guise of historical fiction. Similarly, the *Apology* has the air of a deliberately anachronistic speech. Socrates seems to know the whole time that he will be convicted and executed,³⁰ and he seems constantly to be apologizing for and explaining his courtroom behavior.

²⁹ In addition to the polemical aim, there are also of course philosophical and biographical aims. See, e.g., Momigliano (59) on the *Apologies* of Xenophon and Plato, “They are biographical sketches disguised as autobiographical sketches.”

³⁰ Brickhouse and Smith note this (1989: viii), but do not acknowledge that it is evidence of anachronism.

If the polemical motive of the work offers Plato much room to maneuver, however, the literary form creates serious restrictions on his freedom. Even Diotima could not, for example, name Aristophanes openly, although the reference to him is patently obvious to anyone who has heard his speech.³¹ Plato too can only have Socrates say things that Socrates or another defendant could plausibly have said in court, and this means that he cannot address the post-trial charges or their authors directly.³² He can alter, modify, tone down, explain, and invent with great freedom, even stretching the fiction almost to the breaking point. But he cannot deny the basic facts of the historical event: that Socrates was on trial, that the trial concerned heresy and corrupting the youth, that he was convicted, that he spoke arrogantly, and so on. Without a basic acknowledgment of the facts, his work will have no serious relationship to the subject of the contemporary debate, and hence little or no effect on that debate.

These restrictions on Plato's license have important implications. As we will see, the *Apology* contains contradictory elements. Most prominently, Socrates frequently displays a strange combination of arrogance and humility. This arises from the predicament Plato finds himself in: Socrates really did speak arrogantly, and Plato cannot plausibly deny this *in toto*. All he can do is reproduce the arrogant incidents while modifying, explaining, and justifying them. Most likely, he did not even want to eliminate the arrogance entirely. Instead, he acknowledges the arrogance while toning it down, and this leads to some awkward passages and tensions.³³ Scenes that demonstrate the arrogance and incompetence about which people complained, such as the story of the Oracle, the failure to beg or bring his family to court, and the proposal of an unusual punishment, are probably attributable to the historical Socrates, even if Plato has distorted them for his own purposes.

³¹ With regard to Socrates' speeches in the *Apology*, we are in the unfortunate position of not having seen any of the pamphlets published against him. A contemporary reader may well have perceived contemporary references that we cannot perceive today.

³² As Stokes says (1992: 98 n. 10), "even minimal realism would preclude Pl[ato]'s writing as if Soc[rates] or anyone in court knew the results of the case (though Pl[ato] nearly destroys the illusion at 28a); but, writing after the event, Pl[ato] writes accordingly in a way which without explicitly breaking the illusion or descending to the cheaply obvious is interpretable *both as a trial speech and as an emotionally charged foreshadowing of the result*. Pl[ato] and his readers all know the end" (my italics).

³³ While, according to Xenophon's testimony, ancient critics were unanimous about Socratic arrogance, this is not the case for modern critics of Plato's *Apology*. Most acknowledge the arrogance, but Brickhouse and Smith deny it, an interpretation that would be unimaginable were it not for the humility in Plato's portrait of Socrates.

It might seem self-defeating or counter-productive to use an historical fiction as a vehicle for addressing a contemporary debate about an historical event. By admitting that the scenario he presents is a false one, does not the author relinquish any hope of influencing people's attitudes about the historical event in question? Fiction seems to negate the very purpose that a polemical tract serves, namely, to convince. For this reason, it is understandable that many scholars who view the *Apology* as fictitious see it as an expression of Plato's own ideas rather than as a narrow polemic.

In fact, however, even avowedly fictional portrayals of historical events can be used in order to influence and shape public attitudes concerning those events. Modern docu-dramas can have a powerful effect on public perceptions, even when they are clearly labeled as fiction. Some of the openly fictitious works about Socrates were undeniably polemical. While it is perhaps possible (though wrong) to imagine that Plato's Socrates, or even Xenophon's,³⁴ is a purely fictional or literary character, it is more difficult to imagine what purely literary purpose could have been served by the post-mortem attack on Socrates by Polycrates. And yet, as far as we can judge, it did not aim at historical verisimilitude either.³⁵ Plato does not expect the reader really to believe that this is the speech that Socrates spoke in court. But he does expect to affect the reader's attitude towards Socrates and towards his behavior in court.

A final point about the Socratic controversy: it may seem difficult to imagine that a wide audience was interested in a debate about a man who, however interesting he may have been at one time, was now dead. One can imagine finding one work, perhaps, devoted to defending his memory, but one

³⁴ On the other hand, Xenophon's lack of concern with artistic structure or purpose in the *Memorabilia* seems to me to argue somewhat against its fictitiousness. See however Gray for an effort to uncover some artistic structure.

³⁵ Favorinus already showed that Polycrates' pamphlet contained an anachronistic reference to the rebuilding of the walls of Athens in 393 (D. L. 2.39). Most scholars believe that the pamphlet diverged widely from what was said at the trial, and therefore argue that sections of the *Memorabilia* are aimed at refuting Polycrates as opposed to the actual prosecutors. Socrates' connection with Alcibiades, and his use of Homer to denigrate the *demos* are both ascribed to Polycrates (D. L. 2.39; *Σ*Aristides *For the Four* 133.16, Dindorf 3: 480) and found in Xenophon's *Memorabilia* (1.2.12, 58) but not in his *Apology* or in Plato's. This argument also finds support in Isocrates' comment that Polycrates invented the connection between Socrates and Alcibiades (*Busiris* 4–5). Hansen, however, argues (11–15) that the two *Apologies* only contain Socrates' speech, which concentrated on Meletus' accusations and ignored the political accusations brought by Anytus. In his view, Polycrates and Xenophon based themselves on the actual speech of Anytus.

would not expect a large number of works devoted to such a theme. And yet, the theme abounds in the compositions of both Xenophon and Plato. Aside from this, it seems in bad taste, and also somewhat pointless, for Polycrates to have attacked Socrates when he was already in the grave, although it is clear that he did so. One suspects that there is something more to the whole controversy than just the post-mortem reputation of one Socrates.

Socrates' reputation must have had tangible consequence for his survivors.³⁶ In the tightly knit world of fourth-century Athens, a court-ordered execution was not merely a tragedy, it was a public statement. By killing Socrates, the city of Athens insulted not only the man himself, but also his family, friends, and followers. While there was little practical reason to malign the deceased Socrates, the followers he left behind would have constituted a group with some political influence. Polycrates' pamphlet is inconceivable otherwise. Any group of devoted friends was a political force in the ancient city (see for example Pl. *Smp.* 182c).³⁷ If Polycrates' attack was aimed in part at Socrates' survivors, then Plato's response was a defense not only of his teacher, but also of himself and of the other friends of Socrates who remained loyal to his memory, and of their cohesiveness as a group. But Plato defended these survivors, just as Polycrates attacked them, by referring to their former leader. This response transformed Socrates into an emblem for all those who continued to identify with him. One imagines that the success of Plato's writings would have made him a legitimate heir to what will now have seemed to be a Socratic "movement."

II. FORMAL ARGUMENTS

Evidence for the account I have given above is the analysis of the *Apology* I present below, which will show how virtually the entire composition addresses the post-trial controversy implicitly or explicitly.

That this goal informs the basic plan and structure of the work is clear from the outline of the three speeches given in the Appendix. The basic structure of a work is of course an important clue to the thoughts and intentions of the author. The outline also shows how little time Plato spends addressing the original charges against Socrates (24c4–28a2; Socrates apologizes for this at 28a). Even when he does do so, his Socrates claims that he is interested primarily in discrediting Meletus; his arguments bear this out.³⁸ The fact that

³⁶ That it did is made clear in the *Crito* passage cited above.

³⁷ As is well known, the term ἑταῖροι could be used equally of members of a school or of members of a political party. See Burnet *ad* 21a1.

³⁸ Contrast Libanius' *Apology of Socrates* and Xenophon's account in the *Memorabilia*, which really try to show that Socrates was innocent. De Strycker and Slings (106–7) follow

Socrates does not address the current charges seriously does not in itself prove that the speech is not an accurate reflection of Socrates' actual speech. For all we know, Socrates was perfectly capable of behaving in just this way. But it does argue against the idea that the speech represents Plato's fictional attempt to answer the original charges in his own way.

The outline also shows how almost everything in the *Apology* contributes to a systematic effort to combat the post-trial criticisms listed by Xenophon. Once we have accounted for the apologetic elements there is almost nothing left to explain. The first speech begins and ends with Socrates directly addressing the twin charges of mishandling the court appearance and displaying excessive arrogance. The body of the speech falls naturally into three parts: the older charges, the present charges, and the post-trial charges. Socrates explicitly concludes his reply to the charges at 28a–b, and from there he turns immediately to the post-trial charges, which he addresses in an almost undisguised manner for the remainder. Even the earlier parts of the speech contribute importantly to answering the post-trial charges of misbehavior in court: the account of the older charges and the Oracle help explain why Socrates was convicted, without blaming him for his courtroom antics and without attributing any success to his accusers. The interview with Meletus discredits the courtroom behavior of Socrates' opponents, just as Socrates' post-trial critics had criticized his behavior in court. In many details, the speech aims to accuse Socrates' enemies in court of failing in exactly the ways that critics accused Socrates himself of failing.

To address post-trial charges directly, however, is impossible within the confines of a defense speech without openly breaking the fiction. For this reason, Plato takes the extraordinary step of inventing a third speech, one that Socrates delivers to his judges after the conviction and sentencing, and while the jurors would be trying to collect their fees (*Ath. Pol.* 69; see *Ap.* 39e). The third speech is unique in Greek oratory, and many scholars have denied that Socrates could really have made it.³⁹ But they have not seen why Plato was

Burnet (*ad* 24c9) in concluding that this section does not seriously address the charges (see, e.g., 106), but they believe that Socrates answers the charges later. They argue that his discussion of his commitment to his philosophical mission is designed to show his piety, and that his explanation of his non-participation in public life is designed to show that he did not corrupt the young. But Socrates himself claims to have finished with the charges at 28a.

³⁹ See Wilamowitz (124) and de Strycker and Slings (201–4). Stokes (1997: 179) remains skeptical. Burnet thinks the third speech possible (161–62). Brickhouse and Smith argue (1989: 162) that Socrates made the speech, and conclude (235), following Burnet,

compelled to take this step. Unlike Xenophon, Plato makes no use of a narrator in reporting Socrates' trial and therefore lacks any simple mechanism by which to address questions that arose as a result of the conviction.⁴⁰ The third speech helps solve this problem, since here, after the sentence has been given, Socrates is free to address directly the charge that his death was a shameful defeat. This is precisely what he does.

Virtually everything Socrates says has some implication for the post-trial issues that Xenophon mentioned. Plato often gets involved in contradictions that can be attributed to his enthusiastic desire to absolve Socrates from blame in every conceivable way. In the remainder of this paper, I will try to show the depth of Plato's concern with the post-trial charges by taking them up one by one and showing how Plato deals with them. As will be observed, one of the prominent tactics Plato adopts is to charge Socrates' opponents with behavior similar to the kind of behavior that they charged Socrates with exhibiting. Plato seems to have known that the best defense is a powerful offense.

III. HOW PLATO ANSWERS THE POST-TRIAL CHARGES

A. Incompetence in Court

Plato addresses the incompetence issue directly only in the third speech, for only here can his Socrates speak as one who has already failed in court. He explains (38d–e):

You may think, Athenians, that I have been caught through a shortage of arguments of a kind to have convinced you, if I had thought it right at the cost of doing and saying just anything to escape with an acquittal.⁴¹ Far from it. On the contrary, I have been convicted for a shortage not of arguments but of brazenness and shamelessness and the willingness to tell you the sort of thing you

that, "At least this much is true: the idea that Socrates would have the opportunity to address the jury one last time did not strike contemporary Athenians as absurdly impossible." But even this much is not necessarily true: the argument only works if we assume, unjustifiably, that the *Apology* was not to be read as fiction. Hansen, too, accepts the historicity of the speech (18), without, however, explaining Socrates' unusual step here.

⁴⁰ Xenophon, too, has a third speech, but it serves no essential function in his hands: he has a narrator who can and does express his own reaction to the trial and sentencing, and he even allows Socrates to speak of his death before the trial begins (X. *Ap.* 5–9). Some of the things his Socrates says in the third speech in the *Apology* reappear in the *Memorabilia*, prior to sentencing (compare X. *Ap.* 24–26 with *Mem.* 4.8.9–10). If the third speech was invented, it would seem that Plato is the inventor, and hence that Xenophon relied on Plato in composing his *Apology*. On this see Stokes' comments (1997: 7, 1992: 78).

⁴¹ Here, as elsewhere in the *Apology* (e.g., 20c), Socrates simply assumes that no one really thinks that he is guilty. This may reflect the post-trial attitude.

would most like to hear: laments from me, and grief, and many other actions and words unworthy of me But ... I do not now repent of the way I defended myself.

This is a direct response to the post-trial charge that Socrates brought about his own destruction through his incompetence in court. Here Plato offers his broadest explanation: Socrates could have won a victory by behaving differently in court, it is true, but it would not have been better speaking but rather disgraceful behavior that would have saved him. Judicial success would have been possible only if he acted improperly.

1. *Introductory Apology.* Plato's concern with this issue is apparent from the beginning of the *Apology* where Socrates apologizes for his manner of speaking. He denies that he is "clever" at speaking as his opponents charged (17a–b), thus turning any rhetorical weakness the historical Socrates may have displayed into a virtue. He says that he has not prepared a fancy speech but will speak at random using whatever phrases pop into his head (17c). He explains that it would not be appropriate at his age to come to court like a boy, *πλάττοντι λόγους* (17c). He points out that speaking ability is not as important as speaking the truth, which is what he will do (17b; see also 18a). He asks for forgiveness for speaking in his own peculiar style, as he does in the marketplace, and for indulgence on the grounds that he has never been to court before and hence is like a stranger (17c–18a).

At first sight this is a somewhat conventional attempt to win the sympathy of the audience.⁴² But we cannot dismiss it so easily, because, as we have seen, Socrates did speak in an unusual and offensive manner. We also have evidence that Socrates did not prepare a defense speech: Xenophon reports that he did not spend a minute on it, and was chastised for this by Hermogenes (X. *Ap.* 2–5). This fact may underlie the report that he rejected a speech offered to him by Lysias.⁴³ In this context, Socrates' opening words take on a different complexion: they constitute a response to the charges of arrogance and incompetence that were raised against Socrates, and an apology or at least an explanation for his behavior.

Did the historical Socrates really make an apologetic disavowal of rhetorical ability on these lines?⁴⁴ Xenophon does not mention any, and the entire section (17a–18a) conflicts with the image of incompetence and arrogance attested to by both Xenophon and Plato. But in the post-trial atmosphere, there

⁴² On the claim to truth as opposed to fancy speaking see, e.g., Antiphon 5.2–7, Lys. 17.1, 19.1–6. See also Riddell xxi and Stokes 1997: 97.

⁴³ D. L. 2.40–41.

⁴⁴ See Riddell's arguments (xx) against a Socratic origin for this section. Contrast Burnet 67 and Hackforth 55–57.

was good reason for Plato to introduce this apology. Unable to deny that Socrates spoke poorly, he can apologize for and explain this fact, while giving him a much more polished speech than he actually made.⁴⁵

But in fact Socrates' words here are not altogether conventional: no extant speech that I have seen claims that the speaker did not spend time to prepare a proper speech, that he will speak at random (εἰκῇ),⁴⁶ or that he will adopt his own unique style. So Plato is not simply repeating rhetorical *topoi*, although he draws on them. These unique features call attention to the fact that what Socrates said was genuinely different in manner from what the court was used to hearing, which is something Plato would have to acknowledge and explain if Socrates' defense speech was really as bad as everyone thought it was.

But Plato does not merely apologize for Socrates' poor performance. By adopting the well-known *topos* that truth-telling is better than cleverness in speaking, he tries to show that Socrates' very failure in court was a mark of his virtue. Far from speaking out of disrespect, Socrates' plain-speaking was really a form of respect and right conduct. And he goes one step further than what we find in other extant speeches when he claims (in a manner typical of the Platonic Socrates) that he who speaks the truth, even in poor style, deserves to be called "clever at speaking" in the truest sense.⁴⁷ So while defending Socrates as a plain-speaker rather than a master of rhetoric, Plato also manages to retain for him the title of master of rhetoric, in its new, purified sense.

Finally, it has often been noted that after claiming to be speaking at random, Plato's Socrates actually offers a well-organized speech with few rough

⁴⁵ Even if we wish to attribute these words to the historical Socrates, they still serve this purpose in Plato's hands. No intelligent reader, aware that Socrates was ridiculed for speaking so poorly in court, could fail to interpret Socrates' words here as an apology for and explanation of that fact. And Plato himself must have been aware of the impression these words would make.

⁴⁶ There was a serious debate between orators on the merits of written speeches versus spontaneous ones. Compare Isoc. *Panegyricus* 11–12, *Panathenaicus* 24. At *Antidosis* 140 Isocrates affects to revert to spontaneous speaking claiming to be at a loss (ἀπορῶ) what to say. See also Pl. *Mx.* 234c, where Plato pokes fun at the widespread preference for well-conceived speeches. His general denigration of the written word is of course well known. As John Glucker has pointed out to me, it is possible that Plato is here trying to claim that Socrates' speech possesses the superior quality of spontaneity. In the context of Socrates' disastrous performance in court, this would still be an apology of sorts. On the other hand, Alcidas, who considered spontaneous speeches superior to written ones, does not use the term εἰκῇ to describe spontaneity but rather αὐτοσχεδιαστικός. See Isocrates' *Against the Sophists* 9. εἰκῇ usually has negative connotations. On the debate over the relative advantages of spontaneity and preparation see Liebersohn.

⁴⁷ This idea of a purified rhetoric also appears in the *Gorgias* (460a) and the *Phaedrus* (260d *et alia*).

points in it. There may seem to be some contradiction between the opening words and the rest of the speech. But we should bear in mind that the opening words are primarily an apology for the speech of the historical Socrates, which really was unimpressive. The speech Plato records, like the opening apology, aims itself to counteract the impression of Socratic incompetence. So this apparent contradiction can be explained by a single apologetic motive. This will not be the only place in which Plato responds to a charge in contradictory ways, explaining and denying the offense at the same time.⁴⁸

2. *Interview with Meletus.* This concern with repelling the incompetence charge sheds interesting light on the interview with Meletus. As we have seen, the little time Socrates spends addressing the actual charges is devoted to a personal attack on Meletus (24c4–28a2). Scholars have long been puzzled over this seemingly pointless interview.⁴⁹ As Brickhouse and Smith put it (1989: 112),

the discrediting of Meletus seems to be all that Socrates intends to achieve through the interrogation: before he begins his questioning, he tells the jury only that he will show that Meletus is “joking by lightly involving men in a lawsuit” (24c4–6); he does not explicitly say that he will actually refute the charges.

Brickhouse and Smith go on to argue that, in fact, Socrates *does* address the charges against him in a serious manner. They argue (114) that he must be doing so because if he were not, his words “would constitute an unnecessary incitement to the jury ...” or would be inappropriate in another way. They undertake the difficult task of showing that Socrates’ arguments provide a satisfactory answer to the charges, but it is hard to agree that they succeed.⁵⁰

If Socrates had been seriously interested in answering the charges, he might have mentioned some of the facts brought up in this context by Xenophon: for example, that he always participated in public and private sacrifices. It seems highly coincidental that every argument he uses to “defend” himself happens also to discredit Meletus, which is his professed intention. Better to take Socrates at his word and acknowledge that his primary purpose here is to discredit Meletus.

⁴⁸ See below, III.C.2 “Denying Defeat” and III.C.4 “Claiming Victory” for additional examples of the contradictions that Plato tolerates in the interest of apologetics.

⁴⁹ See Hackforth 104–10, Burnet 100–101, 106–7. Brickhouse and Smith acknowledge (1989: 112) that there is “virtual unanimity” among scholars that Socrates does not seriously address the charges.

⁵⁰ The section in which they attempt to show the power of Socrates’ arguments here (117–28) is not convincing. They address this issue a second time in 1992. In both places their arguments rely heavily on the assumption that Socrates conformed to a set of principles that they derive from the *Apology* itself. But the claim to be telling the truth, for example, is the kind of thing that many speakers say, and it does not guarantee the veracity of the speech as a whole.

But why would he do this? If Socrates' words are sincere, then the whole interview with Meletus seems curiously irrelevant both to Socrates' historical defense against the trial charges and to Plato's alleged defense of the philosophical life. But the discrediting of Meletus is not irrelevant at all when we consider that Plato is writing in the context of contemporary debate (in which Meletus may have played some further role⁵¹) and in particular that he is defending Socrates from charges of incompetence in court. Because the contemporary debate would be foremost in the minds of contemporary readers, Socrates' attack on Meletus would not have seemed out of place, and would certainly not have appeared as an unnecessary incitement to the fictional jury.

Socrates' attack charges that Meletus is not genuinely concerned about the corruption or education of the youth (24c, 25c, 26a–b), that he has written an incompetent and self-contradictory affidavit (26e–27a, 27c, 27e), that he is joking (24c, 27a, 27e), and—what is implied in all this and also made explicit—that he is not treating the jury or the law with proper respect. Socrates elaborates on the charge of disrespect to the jury, claiming that it is a sign of disrespect that Meletus does not think the jury is acquainted with the writings of Anaxagoras (26d). He claims that Meletus wrote his indictment in a spirit of hybris, disobedience, and immaturity (26e–27a). And he points out that Meletus is reluctant and unwilling to comply with the accepted procedures in a court of law (27c). These charges of incompetence and arrogance in court closely resemble the post-trial charges brought against Socrates.

B. Arrogance

The charge of incompetence is closely connected with the charge of arrogance. Xenophon accepts the widespread opinion that Socrates acted with great arrogance in court, and that his arrogance caused him to lose the trial. Plato's treatment of the issue is more subtle and complex. Plato's Socrates surely sounds arrogant, and it is possible, even likely, that Plato's *Apology* is one of the works to which Xenophon refers when he says that everyone who wrote about the trial mentioned Socrates' arrogance.⁵² But how do we account for this arrogance? Did Plato invent it? Or did Socrates really speak arrogantly at his trial?

It is difficult to imagine that Plato has invented Socrates' arrogance out of whole cloth, for this would imply that Xenophon made the colossal mistake of believing a Platonic invention without checking any other independent source, despite telling us that he did check more than one. It would also be

⁵¹ As Chroust says (1957: 240 n. 169), "Every time Plato refers to Meletus, he uses some word of disparagement;" see, e.g., *Euthphr.* 2b, *Grg.* 521c, with Hackforth 108–9.

⁵² See above n. 18.

hard to believe that Plato created a fictitiously arrogant Socrates who was subsequently adopted by all the sources Xenophon read. And anyway, why would Plato invent this trait, which was destined, according to Xenophon, to bring Socrates into disgrace? And if he did not care about that, why, after inventing the arrogance, would he devote extensive efforts to explaining, toning down, and justifying the very arrogance he has invented?⁵³ It is much more likely that Xenophon's conclusion is correct, that Socrates did speak this way (X. *Ap.* 1).

But there is also evidence of humility in Plato's portrait of Socrates' speech. How shall we explain this? Did Socrates himself try to moderate his own arrogance while indulging in it? Or is this humility, absent from Xenophon, to be attributed rather to Plato and his attempts to deal with criticism of Socratic arrogance?

Socrates' efforts to apologize for his arrogance are widespread. In several places (20d–e, 34d–e, 37a, 38a1) he addresses the arrogance issue explicitly, denying that he is speaking out of arrogance or disrespect, and offering alternative explanations for his behavior. In another, he says explicitly that he is seriously trying to win the trial (19a2–4). This contrasts with the image of an arrogant Socrates who inflamed the judges. But it is an anachronism: Socrates was not on trial for arrogance. And it is hard to imagine the historical Socrates simultaneously inflaming the jury and apologizing for doing so.

Plato's efforts to repel these charges are evident most of all in his treatment of three notorious instances of Socrates' arrogance at his trial: his failure to beg for pity, his reference to the Oracle of Delphi, and his proposal of an outrageous counter-penalty. A comparison with Xenophon's treatment of these issues shows how Plato's different rhetorical aim helped shape his treatment of the speech.⁵⁴

1. *Refusal to Beg.* In Xenophon, there is no mention of any begging, and *a fortiori* no attempt to explain why Socrates did not beg. He does not beg, but only a reader familiar with the usual Athenian courtroom antics would notice this. In Plato, on the other hand, Socrates' refusal to beg is made conspicu-

⁵³ See Kennedy's assessment (150): "This arrogance is more clearly marked in the passages which Xenophon puts into Socrates' mouth than in the *Apology* of Plato, though it is present in the latter work."

⁵⁴ It may be objected that Xenophon is exaggerating the arrogance in his version, and that therefore we are not justified in arguing that Plato is toning it down. But Xenophon does not undertake to show how arrogant Socrates was—as he says, that was widely acknowledged—but rather to explain that his arrogance stemmed from his desire to die. So he had no obvious incentive to exaggerate. My argument does not depend on the assumption that Xenophon is a faithful reporter, which I doubt, but rather on a comparison of the two texts: Xenophon is useful because he shows us what Plato could have said, but did not.

ous. Plato recognizes that this was thought to be one of the major causes of Socrates' conviction (34b–c):

But any of you might possibly be annoyed, thinking back to his own behavior, because he, when on trial on a lesser charge than this, begged and entreated the judges with floods of tears

Socrates explains why he is unwilling to beg (34b–35b). He says that he is not being arrogant or disrespectful (34d οὐκ ἀυθαδιζόμενος, ὃ ἄνδρες Ἀθηναῖοι, οὐδ' ὑμᾶς ἀτιμάζων). He is responding to the post-trial charges. He explains that it would not contribute to their δόξα or his if he begged, but would be disgraceful. He adds that he has no fear of death anyway, and that it would be immoral and irreligious to beg. He explains that the duty of the judge is to seek justice and truth, not to hand out judgments as though they were personal favors. And, as we have seen, he returns to this issue after the death sentence, explaining that he has been condemned not because of his inability to speak but because of his unwillingness to engage in lamentation and grief (38d). Here Plato acknowledges that there was no begging, but he defends Socrates: this was not arrogance on his part, but honorable behavior.

In addition to not begging himself, Socrates refrained from bringing his family to court to arouse the pity of the jury. This too seems like arrogance, and Plato acknowledges the fact. But here he goes one step further in countering the arrogance charge. His Socrates does not refrain from *mentioning* his family (34d):

I, my very good fellow, surely also have some relatives. Indeed, I too am not sprung, as Homer has it, “from stick or stone” but from human beings, so that I have both relatives and, in particular, sons, Athenians, three of them, one by now adolescent and two still children . . .

By mentioning his family in this way Socrates, surprisingly enough, does appeal to his judges for pity in this conventional manner, despite his claim that this would be the wrong thing to do.

Since it was, one presumes, notorious that Socrates did not bring his family to court, Plato could not have had him do so. But by having him mention his family in this way, he does the most he can, within the limits imposed upon him by the guise of an historical fiction, to present a Socrates who was willing to beg, just a little, in order to win an acquittal. There is surely a contradiction here: on the one hand, Socrates was right not to beg, and on the other he did beg. But it is easy to see how and why this contradiction arose when we note that Plato's intention in both instances is to deny the arrogance charge.

2. *The Oracle.* The story of the Oracle gives us another opportunity to evaluate the arrogance of Plato's Socrates. According to Xenophon, the Oracle did not say that no one was wiser than Socrates, it said that no one was more ἐλεύθερος, δίκαιος, or σώφρων than he (X. *Ap.* 14). His Socrates is not puzzled in the least by this astounding praise. He takes it in his stride and proceeds to explain to the jury why the Oracle was justified in this complimentary pronouncement. He even goes so far as to explain that he is also wise (X. *Ap.* 16 σοφός), something that the Oracle had not even said.⁵⁵ The only humility he displays here, if it can be called that, consists in his pointing out that, after all, the Oracle did not compare him to a god, as it had Lycurgus (X. *Ap.* 15).

In Plato, the story is quite different. As Plato reports it, Socrates introduces the story with a lengthy apology (20d–21a), apologizing especially for Chaerephon's presumptuous question, and attributing it to his impetuosity (21a). The Oracle only speaks of Socrates' wisdom, denying that anyone else has more of it than he (21a). This emphasis on wisdom, as opposed to the virtues mentioned by Xenophon, fits well with Plato's efforts to interpret the Oracle as enjoining on Socrates a mission to philosophize. More importantly, Plato capitalizes on the negative language of the Oracle, using it to turn Socrates' boasting into a display of humility. Socrates claims to be baffled by the Oracle, since he does not consider that he himself knows anything very great (21b). If the Oracle is right, then no human being knows anything worth knowing. Socrates tries to prove the Oracle wrong not because of any religious skepticism or antagonism on his part, but because he optimistically hopes to discover that human wisdom exists in others. It is only reluctantly that he comes to the conclusion that the Oracle is right, that human wisdom is worthless. The message of the Oracle points less to Socrates' wisdom than to the insufficiency of human wisdom, itself a humbling lesson (23a–b); Socrates' virtue here consists in his knowing how little he knows. In short, Plato turns the Oracle from a confirmation of Socratic greatness, which is its natural and obvious meaning even as Plato reports its words (and is the meaning Xenophon gives it), into a reminder of human limitations and an imperative to seek wisdom. Socrates remains proud of his preeminence even in Plato's version (see 21d, 22c, 22e) but it is a preeminence, paradoxically, in humility.

⁵⁵ There is no need to emend the text to make the Oracle refer to wisdom (as von Arnim suggests at 87), since this would still leave us with a Socrates who does not directly explain the Oracle's reference to his *sophrosune*. The simplest explanation is that the word *sophron* has a wide enough range to refer also to *sophia*; as Xenophon explains at *Mem.* 3.9.4, Socrates did in fact equate the two. See also *Pl. Prt.* 332a–33b.

If we look more carefully into the difficulties surrounding the story of the Oracle we will find additional confirmation of the role I have attributed to Plato in modifying Socrates' words. There are many reasons to doubt the historicity of the Platonic version of the Oracle story. The story is beset with difficulties that stem, primarily, from the fact that in Plato's version the Oracle is responsible for the origin of Socrates' philosophizing. First of all, it follows logically from Plato's story that the Oracle must have been given before Socrates started on his philosophical quest, and this has raised problems of chronology.⁵⁶ Secondly, and for the same reason, it is hard to understand what would have led Chaerephon to ask his question if Socrates were not already distinguished at least in his eyes for a special degree of wisdom. Socrates himself professes to have been utterly incredulous when he got the response since he was not aware that he knew anything at all. Stokes (1992: 68–69) sees the reference to Chaerephon's impetuosity as an effort to explain this oddity. But while impetuosity might explain Chaerephon's willingness to ask a burning question, it would not explain why the question burned in the first place. The simplest motive for mentioning Chaerephon's impetuosity is to apologize for an impudent question that implicitly claims that Socrates is an especially wise man. A third difficulty: as Stokes points out (1992: 55), if the Oracle really played such an important role in motivating Socrates' search for wisdom, we should expect to hear about it elsewhere. And yet, aside from the reference to it in Xenophon, we hear nothing about it in any other surviving writing about Socrates. Fourth, in both *Apologies*, Socrates presents the story of the Oracle as a new piece of information, not yet known to his audience. It is hard to imagine that such a significant Oracle would have remained, in Stokes' words (1992: 55), "the best-kept secret of a lifetime." Finally, there is the awkward interpretation of the Oracle as it appears in Plato. Scholars have long been baffled by the implausible way in which Socrates interprets the Oracle.⁵⁷ The Oracle never said that Socrates was obliged to investigate others in a search for wisdom; it merely said that there was no one wiser than he. It is hard to imagine how Socrates could have come to his mission-interpretation on the basis of the simple negative answer the Oracle gave to Chaerephon's question.

It seems to me that these arguments are strong enough to raise serious doubts about the historicity of the Oracle as it is reported by Plato. But it is worth noticing that virtually all of them (with the possible exception of the fourth) apply only to the story as Plato reports it. These problems are not caused by the Oracle itself, but by the bizarre interpretation that Plato's

⁵⁶ See Burnet *ad* 21a5 and Stokes 1992: 52–54.

⁵⁷ Brickhouse and Smith 1989: 88–91.

Socrates gives it, turning it into the originating impulse for his search for wisdom. It is only because it started him on his philosophical quest that the dating of the Oracle is problematic; it is only because of the early dating that the question itself is an odd one; similarly, the absence of any reference to the story in other literature and the audience's apparent lack of knowledge of the story is much more problematic if the Oracle set Socrates on his life's mission than if it was introduced merely in order to offer extravagant praise. Stokes mentions some contexts in Plato's writings in which a mention of the Oracle would have been appropriate if there really had been one (1992: 55). But it is appropriate in these places only if it is the Oracle as Plato records it. Finally, it is precisely the linkage between the Oracle and Socrates' sense of philosophic mission that creates the difficulty in Socrates' interpretation of the Oracle. There would be no difficulty if Socrates would interpret the Oracle as saying what it seems to say: that no one is wiser than him. In short, none of the arguments against the historicity of the Oracle-story casts serious suspicion on Xenophon's simpler version of the story, where the Oracle only confirms Socrates' moral excellence, and where Socrates himself uses it as an opportunity for boasting. If Plato invented something, we have no reason to suspect him of inventing the basic elements of the story as they appear in Xenophon.⁵⁸

There is some reason to believe that Socrates did speak about an Oracle at his trial. While we can certainly not rely on Xenophon's testimony alone, partly because it may have been inspired by Plato, it is worth noting that Plato's version itself shows signs of being a reaction to something like Xenophon's version. His Socrates introduces the Oracle in the first place, as does Xenophon's, as a proof of his wisdom, and not as an explanation of his philosophical mission, and he seems to be apologizing for mentioning it (20d–21a). This makes sense if, as I have argued, he was thought to have spoken arrogantly at his trial. From the evidence we have, the reference to the Oracle is the most conspicuous example of that arrogance. So, if he really spoke arrogantly in court, he is likely to have spoken arrogantly at this point.

And yet in Plato's version the arrogance, while still present, is offset by unmistakable efforts to apologize. These contradictory tendencies suggest that the story is a composite in which two different elements have been stitched

⁵⁸ Hackforth takes a similar approach, arguing that it is both inherently implausible that the Oracle should have served as Socrates' primary inspiration, and (92–93) that in any case Socrates attributes his impulse to philosophize to a variety of sources later at 33c, to which we may add those mentioned at 37e–38a. But Hackforth still assumes that much of the story is historical: in his view the only thing Plato adds is the idea that the Oracle constituted an *imperative* to philosophize (101–3). He accepts that the Oracle did inspire Socrates to begin philosophizing, so most of the problems remain.

together.⁵⁹ We have in the first place a complimentary Oracle, which offers high praise for Socrates. The most natural role for such an Oracle is to serve as an occasion for boasting, which is what Socrates uses it for in Xenophon's version of the speech, and what he conspicuously denies he is doing in Plato's (20e). If Socrates did mention the Oracle, it seems likely that he did so in order to boast, even if he did not say what either Plato or Xenophon reports him as saying. Plato took this somewhat embarrassing incident and, with great skill, transformed it into a story that both explains Socrates' devotion to philosophy and, conveniently for our argument here, drastically reduces the arrogance, replacing it with the (for Plato) characteristically Socratic humility.⁶⁰ Stuck with an embarrassingly boastful incident, Plato reworked the story, turning Socrates from a rank boaster into a humble servant of the god, supremely conscious of his own ignorance.

And yet, Plato turns this very humility into a source for a milder form of pride: Socrates was in fact the wisest mortal, as he arrogantly claimed in court, if only because he knew how little he really knew. Socrates has a right to be proud precisely because he is free of the delusion of knowledge that characterized his condemners. It was they who were arrogant, not he.

3. *The Counter-Penalty.* Similar observations can be made about Socrates' outrageous behavior when asked to name his counter-penalty. Here the arrogance seems undeniable. As Stokes puts it (1992: 168),

most of us would, I think, be incensed if a convicted man began a speech on his sentence by saying, almost unintelligibly at first, that he had escaped the legal prosecutor, and continued by saying that he deserved special honor, like a sporting hero, only more so, as the hero's services were only apparent, his own being real and his needs greater. Soc[rates] is provocative also in that among

⁵⁹ Riddell (xxiv) comes to the same conclusion, although without much argumentation.

⁶⁰ I do not accept Vlastos' argument (1991: 105–6) that the one place where Xenophon mentions Socratic ignorance (*Mem.* 4.4.9) can be used to confirm as historically accurate the frequent reports of Socratic ignorance in Plato's writings. Aside from other considerations, it is likely that Xenophon read Plato's works (see Stokes 1992: 78, 1997: 7), and his one reference to Socratic ignorance occurs in a context that patently suggests its dependence on *Republic* 1. And even in this place Xenophon's Socrates denies that he is ignorant and explains his own doctrine of justice quite openly. Beyond the works of Plato and Xenophon, there are two fragments of Aeschines that refers to Socrates' lack of possession of a *techne* or a *mathema* through which he can improve others (fr. 3 and 4 Krauss), which might confirm the historicity of Socratic claims to ignorance (so Kahn 1996: 21 citing Döring). This of course is not quite the same as the Socratic ignorance we find in Plato, and we do not know whether or not Aeschines was influenced by Plato or not. A. A. Long points out (esp. 156–60) that the theme of Socratic ignorance is not especially prominent even in Plato, and was not generally noticed until the time of Arcesilaos.

the possibilities he explicitly declines to offer are some at least which, in one case on his own admission (37c), a reasonable jury, many of whom thought him not guilty, could easily have accepted. Tempers were not likely to be soothed by the suggestion that he would rather die or that he would if spared continue the activity for which he had been convicted. It would not help matters to add that the jury will not believe the grounds for his so continuing. It would add fuel to the flames to suggest that having done no harm he is willing to pay a fine—since loss of money would do him no harm. There is no reason to doubt that Pl[ato] meant Soc[rates] to appear intentionally provocative Only a naïve Soc[rates] could fail to realize the likely hostile response. . . . Soc[rates] is not naïve.

In this section, after the conviction, Plato's Socrates displays considerable arrogance, and undoubtedly the historical Socrates did as well. But even here the contrast with Xenophon is illuminating. In Xenophon's version, Socrates proposed no penalty at all, and did not permit his friends to do so either. Without a counter-penalty, there could have been no vote, and the death sentence would have been approved by default. In effect, Socrates would have forced his accusers, perhaps against their own intentions, to become responsible for his execution.⁶¹

Plato's Socrates does not go this far. At first he explains why he deserves to receive something good (36b–d). He argues that the most appropriate thing would be a reward, such as free meals in the *prytaneum*, the reward offered to Olympic victors. This is an outrageous suggestion given that he has just been found guilty of the crimes for which he was charged. But Socrates does beg a bit, pointing out that he actually needs the food (36e). And then, after offering this reward as his hypothetical punishment (37a), he reverses himself and proposes a monetary penalty after all.⁶² What is going on?

Once again, we are confronted with contradictory tendencies, one arrogant and offensive, the other reasonable and apologetic. An explanation is ready at hand: the historical Socrates behaved outrageously when asked to propose a penalty, either by suggesting a reward such as that mentioned by Plato, or by refusing to propose anything, as Xenophon reports, or in some other way. Plato reproduces the outrage, but he also moderates it by having him offer a monetary fine.⁶³

⁶¹ Plato on the other hand is happy to charge Anytus with insisting on the death penalty (29c). Perhaps this is because he does not attribute any death wish to Socrates.

⁶² This seems so odd that even Chroust, who has little respect for Xenophon, judges his version to be more accurate on this point (1957: 40).

⁶³ Note that he could not do this with Xenophon's version of the outrage, for there Socrates simply refuses to propose anything at all.

Plato could not have Socrates propose the more reasonable penalty of exile for one obvious reason: the jury would have most likely accepted such a proposal, and everyone knows that Socrates was executed. But he does insist that Socrates explain in detail why he could not make such a proposal (37c–38a). In this way he shows that there was nothing left to propose except a fine.⁶⁴ Socrates proposes a fine of a *mina*, which amounts to a fifth of his property, if we can trust Xenophon (*Oec.* 2.3). It is a well known Socratic concept that such things should be measured in accordance with one's ability to pay (X. *Mem.* 1.3.3–4; Pl. *R.* 364b–65a). In short, the fine is the best Plato can do in the circumstances.

And Socrates' friends offer a substantial addition to it, so that, as Brickhouse and Smith argue (1989: 225–30), the total sum is a respectable one. It might seem disrespectful for Socrates to mention that the majority of the fine will be paid by others. But what other way was there for Plato to indicate that a substantial sum was offered? And how else to combat the rumor that Socrates' friends had not helped out?⁶⁵ Socrates could not possibly have offered such a sum personally, so it was up to his friends. But it would be inappropriate for another speaker to interrupt Socrates' speech in order to offer additional funds. So Socrates has to make the announcement himself.

There is, of course, some apparently gratuitous arrogance when Socrates points out that paying a fine would not really hurt him at all (38b). This makes an otherwise serious proposal look insulting. But even here, the purpose of this passage may not be simply to show how Socrates antagonized his judges, but to show that Socrates would not perform an act of injustice even against himself, as Socrates says several times in Plato's *Apology* (25c–26a; 29b; 37b) and in Xenophon's *Apology* (23).⁶⁶

But in any case, I would not want to claim that Plato is interested in eliminating Socratic arrogance altogether. All other things being equal, a certain degree of arrogance itself is not a source of embarrassment, but is something to boast about.⁶⁷ Socrates' arrogance became an object of criticism only be-

⁶⁴ Brickhouse and Smith 1989: 221–25.

⁶⁵ It appears from the *Crito* (44b–c, 44e–45c) that there was a widespread feeling that Socrates' friends had not done enough for him. This would have reflected badly not only on these friends, but also on Socrates himself, for it would have shown that he was incapable of arousing loyalty in his friends. By having them propose paying for the penalty, Plato mitigates this sentiment.

⁶⁶ Weiss 32–35. Even more frequent are his assertions that one should not harm anyone. See for example *Crit.* 49a–c, *Grg.* 479c–e, *R.* 335b–e.

⁶⁷ See Cicero's comment, obviously based on his reading of Plato's *Apology*: *Tusc.* 1.71 *Socrates nec patronum quaesivit ad iudicium capitis nec iudicibus supplex fuit adhibuitque liberam contumaciam a magnitudine animi ductam non a superbia.*

cause it seemed foolish once it led to his conviction in court. While Xenophon takes issue with the charge of failure and implicitly overturns the charge of incompetence, he does not feel obliged to deny Socratic arrogance, and even makes a point of saying that Socrates was in no way humbled by the actions of the court (X. *Ap.* 24). The very fact that his spirit was not broken contributes to the effort to show that he was not a loser. Plato too leaves in a good deal of arrogance, particularly (but not exclusively) after the conviction, when it can no longer contribute to the result it was blamed for causing.

C. *The Shame of Defeat*

1. *Explaining Defeat.* The most serious charge, and the only one that Xenophon feels compelled to deny explicitly, is the charge that Socrates failed miserably. Before we can turn to that charge, however, we have to address a new issue that Xenophon was not obliged to address: if the charges were negligible, and Socrates a competent and not outrageously arrogant defendant, then why did he lose the case? Since Plato rejects Xenophon's answer, that Socrates deliberately provoked the jury into condemning him, he needs a new explanation for how the most righteous man of his generation, and one of its most persuasive, was convicted and executed by an ordinary Athenian court on negligible charges. The fact that he feels compelled to address this issue offers further evidence that the *Apology* addresses the post-trial controversy.

Plato offers a variety of explanations for Socrates' conviction, all of which serve to deflect any blame or shame from Socrates himself. His first approach is to introduce the "earlier charges." He explains that deep Athenian prejudices were responsible for Socrates' conviction. These prejudices were simply mistaken: the Athenians confused Socrates with ordinary intellectuals, teachers of rhetoric and natural scientists, who were widely suspected of holding heretical beliefs about the gods (18a–20c). In fact, he did not teach these things, nor did he charge a fee for whatever he did do.

Why does Socrates mention these points? Is he seriously attempting to persuade the Athenians to overcome their prejudices and acquit him? He says (19a) "Well, it's right, then, to offer a defense, Athenians, and to try to remove from your mind in this short time the slander you took in over a long time." But even here Socrates sounds pessimistic about his chances. Later he says that he would be surprised if he should be able to do so (24a). And finally, when he sums up the argument, Socrates refers to this prejudice not as something that the jury is encouraged to lay aside, but as the cause of his own execution, and as Stokes points out (1992: 98), he nearly breaks the fiction in doing so (28a): "This is what will catch me—if indeed it is going to catch me—not Meletus nor Anytus, but the widespread slander and grudging feelings

against me.”⁶⁸ These points seem aimed not at the audience in court, but at a post-trial audience Socrates never met, an audience that wants to know why Socrates was convicted.

Plato offers another excuse as well, and a petty one at that: Socrates simply did not have enough time to make an adequate defense (19a2, 24a1–3). In other cities more time is devoted to capital trials (37a–b).

So far, Plato has blamed the others: the Athenians and their inadequate legal system. But these explanations are not sufficient. They remove the blame, perhaps, from Socrates and his courtroom antics, but they do not remove the humiliation. They surely do not transform Socrates into an object of envy, which is in the end an important goal of Plato’s writings. To reach this goal, Plato transforms Socrates into a hero and martyr, introducing two more explanations for his death, one rooted in his personal divine mission, the other in an essential conflict between Socrates’ excellence and the nature of human political life.

Socrates explains that he will be killed because of the hatred of his fellow citizens, and he explains how this hatred arose. It is for this reason that he brings in the story of the Oracle. He explains that he interpreted the Oracle as commanding him to question others and show them that they are not truly wise (23b). By arousing their hatred in this way he made it virtually certain that he would be convicted (24a), as indeed he was. He knew he was angering people through his service to god, but he felt that his duty came first (21e). This account of Socrates’ death goes beyond mere explanation, and contributes to transforming that death from a source of shame to a source of pride, and religious pride at that: Socrates was a martyr for the god of Delphi.

But Plato is not content to blame the god. What brought Socrates into conflict with the city of Athens was not merely the peculiar mission assigned him by the Oracle, but also the inner compulsion of philosophy. There were hints of this already in the earlier treatment of Socrates’ incompetence in court and his arrogance: being a virtuous man, Socrates refused to speak in an unworthy manner in order to gain an acquittal. But Plato does not leave things at implications. Like other Athenian defendants, Socrates lists his merits: the occasions on which he endangered his life by obeying the law rather than the ruling body, whether the demos (32a–32c) or the oligarchs (32c–32e). And he demonstrates this strength of character throughout the *Apology* by his abrasive and stubborn unwillingness to compromise his moral principles even in the face of death.

The conflict is not simply between Socrates or Socrates’ unique mission and the city of Athens. Although it is true that Socrates attributes his refrain-

⁶⁸ This passage also aims to lessen the impression that it is Meletus and Anytus who have won. Socrates deprecates Meletus further in the second speech, where he explains that Meletus could not have succeeded without the assistance of the other two prosecutors (36a).

ing from entering political life to the mysterious personal warning he received from his divine sign (31c–e), the sign is not as unintelligible as it might seem. Its message is of universal import, and its truth is perceptible by reason. Socrates usually understands the reasoning behind the advice given by this sign quite well (see X. *Ap.* 5–9 with Weiss 8–15), and this bit of advice is no exception. No righteous person who opposes the masses can be saved (31e, 32e).⁶⁹ The truly virtuous will always suffer in politics (28b, 31d–32a; X. *Ap.* 4, 26). Therefore, the good man must have a private station (31c–33a).

Faced with the impossibility of blaming Socrates for his own failure, and with the triviality of blaming a particular Athenian jury (although he does that as well), Plato took the only option left: he blamed the nature of human political life.⁷⁰ There is an eternal conflict between the ideal and the real. It was not foolishness or misplaced arrogance that brought about Socrates' defeat. It was surely not the successful efforts of his victorious opponents either—they have nothing to boast of—but rather it was Socrates' own superior nature and superior behavior that led, inevitably, to his death. Thus the cause lies with him, but the blame falls only on the others.

It is easy to see here that Plato is wrestling with an issue that Socrates would not have confronted in his trial.

2. *Denying Defeat.* Plato's concern about the humiliating result of the trial is so strong that he resorts to some unimpressive measures to counter the impression of defeat. He has his Socrates claim a degree of victory after the vote to convict, on the grounds that he lost by a small margin (36a). And he points out that Meletus cannot boast of any accomplishment, since the vote to convict is due primarily to the popularity of the other prosecutor, Anytus (36a–b; see also 28a–b).⁷¹ But despite this brief moment of post-conviction jubilation, Socrates cannot claim that he has won. How, then, does Plato address the charge that Socrates lost, and by his own fault?

⁶⁹ Socrates mentions in this context his resistance to the masses when they insisted on illegally trying the generals as a group, and he points out that they later regretted their action. After the trial this passage may remind its audience of the regret that was felt in Athens after the execution of Socrates, as Plato seems to indicate later (38c, 39c–d).

⁷⁰ Socrates uses this conflict to explain another circumstance that may well have been the subject of post-trial accusations: why did Socrates not participate actively in political life? Xenophon also addresses this issue, in his *Memorabilia*, arguing that by training politically active persons Socrates did in effect participate in political life (1.6.15). Oddly enough, he offers Charmides, later a member of the tyrannical government of the Thirty, as an example of someone whom Socrates personally persuaded to enter politics (3.7.1–8).

⁷¹ Pace Hackforth 81, by attributing his execution earlier to the old prejudices against him, Plato's Socrates effectively denies any real victory to his prosecutors.

It is obviously grossly anachronistic to have Socrates address this question directly in his defense speech, but this is what Plato has him do. Socrates asks himself a theoretical question (28b), “Someone may perhaps say: ‘Are you really not ashamed, Socrates, of having practiced the kind of activity that puts your life now in danger?’” The question is not an *impossible* one for a defendant to ask himself hypothetically—Plato does not destroy the fiction—but it is a peculiar one.⁷² And it is precisely the sort of question that Xenophon says was raised after the trial. Obviously Plato could not have Socrates ask himself even hypothetically whether he is not ashamed of the fact that he was killed in the end. But since Plato does not employ a narrator, he has no other way to raise the issue than to have Socrates himself do so.

To answer the question, Socrates brings in heroes of Greek mythology. He explains that a person should not calculate dangers, but only do what is right. One must risk one’s life in order to perform what is commanded by a superior (28b–c):

Your suggestion is dishonorable, Sir, if you think a man who is the slightest use ought to take into account the risk of life or death, rather than to consider one thing alone in every action, whether the action is just or unjust, and the behavior that of a good man or bad. For the demigods who fell at Troy would be of little worth, on your principle, including even Thetis’ son ...

This is the first substantial rejection of shame for Socrates’ death: the god commanded him to undertake an unpopular religious mission, and he heroically obeyed the command of the god, even at the cost of his own life (28b–30c). This obviously has nothing to do with a real defense speech.

The Oracle of Delphi, and Socrates’ interpretation of it, plays a vital role in all of this, since all the risks were taken in obedience to this Oracle. But this service of the god is only one way of explaining Socrates’ pursuit of philosophy. He describes it differently when he says (28d) “*wherever a man posts himself, thinking that best*, or is posted by a commander, there he ought ... to stand his ground” (my italics). It is not the god, but he himself who has ordered this mission. He makes this clearer later when he says, speaking of the hypothetical punishment of quietude (37e–38a),

If, first, I tell you that that is disobedience to the god, and for that reason I cannot lead a quiet life, you will not be convinced, but will think I am putting it on. If, secondly, I say that this is the greatest good for a human being, every day to discuss goodness and the other topics on which you’ve heard me conversing and examining myself and others, and that life without examination is not worth a man’s living, *that* you will believe even less from me.

⁷² I have not found a good parallel to it in existing Greek forensic speeches.

Here Socrates offers two ways of saying the same thing. In a sense it was the god, but in another sense it was Socrates' own conviction that philosophy was the best way of life for a human being that led to his mission and to his martyrdom. Socrates is both a servant of the god and a heroic man of principle.

But Plato is not satisfied with this impressive heroism. Heroic losers are not always the objects of real envy. And so he presents two new arguments to the effect that Socrates did not really lose. Again, these are wildly anachronistic arguments. First is the theoretical point, elaborated later in the *Gorgias*, that a good man can never be harmed by a bad one (30c–d). The point is valid whether Socrates is condemned or not: whatever the results of the trial may be, they cannot be bad ones, since it is impossible for bad men to harm good ones. For this reason, this argument is appropriate (though barely) even before the sentencing.

Plato's main argument, however, is an elaborate version of the point made by Xenophon, that death was really better than life for him. Prior to the sentencing Socrates points out that it would be arrogance to think we know that death is bad (29a–b).⁷³ This is the most he can say in confronting the possibility of his own execution. To argue at length that death is certainly better than life would be absurdly inappropriate at this stage.

Plato can develop this theme further only by creating a third speech, after the sentencing, in which Socrates can openly speak of his own impending execution. Without in any way excusing the culpable behavior of the judges in condemning him (41d–e), Socrates argues that he is better off dead, not for the reason that Xenophon gives, that he is an old man with nothing good to look forward to, but rather because death itself may well be a better thing than life.

Socrates' initial claim is that death must be a good thing, since the *daimonion* did not stop him from speaking as he did (40a–c). Scholars have wondered whether the *daimonion* was so active in Socrates' life that he could safely draw this conclusion merely from its non-interference.⁷⁴ But it is hard to imagine that Plato intended his readers to pursue this fruitless line of speculation. His point is that Socrates was really better off dead, and the *daimonion* proves this—even if this comes at the expense of a slightly illogical argument. But in any case, there is logic to the *daimonion*'s opinion, and Socrates is fully capable of explaining that logic: death is either a great rest, or a chance to philosophize with better companions (40b–41c). The realm of Hades is one in which true justice reigns. Socrates believed that he was better off in Hades,

⁷³ His point here is both a defense of Socrates and an attack on those who charged Socrates with failing through arrogance: they are the truly arrogant ones if they think they know that death was bad for him.

⁷⁴ Brickhouse and Smith 1989: 237–57.

and this means not only that he did not lose his spirit in the face of his sentence, but also that he was really better off dead.⁷⁵ With these arguments Plato not only repels any insult or pity, but actually contrives to arouse jealousy for Socrates on the grounds that he died.

3. *Some Complications.* In the final analysis, then, Plato's Socrates, just like Xenophon's, did not suffer anything shameful or bad at the hands of the court. But for Plato this conclusion is somewhat awkward, since Plato's Socrates is not, like Xenophon's, an arrogant man gloating at the prospect of an easy death. He is a hero, willing to risk the ultimate sacrifice in the service of the god. This glorious image is somewhat diminished by the fact that death is actually advantageous for him. Plato wants to have his cake and eat it too: to claim both heroism and what we may call self-interested success for his hero. This, it seems to me, is a deep and well hidden weakness in Plato's *Apology*.⁷⁶ In order to alleviate this problem somewhat, Plato downplays the death wish and brings it into prominence only after the sentencing. But the problem still remains.

A second problem: despite his heroic willingness to sacrifice himself, and despite his actual indifference to death, Plato's Socrates, unlike Xenophon's, makes a serious effort to win an acquittal (19a). This announcement, uncalled for in an actual defense speech, may be designed to respond to those who believed, like Xenophon's Hermogenes, that Socrates never really tried to defend himself effectively. It may even be a response to Xenophon, whose *Apology* portrayed Socrates as wanting to die (see also *Crito* 45c–d, which mentions this as a charge against him). As we have seen, Plato has made efforts to reduce Socrates' arrogance and disrespect for the court, explaining, justifying, and toning down. He takes the opposite course from Xenophon: with Xenophon, Socrates' desire to be rid of his earthly troubles contributes to the effort to show that he did not lose. But if Plato's Socrates genuinely wanted to win, and was even willing to act with some degree of humility and

⁷⁵ In the *Phaedo* Plato offers more elaborate arguments in favor of death, and his purpose there too is to show that Socrates was not a loser. When his friends arrive full of humiliating pity for his unfortunate fate, Socrates turns the tables on them. He first expresses the shocking wish that his rival Evenus join him in death (61b–c). His friends naturally suspect that he bears some ill-will to Evenus, but Socrates explains that this is not a curse but a blessing, since any philosopher would be happy to die (61c). Unfortunately for Evenus, and for everyone else who remains behind, suicide is forbidden (61c–d). Only Socrates has had the good luck to be condemned to death by a court of law; the others are condemned to live. Socrates thus offers only pity for those who would have pitied him. The *Phaedo* makes it even more clear than the *Apology* does that Socrates is fortunate to have received the death penalty by the court.

⁷⁶ However, Xenophon at least finds the alliance of self-interest and the winning of glory unproblematic; see *Lac.* 9.2.

respect in order to secure an acquittal, even mentioning his poor family, does this not make his loss all the more humiliating for him and his followers? Plato seems to be working against his own interest, if his goal is to dissolve all shame and suffering, and to arouse envy on Socrates' behalf.

But Plato devised a solution to this self-made problem as well. He argues that Socrates' solicitousness in court stemmed only from his desire to benefit his judges, and not from any concern for his own welfare (19a, 30c, 30d–31a, 35d). He himself did not care whether or not he would win the case (30b–c). His defense efforts aimed only to preserve the life of Athens' great benefactor, himself (30d–31c).

By this device, Plato offsets two possible criticisms of Socrates. On the one hand, any charges of arrogance or mishandling of the defense lose their punch since Socrates had no interest in living anyway. But at the same time, any embarrassment that might be associated with his humility and his willingness to mention his family is eliminated as well: if Socrates begged, he did it on behalf of the city of Athens.

4. *Claiming Victory.* Plato goes one step further, arguing not only that Socrates did not lose, but also that his condemners were the real losers. Obviously they made a mistake in condemning an innocent man. Plato makes this point not primarily by providing evidence of Socrates' innocence, but rather by denying that this jury or any other is competent to pass judgment. By arguing that few people if any know what is a good or a bad man (19e–20c, 23a–b, 24e–25c, 29e–30b), he undermines any claim that the court could make to possessing the competence necessary to make decisions concerning human beings. And for this reason, as Socrates says, he does not address his judges as judges, but merely as Athenians (compare 17a with 40a). Similarly, by arguing that his hypothetical crime was necessarily unintentional (25d–26a), an argument that he expands elsewhere into the claim that no one does wrong intentionally (e.g., *Prt.* 345d–e; *Lg.* 731c, 860d), Plato delegitimizes the application of punishment on the part of the court.

But Plato charges not only that the court was incompetent, but also that its members suffered actual damage. *They* are pathetic failures, not Socrates. They have lost their reputations and have little gain to show for it. They have only saved themselves a few years of annoying Socratic chatter, and they will be blamed hereafter as the killers of Socrates (38c). They attempted to escape Socrates' beneficial interrogation, but now many more people will interrogate them (39c–d). Clearly this too is part of Plato's post-trial polemic.

Aside from these relatively comprehensible losses, the judges will lose much more by their very involvement in an act of injustice: it is much worse to do wrong than to suffer it (30d), and those who convicted Socrates are guilty of great injustice. Socrates was caught at an old age by death, which is slow, while

his accusers were caught at a much younger age by wickedness, which runs more quickly (39a–b).

But the worst loss of all is the loss of Socrates himself, god's greatest gift to Athens, and one nearly impossible to replace (30d–31a). By losing him, Plato claims, the Athenians became the world's greatest losers, and they had only themselves to blame.

This attack on the jurors, and on Athens itself, is the most powerful attack of all since it charges Athens not merely with injustice, but rather with failure, a more serious charge, and precisely the one that was brought against Socrates in the post-trial dispute.⁷⁷ This reversal of positions enables Socrates not only to avoid the stigma of defeat but also to achieve the kind of victory that can only be obtained through the defeat and humiliation of one's enemies. This is the revenge that Plato took on his master's (and his own) adversaries. However much he renounces the ethics of helping friends and harming enemies, Plato is not above acting in accordance with it.

IV. CONCLUSION: TWO IMAGES OF SOCRATES

In the *Apology* Plato never completely breaks the dramatic illusion. But while the work has the appearance of a defense speech, Plato nevertheless uses it for a variety of his own goals, philosophical and biographical as well as social and polemical. The central goal is the defense of the reputation of Socrates, and through it of all who still associated themselves with Socrates' name. This is made clear above all by the comprehensiveness of Plato's treatment of the specific post-trial issues. It is not only the formal structure of the work, but also the systematic way in which Plato treats the post-trial issues and their implications, sometimes even bringing forward petty or contradictory arguments, that makes it clear that he is addressing this controversy.

There is virtually nothing in Plato's *Apology* that does not relate to the post-trial debate; we need no other hypothesis in order to explain the work as we have it. Insofar as this would have been obvious to a fourth-century reader, personally familiar with that controversy, to that degree we can be confident that the work was written as a work of fictional pseudo-historical polemics.

We can also discern a close connection between the different attitudes of Xenophon and Plato to the trial and execution of Socrates and their different portraits of Socrates and his conversations. We have mentioned specifically the charge of arrogance that Xenophon endorses wholeheartedly, and that Plato modifies with some signs of humility both here and elsewhere. For

⁷⁷ The Athenians lost the god's gift through their own foolish and arrogant misbehavior in court, and they lost for the very reasons for which Socrates was later blamed for his defeat in court.

Plato's Socrates one might also point to the argument that those who commit wrong are harmed more than those who suffer it (*Gorgias*) as an example of how Plato's view of the trial influenced the formulation of his doctrines. One of the frustrating problems with this doctrine is that it focuses only on the relative positions of the sufferer and the inflictor of injustice. This may result from the fact that Plato was interested in contrasting Socrates with those who did him wrong. Similarly, arguments about the immortality of the soul, about the nature of virtue, and about true justice, fit nicely with the effort to justify and defend the life of an apolitical philosopher who seemed to have led a miserable existence and met an unfortunate doom. In his *Republic*, Plato tries to conceive of the rare and almost impossible circumstances in which this fundamental wrong could be righted. And at the same time, there and in other works, he tries to show that the philosopher is really better off despite everything.

Xenophon took a very different approach. Although he tried to defend and praise Socrates, he did not allow the failure in court to form the basis of an entire outlook. He does not argue for an essential conflict between the man of virtue and the corrupt political and social community, but on the contrary, constantly says the opposite. In his view, virtue tends to be rewarded in political life as in any other aspect of life. Socrates, being virtuous, could not have been unsuccessful and therefore he was not. Because of his virtues, Socrates was popular and well-loved by his many friends. While there are instances of hostile confrontation between Socrates and others in Xenophon's writings, they are few and far between, and they are generally initiated by others (see for example *Mem.* 1.6). His Socrates primarily gave helpful advice to his friends and acquaintances. Among other lessons, he told them that the only way to win friends and influence people is by convincing them that one is a good person, and that the only way to do that is by really being one (*Mem.* 2.2–6, 3.1, 3.3–6; compare *Cyr.* 1.6.22). Far from being "too good" to succeed in ordinary civic life, Xenophon's Socrates was exactly good enough to do so. He was an expert precisely in the practical art of self-presentation (which Plato ridicules in the *Gorgias* and elsewhere), and was able to teach others how to present themselves as well. This is the meaning of his strange claim in Xenophon's *Symposium* that he is an expert in the art of pimping (*Smp.* 4.56–60, cf. *Mem.* 2.6.29), a claim that is illustrated in the bulk of the conversations recorded in the *Memorabilia*, especially in Books 2 and 3. This view of Socrates conflicts drastically with the facts of his life and in particular with his apparently disastrous performance in court. If Socrates was a great expert in winning friends and influencing people, how could he have wound up being executed by his own neighbors? It is for this reason that Xenophon's explanation of the trial and execution is so fundamental to his whole view of Socrates. In Xenophon's view, Socrates wanted to die. Any other explanation would be inconceivable.

For both Plato and Xenophon, then, the portrait of Socrates' behavior in court stems from the need to respond, in different ways, to the post-trial debate. Moreover, their broader portraits of Socrates appear to be extensions of the images they created for their *Apologies*. These portraits stemmed not so much from the recollection of time spent with the great master as from the need to say something in response to the criticisms that were voiced after the trial. The inspiration for this great literature is to be found not merely in the unique personality of the historical Socrates, but more in the responses of his friends to the scurrilous attacks on him and his memory, perpetrated by the likes of Anytus, Meletus, Lykon, and Polycrates. While we may not be able to learn very much about the ideas of Socrates from the writings of Plato or Xenophon, we do learn a lot about both Plato and Xenophon by considering how their ideas evolved in reaction not to Socrates himself, but to the debate on Socrates that followed his death.

APPENDIX: OUTLINE OF PLATO'S *APOLOGY*

This outline shows how virtually the entire composition addresses the post-trial controversy implicitly or explicitly, but does not provide a complete account of all the issues raised in it.

I. First Speech:⁷⁸

A. Preface:

1. Apology for Socrates' failure to prepare or present a reasonable defense speech (17a–18a6)
2. Statement of the older, more serious charges, which provide the true explanation for Socrates' conviction (18a7–e3)
3. Assertion that the defense effort was a serious one, made for the sake of the audience and for the sake of the law, despite the inevitable futility of the effort (18e4; 19a6; 30c)

B. Body of the speech:

1. The older charges (19a7–24b)
 - a. Explanation of why Socrates was condemned: deeply ingrained but mistaken prejudices (19a7–24b), which cannot be expelled in a short time (19a1–2; 24a)
 - b. Denial to Meletus of the satisfaction of victory (19b–c; 28a–b)
 - c. The story of the Oracle (20c–24b)
 - i. Further explanation of why Socrates was condemned: personal hatred that arose from his heroic service to the god (20c–24b)
 - ii. Denial of the charge of arrogance in court: Socrates interpreted the Oracle with all possible humility

[Summary of older charges and statement of the actual charges (24b–c)]

⁷⁸ Note that the speech is divided into three parts: the old charges, the current charges, and the post-trial charges, although all parts address the post-trial charges implicitly. C. D. C. Reeve, too, notes the three-part division of the speech, although he explains it differently (3–4).

2. The current charges: the interview with Meletus (24c–28a). Socrates launches a personal attack arguing that the accusation was a frivolous and self-contradictory joke exhibiting arrogance, vice, and youth. As such, the interview implicitly defends Socrates against the charge of incompetence and arrogance in court.

[Summary: The older charges caused his conviction, not the newer ones (28a–b)]

3. The post-trial charges:
 - a. Socrates did not lose (28a–31c)
 - i. Denying Meletus the satisfaction of victory (28a–b)
 - ii. Facing death bravely is a source of pride not shame (28b–29a)
 - iii. Death may not be a bad thing at all (29a–29c)
 - iv. Socrates deliberately chose death rather than abandon his mission (29c–30c)
 - v. A good man cannot be harmed by a bad (30c–d)
 - vi. The Athenians lose god’s gift (30c–31a)
 - vii. It would be to Athens’ advantage to spare him (31a–31c)
 - b. Profoundest explanation for Socrates’ execution (or: why Socrates did not participate in the public life of the city; 31c–34b)
 - i. The just and good man cannot succeed in public life, but must adopt a private station
 - ii. Examples of Socrates’ devotion to law in his public activities (31c–33a)
 - iii. *Examples of Socrates’ virtue in private:*⁷⁹

He never taught for money but was available to all (33a–b)

He never said things in private other than what he said in public (33b)

His conversations were amusing (33c)

All of his students and their relatives were pleased with his results (33c–34b)
- C. Final Summary: Direct response to the charge of arrogance in court: Socrates did not beg because that would not be honorable, just, or pious. (34b–35d)

II. Second Speech: Socrates’ Reaction to the Conviction

- A. Socrates’ conviction did not harm him (35e–36b)
 1. Not in the least disturbed by the conviction (35e–36a)
 2. Claims a degree of victory (36a)
 3. Denies Meletus any important role in the conviction (36a–b)
- B. Proposal of a penalty: modified arrogance (36c–38c)
 1. Reviews his own merits (36b–36d)
 2. Deserves honorary meals (36d–37a)
 3. Denies that this request constitutes arrogance (37a)
 4. Cannot in good conscience propose any harm to himself (37a–38b)
 5. Blames the laws of Athens for not providing enough time to convince the jury of his innocence (37a–b)

⁷⁹ The section summarized in italics is the only section that does not directly address the charges mentioned by Xenophon and their implications. It may be intended as a defense of Socrates’ private way of life against the charge that a good citizen ought to participate in public life (see *Mem.* 1.6.15) or as a defense against the charge that he taught disreputable doctrines in secret. At the same time, it seems to be almost an advertisement for a Socratic or Platonic school.

6. Could not propose prison, a fine, or exile (37b–38b)
7. Proposes a fine as large as he can afford, and adds to it the money of his friends (38b–c)

III. Third Speech:⁸⁰ Results of the conviction and execution of Socrates

- A. The Athenians gained only a bad reputation (38c)
- B. Socrates lost the trial not because of the inadequacy of his defense, but because he did not act disgracefully (38d–39b)
- C. He did not repent of how he handled the defense (38e)
- D. Those who voted against him deserve the disgrace (39b)
- E. The Athenians will suffer a harsher penalty than Socrates did: they will be punished by lessons from his students (39c–d)
- F. Both supernatural indications and rational considerations show that death is good (39e–41d)
- G. Despite the good results of the trial, those who voted to condemn deserve blame (41d–e)
- H. Encouragement to others to follow the path of Socrates (41c–42a)
- I. Aporetic ending (42a)

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⁸⁰ Note that only here can the character Socrates openly address the post-trial charges that concern Plato throughout, since only here does he have full knowledge of the results of the trial. Hence there is little dramatic irony in the third speech.

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