

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

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

19
20 I am like the midwife insofar as I cannot myself give
21 birth to wisdom; so the common reproach is true, that
22 though I question others, I can myself bring nothing
23 to light because there is no wisdom in me.
24 —

25 THEAETETUS 150c

26
27 It is literally true, even if it sounds rather comical,
28 that God has specially appointed me to this city, as
29 though it were a large thoroughbred horse which
30 because of its great size is inclined to be lazy and
31 needs the stimulation of some stinging fly. It seems
32 to me that God has attached me to this city to
33 perform the office of such a fly, and all day long I
34 never cease to settle here, there, and everywhere,
35 rousing, persuading, reproving everyone of you.

36 — APOLOGY 30e

37
38 When regarded from a modern-day vantage platform, Socrates' execution
39 tends to appear as a barbarous overreaction by ancient Athens' legal system to his
40 lifestyle and publicly pursued philosophical inquiry. Nor is it obvious that
41 succeeding generations of guardians and administrators of that same system
42 learned much from their predecessors' overreaction — if we might indeed aptly
43 characterize it as such — when we think that decades later Aristotle (because of
44 his close association with Alexander the Great) felt compelled to hastily remove
45 back to his native Macedonia so as to, as he is frequently cited to have declared,
46 preclude the Athenians from committing a “second sin against philosophy” (see
47 Guthrie, p. 19). Would we not, then, be right to nod in agreement with Alexander
48 Rubel's claim that the “very prosecution of the genial and ironic Socrates, whom

1 his disciples Xenophon and Plato sympathetically described as the innocent victim
2 of a judicial assault, is still considered a mark of dishonor in the history of Athens”
3 (2014, p. 17)?

4 If posed as a general question, Rubel’s remark should attract a legion of
5 answers from commentators of various orientations: The chronically dyspeptic and
6 bleary-eyed cultural guardians, for instance, those self-appointed champions of
7 universal equality indefatigably sniffing and scratching for any, even the most
8 incredible evidence of bias and bigotry in the Western world, would likely observe
9 that Socrates’ demise — though in itself of, essentially, tertiary significance to their
10 ultimate intents — represents still another refutation of the widely perpetuated
11 *mythology* of Athens as the birthplace of democracy. As Mary Beard, for one,
12 Professor of Classics at Cambridge and a public commentator at large, maintains,
13 adherents from “both left and right of the spectrum” have turned the notion of
14 Athenian democracy into a veritable “political fetish,” while “airbrush[ing] out” its
15 less appealing features, such as the “exclusion of women and slaves from any form
16 of political action” (2006). Insofar as they insist on judging past world events even
17 while consciously gazing at them through the lens of the historian’s fallacy, we
18 should be correct to dismiss Beard and all like-minded deniers of ancient Athens’
19 legacy as irrelevant to our current discussion.

20 Some others, while not quite exonerating Athens’ legal system of the period,
21 might attempt to persuade us to reflect upon Socrates’ end from a psychological
22 angle: Instead of considering Socrates a victim or a martyr, we should be closer to
23 the truth, they are inclined to hold, to think of him as, in a most important sense,
24 welcoming the court’s sentence as a fortuitous opportunity to escape the
25 infirmities of senescence. This is a notion that appears to have lost practically none
26 of its currency since its inception just about immediately following Socrates’
27 death. As, for example, Harold Ravitch remarks: “Although this exact phrase does
28 not occur in Xenophon’s *Apology*, Socrates does state (twice) that the god gave
29 him the opportunity of ending his life ‘in the way that is easiest.’ Socrates then
30 describes how the death penalty allows him to avoid the hardships of old age”
31 (1992). To his credit, Ravitch acknowledges, but remains unconvinced by, John
32 Burnet’s claim that “Socrates is in good health at the time of the trial, indeed, good
33 enough to allow ‘at least another ten years of activity. . .’ ” (ibid.). Burnet’s point,
34 according to Ravitch, is really a reply to a thesis “excogitated” either by Xenophon
35 or by Hermogenes, that “Socrates deliberately provoked his condemnation in order
36 to escape the troubles of old age, such as blindness, deafness, and loss of memory”
37 (ibid.).

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

39
40 Xenophon was not in Athens at the time of the trial. He says he based his account on
41 what he was told later by Hermogenes, one of Socrates’ closest disciples, who told
42 Xenophon that he pleaded with Socrates to prepare an eloquent defense because the
43 juries were so susceptible to oratory. ‘Do you not observe,’ Hermogenes asked
44 Socrates, ‘that the Athenian courts have often been carried away by an eloquent
45 speech and have condemned innocent men to death, and often on the other hand the
46 guilty have been acquitted either because their plea aroused compassion or because
47 their speech was witty?’ Socrates replied that he had twice tried to write such a

1 speech but each time his *daimonion*, or guiding spirit, had intervened and dissuaded
 2 him. Socrates told Hermogenes that this divine inner voice advised him that it was
 3 better to die now before the ills of old age overtook him (p. 183).

4
 5 As if these remarks did not speak clearly enough, Stone rephrases his point thus:

6
 7 When Hermogenes, a close disciple of his, asked Socrates to write an ‘eloquent defense
 8 the juries were susceptible to oratory,’ Socrates replied that he had twice tried to write
 9 such a speech but each time his *daimonion*, or guiding spirit, had intervened and
 10 dissuaded him. Socrates told Hermogenes that ‘his divine inner voice advised him that
 11 it was better to die now before the ills of old age overtook him Socrates goes on to
 12 say, ‘If my years are prolonged, I know that the frailties of old age will inevitably be
 13 realized — that my vision must be less perfect and my hearing less keen, and I shall be
 14 slower to learn and more forgetful of what I have learned . . . ’ (ibid). Accordingly,
 15 ‘death was his choice, and he could obtain it only from an exasperated jury. He did not
 16 wish to charm them. The tone he adopted in his address to the jury was offensively
 17 boastful and arrogant’ (ibid. 184).

18
 19 This thesis is somewhat distantly echoed in, and thus injected with a rush of
 20 fresh *élan* by, R.G. Frey’s following opposition to any claim that Socrates ought
 21 not to be thought of as having “commit[ted] suicide because he [drank] the
 22 hemlock in the context of an execution by the state of Athens”: “I agree,” Frey
 23 tells us, that “Socrates takes the hemlock as a result of his sentence, indeed, as his
 24 sentence, but I deny that intentionally taking one’s life because it is one’s sentence
 25 *ipso facto* precludes committing suicide” (1978, p. 107). “Even granted that he had
 26 to die,” Frey explains, one could hardly properly deny that Socrates, in fact, “had a
 27 choice between drinking the hemlock willingly and having it, so to speak, force-
 28 fed; and only by choosing to be force-fed would Socrates have been forced to
 29 drink the hemlock, that is, compelled to die against his will” (ibid. p.106). In
 30 Frey’s eyes, then, so long as any legally condemned individual who, just moments
 31 before being executed, not only refuses to turn himself or herself into an unseemly
 32 spectacle, but even fully conforms to the executioner’s instructions, any such
 33 individual could not but be thought of as having committed suicide — Socrates’
 34 insistence, in the *Crito*, that it “would be hardly suitable for a man of my age to
 35 resent having to die” (43c) notwithstanding. (Perhaps worse, at least some
 36 historical events would have had to be perceived differently: Had Frey’s view of
 37 the nature of suicide prevailed at the time of, say, the French Revolution, today we
 38 would have had to accept the claim that most of the blue bloods condemned to die
 39 by the guillotine actually committed suicide, insofar as in most cases the
 40 executioner did not have to force their necks under the blade.)

41 As concerns conceptual support in the primary corpus for positions advocated
 42 by writers from either side of this interpretation, we could point to perhaps (literally)
 43 no more than one and the same passage in the *Phaedo*: To the extent that, as
 44 Socrates emphasizes here, we are merely *possessions* of the gods, to subject
 45 oneself to any injury without, first, receiving some intimation of approval from
 46 them would be “not legitimate” — not legitimate, in fact, even “for those to whom
 47 death would be an advantage” (61c-62b). Yet, no sooner does he say so than
 48 Socrates modifies the former half of his claim by relating it to his own circumstance:

1 “[W]e must not put an end to ourselves until God sends some compulsion like *the*
2 *one which we are facing now* (italics mine)” (62c).

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

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

30 Nor should this question necessarily surprise us if, as we read in the
31 commencing paragraphs of the *Phaedo*, and as I attempt to demonstrate in the
32 succeeding pages, Socrates’ in-jail life of solitude and reflection would appear to
33 have, attitudinally speaking, turned him into a *novus homo*. For example, only
34 days prior to his execution, Socrates began to set to lyrics some of Aesop’s fables,
35 something he had never done before (60c-61c). He did this, he informs Cebes and
36 the rest of the assembled visitors in his jail cell, in an “attempt to discover the
37 meaning of certain dreams, and to clear my conscience, in case this was the art
38 which I had been told to practice.” Prior to his trial, Socrates continues, he had
39 always practiced philosophy, in accordance with a dream that had appeared to him
40 in “different forms at different times,” which persistently urged him to “practice
41 and cultivate the arts” (60e). Socrates thought he was already doing exactly that, as
42 he was for most of his life convinced that philosophy is the greatest of the arts. At
43 some point while in jail, however, he began, as he tells the assembled on his day of
44 execution, to believe that “perhaps it might be this popular form of art that the
45 dreams intended me to practice, in which case I ought to practice and not disobey.”
46 Who but a trained philologist, such as, for example, Nietzsche, might have given

1 us a most fruitful glimpse at this change in Socrates' behavior? As he observes,
2 then:

3
4 Let us now imagine the one great Cyclops eye of Socrates fixed on tragedy, an eye in
5 which the fair frenzy of artistic enthusiasm had never glowed. To this eye was denied
6 the pleasure of gazing into the Dionysian abysses. What, then, did it have to see in the
7 'sublime and greatly lauded' tragic art, as Plato called it?
8 Something rather unreasonable, full of causes apparently without effects, and effects
9 apparently without causes; the whole, moreover, so motley and manifold that it could
10 not but be repugnant to a sober mind, and a dangerous tinder for sensitive and
11 susceptible souls. (*The Birth of Tragedy*, Section 14)

12
13 Nietzsche's remarks point to a parallel notion; specifically, if Socrates did,
14 indeed, eventually see himself as having misperceived reason as being superior to
15 folk wisdom, then might he not have also come to think that he perhaps
16 misperceived his mission in life? Might he not have, in the contemplative
17 atmosphere of his jail cell, ultimately grasped that instead of a useful irritant on the
18 equine body of Athens, he in fact might have all along been what more than a
19 mere few had already thought him to be, a criminal of the first order? If it is true
20 — as perhaps most believe — that any radical change in one's general outlook and
21 comportment necessarily includes a remarkable change in his or her guiding
22 aim(s) and even self-perception, then the in-jail change in Socrates we are
23 informed about in the *Phaedo* might be said to be pointing to a different
24 possibility, and perhaps a likelihood, namely, that Socrates firmly declined Crito's
25 offer to escape not because he wished to die a martyr, but because he realized that
26 he richly deserved the sentence he was given.

27 Another, and of course much more consequential, change in Socrates' general
28 frame of mind occurs when he imagines, while getting ready to escape, an encounter
29 with Athens' constitution and laws: As we read in the *Crito*, he imagines these as
30 not only urging him to stay put and face his legal punishment, but as, providing he
31 proceeds to translate his plan into action, even threatening him with no less than
32 eternal persecution by their brethren and sistren beginning the moment he
33 eventually enters the next world. As Stone puts it, Socrates "let the Laws win the
34 argument because he did not want to escape" (p. 191). Granted, but why did he not
35 wish to escape? Perhaps in the light of the laws' threat, one might counter, it
36 would be more accurate to argue that Socrates did not necessarily develop a new
37 outlook while awaiting execution, but merely decided to die the death of an
38 unwilling martyr instead of, whether properly or improperly, suffer eternal afterlife
39 persecution. If so, his decision would have to be declared more practical than truly
40 ideological. This is, certainly, possible; but Socrates, let us note, was also
41 conscious that that the laws are by no means divinities, and that they are, by their
42 very nature, required to be consistently fair and impartial. Hence, it is reasonable
43 to infer that had he wished to do so, he could have at least attempted to mount a
44 counterargument in support of his escape from jail, which, in turn, might have
45 convinced the laws to waive the sort of persecution wherewith they threatened
46 him. Yet, according to the *Crito*, not only does Socrates avoid even suggesting any
47 such counterargument, he also effectively diverts or undermines or discourages

1 Crito from doing so. Correspondingly, the implicit premise of our earlier, erotetic
 2 point might now sound more telling than it did initially: Might have Socrates' in-
 3 jail behavior and general frame of mind only reflected his eventual, post-trial
 4 realization that he was, after all, genuinely guilty as charged, and therefore deserving
 5 of the assigned punishment?

6 A survey of the more telling, then well-known body of evidence concerning
 7 Socrates' public demeanor might well have provided the prosecutors and the
 8 Athenian jury little (or perhaps even no) alternative but to bring the charges and to
 9 reach the verdict against him they did: (i) In the *Apology*, for example, Socrates
 10 refers to himself as at once a well-intentioned and good-natured, large-scale do-
 11 gooder. He calls Athens "a large thorough-bred horse which, because of its great
 12 size is inclined to be lazy and needs the stimulation of some stinging fly" (30a), and
 13 declares that it was none but God who had appointed him to carry out the latter's
 14 duties. This is precisely why, he concedes to the jury, he has become such a
 15 nuisance, never ceasing to settle anywhere, but "here, there, and everywhere,
 16 rousing, persuading [and] reproving everyone of you." As confirmation of this,
 17 Socrates continues, anyone might easily see how "I . . . have neglected my own
 18 affairs and endured the humiliation of allowing my family to be neglected for all
 19 these years, while I busied myself all the time on your behalf, going like a father or
 20 an elder brother to see each one of you privately, and urging you to set your thoughts
 21 on goodness" (ibid. 31b). "For this reason, gentlemen, so far from pleading on my
 22 own behalf, as might be supposed, I am really pleading on yours, to save you from
 23 misusing the gift of God by condemning me" (ibid. 30d-e).

24 Whereas it is true that the pronounced nonchalance and impertinence conveyed
 25 in the preceding quotations appear to be genuine in their expression, and therefore
 26 depict precisely how Socrates perceived himself, it is also true that they illumine
 27 only one side of this multifaceted character about town. One could, moreover,
 28 relatively easily make the case that perhaps most of Socrates' reported publicly
 29 witnessed discussions must have comprised the seeds of a new existential outlook,
 30 and thus must have been as potentially politically destabilizing as they were
 31 philosophically engaging; in fact, his seemingly good-natured, but self-convinced
 32 extremism might have served as the magnet of his message. To the extent that, as
 33 he tells us, his cardinal aim while playing the role of a stinging fly was always to
 34 reform the citizenry's interpersonal manners, he is *ipso facto* conceding that
 35 another, a concomitant aim of his must have been to significantly change Athens'
 36 political structure. After all, if the principal — nay, the sole — reason for
 37 institutionalizing any table of morals is to shape people's behavior in all its
 38 manifestations, then, clearly, any remarkable change in the cultural mores could
 39 not but be invariably reflected in the city's political spirit and being. Since he must
 40 have been as aware as we are nowadays that social intercourse writ large is
 41 inextricably related to politics, we might safely infer that Socrates could not but
 42 have also regarded himself as someone who exercised a wide, revolutionary
 43 influence of the most comprehensive sort. Nor, judging by the verdict they brought
 44 against him, was this point lost on most of the citizens who comprised his jury. On
 45 the contrary, instead of nodding in agreement that, although a social irritant,
 46 Socrates played a decidedly useful role, the jury, aware of his subversive message,

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

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

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

1 standards of their elders; accordingly, by questioning the accomplishments of
 2 members from these ranks, Socrates was inevitably calling into question the
 3 authority of the main source wherefrom the developing opinions and principles of
 4 Athens' future leaders and jurists had always derived their legitimacy.

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

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

37 (iv) Socrates was a cultural deviant of the first order; he was more than a mere
 38 eccentric, or a cultural oddity. Aside from rejecting not only the main cultural aim
 39 of any free man at the time, namely, to become wealthy and influential, he rejected
 40 the free man's dress, flaunting and openly defying how a free man ought to behave
 41 in public. Nor, evidently, did Socrates let any of his interlocutors' complaints
 42 become constraints; on the contrary, he forsook his obligations as a political and
 43 cultural citizen of Athens, and fortified himself with "a sort of voice" which dissuades
 44 but never persuades him in any of his undertakings (*Apology* 31d). If so, we could not
 45 but, whether by historical or present-day standards, see him as psychologically flawed,
 46 suffering from schizophrenia, insofar as he was experiencing auditory hallucinations.

1 Would we blame anyone for suspecting that he might have been, as it were,
 2 demonically possessed? To be sure, history has recorded a host of other deviants
 3 both as individuals and groups before and after Socrates — such as, for example,
 4 the Stoics and the Cynics — but none of them generated quite the attention Socrates
 5 drew to himself. Still more, Socrates' political views must have been looked at with a
 6 jaundiced eye. If we take his political views to have been correctly represented in
 7 Plato's *Republic*, then he must have held a decidedly democratic attitude.

8 (v) Lastly and closely paralleling the possible perception that he might have
 9 been psychologically ill, we might point to Socrates' personal appearance, his
 10 (in)famous ugliness as a symptom of *dissolution* and *degeneration*. Let us here,
 11 again, appeal to Nietzsche as a student of classical culture. In his words:
 12

13 In origin, Socrates belonged to the lowest class: Socrates was plebs. We know, we
 14 can still see for ourselves, how ugly he was. But ugliness, in itself an objection, is
 15 among the Greeks almost a refutation. Was Socrates a Greek at all? Ugliness is often
 16 enough the expression of a development that has been crossed, thwarted by crossing.
 17 Or it appears as declining development. The anthropologists among the criminologists
 18 tell us that the typical criminal is ugly: monstrum in fronte, monstrum in animo. But
 19 the criminal is a decadent. Was Socrates a typical criminal? At least that would not be
 20 contradicted by the famous judgment of the physiognomist which sounded so
 21 offensive to the friends of Socrates. A foreigner who knew about faces once passed
 22 through Athens and told Socrates to his face that he was a monstrum — that he
 23 harbored in himself all the bad vices and appetites. And Socrates merely answered:
 24 'You know me, sir!' (Twilight of the Idols, "The Problem of Socrates," Section 3).
 25

26 Yet, even his severest detractors had to concede that, irrespective of his physical
 27 appearance, it would have been a mistake to treat Socrates as a mere buffoon.
 28 While it may have been true that he frequently came across as an oddball, he was
 29 an oddball with a sizeable following of admirers and imitators of his interrogative
 30 mode of discussion. Of course, we might nowadays wonder just how much
 31 influence he really did have, since had that influence been as deep as his accusers
 32 and detractors seem to have thought, why did it not spread far enough to
 33 encompass more members of the jury pool? On the other hand, it is not unlikely
 34 that Socrates' influence was in the process of growing among those of the younger
 35 generation, or the future generations of the Athenian leaders.

36 In the light of the latter possibility, Socrates' influence could be hardly
 37 overestimated had he lived to die of natural causes.

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

43 According to Stone, Socrates "could have argued thus: " ' Men of Athens,
 44 fellow citizens, this is not a trial of Socrates, but of ideas, and of Athens.' "

45
 46 'You are not prosecuting me for anything I did, but for what I have said and taught.
 47 You are threatening me with death because you do not like my views and my
 48 teaching. This is a prosecution of ideas and that is something new in our city's

1 history. In this sense, Athens is in the dock, not Socrates. Each of you, as my judges,
2 is a defendant. . .

3 '[H]ow can you boast of your free speech if you suppress mine?' (p. 212).

4

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

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

17

18 To urge, as you do, Socrates, that Athenians ought to express their minds as they
19 wish might sound noble in some ears. Still, you would have done better had you
20 preceded your claim with a reflection on a question of a decisive sort, namely,
21 whether speech should be truly unconditional, or whether it must be expressed within
22 socially and legally defined boundaries. Surely, even you would concur that truly free
23 speech could rather easily lead to collective ruin. To prevent such a catastrophe, the
24 citizens who would comprise our fair Republic would have to be remarkably
25 different from the ones we have now, the latter being the sort of people who are only
26 too willing — nay, eager — to engage not only in mere gossip, but also in libel and
27 slander. Yes, Socrates, citizens who would agree to live in any city with unrestricted
28 speech would have to be functioning on a clearly unnatural plane, as they would have
29 to have overcome their instinct for peace and self-preservation. It is either this sort of
30 supra-human persons, if our city is to thrive, or a city filled with citizens who possess
31 the sort of conscience and wisdom you have correctly assigned to none other than
32 men of reason. But men of reason could be hardly said to comprise a majority among
33 us. As social affairs stand in Athens now, our dear man, many — and perhaps most
34 — of our young men have adopted your manner of discourse and argument, your . . .
35 let's see, what did you call it, . . . aah, yes, dialectic manner, and have thus exposed a
36 large host of their elders' values and attitudes as at once outdated — and even silly.
37 More consequentially than this, they seem to have also adopted your attitude toward
38 the gods of Athens, the very guardians of our city's order and prosperity, an attitude
39 that, if it continues, would, we are afraid, inevitably lead to no pleasant results for any
40 of us at all.

41

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

49

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