

From Midwife to Criminal: Socrates' Likely Final Self-Perception

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Since the appearance of Plato's Apology and Crito during the former half of the fourth century BCE, up to and including today there seems to have persistently prevailed a consensus non scriptus among students of (Western) philosophy, namely, that the Athenian jury convicted and executed an innocent and decidedly harmless man, Socrates — and that this reckless action was grounded in exaggerated and even false charges. A closer reexamination of the known evidence, however, ought to reveal that Socrates was probably entirely correctly charged and declared guilty. While, granted, we might nowadays look upon him as, essentially, an innocuous eccentric, in the light of the social and cultural standards of his time, he could not but be taken as a rebel of the first order. Indeed, more than this, his in-jail behavioral changes we read about in the Phaedo, may well be interpreted as intimating that while awaiting execution, Socrates probably came to see himself as the criminal he was accused of being, and, correspondingly, fully deserving of the capital punishment required by the law.

I am like the midwife insofar as I cannot myself give birth to wisdom; so the common reproach is true, that though I question others, I can myself bring nothing to light because there is no wisdom in me.
— THEAETETUS 150c

It is literally true, even if it sounds rather comical, that God has specially appointed me to this city, as though it were a large thoroughbred horse which because of its great size is inclined to be lazy and needs the stimulation of some stinging fly. It seems to me that God has attached me to this city to perform the office of such a fly, and all day long I never cease to settle here, there, and everywhere, rousing, persuading, reproving everyone of you.
— APOLOGY 30e

When regarded from a modern-day vantage platform, Socrates' execution tends to appear as a barbarous overreaction by ancient Athens' legal system to his lifestyle and publicly pursued philosophical inquiry. Nor is it obvious that succeeding generations of guardians and administrators of that same system learned much from their predecessors' overreaction — if we might indeed aptly characterize it as such — when we think that decades later Aristotle (because of his close association with Alexander the Great) felt compelled to hastily remove (in the summer of 323 BCE)

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to (possibly) one of his mother's estates in Chalcis, Euboea — where he died about a year later — so as to, as he is frequently cited to have declared, preclude the Athenians from committing a “second sin against philosophy” (see Guthrie 1981, p. 19). Would we not, then, be right to nod in agreement with Alexander Rubel's claim that the “very prosecution of the genial and ironic Socrates, whom his disciples Xenophon and Plato sympathetically described as the innocent victim of a judicial assault, is still considered a mark of dishonor in the history of Athens” (Rubel 2014, p. 17)?

If posed as a general question, Rubel's remark should attract a legion of answers from commentators of various orientations: The chronically dyspeptic and bleary-eyed cultural guardians, for instance, those self-appointed champions of universal equality indefatigably sniffing and scratching for any, even the most incredible evidence of bias and bigotry in the Western world, would likely observe that Socrates' demise — though in itself of, essentially, tertiary significance to their ultimate intents — represents still another refutation of the widely perpetuated *mythology* of Athens as the birthplace of democracy. As Mary Beard, for one, Professor of Classics at Cambridge and a public commentator at large, maintains, adherents from “both left and right of the spectrum” have turned the notion of Athenian democracy into a veritable “political fetish,” while “airbrush[ing] out” its less appealing features, such as the “exclusion of women and slaves from any form of political action” (Beard 2019). Insofar as they insist on judging past world events even while consciously gazing at them through the lens of the historian's fallacy, we should be correct to dismiss Beard and all like-minded deniers of ancient Athens' legacy as irrelevant to our current discussion.

Some others, while not quite exonerating Athens' legal system of the period, have attempted to persuade us to reflect upon Socrates' demise from a psychological angle: Instead of considering Socrates a victim or a martyr, they tend to argue that we should be closer to the truth to think of him as, in a most important sense, welcoming the court's sentence as a fortuitous opportunity to escape the infirmities of senescence. This is a notion that appears to have lost practically none of its currency since its inception just about immediately following Socrates' death. As, for example, Harold Ravitch remarks: “Although this exact phrase does not occur in Xenophon's *Apology*, Socrates does state (twice) that the god gave him the opportunity of ending his life ‘in the way that is easiest.’ Socrates then describes how the death penalty allows him to avoid the hardships of old age” (Ravitch 1992). To his credit, Ravitch acknowledges, but remains unconvinced by, John Burnet's claim that “Socrates is in good health at the time of the trial, indeed, good enough to allow ‘at least another ten years of activity. . .’” (ibid). Burnet's point, according to Ravitch, is really a reply to a thesis “excogitated” either by Xenophon or by Hermogenes, that “Socrates deliberately provoked his condemnation in order to escape the troubles of old age, such as blindness, deafness, and loss of memory” (ibid).

In his thorough *The Trial of Socrates*, I.F. Stone reinforces this view as follows:

Xenophon was not in Athens at the time of the trial. He says he based his account on what he was told later by Hermogenes, one of Socrates' closest disciples, who told Xenophon that he pleaded with Socrates to prepare an eloquent defense because the juries were so susceptible to oratory. ‘Do you not observe,’ Hermogenes asked Socrates, ‘that the Athenian courts have often been carried away by an eloquent speech

and have condemned innocent men to death, and often on the other hand the guilty have been acquitted either because their plea aroused compassion or because their speech was witty?’ Socrates replied that he had twice tried to write such a speech but each time his *daimonion*, or guiding spirit, had intervened and dissuaded him. Socrates told Hermogenes that this divine inner voice advised him that it was better to die now before the ills of old age overtook him (Stone 1988, p. 183).

As if these remarks did not speak clearly enough, Stone rephrases his point thus:

When Hermogenes, a close disciple of his, asked Socrates to write an ‘eloquent defense the juries were susceptible to oratory,’ Socrates replied that he had twice tried to write such a speech but each time his *daimonion*, or guiding spirit, had intervened and dissuaded him. Socrates told Hermogenes that ‘his divine inner voice advised him that it was better to die now before the ills of old age overtook him Socrates goes on to say, ‘If my years are prolonged, I know that the frailties of old age will inevitably be realized — that my vision must be less perfect and my hearing less keen, and I shall be slower to learn and more forgetful of what I have learned . . .’ (ibid).

Accordingly, ‘death was his choice, and he could obtain it only from an exasperated jury. He did not wish to charm them. The tone he adopted in his address to the jury was offensively boastful and arrogant’ (ibid, p. 184).

This thesis is somewhat distantly echoed in, and thus injected with a rush of fresh *élan* by, R.G. Frey’s following opposition to any claim that Socrates ought not to be thought of as having “commit[ted] suicide because he [drank] the hemlock in the context of an execution by the state of Athens”: “I agree,” Frey tells us, that “Socrates takes the hemlock as a result of his sentence, indeed, as his sentence, but I deny that intentionally taking one’s life because it is one’s sentence *ipso facto* precludes committing suicide” (Frey 1978, p. 107). “Even granted that he had to die,” Frey explains, one could hardly properly deny that Socrates, in fact, “had a choice between drinking the hemlock willingly and having it, so to speak, force-fed; and only by choosing to be force-fed would Socrates have been forced to drink the hemlock, that is, compelled to die against his will” (ibid, p. 106). In Frey’s eyes, then, so long as any legally condemned individual who, just moments before being executed, not only refuses to turn himself or herself into an unseemly spectacle, but even fully conforms to the executioner’s instructions, any such individual could not but be thought of as having committed suicide — Socrates’ insistence, in the *Crito*, that it “would be hardly suitable for a man of my age to resent having to die” (43c) notwithstanding. (Perhaps worse, at least some historical events would have had to be perceived differently: Had Frey’s view of the nature of suicide prevailed at the time of, say, the French Revolution, today we would have had to accept the claim that most of the blue bloods condemned to die by the guillotine in effect committed suicide, insofar as in most cases the executioner did not have to force their necks under the blade.)

As concerns conceptual support in the primary corpus for positions advocated by writers from either side of this interpretation, we could point to perhaps (literally) no more than one and the same passage in the *Phaedo*: To the extent that, as Socrates emphasizes here, we are merely *possessions* of the gods, to subject oneself to any injury without, first, receiving some intimation of approval from them would be “not

legitimate” — not legitimate, in fact, even “for those to whom death would be an advantage” (61c-62b). Yet no sooner does he say so than Socrates modifies the former half of his claim by relating it to his own circumstance: “[W]e must not put an end to ourselves until God sends some compulsion like *the one which we are facing now* (italics mine)” (62c).

Reinforcing Frey's conception of suicide and Ravitch's version of what might nowadays be widely referred to as suicide by proxy, is Plato's *Crito*, which narrates Socrates' refusal of his eponymous friend's offer to evade execution by escaping from jail — and this despite Crito's risky effort to render that escape practically a certainty. But . . . if so, I imagine one interjecting at about this point with a raised index finger and pensively distended eyebrows, if so, we could probably no less cogently make the case that Plato's object in the *Crito* must have been something decidedly other than to dramatize Socrates' desire to die. He might well have intended to portray Socrates as a man of post-conventional values, a man whose conception of the good life included, along with an honorable temperament and demeanor, obedience to the prevailing cultural climate and established legal system. Indeed, when we remember that throughout his lengthy literary career, Plato has consistently cast Socrates in the best possible light, we might appraise our imaginary objector's interjection as a more persuasive opinion. Moreover, the enduring and widely held image of the composure and dignity wherewith an “unfairly convicted” Socrates met his end, an image which the *Crito* (surely more than any other text of the time) has helped to form could be hardly aptly denied.

Another, a closer hearing of our hypothetical interjector's point might reveal that it is, in effect, drawing open the curtain to another angle wherefrom to consider Socrates' unusual in-jail actions we are informed about in Plato's *Phaedo*. The following erotetic questions ought to put into focus the underlying premise of this new vista: Did Socrates really merit the persistent reputation of having been unfairly charged and convicted? In fact, might he have ceased to look upon himself as a victim or a martyr by the time he came face-to-face with his executioner, which might well explain his *easy willingness* — not to say *impatience* — to bring the cup of hemlock to his lips?

In his remarkable (yet frequently tedious) study *Why Socrates Died*, Robin Waterfield holds that Socrates, in fact, died quite voluntarily, as a scapegoat (*φάρμακός*) so as to appease the gods and ipso facto help heal the splintered socio-political climate in post-war Athens. As he puts it in the book's concluding paragraph:

Socrates' last words, uttered to his old friend Crito from his deathbed in prison as the poison took hold of his body, were: ‘Crito, we owe a cock to Asclepius. Please make sure you pay the debt’ . . . These famous and mysterious words have attracted numerous interpretations. I would like to add one more. Playing on the close link between *pharmakos* and *pharmakon*, ‘scapegoat’ and ‘cure,’ Socrates saw himself as healing the city's ills by his voluntary death. A thanks offering to the god of healing was due. (2009, p. 204).

Waterfield is mistaken in his attempt to decode the semantic weight of Socrates' final injunction to Crito. By interpreting the debt of a rooster to Asclepius as a metaphor for reviving Athen's post-Peloponnesian War civic health, Waterfield overlooks the ritual context of the *κορβάν* — still practiced in (mostly) isolated areas of the Eastern

Mediterranean — as a specific offering for physiological recovery. Ultimately, his political reading is unsustainable; a structural critique reveals that a civic metaphor would have necessitated a sacrifice to Eirene, the divine personification of peace and political stability, rather than the god of medicine.

At the same time, we ought to concede that Waterfield is at least on target when he writes about the social climate in Athens: More specifically, both the Athenian leadership and the populace appeared to be afraid that “[i]n a society so thoroughly permeated and cemented by religious sentiment, catastrophe could only be seen as sign of the gods’ displeasure. Athens had just lost a war; the gods were clearly not on the city’s side”.

Since the gods were motivated by reciprocity, the removal of their goodwill towards the city proved that the Athenians had let them down somehow, and deserved to be punished. In other words, there was a vein of impiety in the city, which the gods were punishing. [And] [t]he easiest way to deal with such a trend was to make it particular, to attribute it to a single individual . . .

I like to think that Socrates, the devotee of Apollo, accepted his death, as [just such] a voluntary scapegoat. He had failed to see his vision for Athens become reality, and no doubt if he were still free he would think that the continuation of his mission was the best chance Athens had for regeneration . . . Rather than escape, as he easily could, he let himself be killed (pp. 202–204).

Waterfield’s hand-in-glove explanation of Socrates’ demise appears as seamless as it is deceptively elegant. By his own concession, he locates “political concerns at the heart of Socrates’ enterprise” and, accordingly, invariably presents us with a “revisionist picture of his thought” (p. xiii). Waterfield’s account speaks entirely past my aim insofar as here I am concerned with a literary analysis of the structural and dialectical nature of Plato’s dialogues, or the rhetorical asymmetry between Socrates and his interlocutors. Phrased differently, whereas Waterfield has in mind to enrich the secondary scholarship on Plato with a historian’s perspective of the landmark event in 399 BCE, I am more concerned with showing that Socrates did not merely lose a trial in the face of a defective political system, but that he did not resist being put to death as a matter of — supreme philosophical consistency.

On the contrary, as shown in Plato’s *Crito* and partly in the *Phaedo*, Socrates seems to have accepted his jury’s verdict as valid: The *Phaedo* depicts Socrates as relaxed and even jovial on his final day, behaving very much like his old self. At the same time, his solitary days in prison also appear to have significantly changed his mindset, turning him into a *novus homo*. For instance, only days before his execution, he began turning Aesop’s fables into poetry — something he had never done before (60c-61c). He did this, he informs Cebes and the rest of the assembled visitors in his jail cell, in an “attempt to discover the meaning of certain dreams, and to clear my conscience, in case this was the art which I had been told to practice.” Prior to his trial, Socrates continues, he had always practiced philosophy, in accordance with a dream that had appeared to him in “different forms at different times,” which persistently urged him to “practice and cultivate the arts” (60e). Socrates thought he was already doing exactly that, as he was for most of his life convinced that philosophy is the greatest of the arts. At some point while in jail, however, Plato quotes him further, he began to believe that “perhaps it might be this

popular form of art that the dreams intended me to practice, in which case I ought to practice and not disobey.” Who but a trained philologist, such as, for example, Nietzsche, might have given us a most fruitful glimpse at this change in Socrates’ behavior? In his words:

Let us now imagine the one great Cyclops eye of Socrates fixed on tragedy, an eye in which the fair frenzy of artistic enthusiasm had never glowed. To this eye was denied the pleasure of gazing into the Dionysian abysses. What, then, did it have to see in the ‘sublime and greatly lauded’ tragic art, as Plato called it? Something rather unreasonable, full of causes apparently without effects, and effects apparently without causes; the whole, moreover, so motley and manifold that it could not but be repugnant to a sober mind, and a dangerous tinder for sensitive and susceptible souls. (Nietzsche 1872/1967, section 14).

Nietzsche’s remarks point to a parallel notion; specifically, if Socrates did, indeed, eventually see himself as having misperceived reason as being superior to folk wisdom, then might he not have also come to think that he perhaps misperceived his mission in life? Might he not have, in the contemplative atmosphere of his jail cell, also ultimately grasped that instead of a useful irritant on the equine body of Athens, he might in effect have all along been what more than a mere few had already thought him to be, a criminal of the first order?

If it is true, as perhaps most of us are likely to believe, that any radical change in one’s general outlook and comportment necessarily includes a remarkable change in his or her guiding aim(s) and even self-perception, then the in-jail change in Socrates we are informed about in the *Phaedo* might well be understood to be pointing to a different possibility, and perhaps a likelihood, that is, that Socrates firmly declined Crito’s offer to escape not because he wished to die a martyr or a scapegoat, but because he realized that he richly deserved the sentence he was given and its corresponding punishment.

Another, and of course much more consequential, change in Socrates’ general frame of mind occurs when he imagines, while getting ready to escape, an encounter with Athens’ constitution and laws: As we read in the *Crito*, he imagines these as not only urging him to stay put and face his legal punishment, but, providing he proceeds to translate his plan into action, as even threatening him with no less than eternal persecution by their brethren and sistren beginning the moment he eventually enters the world beyond. As Stone puts it, Socrates “let the Laws win the argument because he did not want to escape” (Stone 1988, p. 191). Granted, but why did he not wish to escape? Perhaps in the light of the laws’ threat, one might retort, it would be more accurate to argue that Socrates did not necessarily develop a new outlook while awaiting execution but, as Waterfield has revealed, merely decided to die the death of martyr instead of, whether properly or improperly, suffer eternal afterlife persecution. If so, his decision would have to be declared more practical than truly ideological. This is certainly possible, but Socrates also recognized that laws are not gods and must always be fair and impartial. Accordingly, it is reasonable to infer that had he wished to do so, Socrates could have at least attempted to mount a counterargument in support of his escape from jail. This, in turn, might have convinced the laws to waive the sort of persecution wherewith they threatened him.

Yet, according to the *Crito*, not only does Socrates not so much as attempt any such counterargument, he also effectively diverts or undermines Crito from doing so. The implicit premise of our earlier, erotetic point, then, might now sound somewhat more telling than it did initially: Might have Socrates' in-jail behavior and general frame of mind only reflected his eventual, post-trial realization that he was, after all, genuinely guilty as charged, and therefore deserving of the assigned punishment?

A survey of the more noteworthy, then well-known body of evidence concerning Socrates' public demeanor might well have provided the prosecutors and the Athenian jury little (or perhaps even no) alternative but to bring the charges and to reach the verdict against him they did: We might here point to a twofold explanation:

(i) In the *Apology*, for example, Socrates refers to himself as at once a well-intentioned and good-natured, large-scale do-gooder. He calls Athens "a large thorough-bred horse which, because of its great size is inclined to be lazy and needs the stimulation of some stinging fly" (30a), and declares that it was none but God who had appointed him to carry out the latter's duties. This is precisely why, he concedes to the jury, he has become such a nuisance, never ceasing to settle anywhere, but "here, there, and everywhere, rousing, persuading [and] reproving everyone of you." As confirmation of this, Socrates continues, anyone might easily see how "I . . . have neglected my own affairs and endured the humiliation of allowing my family to be neglected for all these years, while I busied myself all the time on your behalf, going like a father or an elder brother to see each one of you privately, and urging you to set your thoughts on goodness" (ibid, 31b). "For this reason, gentlemen [of the jury], so far from pleading on my own behalf, as might be supposed, I am really pleading on yours, to save you from misusing the gift of God by condemning me" (ibid, 30d-e).

Whereas it is true that the pronounced nonchalance and impertinence conveyed in the preceding quotations appear to be genuine in their expression, and therefore depict precisely how Socrates perceived himself, it is also true that they illumine only one side of this multifaceted character about town. One could, moreover, relatively easily make the case that perhaps most of Socrates' reported publicly witnessed discussions must have comprised the seeds of a new existential outlook, and thus must have been as potentially politically destabilizing as they were philosophically engaging; in fact, his seemingly good-natured, but self-convinced extremism might have served as the magnet of his message. To the extent that, as he tells us, his cardinal aim while playing the role of a stinging fly was always to reform the citizenry's interpersonal manners, he is *ipso facto* conceding that another, a concomitant aim of his must have been to significantly change Athens' political structure. After all, if the principal — nay, the sole — reason for institutionalizing any table of morals is to shape people's behavior in all its manifestations, then, clearly, any remarkable change in the cultural mores could not but be invariably reflected in the city's communal spirit and being. Since he must have been as aware as we are nowadays that social intercourse writ large is inextricably related to politics, we might safely infer that Socrates could not but have also regarded himself as someone who exercised a wide, revolutionary influence of the most comprehensive sort.

Nor, judging by the verdict they brought against him, was this point lost on most of the citizens who comprised his jury. On the contrary, instead of nodding in agreement that, although a social irritant, Socrates played a decidedly useful role,

the jury, aware of his subversive message, decided to dispatch him with dispatch. Curiously, what neither Socrates nor his judges seem to have realized is that while potentially subversive, Socrates had, by the time he was brought to trial, also become something of a *buffo*, Athens' version of the village idiot whose moral and political message had lost perhaps most of whatever appeal it might have had initially.

(ii) Undoubtedly, making a public, even a conspicuous, nuisance of himself should have been the least consequential of Socrates' infractions. Still, following decades of being subjected to the same kind of questioning and cross-examinations on themes that probably most Athenians were decidedly less than curious about, a great many of them had, undoubtedly, come to feel put upon, tired of, and antipathetic to, as Thrasyarchus describes it, Socrates' pluming himself upon controverting virtually every answer anyone ventured (*Republic* I 336c). Granted, this was, and would have continued to be, generally tolerated, had it not widely transcended its philosophical boundaries. What seems to have rendered his questioning suspicious was the arrogance, that is, the clear absence of any qualms about exposing the fallibilities of the socially acknowledged pillars of Athens, or about smashing the clay plinths whereupon they stood. When, for one, he observes that Themistocles, despite being a good man, must have been less than a good teacher of virtue — as witnessed by the fact that his own son turned out to be a *failure* — Socrates, as a life-long Athenian, must have known that he was throwing down a gauntlet that could not but have less than pleasant consequences for him, and, indeed, for everyone else who might have supported that impression. Chances are that most everyone who knew him well likely thought the same, that is, that Socrates knew the social and cultural consequences of what he was saying. To the extent, therefore, that he did not clearly attempt to curb his pronouncements against these pillars, we would have to see him as effectively calling for a social upheaval against the established representatives of the state, and, on a larger scale, the state itself. The concluding quarter of the *Meno*, for example, provides a characteristic illustration of Socrates' method, and — insofar as Socrates reveals his fully developed understanding of the subject — of his rather playful, yet, conceptually speaking, practically superfluous questioning of his interlocutor, the choleric Anytus.

Socrates' concession that he had publicly put off many from the Athenian professional ranks ought to have been ample evidence for him to infer, much earlier than he finally did, that he was increasingly being regarded as more than a merely innocuous eccentric. Indeed, how could he have not noticed that he was probably increasingly being looked at with jaundiced eyes as a rebel of the most comprehensive sort — or did he believe that his eccentric appearance and demeanor would have likely deflected any such suspicion? Is it possible that he actually did not realize what ought to have been obvious to even the most ordinary of intellects, that these proud men of achievement will, eventually, set out to extract vengeance for being defamed — or did he only feign shortsightedness? Of course, it is just as conceivable that these same men would have decided against vengeance had Socrates been significantly less admired and emulated by the young men of Athens. After all, speaking historically, whenever testing and measuring their substance, (especially) young men have tended to resist and to push against the recognized views and standards of their elders; accordingly, by questioning the accomplishments of members from these ranks,

Socrates was inevitably calling into question the authority of the main source wherefrom the developing opinions and principles of Athens' future leaders and jurists had always derived their legitimacy.

Intimately related to this, despite his acknowledged high regard for Protagoras and Gorgias, Socrates also took a public stand against the Sophists, itinerant instructors who for most of the Athenian population at the time represented the best teachers of virtue, and nearly every subject any free man was supposed to be educated in for a successful career — Anytus' ranting against them in the *Meno* notwithstanding. When, therefore, Socrates criticized them, he was, by extension, belittling and dismissing the education some of the most distinguished families paid high tuitions to secure for their sons. It is thus no surprise why we find Socrates on more than one occasion not only regarded with distrust, but even advised, or, more accurately, *warned* against continuing to speak the way he normally did. As such, we could not but think that he was playing a more destructive than a constructive role. Simply phrased, while Socrates was, as he says at his trial, more concerned with the people's souls, the city leaders were concerned with the looming possibility that he was *ipso facto* undermining the existing social order.

(iii) The suspicion that there was more than ethics to Socrates' self-imposed office of a stinging fly appears to have been raised by more than the three accusers we hear about in the *Apology*, namely, Anytus, Meletus, and Lycon. Nor might it have been otherwise when we observe that his critical analysis of other matters seems to have been as daring as his ethical criticisms. He seems, for example, to have had no less than a visceral reaction to Athens' official gods. As, for example, he concedes to Euthyphro, following the latter's claim that "the same men [who] admit that Zeus shackled his own father [Cronus] for swallowing his [other] sons unjustly . . . are [now] enraged at me when I proceed against my father [for murdering a laborer of mine]": "There, Euthyphro, you have the reason why the charge is brought against me. It is because, whenever people tell such stories about the gods, *I am prone to take ill*, and so it seems that is why they will maintain that I am sinful" [*italics mine*] (*Euthyphro* 6a). This tendency in Socrates becomes pronounced after Chaerephon's citing of the Oracle, which might have been what Socrates needed least to hear at the time he did; for it was right thereafter that he must have experienced a sudden liberation: It was precisely after Chaerephon's report that the scope of Socrates' revolt became much broader, and his tone more caustic.

(iv) Socrates was a cultural deviant of the first order; he was more than a mere eccentric, or a cultural oddity. Aside from rejecting not only the main cultural aim of any free man at the time, namely, to become wealthy and influential, he rejected the free man's dress, flaunting and openly defying how a free man ought to behave in public. Nor, evidently, did Socrates let any of his interlocutors' complaints become constraints; on the contrary, he forsook his obligations as a political and cultural citizen of Athens, and fortified himself with "a sort of voice" which dissuades but never persuades him in any of his undertakings (*Apology* 31d). If so, we could not but, whether by historical or present-day standards, see him as psychologically flawed, suffering from schizophrenia, insofar as he was experiencing auditory hallucinations. Would we blame anyone for suspecting that he might have been, as it were, demonically possessed? To be sure, history has

recorded a host of other deviants both as individuals and groups before and after Socrates — such as, for example, the Stoics and the Cynics — but none of them generated quite the attention Socrates drew to himself. Still more, Socrates' political views must have been looked at with a jaundiced eye. If we take his political views to have been correctly represented in Plato's *Republic*, then he must have held a less than democratic attitude.

(v) Lastly and closely paralleling the possible perception that he might have been psychologically ill, we might point to Socrates' personal appearance, his (in)famous ugliness as a symptom of *dissolution* and *degeneration*. Let us here, again, appeal to Nietzsche as a student of classical culture. In his words:

In origin, Socrates belonged to the lowest class: Socrates was plebs. We know, we can still see for ourselves, how ugly he was. But ugliness, in itself an objection, is among the Greeks almost a refutation. Was Socrates a Greek at all? Ugliness is often enough the expression of a development that has been crossed, *thwarted* by crossing. Or it appears as *declining* development. The anthropologists among the criminologists tell us that the typical criminal is ugly: *monstrum in fronte, monstrum in animo*. But the criminal is a decadent. Was Socrates a typical criminal? At least that would not be contradicted by the famous judgment of the physiognomist which sounded so offensive to the friends of Socrates. A foreigner who knew about faces once passed through Athens and told Socrates to his face that he *was a monstrum* — that he harbored in himself all the bad vices and appetites. And Socrates merely answered: 'You know me, sir!' (Nietzsche 1888/1976, Section 3).

Yet even his severest detractors had to concede that, irrespective of his physical appearance, it would have been a mistake to treat Socrates as a mere buffoon. While it might have been true that he frequently came across as an oddball, he was an oddball with a sizeable following of admirers and imitators of his interrogative mode of discussion. Of course, we might nowadays wonder just how much influence he really did have, since had that influence been as deep as his accusers and detractors seem to have surmised, why did it not spread far enough to encompass more members of the jury pool? On the other hand, it is not unlikely that Socrates' influence was in the process of still growing among those of the younger generation, or the future generations of the Athenian leaders. In the light of the latter possibility, Socrates' influence could be hardly overestimated had he lived to die of natural causes.

Even so, one might (rather confidently) object here, even in the face of these considerations, had he wished to do so, Socrates could still have saved himself had he, as Stone points out in his aforementioned *Trial of Socrates*, in a Chapter titled, "What Socrates Should Have Said," "invoked his right as an Athenian to free speech" (Stone 1988, p. 210). According to Stone, Socrates "could have argued thus:

"Men of Athens, fellow citizens, this is not a trial of Socrates, but of ideas, and of Athens. You are not prosecuting me for anything I did, but for what I have said and taught. You are threatening me with death because you do not like my views and my teaching. This is a prosecution of ideas and that is something new in our city's history. In this sense, Athens is in the dock, not Socrates. Each of you, as my judges, is a defendant . . . '[H]ow can you boast of your free speech if you suppress mine?'" (Stone 1988, p. 212).

Stone is mistaken both historically and conceptually: As Halford Ryan informs us in his account of free speech in ancient Athens, even well after Solon's democratic reforms at about the beginning of the sixth century B.C., "The Athenian citizen was not allowed to say anything that entered his mind to say. Strict limitations were placed upon what he might say. In the time of Solon and Cleisthenes, the fathers of their democracy," Ryan continues, "the Athenians did not believe that democracy meant licence [sic], that freedom meant anarchy, that equality under the law meant freedom to say anything one wished" (Ryan 2012, p. 24).

Nor is Stone on any firmer soil, conceptually speaking. Providing they followed any line of reasoning that would have paralleled what I have already delineated, the court's plaintiffs could have without much difficulty neutralized the free speech angle as follows:

To urge, as you do, Socrates, that Athenians ought to express their minds as they wish might sound noble in some ears. Still, you would have done better had you preceded your claim with a reflection on a question of a decisive sort, namely, whether speech should be truly unconditional, or whether it must be expressed within socially and legally defined boundaries. Surely, even you would concur that free, unregulated speech could rather easily lead to collective ruin. To prevent

such a calamity, the citizens who would comprise our fair Republic would have to be remarkably different from the ones we have now, the latter being the sort of people who are only too willing — nay, eager — to engage not only in mere gossip, but also, in libel and slander. Yes, Socrates, citizens who would agree to live in any city with unrestricted speech would have to be functioning on a clearly unnatural plane, as they would have to have overcome their instinct for peace and self-preservation.

It is either this sort of supra-human persons, if our city is to thrive, or a city filled with citizens who possess the sort of conscience and wisdom you have correctly assigned to none other than men of reason. But men of reason could be hardly said to comprise a majority among us.

As social affairs stand in Athens now, our dear man, many — and perhaps most — of our young men have adopted your manner of discourse and argument, your . . . let's see, what did you call it, . . . aah, yes, dialectic manner, and have thus exposed a large host of their elders' values and attitudes as at once outdated — and even silly. More consequentially than this, they seem to have also adopted your attitude toward the gods of Athens, the very guardians of our city's order and prosperity, an attitude that, if it continues, would, we are afraid, inevitably lead to no pleasant results for any of us at all.

It is ideas of this sort that must have crossed (and even made a nest in) Socrates' mind while he was awaiting execution and ruminating on the question of how he ended up as he did. In the light of the evidence exhibited at his trial, it is easier to believe that Socrates must have finally grasped that his influence in Athens must have been more destructive than beneficial, that both the jury's verdict and its recommended punishment must have been fundamentally correct, and that, correspondingly, he most richly deserved them both.

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