SOCRATES IN THE *APOLOGY*

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AN ESSAY ON PLATO'S *APOLOGY OF SOCRATES*

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For
Alison, Catherine, and John

The world is what it is; men who are nothing, who allow themselves to become nothing, have no place in it.

V. S. NAIPAUL

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

> No one can conceive fairly the character of Sokratēs who does not enter into the spirit of that impressive discourse [the *Apology*]. —GROTE

The first aim of this essay is to give a detailed interpretation of Plato's *Apology*, available to readers with different backgrounds and interests, which confronts and attempts to solve the multitude of problems, both analytical and historical, this deceptively simple text raises. The second aim, parasitic on the first, is to reach an understanding of Socrates himself as he appears in the *Apology*.

While it is unnecessary to dilate on the first aim, it does merit brief elaboration. Like the Gospels, the *Apology* is part of our common culture. Like the Gospels, it suffers—if that is the right word—from having as its chief protagonist a world-historical figure about whom almost everyone has views and feelings. Like the Gospels, it is part of a larger whole—Plato's Socratic dialogues[1]—in relation to which it is inevitably seen and understood. Like the Gospels, it is an interdisciplinary text studied, sometimes in proprietary fashion, by classicists, philosophers, historians, literary scholars, and students of law, politics, and religion. A writer on the *Apology* is necessarily involved, as a result, in a complex dialectic with the *Apology* itself, with the Socratic dialogues, and with their many and various interpreters.

To keep this dialectic within manageable limits, I have tried as far as possible to treat the *Apology* as a self-contained work, drawing on the other dialogues and other ancient writings about Socrates for the ancillary purposes of corroborating an interpretation, filling out the details of a doctrine, or solving a puzzle otherwise intractable. In developing my own argument, I have necessarily confronted a representative sample of the most compelling variant interpretations. But I have not attempted

1. The roster of Socratic dialogues—or dialogues thought to reflect the views of the historical Socrates—currently accepted by most authorities is (in alphabetical order) as follows: *Apology*, *Charmides*, *Crito*, *Euthydemus*, *Euthyphro*, *Gorgias*, *Hippias Major*, *Hippias Minor*, *Ion*, *Laches*, *Lysis*, *Menexenus*, *Protagoras*, and *Republic 1*. Guthrie (1975, 39-66) is a sensible and succinct review of the issues.

to survey the immense and often frustrating secondary literature on Socrates or on the *Apology* proper. To have done so would have resulted in a longer book but not, I am persuaded, a better or more useful one.

I turn now to my second aim.

Six problems in particular vex the student of Plato's Socrates: the problem of the elenchus (Socrates' characteristic method of inquiry and refutation), the problem of Socratic ignorance (or Socratic knowledge), the problem of Socratic virtue (*aretē*),[2] the problem of Socratic teaching, the problem of Socratic politics, and the problem of Socratic irony. Accounts of Socrates can often be categorized and individuated by reference to these problems and their putative solutions.

Socrates presents himself in the *Apology* as someone who questions others about virtue and who examines or refutes them by means of an elenchus when they have answered inadequately. He also presents himself, however, as the servant of Apollo, as someone whose divinely inspired mission is not simply to refute people but to get them to care about virtue and their psyches—their souls—above everything else. The problem is to reconcile the mission with the means of executing it. Why does Socrates think that showing someone that he cannot defend his views about virtue against the elenchus is a way of getting him to care for his psyche? Why does he think that a gadfly can be an apostle of Delphi? This is the problem of the elenchus.

In addition to presenting himself as the elenchus-wielding servant of Apollo, Socrates also makes the disclaimer traditionally captured in the slogan "Socrates knows only that he knows nothing." He makes a number of other specific claims, however, which strongly suggest that he must indeed know what he claims not to know. Prominent among these—though more so in the other Socratic dialogues than in the *Apology* itself—are the infamous paradoxes of Socratic ethics: virtue is knowledge; akrasia (weakness of will) is impossible; no one is voluntarily vicious. What is it that Socrates does not know, then? What is it

2. If something is a knife (say) or a man, its *aretē* as a knife or a man is that state or property of it that makes it a good knife or a good man. See *Chrm.* 161a8-9; *Euthphr.* 6d9-e1; *Grg.* 506d2-4; *Prt.* 332b4-6; *R.* 353d9-354a2. The *aretē* of a knife might include having a sharp blade; the *aretē* of a man might include being intelligent, well-born, just, or courageous. *Aretē* is thus broader than our notion of moral virtue. It applies to things (such as knives) which are not moral agents. And it applies to aspects of moral agents (such as intelligence or family status) which are not normally considered to be moral aspects of them. For these reasons it is sometimes more appropriate to render *aretē* as 'excellence'. But 'virtue' remains the most favoured translation. And once these few facts are borne in mind it should seldom mislead.

that he does know? This is the two-sided problem of Socratic ignorance.

The problem of ignorance is sharpened by the Socratic paradoxes. For if Socrates' disclaimer of knowledge is sincere and if knowledge is even necessary for virtue, Socrates must lack both knowledge and virtue. Yet he seems to be virtuous and to present himself as such. This is the problem of Socratic virtue.

Socrates is often characterized as one of the greatest teachers the world has seen. Yet he denies that he is a teacher, and he makes that denial part of his defense against the charge that he has corrupted the youth. The resultant dilemma is the problem of Socratic teaching.

If knowledge of the sort that enables someone to withstand elenctic examination is necessary for virtue, it seems that virtue will be the prerogative of the few. If only the virtuous rule or govern well, it seems that government ought to be in the hands of the knowledgeable few, rather than in those of the ignorant many. This sounds antidemocratic. But it is antidemocratic only if possession of that knowledge is envisaged as a real possibility—as, of course, it would be if Socrates himself possessed and taught it. The problems of Socratic knowledge, virtue, and teaching are central, then, to the problem of Socratic politics. But they are also central to the assessment of Socrates' defense against Meletus' charges; for many believe that the latter resulted from suspicion of Socrates as the teacher of the notorious enemies of Athenian democracy, Alcibiades and Critias.

The final element in the constellation of problems surrounding Socrates is Socratic irony. Many have argued that, if Socrates' disclaimers of knowledge and teaching are to be consistent with his possession of the knowledge he disclaims and with his elenctic activities, they must be ironical. The problem is to find a plausible role for irony in Socrates' elenctic, psyche-improving mission. That is difficult enough. But the difficulties do not end there; for these Socratic disclaimers are not restricted to the elenctic situation; they are also key components of his defense against Meletus. If we resort to irony to solve the problems of Socratic ignorance and teaching, we must, therefore, find a plausible role for irony in that defense.

The *Apology* raises all of these problems, and many others as well. But because of its peculiar nature it also suggests ways in which they might be profitably tackled, and—or so I shall argue—persuasively solved.

In most of the other Socratic dialogues, it is Socrates' interlocutors who are caught in the harsh light of the elenchus. Their beliefs, especially their ethical beliefs, are submitted to scrutiny; the level of their understanding of them, and of their self-understanding, is plumbed, while about himself and his own beliefs Socrates is mostly silent. In the

Apology, by contrast, Socrates is trying to characterize himself, to explain the distinctive nature of his brand of wisdom, and to justify his *modus operandi*. This is how he understands himself and his activities. This is his self-interpretation—the richest single self-portrait that we have. Moreover, the *Apology* presents Socrates in a social and historical context about which we have considerable independent knowledge. And that knowledge—whether about Athenian law, or the Delphic oracle, or Greek religion, or the political situation in Athens in 399—gives us a kind of handle on him which we would otherwise lack. It is this potent combination of detailed self-portrait and historical context which makes the *Apology* such a fertile source of insight into Socrates.

Let me briefly indicate what we shall discover. The goal of elenctic examination is to persuade people to care for virtue more than for wealth and other conventional goods, in part by showing them that they already believe that virtue is more valuable than any of these things. Even if virtue is not, in fact, more valuable, however, elenctic examination nonetheless improves the psyches of those repeatedly subjected to it by saving them from the hubris—the "most blameworthy ignorance"—of thinking they have expert craft-knowledge of virtue when they do not. Elenctic examination constitutes service to Apollo because, in disabusing people of their hubris, it brings about something he particularly values, namely, human recognition of human limitations.

Socrates knows—or claims to know—many things, including things about the virtues, including what they are, and some of the things he claims to know are established by arguments he uses in elenctic examination. But his disclaimer of knowledge applies only to the expert craft-knowledge of virtue, which is identical to the craft of politics, and this he genuinely lacks. Indeed, he thinks that such knowledge is almost certainly beyond the reach of anyone except the gods.

Socrates thinks that this expert knowledge is identical to virtue. It follows that he is not virtuous. But he never claims he is virtuous. Instead he claims that, having tried as far as he can to avoid the blameworthy ignorance of thinking he knows when he does not, he is not voluntarily (or culpably) vicious. Given the prevalence of hubris, this makes Socrates one of the most virtuous (or most nearly virtuous) of people.

The beliefs drawn upon by Socrates in elenctic examination are those of his interlocutor. The beliefs he draws out are already (implicitly) there. He imparts nothing of his own. This is what renders his disclaimer of teaching credible. Moreover, what he draws upon is not something technical or intellectually outré, but rather something widely

acceptable. That, in essence, is why Socrates is willing to question almost anyone, not just the intellectually gifted few. That is why he thinks that the examined life is for all human beings. Socrates' elenctic mission to Athens, his elenctic philosophizing, is in one important sense, then, profoundly and fundamentally democratic.

Because Socrates' disclaimers of knowledge are true, because his virtue (or absence of voluntary vice) is compatible with his nonpossession of the knowledge necessary for virtue, because his disclaimer of teaching is credible, there is no fundamental irony in his disclaimers. Conventional wisdom notwithstanding, Socrates mostly means just what he says.

What is true of Socrates in these matters is equally true of him when he is on trial for his life. His defense is reasonable, intelligibly motivated, nonevasive, and seriously or nonironically tendered. It establishes that he is innocent of the legal charges brought against him. It is a defense appropriate to a man whose most basic characterization of himself is as a philosopher servant of Apollo; a man whose devotion to the gods is founded not in unquestioning religious faith, but in elenctic philosophy, in human wisdom.

Students of Socrates will recognize some familiar themes in this brief thumbnail sketch, but also some new ones and a new way of orchestrating them.

Socrates is a historical figure. His trial is a historical event. But is the *Apology* a historical document? Did the historical Socrates really say what it presents him as saying at his trial in 399? I know of no fully satisfactory answer, and I offer none (although much of what I argue is certainly relevant to the issue). My interest is in Plato's Socrates and in the things he says, whether they are fact, fiction, or—as is perhaps most likely—something in between. I have often found it convenient, nonetheless, to treat what Socrates says as history rather than fiction and to raise the kinds of questions about it more appropriate to the former than the latter. I doubt that this will cause confusion or that it will seriously compromise what amounts on my part to agnosticism rather than skepticism on the so-called Socratic problem.[3]

In keeping with my aim of reaching a fairly wide audience, I have not presupposed any knowledge of Greek. But interpretative questions sometimes—not often in this case—depend on issues of translation, so

3. The Socratic problem is discussed in Guthrie (1971a, 3-57); Lacey (1971); Vogel (1955). The historicity of the *Apology* is defended in Brickhouse and Smith (1988, 2-10).

that I have occasionally had to discuss the Greek text. A patient Greekless reader should have little difficulty following these infrequent discussions.

For references to Plato's works, I have used the standard system of Stephanus page numbers and letters together with the line numbers of Burnet, *Platonis Opera* (for example, 18c1-3, 6d9-e6). Readers using a translation equipped with Stephanus page numbers will easily locate the appropriate passage. Abbreviated references to other ancient works, which are (with few exceptions) those adopted in the *Oxford Classical Dictionary*, are usually self-explanatory. Other references (for example, 1.8, 3.3) are internal.

I have drawn freely on the available translations of the ancient works I quote—West's *Apology* was particularly useful—emending and adapting them to suit my purposes.

I am grateful to Gregory Vlastos for helpful and encouraging comments and suggestions and for letting me see some of his unpublished papers (one of which in particular led me to rethink and substantially modify my views on Socratic religion); to the publisher's reader, Richard Kraut, whose sensitive queries provoked many improvements; to Walter Englert for help with Greek; to Don Rutherford and Peter Steinberger for useful written comments; to Carrie Swanson for assisting with proofreading and the Index Locorum; and, especially, to Neil Thomason, who has been helping me clarify my views on the *Apology* since I first committed them to paper in 1982. Recent work on Socrates by Terry Irwin, Richard Kraut, and Alexander Nehamas has often been the stimulus to fruitful thought, no less when I ended up disagreeing with it than when I found it congenial.

As I was putting the finishing touches to this essay, Thomas Brickhouse and Nicholas Smith were kind enough to send me in page proof a copy of their own forthcoming book on the *Apology*. Many of their views were already familiar from earlier publications. But I was glad to have the chance to respond to their latest thoughts and to discover that, though our conceptions of Socrates were very different, we were, nonetheless, sometimes allied on novel points of interpretation.

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Portland, Oregon
December, 1988

Abbreviations of Plato's Works

Ap.	*Apology*
Chrm.	*Charmides*
Crat.	*Cratylus*
Cri.	*Crito*
Euthd.	*Euthydemus*
Euthphr.	*Euthyphro*
Grg.	*Gorgias*
Hp. Ma.	*Hippias Major*
Hp. Mi.	*Hippias Minor*
La.	*Laches*
Lg.	*Laws*
Ly.	*Lysis*
Mx.	*Menexenus*
Men.	*Meno*
Phd.	*Phaedo*
Phdr.	*Phaedrus*
Plt.	*Politicus* (*Statesman*)
Prt.	*Protagoras*
R.	*Republic*
Smp.	*Symposium*
Tht.	*Theaetetus*

Disputed or Spurious Works

Alc. 1	*Alcibiades 1*
Alc. 2	*Alcibiades 2*
Amat.	*Amatores*
Cleit.	*Cleitophon*
Def.	*Definitions*
Hipparch.	*Hipparchus*
Thg.	*Theages*

SOCRATES IN THE *APOLOGY*

ONE

THE FALSE SOCRATES

What Socrates said meant something completely different. —KIERKEGAARD

He always knew the way out; knew it yet would not tell it. —EMERSON

The *Apology* is usually divided up in the following way: the *opening address* (17a1–18a6), in which Socrates distinguishes the kind of speech he plans to make from the one made by the prosecution; the *prothesis* (18a7–19a7), in which he outlines the plan of the defense; the *defense proper*, which consists of the defense against the popular caricature (19a8–24b2) and the defense against the formal charges brought by Meletus (24b3–28a1);[1] the *digression* (28a2–34b5), in which Socrates describes his divinely enjoined, philosophical mission to Athens; the *epilogue* (34b6–35d8), in which he returns to the rhetorical themes of the opening address; the *counterpenalty* (35e1–38b9), in which he proposes an alternative to the death penalty demanded by the prosecution; and, finally, the death penalty having been chosen by the jury, a *closing address* (38c1–42a5).

This standard division, though solidly based in the text, somewhat conceals a broader tripartite structure which needs emphasis. From the beginning of the opening address through the defense against the ancient caricature (17a1–24b2), Socrates' characterization of himself is largely negative: he is not what the ancient caricature makes him out to be, but something else. That is the first movement in his speech. The second movement, the defense against Meletus (24b3–28a1), is also negative. But, because it takes the form of an elenchus, it has a strong positive component as well. What it says is, "I am not guilty." But what it shows—and shows for the only time in the *Apology*—is Socrates as he normally is, engaged in rather than describing the activities which are his philosophical life, his service to Apollo. Then, in the digression, and continuing through the counterpenalty to the end of the closing address (28b3–42a5), Socrates' characterization itself becomes more positive: this is what he is really like; this is what the jurors should have in mind

1. Meletus and his fellow accuser, Anytus, are discussed in 2.3. About Lycon, the third accuser, nothing significant is known.

as they decide his guilt or innocence. The broader structure is reflected in my own discussion. The present chapter deals with the false Socrates of the prosecution and ancient caricature; the next with Meletus' charges; the third with the true Socrates. But positive and negative, true and false, being what they are, the false Socrates will, of course, tell us much about the true.

1.1 The Opening Address

Socrates introduces himself and his speech of defense with the following address to the jurors:

> I do not know, men of Athens, how you have been affected by my accusers; for my part, I was almost carried away in spite of myself, they spoke so persuasively. Yet hardly anything they said is true. Of the many falsehoods they told, one most surprised me, when they said that you should take care not to be deceived by a clever [*deinou*] speaker like me. That they are not ashamed that they will immediately be refuted by what I do, when I show myself not to be a clever speaker at all, that I think is most shameless on their part—unless, of course, by a clever speaker they mean the one who speaks the truth. If this is what they are saying, then I would agree that I am an orator, but not one of their sort. These men, then, as I say, have said little or nothing that is true, while from me you will hear the whole truth, but not, by god, men of Athens, expressed in fine language embellished with choice phrases and words, like theirs, nor carefully arranged, but things spoken as I please in the words that come to me—for I put my trust in the justice of what I say—and let none of you expect anything else. Surely, it would not be fitting, men, for someone of my age to come before you making up stories like a youth. And, men of Athens, I do beg and beseech you: if you hear me making my defense in the same words that I am accustomed to use in the marketplace by the banker's tables, where many of you have heard me, and elsewhere, do not be surprised and create a disturbance [*thorubein*] because of this. For this is how it is: now, for the first time, I have come before a law court [*nun egō prōton epi dikastērion anabebēka*], at the age of seventy; the manner of speaking here is simply foreign to me [*atechnōs oun zenōs echō tēs enthade lexeōs*]. So just as if I were really a foreigner, you would certainly excuse me if I spoke in that dialect and manner to which I was accustomed, so too my present request seems a just one, that you pay no attention to my manner of speaking—whether it is better or worse—but concentrate your attention on whether what I

> say is just. For this is the excellence [*aretē*] of a judge, while that of an orator is to speak the truth. (17a1–18a6)

Is it an ironical address? Has Socrates come before the court clothed in the trope to which he has given his name—Socratic irony?[2] Is "something contrary to what is said to be understood?" (Quintilian, *Inst.* 9.22.44).

Two reasons have been given for returning an affirmative answer. First, Socrates denies that he is a clever speaker, but he is clearly a clever speaker: "The first level of irony in the *Apology* presents the apparent falsehood: Socrates disclaims ability to make a speech, and proceeds to make so able a speech that it is a masterpiece of rhetoric" (Allen 1980, 5–6). Second, Socrates disclaims "all knowledge of forensic diction" (Burnet 1924, 67). Yet the opening address itself suggests that he was familiar with the writings of the forensic orators. The topics it covers—the counteraccusation that the prosecutors are lying, the denial of being a clever speaker, the asking pardon for speaking in ordinary fashion, the plea of unfamiliarity with the law courts, the request for an impartial hearing, the deprecation of disturbance, the disclaiming of a style unsuited to an old man— "may be completely paralleled" from the speeches of the orators Lysias, Isocrates, and Aeschines (Riddell 1877, xx–xxi). The disclaimer of oratory, it is concluded, is "a piece of Socratic *eirōneia* [irony], and, like most disclaimers made by Socrates, to be taken *cum grano salis*" (Burnet 1924, 67).

Initially somewhat compelling, this reasoning trades on serious misperception. Socrates does not deny that "he has any skill in speaking," or that "he cannot make a speech." He does not deny that he is, in all senses of the word, a clever speaker. He is not the kind of "clever" (*deinon*) speaker his accusers have made him out to be, one who will use his quasi-magical rhetorical powers in order to make the weaker argument appear the stronger.[3] But if a clever speaker is one who speaks the

2. 'Irony' is defined in the *OED* as "dissimulation, pretence; especially in reference to the ignorance feigned by Socrates as a means of confuting an adversary." Unlike what we call irony, its Greek ancestor, *eirōneia*, involves an intention to deceive. When Thrasymachus says, "This is Socrates' habitual *eirōneia*" (*R.* 337a4–5), he is charging Socrates with lying, not with meaning the contrary of what he says. Vlastos (1987b) argues that Socratic irony is "complex" irony in which "what is said both is and isn't what is meant." Kierkegaard (1965) is a famous but idiosyncratic and unreliable discussion of Socratic irony.

3. *Deinon*, which has no exact English equivalent, often carries this connotation of trickery or magic. See Liddell and Scott (1966, s.v. *deinos*). The connection between rhetoric and magic is explored in Romilly (1975).

truth, he is quite willing to be called an excellent orator (17b4–6, 18a5–6). Socrates does not say either that he knows nothing about rhetoric or that he is unfamiliar with forensic diction:

> When he [Socrates] says *atechnōs oun zenōs echō tēs enthade lexeōs*, he is not being 'ironical', he merely means that he has never had occasion to speak in a law-court before, since he has never been a party to a case (this is clearly the meaning of *nun egō prōton epi dikastērion anabebēka* . . .): he does not mean that he has never been present at a trial, and knows nothing of the methods of courts and forensic oratory. (Hackforth 1933, 56)

Later, indeed, Socrates is explicit that he has "often [*pollakis*]" been present at the trials of others (35a4–7). The fact, therefore, that his opening address is similar in structure to speeches of the orators is insufficient to establish that it is ironical.

What Socrates actually says is that he will not make a speech like that of his accusers, "carefully arranged" and "embellished with choice phrases and words." Instead, he will extemporize, speaking as he pleases in the words that come to him and putting his trust in the truth and justice of what he says rather than in rhetorical niceties. This does not imply that Socrates will eschew rhetoric altogether (whatever that would mean) but only that the rhetoric he employs will be keyed to truth, justice, and rational persuasion rather than to gaining acquittal by swaying the emotions of the jurors in his favour. It does not imply either, and should not lead us to expect, that Socrates will deliver a haphazard or disorganized speech. He has had "experience of many arguments" (*Grg.* 457c4–5), after all, and is so used to defending himself in elenctic tussles, that there is a sense in which, as he puts it, he has spent his "whole life" preparing his legal defense (Xenophon, *Ap.* 3).

Does Socrates live up to what is in essence a promise that he will subordinate a rhetoric of nonrational persuasion to a rhetoric of truth-telling? Most writers are agreed that he does. Indeed, many argue that he goes so far in this direction that he purposely antagonizes and alienates the jury.[4] Three examples, in particular, are commonly cited. First, in his cross-examination of Meletus, Socrates seems to imply that he

4. Xenophon traces the *megalēgoria*, the antagonizing big talk or boastfulness, which in his view characterized Socrates' defense, to a desire for death as a release from old age (*Ap.* 1–2). Epictetus (*Discourses*, ii.2.18) advises a defendant not to assert that he will abstain from begging for mercy "unless like Socrates he intends to provoke the judges." Cf. Grote (1888, 7: 157–163). Brickhouse and Smith (1988, 37–47, 210–214) are among the few dissenters.

alone makes the youth better while "the many [*hoi de polloi*] . . . corrupt them" (25a12–b7). This implication seems to combine insult and arrogance in a way likely to alienate. Second, Socrates seems to insult the jury again by telling them that "no one will preserve his life if he genuinely opposes you or any other multitude and prevents the occurrence in the polis of many unjust and illegal things" (31e2–4). Finally, having been found guilty, Socrates seems to offer what many take to be his most serious provocation to the jury, first, by proposing that he deserves a great civic honour, namely, free meals in the prytaneum, and then by proposing a ridiculous fine. When we examine these examples more carefully, we shall see that they provide little support for the view that Socrates is arrogant, boastful, or intentionally alienating—a view Socrates himself explicitly warns against (37a2–5). The fact that they are so frequently cited to support it, however, is compelling evidence of just how successful Socrates has been in fulfilling his promise to subordinate persuasion to telling the truth. His speech is "a masterpiece of rhetoric." But it is not a masterpiece of the rhetoric he disclaims.

Also important in this regard and serving to moderate the extreme view that Socrates engages in alienation or counterpersuasion are the striking parallels, down to specific similarities of phrase, between the *Apology* and Gorgias' *Defense of Palamedes*.[5] Socrates and Palamedes both cite their modest means as proof of their sincerity (*Ap.* 31c2–3; *Pal.* 15). Both argue that the charges they face are not only false but contradictory (*Ap.* 27a1–7; *Pal.* 25–26). Both raise the question of what advantage they would have gained by committing the crime alleged against them (*Ap.* 25d8–26a6; *Pal.* 13). Both reject appeals to pity and claim to rest their case on truth and justice (*Ap.* 34b6–35d8; *Pal.* 33). Both claim to be the benefactors of their judges (*Ap.* 30c2–31a7; *Pal.* 30). Both claim to find death preferable to dishonour (*Ap.* 28b3–9; *Pal.* 35). Both urge the jury not to hurry what old age will soon accomplish (*Ap.* 38c5–8; *Pal.* 34–35). Both contrast actions with words (*Ap.* 32a4–5; *Pal.* 34). Both mention that the jury will be guilty of condemning an innocent man and will be themselves condemned eventually (*Ap.* 38c1–4; *Pal.*

5. Diels and Krantz (1952, 2: B11a); Freeman (1977, 134–138). The suggestion of Brickhouse and Smith (1988, 50 n. 7) that these parallels are due simply to the fact that Socrates is "a highly intelligent and educated man . . . seriously seeking acquittal" and that *Pal.* is a collection of stock rhetorical devices for achieving that goal does not survive confrontation with the evidence which follows. See Coulter (1964). Guthrie (1975, 76–77) provides some necessary correctives to Coulter's conclusions. Gorgias' views are discussed in Guthrie (1971b) and Kerferd (1981).

36). Socrates says that "the unexamined life is not worth living for a human being" (*Ap.* 38a5–6); Palamades says that "a life without trust is not worth living" (*Pal.* 21). Towards the end of his speech (41a8–b5), Socrates explicitly compares himself to Palamades, as he does, indeed, in Xenophon's *Apology* (26).

The precise purpose of these seemingly intentional parallels is difficult, if not now impossible, to judge. Perhaps, as some have argued, Socrates (or Plato) is borrowing from Gorgias in order to set up an implicit contrast between Gorgianic rhetoric, which aims "to stir passions, and thereby to deceive," with Socratic rhetoric, which aims primarily at truth (Romilly 1975, 25). But, whether intentional or not, these parallels with a speech whose entire purpose is persuasion are good evidence that the subordination of persuasion to truth-telling in Socrates' speech is subordination only and not the abandonment of persuasion altogether. Socrates aims to persuade the jury of his innocence, as we shall see, but he is not willing to do so at the expense of truth, justice, or his own deepest convictions.

In addition to saying that he will subordinate a rhetoric of persuasion to a rhetoric of truth, Socrates also says that he will speak "in the same words that I am accustomed to use in the marketplace by the banker's tables, where many of you have heard me," and he requests the jurors not to create a disturbance at this. Now, if he were here predicting demotic, or marketplace, Greek, we might conceivably convict him of some very minor ironical dissimulation. For his diction is, to some degree at least, "periodic and marked by the neatly balanced antitheses of Greek rhetorical style" (Allen 1980, 5). But this is not what he means. What Socrates is referring to, while it may well include other aspects of his normal way of talking, is primarily elenctic examination and the characteristic and provocative doctrines which are part and parcel of it.[6] He makes this clear by his explicit references back to his initial request. The first of these occurs just as he is about to use the elenchus to catch Meletus in a contradiction:

> I think he contradicts himself in his writ, as if he said, "Socrates does injustice by not believing in the gods and believing in the gods." . . . Examine with me, men, how he seems to me to say

6. Noticed by Grube (1975, 28 n. 6). Another feature of Socrates' accustomed manner of speaking is the use of craft analogies (20a6–b6, 25a12–c4): "But you see, Socrates, explained Critias, you will have to avoid your favourite topic—the cobblers, builders, and metal-workers; for it is already worn to rags by you in my opinion" (Xenophon, *Mem.* I.ii.37). As Irwin (1977, 71–77) shows, however, these analogies, too, are elenctic baggage.

> this. But you others, as I begged of you from the beginning, remember not to make a disturbance [*thorubein*] if I speak in the manner to which I am accustomed. (27a4–b2)

The second prefaces an appeal to his characteristic doctrine—his paradigm "unacceptable proposition" (1.8)—that it is better to suffer injustice than to do it:

> Do not make a disturbance, men of Athens, but abide by what I begged of you, not to create a disturbance at the things I say [*mē thorubein eph' hois an legō*], but to listen. For I think you will be benefited by listening. I am going to tell you other things at which you will perhaps cry out. By no means do this. (30c2–6)

And, indeed, elenctic examination *is* Socrates' accustomed way of speaking. It is the way they have all heard him speak in the agora. Unlike demotic, which must have sounded often in an Athenian court, it was sufficiently unusual in court proceedings to merit special advance mention: "The nearest approach to cross-examination [in Athenian law] was the questions addressed by a litigant to his opponent, but here again the extant orations furnish no such examples as Socrates' examination of Meletus" (Bonner and Smith 1938, 2: 297). Socrates is not ironically promising demotic, then; he is nonironically promising that he will use the elenchus and express the views which are a characteristic part of it.

There is no doubt some innocent irony in Socrates' remark that he was almost swept away by the eloquence of his accusers. But there is no fundamental irony in his opening speech, no reason to think that from the very outset an ironical tone has been established. There may, of course, be some fundamental irony later. But nothing in Socrates' opening remarks should lead us to expect it at every turn.

1.2 The Defense Against the Popular Caricature

In the Prothesis (18a7–19a7), Socrates outlines the plan of his defense. He distinguishes Meletus' new formal charges from a long-lived popular caricature of himself which is likely to have prejudiced the jury. He thinks that Meletus has relied on the existence of this prejudicial caricature in bringing his charges (19b1–2) and that without it the charges would not be difficult to refute (28a2–4). Consequently, he makes the caricature his first target. He knows it will not be easy to undermine. Its originators, unlike Meletus, are not there to be "examined [*elegxai*]" (18d2–7); prejudice long ingrained is not easily overcome (18e5–19a7, 24a1–4, 28a6–8). But if he is right in thinking that prejudice is the

major obstacle to acquittal—and that is something we shall investigate in 2.3—his strategy is a sound and reasonable one.

The popular caricature portrays Socrates as a generic intellectual (23d4–7), a heady mixture of natural scientist and forensic orator, "who thinks about things in the sky, who has investigated everything concerning what is beneath the earth, who makes the weaker speech the stronger" (19b4–c1). This reputation is prejudicial because such advanced thinkers are widely believed to be atheists: "Those, men of Athens, who have spread this report are my dangerous accusers; for their hearers believe that investigators of these things do not believe in gods [*oude theous nomizein*]" (18c1–3).[7] And atheism, as we shall see in 2.1, is precisely the burden of Meletus' indictment. Atheism is the thread, therefore, which links the new formal charges Socrates faces to the ancient slanders against him.

Socrates treats this ancient caricature as consisting of essentially two separate charges, that he is a professor and teacher of oratory and natural science and that he is a fee-earning sophist teacher of virtue (19d8–20c3).[8] And he responds to these charges in quite different ways. He dismisses the first in under twenty lines (19a8–d7). The Socrates presented in Aristophanes' *Clouds* professes science and oratory. But Socrates himself has "no share" in such activities. And the majority of the five hundred jurors[9] who have listened to him regularly in the agora—perhaps for as long as thirty years (1.4)—can witness on his behalf that they have never heard him "discoursing [*dialegomenou*] on such things either much or little" (19c7–d7; 1.3). Clearly, then, Socrates does not believe that the jury will, on reflection, find it credible that he is an orator and a scientist. The second charge, on the other hand, requires extended treatment (19d8–24b2); for though Socrates never discourses on natural science or oratory, he talks about virtue every day of his life (29d2–30b4, 38a1–6). This gives at least superficial plausibility to the charge that he is a sophist teacher of virtue (19d8–20c3). Consequently, he tries to explain how his wisdom differs from that of Gorgias and the other sophists and how, despite the fact that he knows nothing

7. In Aristophanes, *Clouds*, 1506–1509, Strepsiades urges that Socrates and Chaerephon should be burned to death "mostly because they have blasphemed the gods."

8. Guthrie (1971b) and Kerferd (1981) are sensible contemporary treatments of the sophists. Grote (1888, 7: 1–80) is a celebrated account still very much worth reading.

9. See Burnet (1924, 150–151).

of the things they claim to know (20c1–3), his wisdom got confused with theirs (20c4–24b2).[10]

Socrates attributes the popular misperception of him as a sophist teacher of virtue to his possession of "a certain kind of wisdom" (20d6–7), which he calls "human wisdom [*anthōpinē sophia*]" (20d8). And he claims that Apollo no less will testify on his behalf to its "existence and nature" (20e6–8). Apollo's testimony is the famous Delphic oracle to Chaerephon, discussed in 1.4–5 and 1.10.

As a result of this oracle, Socrates began a search for someone wiser than himself. And because politicians have "the best reputations for wisdom" (22a5–6), his first candidate was drawn from their ranks:

> So I thoroughly examined this man—there is no need for me to name him, but he was one of our politicians—and when I examined him, men of Athens, and engaged him in conversation, my experience was something like this: I came to believe that this man seemed to be wise to many people and most of all to himself, but that he was not. And then I tried to show him that though he supposed himself wise, he was not. On account of this he came to hate me, as did many of those present. So I went away and thought to myself: "I am wiser than this person. It looks as though neither of us knows anything fine and good [*kalon kagathon*], but he thinks he knows something when he does not know it, while I, just as I do not know, do not think that I know. So it is likely that in just this one little thing I am wiser than he is, that what I do not know, I do not suppose that I know." (21c3–d7)

Thus began a systematic examination of all those with a reputation as wise men (21e3–4).

Having examined the politicians, Socrates turned to the poets, the traditional teachers of ethical values,[11] and questioned them about their poems:

10. Part of Socrates' explanation is that people listening to him thought that "I myself am wise in the things about which I refute someone else" (23a1–5). But these things consist exclusively in beliefs about the virtues (21b7–22e5, 29d2–30b4, 38a1–6), never in beliefs about oratory or science (19c7–d7). This is further proof that Socrates' account of the aetiology of his reputation as a sophist teacher of virtue is not intended to apply to his reputation as a natural scientist and orator. At 23d1–9, Socrates describes the route by which his accusers (and the groups they represent) brought science and oratory back into the picture.

11. See Beck (1964, 72–141).

> I took up those poems of theirs which it seemed to me they had worked on most, and I examined them on what they said [*ti legoien*], so that I might also learn something from them at the same time. (22b2–5)

But they were no better able to answer his questions than their non-specialist audience: "They say many fine things, but they know nothing of what they speak" (22c2–3). Because of their poetic abilities, however, the poets supposed that "they were the wisest of people in the other things also, in which they were not wise" (22c5–6).

Finally, Socrates went to the craftsmen, whose reputation for wisdom is inferior to that of the poets and politicians. And among them he at last found some genuine knowledge and wisdom:

> Finally, I went to the craftsmen, for I was aware that I knew practically nothing, and I knew that I would find that they knew many fine things. In this I was not mistaken; they knew things that I did not know, and in that way they were wiser than I. But, men of Athens, the good craftsmen also seemed to me to make the same mistake as the poets: each of them, because he performed his craft well, thought himself wisest in the other things, the most important things [*talla ta megista*], and this error of theirs seemed to overshadow the wisdom they had. So I asked myself, on behalf of the oracle, whether I would prefer to be as I am, being in no way wise in their wisdom nor ignorant in their ignorance. I answered myself and the oracle that it profits me to be as I am. (22c9–e5)

The craftsmen possess more of one kind of wisdom than Socrates does. But he is wiser than they are, because he possesses more of another more important kind of wisdom (22e4–5).[12]

In each case, then, the same pattern emerges. On the one hand, there is a kind of knowledge or wisdom that the politicians, poets, and craftsmen falsely believe they possess and that Socrates is aware he lacks—knowledge that is fine and good, knowledge that would make its possessor the wisest of men, knowledge of the most important things. On the other hand, there is the human wisdom Socrates possesses and the others lack precisely because of that awareness. The natures of these two kinds of knowledge will occupy us in 1.6–8, 3.4, and 3.9.

12. The fact that Socrates says that the craftsmen were wiser than him in regard to their crafts suggests that he was not, as some scholars believe, trained in the craft of stonecarving by his father. See Zeller (1885, 55–56 n. 1). Cf. Burnet (1924, 50–51).

It is in this distinction between significant knowledge of the most important things and human wisdom that Socrates finds the key to the oracle's message and the explanation of the false caricature of him as a generic intellectual:

> It looks as though, gentlemen, it is really the god who is wise, and in this oracle he is saying that human wisdom [*hē anthrōpinē sophia*] is worth little or nothing. In speaking of Socrates here before you and in making use of my name, he appears to be taking me as an example, as if to say, "That one of you, humans, is wisest who, like Socrates, knows that in truth he is worth nothing in regard to wisdom." (23a5–b4; cf. *Hp. Ma.* 289b3–7)

Socrates now sees that the import of the oracle is quite general, that he is simply an example used by Delphi to illustrate a general deflationary view of the wisdom of which human beings are capable. Real human wisdom involves seeing that one does not possess any significant knowledge of the most important things, that in all probability such knowledge belongs only to the god. Because Socrates sees this and is innocent of the hubris of the politicians, poets, and craftsmen, he is wisest. We shall discover why in 1.7.

The distinction between human wisdom and significant knowledge of the most important things was lost on the majority of people, however, who, seeing Socrates refute the views of others on these things, concluded that he possessed the knowledge he showed others to lack (23a1–5). Hence he came to have a reputation for knowing precisely the things that the god had attested he was wise for recognizing he did not know at all.

Having reached this conclusion about the probable meaning of the oracle (21e4–22a1) through his examination of the politicians, poets, and craftsmen, Socrates came to see in it a divine injunction to extend his examinations beyond the initial group of those traditionally thought to be wise:

> So even now I still go around investigating according to the god, searching out anyone, citizen or stranger, I think wise. And whenever someone does not seem so to me, I come to the god's aid and show that he is not wise. And because of this occupation, I have had no leisure worth speaking of to do any of the things concerning the polis or any of my own private things; instead I live in great poverty because of my service to the god. (23b4–c1)

This is clearly a distinct phase in Socrates' elenctic activities.

Both phases, however, had unhappy consequences. Examining those with a reputation for wisdom made Socrates a hated and unpopular man (22e6–23a3). For the men he himself showed to lack knowledge came to hate him, as did many of the bystanders (21d1). More catholic examination led to his being on trial for his life:

> The young men who follow me of their own accord—those who have most leisure, the sons of the wealthiest—enjoy hearing people being examined; they themselves often imitate me and try to examine others. I think they find plenty of people who think they know something, but in fact know little or nothing. The result is that those whom they question are angry, not with them but with me. They say, this Socrates is a most polluted fellow [*miarotatos*][13] who corrupts the youth. If one asks them, however, what he does or what he teaches to corrupt them, they are silent, because they do not know, but, so as not to appear at a loss, they mention those things that are available against all philosophers, about "astronomy and things beneath the earth," and "not believing in the gods," and "making the weaker argument the stronger." For I do not think that they would be willing to tell the truth, that it is clear that they pretend to know, but know nothing. (23c2–d9)

Meletus, Anytus, and Lycon represent people of this sort, "Meletus being angry on behalf of the poets, Anytus on behalf of the politicians and craftsmen, and Lycon on behalf of the orators" (23e4–24a1).

Thus, as Socrates represents the matter—and this will be of some importance in 2.3—it is anger at the humiliation inflicted by his young imitators that motivated Meletus, Anytus, and Lycon to prosecute him for corruption, and it is their inability to specify the precise nature of the corruption that has led them to the charge, available against all philosophers, of "not believing in the gods."

1.3 Socrates' Disclaimer of Science and Oratory

As part of his defense against the prejudicial caricature of himself as a generic intellectual, Socrates disclaims any share in the kind of knowledge of science and forensic oratory attributed to him in *Clouds*. We must now try to determine what this disclaimer amounts to and whether or not it is credible.

13. The significance of this characterization is discussed in 2.2 n. 35.

Despite the claims of some scholars to the contrary,[14] Socrates cannot be denying, whether ironically or otherwise, that he is acquainted with the advanced scientific views of others. For later in the *Apology* he shows himself familiar with the views of Anaxagoras and suggests that they are common knowledge:

> My dear Meletus, do you think that you are prosecuting Anaxagoras? And do you so much despise these men here and think that they are so ignorant of letters, that they do not know that the books of Anaxagoras are full of such theories ["that the sun is a stone and the moon earth"], and that the young men learn from me what they can sometimes buy for at most a drachma in the orchestra, and that they won't ridicule Socrates if he claims such views to be his own, especially as they are so strange? (26d6–e2)

Nor is there any reason to think that Socrates is denying that he knows the kinds of astronomical facts, of the sort familiar to mariners, farmers, or laymen, in which no one sees any harm. The point at issue—as the phrase "if he claims such views to be his own" (26e1–2) makes clear—is whether he is himself a scientist and teacher of science, whether he claims personal authority in scientific matters and professes the sorts of arcane views about things in the sky and beneath the earth that earn one the reputation of being an advanced atheistical thinker. And what is true of science is also true of oratory. Socrates is well acquainted with the work of the orators and never denies that he is. But, unlike his namesake in *Clouds*, he is not a self-proclaimed professor of oratory.

Is there any reason to think that Socrates' disclaimer of science and oratory, understood in *this* way, is insincere or knowingly false? Three pieces of evidence are particularly relevant here: the so-called "autobiographical" section of the *Phaedo*,[15] which bears specifically on science; Xenophon's *Memorabilia*; and *Clouds*, which bears on both science and oratory.

In the *Phaedo* (96a6–99d2), Socrates claims that when he was young "he was remarkably keen on the kind of wisdom known as natural

14. See Burnet (1924, 82). Hackforth (1933, 146–154) is critical.

15. Few scholars would now include the *Phaedo* among the Socratic dialogues or would expect to find consistency of doctrine between it and the *Apology*. But the section in question, like the famous death scene (117a4–118a17), is sometimes thought to have a better claim to being about the historical Socrates than the rest of the dialogue. See Guthrie (1971a, 101–105); Lacey (1971, 43–44). Gill (1973) is an important discussion of the historicity of the death scene.

science" (96a6–8). Far from leading him to develop *outré* physical theories of his own, however, that interest led him to skepticism:

> I finally judged myself to have absolutely no gift for this kind of inquiry. I'll tell you a good enough sign of this: there had been things that I previously did know for sure, at least I and others thought we knew them; yet I was then so utterly blinded by this kind of inquiry, that I unlearned even those things that I formerly supposed I knew. (96c1–6)

Eventually, he abandoned the study of nature altogether (99d4–5). Socrates does not say that he discussed physical questions with anyone—his interest in natural science may have been entirely a private matter. And, in any case, the outcome of his study was agnosticism about astronomy and things beneath the earth, not strange or advanced doctrines.[16]

All in all, then, there is nothing in the *Phaedo* to give us pause. It raises problems only if we adopt the completely unjustified view that in the *Apology* Socrates denies any familiarity with natural science or with common beliefs about nature. But, then, that view causes problems internal to the *Apology* itself, since, as we have seen, Socrates there exhibits familiarity with Anaxagoras' views.

The account given by Xenophon is, broadly speaking, along the same lines as the *Phaedo*. Socrates was "not unfamiliar" with the more complicated parts of geometry (*Mem.* IV.vii.3) and "attended lectures" on astronomy (*Mem.* IV.vii.5). But these topics were not what he talked about himself, "his own conversation was ever of human things" (*Mem.* I.i.16). Somewhat inconsistently, however, Xenophon also represents Socrates as teaching a teleological theory of the natural world, according to which god designed the world to satisfy man's needs (*Mem.* I.iv.2–19, IV.iii.2–17).[17] The inconsistency is perhaps reduced by the pertinent suggestion that this doctrine originated in ethical theory rather than in natural science: "Not aware himself that he [Socrates] was engaged on natural science, he only studied the relation of means to ends in the world in the moral interest of piety" (Zeller 1885, 175). Such doctrine as this could hardly, in any case, lead anyone who heard it to believe that Socrates was an atheist.

We turn, now, necessarily at considerably greater length, to *Clouds*. The picture here is obviously quite different. For Aristophanes presents

16. See Dover (1971, 67–68); Guthrie (1971a, 103–104).

17. See Furley (1987, 1: 14).

Socrates as being, in regard to science and oratory, exactly what Socrates himself says he is not, namely, an adept and a teacher. So our question is one of whom to believe—Aristophanes or Socrates.

In the early verses of *Clouds* (112–118), Socrates appears in two different, but related, roles: first, as the head of the *phrontistērion,* or "thinkery," a school where, for a small fee, usually in kind (856–858, 1146–1149), one can learn the just logic, which represents traditional aristocratic values (961–1023), and also the unjust logic, which represents the new values of the sophists (1036–1104); second, as the ascetic high priest (833–839) of a mystery religion, with initiation rites (140), oaths of secrecy (143), and monastic seclusion (198–199), who teaches a variety of sciences, including a mechanistic theory of the cosmos (94–99, 331–407), on the basis of which he denies the existence of Zeus (367) and the other gods of tradition (423), worshipping in their place the various forms of Air (264), including the eponymous Clouds, as the only gods (364).

Each of these roles is important in the play. But it is clear that the first is more central to the plot than the second; for Strepsiades is not interested in mystery religion or in living in monastic seclusion for the rest of his life. He is not, for that matter, interested in science. He comes to the *phrontistērion* solely for the purpose of learning the unjust logic, so that he can escape the debts incurred by his extravagant son, Pheidippides:

> I wish to learn to speak. But teach me your second [unjust] logic, the one that enables someone to escape his debts. Name your own price; by all the gods I'll pay it. (239–246)

When Strepsiades proves unteachable himself, he prevails upon Pheidippides to attend the *phrontistērion* in his place, introducing him to Socrates with the following words:

> Teach him each of your logics, the stronger, as you call it, and the weaker, the unjust one which can defeat the stronger. Or if not both, then, at all events, the unjust one. (882–885)

Again, Strepsiades' eye is solely on the unjust logic. Pheidippides proves more tractable than his father. He learns both logics and can "argue down justice" (887–888, 1339) with either one (1336–1337). Indeed, he can argue down even those traditional values, such as honouring parents, which his father, naturally enough, would like him to retain. The result is that Strepsiades blames Socrates for the corruption of his son (1464–1466) and burns the *phrontistērion* to the ground (1472–1510).

Clearly, then, it is Socrates, the teacher of sophistic oratory, of the unjust logic, who drives the main action of the play.[18]

But the first role is central for another reason which has not always been sufficiently emphasized. The vast majority of the specific scientific and related religious views propounded by Socrates have to do with *air* in some shape or form. And air plays an integrative symbolic role in the play strongly at odds with its having an origin in anything other than the poet's structural imagination. Air is the medium of speech. Therefore, clouds, a form of air (330) both visible and stageable, make a dramatically compelling object of worship for those who put their trust in oratory rather than in Zeus:

> To them we owe our judgement and skill in debate and intelligence and marvels of rhetoric and longwindedness and the power to crush an opponent and quickness of grasp. (316–318)

Moreover, air and clouds have elaborate conventional metaphorical associations with intellectuals. The latter have their heads in the clouds (331–334); they are up in the air, as Socrates is when we first encounter him (219–234), rather than down to earth; and so on. Consequently, they offer the poet a rich comic vein to mine.

We have good reason to think, then, that the majority of the specific scientific views attributed to Socrates in *Clouds* are not the adventitious product of Aristophanes' knowledge of Socrates himself, but a dramatic invention largely dictated by his primary role as a teacher of unjust logic.[19]

To this reason, based primarily on considerations internal to *Clouds*, we may add another of a different sort, namely, the total absence of any evidence that corroborates this part of Aristophanes' portrait:

> The doxographical tradition contains not the slightest trace of any scientific theory attributable to Socrates, and it seems equally unlikely that a man of his presumed ability should have made no contribution to the subject had he persisted in it so far as to become head of a school, or that any contribution he did make should have sunk without a trace. (Lacey 1971, 27)

That no such evidence was available to Aristotle, who would surely have known about it, is established by his characterization of Socrates as

18. "Aristophanes attacked him [Socrates] in his plays for making the weaker argument appear the stronger" (Diogenes Laertius, 2.20).

19. Cf. Montuori (1981, 102–108).

having concerned himself "with ethics and not at all with nature in general" (*Metaph.* 987b1–2).

What, then, of oratory? Socrates makes no secret in the *Apology* of the fact that the young men who follow him around learn how to refute others through seeing him do it (23c2–5). But whether rightly or wrongly (and that is an issue to which we shall have to return in 3.8) he clearly does not think that he is on that account their teacher (33a5–6), or that what they learn is specifically a technique, whether original with him or not, to enable them to make the weaker argument the stronger (19a8–d7). Consequently, Socrates' disclaimer of oratory should not be taken to extend to the elenchus or its unintended inculcation through practice. It follows that the attack on the elenchus which some critics have discerned in *Clouds*—specifically in the exchange between the just and unjust logics—while it *may*, perhaps, be a genuine feature of the play (and this itself is a controversial matter to which we shall also have to return in 3.8), cannot be relevant to the question of whether Socrates is being sincere in making that disclaimer.

The elenchus aside, then, the real issue is whether *Clouds* gives us any reason to believe that Socrates claimed to know and to be able to teach oratory. And surely it does not. For Socrates is not represented in *Clouds* as the purveyor of any credible strategies of forensic oratory. He claims, to be sure, that students can learn the unjust logic in the *phrontistērion* (1147–1150). But what exactly they learn in learning this, if it is not the elenchus, is left in the comic dark of jokes about the gender of nouns (658–694).

And, as in the case of science, the silence of history underwrites this view. For if Socrates had made any contribution to oratory, we would expect it to "have come through to Aristotle and to have been mentioned by him in his work *The Sophist*, lost to us but used by late ancient writers interested in the history of philosophy" (Dover 1972, 117 n. 12).

Clouds gives us little or no reason, then, to attribute either specific scientific doctrines or—the elenchus aside—specific strategies of forensic oratory to Socrates. To that extent it is lacking in the detail which lends credibility to otherwise uncorroborated historical evidence. There is a general reason, nonetheless, to believe that the portrait the play presents of Socrates cannot be wholly wide of the mark. It is this. To achieve its comic purpose, *Clouds*, like all successful satire, had to be based on something. If the Socrates it presented was sufficiently unlike the Socrates the audience knew, it would fail. Surely, then, we can infer that Socrates must have been a teacher of science and oratory of some sort.

There are essentially two reasons not to accept this argument. The first is that an earlier version of *Clouds*—the only one that we know to

have been staged—did fail, being judged third out of three contenders.[20] Perhaps it failed because the audience did not find the portrait of Socrates as an orator-scientist sufficiently credible. Perhaps the present version of the play would have failed for the same reason. We do not know. The point remains that we cannot be sure that our version of *Clouds* is successful satire, and so we cannot argue from its success to the verisimilitude of its portrayal of Socrates. The second reason to reject the present argument has to do with satire in general. While it is true that successful satire must be based on something, what it must be based on is not fact, but its audience's—possibly false—beliefs and prejudices. Hence, if we can find a plausible basis for Aristophanes' satirical portrait of Socrates in such beliefs, we can block the inference from the demands on successful satire to truth or fact. And Socrates himself suggests a basis of just this sort. He tells us that his young followers imitate his elenctic techniques on others, who, as a result, charge him with their corruption. Here—provided this was already true when *Clouds* was first produced in 423—is a basis for his representation as a teacher of the unjust logic. Socrates tells us, too, that certain charges were available in Athens against all philosophers, among them the charge of teaching about "astronomy and things beneath the earth" (23d2–9). Here is a basis for his representation as a scientist.

We can explain away the evidence in *Clouds*, then, at least to some extent. But why should we explain it away? The most straightforward answer is this. Socrates not only makes the disclaimers about science and oratory we have been discussing, he appeals to the jury—who have had over twenty more years to observe him about his elenctic business in the public agora than the original audience of *Clouds*—as witness to the truth of what he says. He asks them to confront their prejudicial beliefs about advanced thinkers with their actual knowledge of him. And this appeal is simply not intelligible, whether as irony or anything else short of madness, unless he believed its outcome to be certainly favourable: "It was customary to ask the diecasts who knew to inform their neighbors. Naturally the diecasts could be called upon as confirmatory witnesses only in matters of public knowledge" (Bonner and Smith 1938, 2: 125). The fact that Socrates makes his appeal with such confidence, therefore, and spends such little time on this part of the prejudicial caricature, gives us a powerful reason to treat *Clouds* as something other than the truth.

Much more needs to be said about *Clouds*, of course, before any of these conclusions can be taken as certainly established. But perhaps enough has been said to show that to try to use *Clouds* as evidence of the

20. See Dover (1972, 101–105).

ironical nature of Socrates' disclaimer of science and oratory is a deeply problematic undertaking.

1.4 The Religious Origins of Socrates' Mission

Socrates began his elenctic mission sometime after the oracle to Chaerephon (23b4–c1). The following passage from the *Laches* suggests that he was then in early adulthood:

> Lysimachus, it truly seems to me that you only know Socrates from what you know of his father and that you haven't had anything to do with him personally except, perhaps, when he was a boy, when you might have met him with his father in his own district at the temple or at some local gathering. But it is certain that you haven't had to do with him since he has become older [*presbuteros*].—What makes you say that, Nicias?—It seems to me you do not know that anyone who comes face to face with Socrates and converses with him, although they may have started on a completely different topic, is inevitably turned around by the argument until he is led to give an account of himself and of his way of life, past and present. And once he has been led into that, Socrates will never let him go until he has well and truly examined all of his ways. (187d6–188a3)

This would date the oracle in the 430s, or some thirty years prior to Socrates' trial in 399. And most scholars now accept that rough date.[21]

The account which Socrates gives of the oracle is as follows:

> You know Chaerephon. He was my companion from youth as well as the companion of most of you, sharing in your recent exile and return. You know what sort of man Chaerephon was, how impulsive in everything he did. He went to Delphi and dared to consult the oracle about this—as I say, do not create a disturbance, gentlemen—he asked if there is anyone wiser than I. The Pythia replied that no one is wiser. Chaerephon is dead, but his brother here will testify to these things. (20e8–21a8)[22]

21. See Guthrie (1971a, 85–86); Parke and Wormell (1956, 1: 401–403); Strycker (1975, 40–41).

22. During the brief rule of the Thirty Tyrants (404/403), the supporters of democracy were driven into exile from Athens. After the defeat of the Thirty, they returned to Athens (2.3). Chaerephon's brother, Chaerecrates, is mentioned in Xenophon, *Mem.* II.iii.1–19. Montuori (1981, 65) suggests that Xenophon's portrayal of the brothers as quarrelling raises a question about whether

The Pythia—the Delphic priestess through whom Apollo spoke—said that "no one is wiser [*sophōteron*]" than Socrates. A few lines later, however, Socrates represents Apollo as making the apparently stronger claim that he is wisest: "What does he [Apollo] mean by saying that I am wisest [*sophōtaton*]" (21b5–6). There seems to be a problem, therefore, about just what Apollo really said. But the problem is more apparent than real. Socrates' final account of what the oracle means is this: "That one of you, humans, is wisest [*sophōtatos*] who, like Socrates, knows that in truth he is worth nothing in regard to wisdom" (23b1–4). And this makes it clear that, as Socrates understands the matter, anyone as wise as himself would also be wisest of men. To be wisest is not to be wiser than anyone else; it is to be included in a class of equally wise people who are wiser than those not in that class. Hence the two earlier interpretations Socrates gives of the oracle differ only verbally from one another. No one is wiser than Socrates just in case Socrates is wisest of men.

Socrates' initial response to this oracular characterization of him was one of puzzlement and perplexity: "What is the god saying, what riddle is he uttering [*ti pote ainittetai*]?" (21b3–4).[23] For, on the one hand, he knew that he was "wise in neither a great nor a small way" (21b4–5), on the other, he knew that the god could not be speaking falsely (21b6–7).

After a long period of simply being at a loss, Socrates attempted to solve the riddle as follows: "I went to one of those reputed wise, thinking that there, if anywhere, I could refute the oracle [*elegxōn to manteion*] and say to it, 'This man is wiser than I, but you said that I was wisest' " (21b9–c2). This was the beginning of his questioning of the politicians, poets, and craftsmen described in 1.2.

Socrates' remark about "refuting" the oracle has led many writers to accuse him of impiety: "The fact that Socrates eventually becomes the

Chaerephon would have "revealed the secret" of the Delphic oracle to Chaerecrates. But this is farfetched. Socrates does not suggest that the Delphic oracle was a secret or that no one knew about it except Chaerephon and his brother. As Chaerephon's next of kin and as a democrat known to the jurors, Chaerecrates was simply an obvious choice as witness. See Bonner and Smith (1938, 2: 130).

23. Fontenrose (1981, 236) claims that the Delphic oracle's reputation for ambiguity "is wholly modern: Delphi had no such reputation in antiquity." He overlooks this text, however, which provides clear evidence that Delphi spoke in riddles. Moreover, his claim that the oracle delivered to Chaerephon is "not ambiguous" does not accord with Socrates' view of it; for Socrates argues that the oracle trades on a hitherto-unnoticed ambiguity in the notion of wisdom. See 1.6.

pious champion of the god's veracity draws attention away from his original impious intention and expectation: to show up the Delphic Apollo as a liar or a fool" (West 1979, 106).[24] But the accusation is misplaced. For Socrates clearly does not mean that he intended to refute the oracle outright. His plan, on discovering someone wiser than himself, was not to dismiss the oracle as false, but to return to Delphi in puzzlement (21c2). He believed from the beginning that, properly interpreted, the oracle had to be true. Apollo "cannot be speaking falsely; for that is not lawful [*themis*] for him" (21b6–7). Hence his strategy of refutation is interpretative only (21c6–22a1). By showing that one proposition the oracle might be taken to have expressed is false, he can get closer—in part by reapplication to Delphi itself—to the true proposition that is its real meaning.

Even this purely interpretative attitude, however, has been taken to show that Socrates does not treat the oracle seriously and that his interpretation of it is ironical:

> His procedure of testing the oracle is incompatible with a serious acceptance of its authority; and . . . is itself evidence that he did not receive it in such a spirit as could make it possible for him to regard it as the voice of God, determining and ordering all his future activity. His interpretation of the oracle is a typical example of his accustomed irony. (Hackforth 1933, 94)

This view of the matter presupposes that Socrates could not both take the oracle seriously and inquire into its meaning. And this presupposition is false.[25] When Croesus reproached the oracle with having deceived him about his chances of defeating the Persians, he received the following reply:

> As to the oracle, Croesus had no right to find fault with it: the god had declared that if he attacked the Persians he would bring down a mighty empire. After an answer like that, the wise thing would have been to send again to inquire which empire was meant, Cyrus' or his own. But as he misinterpreted what was said and made no second inquiry, he must admit the fault to have been his own. (Herodotus 1.91–92)

Not even Delphi itself, then, would have seen Socrates' attitude to its pronouncement as in some way ironical or impious.

24. Cf. Burnet (1924, 92); Hackforth (1933, 88–104); Ryle (1966, 177); Teloh (1986, 111).

25. See Guthrie (1971a, 86–87); Parke (1967, 113).

We turn, now, to Socrates' interpretation of the oracle. Socrates makes it quite clear that on numerous occasions he received definite orders from the god to examine his fellows:

> But why then do certain people enjoy spending considerable time with me? You have heard it, men of Athens, I have told you the whole truth. It is because they enjoy hearing men being examined who think they are wise but are not. For this is not unpleasant. I have been ordered [*prostetaktai*] to practice this, as I say, by the god through oracles and through dreams [*ek manteiōn kai ex enupniōn*] and in every other way that divine providence ever ordered [*prosetaxe*] a human being to practice anything at all. (33b9–c7)

There is no doubt, therefore, that Socrates believed he had ample evidence, quite apart from the original Delphic pronouncement, that his elenctic activities were divinely commanded.

At 28e4–6, however, long before he mentions these more explicit dreams and oracles, Socrates says: "The god stationed [*tattontos*] me [in Athens] . . . obliging [*dein*] me to live philosophizing and examining myself and others." A few lines later, referring back to this characterization, he says, "I will obey [*peisomai*] the god" (29d3–4). Finally, there is the following account of his activities, which forms part of the oracle story itself:

> After that, I kept going to one after another, perceiving with pain and fear that I was becoming hated, but thinking, nevertheless, that it was necessary to treat what pertained to the god as most important, so that I had to go, in seeking what the oracle was saying, to all those with a reputation for wisdom. And, by the dog, men of Athens—for I must speak the truth—I experienced something like this: in my investigation according to the god [*kata ton theon*], I found that those with the best reputations [the politicians] seemed to me nearly the most deficient, while those who were thought to be inferior [the craftsmen] seemed to me to have more wisdom. Indeed, I must display my wanderings to you as if they were labours I had undertaken to prove the god irrefutable. (21e3–22a8)

Here Socrates characterizes his investigation as being *kata ton theon*—a phrase to which he recurs at 23b5. It seems clear, therefore, that by the time he had completed his examination of the politicians, poets, and craftsman, Socrates took the oracle's pronouncement itself either as an explicit injunction to elenctically examine his fellows or, at the very least, as strongly commending, approving, and underwriting that activity.

The question is, what possible justification can Socrates have to think any of this? First, the oracle, even as he finally interprets it, is not an explicit command or imperative. Second, it does not mention elenctic examination. By the same token, and this is the third problem, it does not mention elenctic examination on ethical issues.

Faced with these three problems, which have not always been sufficiently distinguished from one another, interpreters have, by different routes, reached rather pessimistic conclusions about the cogency of the oracle story. Some have argued that the problems are the result of Plato's having inconsistently combined fact and fancy:

> What solution then can be offered for these difficulties? . . . I believe that Plato has caused them himself . . . by attempting to find in the oracle the source of Socrates' consciousness that his life's work—of exposing men's vain conceit of wisdom (his 'elenchtic' activity) on the one hand, and of urging them to care for their souls or their moral welfare (his 'protreptic' activity) on the other hand—was prescribed and inspired by a divine Master. (Hackforth 1933, 91–92)

Some deny that we are supposed to find in the oracle—or elsewhere in the *Apology* indeed—any explanation of why Socrates examined his fellows: "He nowhere explains just how the oracle was responsible for his undertaking his mission" (Brickhouse and Smith 1988, 98). Still others entertain the idea that the god in accordance with whom Socrates examines is not Apollo at all, but some other, non-Olympian deity: "How could the attempted refutation of the oracle be in accordance with the god? Perhaps 'the god' is not the Delphic god (Socrates never speaks of Apollo by name)" (West 1979, 125).[26] But are these responses justified? Has Socrates left the jury in ignorance about the bearing of the oracle on his philosophical life? He has not. A plausible explanation is implicit in what he tells them.

It is clear, first of all, that Socrates was already sufficiently religious and devoted to Apollo when he heard the news of the oracle to treat it very seriously; for who but a religious person already devoted to Apollo would puzzle over one of his oracles, set about a time-consuming activity to determine its meaning, and persist in that activity even when it

26. Other writers, too, have tried to make sinister capital out of Socrates' failure to name Apollo as the god he serves. Burnyeat (1988, 18) is a recent example. But this is unjustified; for Socrates does refer to the god he serves by means of a definite description—"the god, the one in Delphi [*ton theon ton en Delphois*]" (20e8)—which could have no denotation other than Apollo.

made him both poor and unpopular (21b2–22a1, 23b9–c1)?[27] Second, what the oracle said is that no one is wiser than Socrates. And the reason that Socrates found this puzzling was that he knew himself "to be wise in neither a great nor a small way" (21b4–6). The obvious people for him to go to, therefore, in search of an interpretation-aiding counterexample were those with a reputation for wisdom, and the obvious topics for him to discuss with them were those about which he believed himself not to be wise and they were believed to be wise. Third, in most cases, these topics were almost certainly ethical at the outset. But since we know that Socrates discussed poetry with the poets (22b2–8) and that, as a result of examining the craftsmen, he discovered that they "knew many fine things" about their crafts (22c9–e5), it is possible that in other cases his questioning originally ranged beyond ethics, coming to be exclusively ethical only as he began to see in his interlocutors' false presumptions in regard to ethics in particular a possible solution to the puzzle set by the oracle.

Putting these three facts together, we have an explanation, available to the jurors, of why Socrates began examining his fellows and why the topic of his examination was, or very soon became, ethics and the virtues.[28] What we do not have yet is an explanation of why this activity, thus begun, seemed to him to be *kata ton theon*.

If Socrates is right about the meaning of the oracle, the god Apollo has said that no human being possesses any real wisdom, any knowledge of the most important things, and that the person is wisest who, like Socrates, recognizes that this is so. According to Apollo, therefore, that is how things are. There is a sense in which Socrates is acting according

27. Montuori (1981, 125) overlooks this fact: "There is no evidence, at least in the *Apology*, that before the pronouncement of the oracle, Socrates had any great devotion to Apollo which would have earned him the favor of the god." 31c8–d4, 40a4–6, and 40b1 make it clear, indeed, that Socrates enjoyed Apollo's favour from childhood.

28. We need not suppose that Socrates' examination of the supposedly wise—or the self-examination which we shall see reason to think preceded it—initially took the form of a "standard elenchus" (1.7–8). Socrates may have found his best weapon, as he found its best target, only over the course of time. What ended up as a standard elenchus may have begun life as a much more generic kind of examination and refutation. Hence we should not expect to find an explanation of the precise form of examination Socrates' employed in the Delphic oracle. Neither should we suppose that the jury would have looked to it for such an explanation; for they are not likely to have been aware of the precise nature of a standard elenchus.

to Apollo, therefore, by refuting those who claim that they do have knowledge of the most important things, since he will be demonstrating that—appearances to the contrary—things really are in accord with what Apollo has said. By the same token, there is a clear sense in which he will be coming to the aid of Apollo and be engaged in service to him (23b4–c1), by demonstrating, in the face of apparent counterexample, that what the god has said is indeed true. Socrates' characterization of his activities at 22a6–8 strongly suggests that this is part at least of what he has in mind: "Indeed, I must display my wanderings to you as if they were labours I had undertaken to prove the god irrefutable."

If we suppose, however, that this is all that he has in mind, we face the following objection:

> How can his lifelong continuance of his activity on the same lines, after he had substantiated it [the truth of the oracle], be still explained as obedience? It may be replied that though he had substantiated it to his own satisfaction, it was still incumbent on him to substantiate it before others; but who will believe that Socrates really conceived his life's work to have consisted in substantiating an oracle before men who had most of them never heard of it? What a pitiable and absurd thing the sense of a divine mission would then become! (Hackforth 1933, 90–91)

As Socrates came to interpret the oracle, however, it contains not only the factual claim that no human being possesses any knowledge of the most important things but also the *value judgement* that the person is *wisest* who recognizes this fact. Consequently, the oracle has, in what we shall see to be characteristic Delphian fashion, commended antihubristic awareness of human limitations in wisdom. And value judgements and commendations, even if they are not, as some recent philosophers have claimed, disguised imperatives, certainly have—especially when uttered by a god to a religious person already devoted to him—strong action-guiding force.

It follows that by refuting those who claim to have knowledge of the most important things and, more especially, by getting them to see that they do not know what they claim to know, Socrates is helping to bring about something that Apollo especially commends and values. But if this is so, his elenctic activities do not become senseless once it has been sufficiently established that the oracle is true. They go on being important as long as he believes that they continue to bring about something Apollo values. Moreover, it becomes much more intelligible that Socrates should think of his activities as he does. For to help bring about

something Apollo values is to aid and serve him and in that much more full-blooded sense to act in accordance with him—notice that Socrates speaks of himself as coming "to the aid of the god" only at the stage at which he tries to get the interlocutor to recognize his own lack of wisdom (23b3–6). We can also see in this antihubristic aspect of the elenchus the beginning of an explanation of the religio-ethical significance Socrates attributes to it (30a7–b4, 36d9–e1); for anything that helps one to avoid something so repugnant to Apollo and so inimical to human well-being as hubris is of enormous significance to ethics and religion.[29]

The Delphic oracle can be seen, then, as underwriting and initiating Socrates' elenctic mission. His interpretation of it is, therefore, reasonable and intelligible. But why does he do what the oracle commends? Why does he obey the orders that later dreams and oracles more explicitly contained? So far we have settled for the answer that Socrates was a religious man, disposed to heed the word of the god. But in 1.10, equipped with a better understanding of Socrates' human wisdom, we shall have to return to that answer to determine whether it is really the last word on the matter or whether Socratic religion is itself based on something else.

1.5 Why Delphi Praised Socrates' Wisdom

The majority of interpreters of Socrates' account of the Delphic oracle have urged the following argument on us: Chaerephon must have had some reason to think that Socrates was wise before asking his question of the oracle, and, more important, the oracle must have had some reason for returning the answer it did; therefore, Socrates must have done something sufficiently remarkable to earn himself a considerable reputation for wisdom—news of it travelled to Delphi, after all—before the oracle delivered its fateful response.[30]

This argument seems unexceptionable. But in fact it is quite controversial; for it presupposes that the Delphic oracle did indeed rely on evidence in making its pronouncements. Some historians believe this to have been the case:

29. The Greek concept of *hubris*, which differs significantly from our own much narrower concept, is examined in Dover (1974, 54–55, 110–111); MacDowell (1978, 129–132); Nilsson (1948, 52–59).

30. See Brickhouse and Smith (1988, 94–95); Burnet (1924, 74–75, 90–91); Kraut (1984, 271 n. 43); Taylor (1952, 78–79); Vlastos (1985, 26–29).

> The Pythia entered into a mantic frenzy or state of trance, in which she uttered unintelligible sounds . . . the attendant priests interpreted these sounds, giving the inquirer a coherent, more or less ambiguous reply usually expressed in dactylic-hexameter verse. The priests' interpretations . . . were slanted and colored by their devotion to Delphic interests and by the unexampled knowledge of Greek affairs and of Mediterranean lands which they picked up from the numerous visitors who came to Delphi from the whole Greek world.[31]

But others completely reject this idea. They argue that Delphi relied not on information but on banality and on telling people what they expected to hear.[32]

There were, moreover, two methods of consulting the oracle. One, involving the sacrifice of sheep and goats, was quite expensive but resulted in a written response. The other—the so-called method of "the two beans"—was substantially cheaper but resulted only in a response by lot. Since Chaerephon was notoriously poor, it seems probable that he consulted the oracle by the latter method. He asked, "Is anyone wiser than Socrates?" The Pythia responded by drawing forth a bean whose colour indicated a negative answer. Hence, even if Delphi sometimes relied on evidence, the message to Chaerephon in particular may have been based on nothing more than the luck of the draw.[33] There is more than one reason, then, to be circumspect about using that message to argue backwards to the facts about Socrates' previous life on which it was allegedly based.

31. This succinct summary of a view he himself rejects is due to Fontenrose (1981, 6). The view is defended by Parke and Wormell (1956, 1: 30–41) and to some extent by Guthrie (1968, 262).

32. See Fontenrose (1981, 7–8, 11–57, 233–239).

33. Xenophon gives a somewhat different account of what the oracle communicated to Chaerephon: "When Chaerephon inquired at the Delphic oracle about me, in the presence of many people [*pollōn parontōn*], Apollo answered that no man was more free than I, or more just, or more moderate" (*Ap.* 14). This is additional evidence that Chaerephon consulted the lot oracle. First, the significance of the outcome of a lot might be variously characterized. And, second, the phrase *pollōn parontōn* suggests that the lot oracle was involved; for few people were admitted into the presence of the Pythia during a verbal consultation. See Parke (1961, 249–250; 1967, 72–88, 112–113); Parke and Wormell (1956, 1: 17–45). *Clouds* (103–104) attests to Chaerephon's poverty, as does his failure to appear in Davies (1971).

Nonetheless, because there is uncertainty about how Delphi operated, uncertainty about whether even the lot oracle was entirely a chance affair, and no more than reasonable probability that Chaerephon did, indeed, consult the lot, it is prudent to try to discover what, if anything, the oracle *might* have been relying on in responding to Chaerephon as it did.

A host of candidates have been proposed. Some argue, citing *Clouds* as corroborative evidence, that Socrates must have been an able natural scientist in his early life and that it was his scientific contributions that recommended him to Delphi.[34] Some claim that it was dialectical ability, not science, that played this role.[35] Some believe that it was Socrates' philosophical doctrines that Delphi found appealing.[36] Some completely reject the oracle story as Platonic invention, on the grounds that none of these candidates is unproblematic.[37] There is a candidate remaining, however, immune to the objections the others face, something the Delphic oracle would have found commendable and that Socrates himself believed it was actually commending (23a5–b4), namely, human wisdom or, at any rate, human wisdom appropriately understood.

The inscriptions on the walls of the temple at Delphi well convey the spirit the oracle stood for: Know thyself [*gnothi sauton*]; Nothing in excess [*meden agan*]; Curb thy spirit [*thumou kratei*]; Observe the limit [*peras epitelei*]; Hate hubris [*hubrim meisei*]; Bow before the divine [*proskunei to theion*]; Fear authority [*to kartoum phobou*]; Glory not in strength [*epi rōmēi mē kauchō*].[38] There is no record, absent the case in point, of the oracle ever having praised anyone for what we would think of as his significant or noteworthy positive achievements or abilities, whether ethical, dialectical, scientific, or otherwise: Delphi was not the ancient equivalent of the Nobel Prize Committee:

> We meet with even greater difficulties if we examine the Delphic pronouncement within the Delphic oracular tradition and bearing in mind the nature of the religion of Apollo. It then becomes impossible to believe that the Sanctuary of Delphi, which was the jealous and intransigent custodian which opposed to the insolence

34. See Burnet (1924, 74–75, 90–91); Taylor (1933, 37–88).

35. See Vlastos (1985, 26–29).

36. See Brickhouse and Smith (1988, 94–95).

37. See Montuori (1981, 140); Gomperz (1931, 2: 104–108).

38. See Guthrie (1955, 183–204); Parke and Wormell (1956, 1: 378–392).

> of *hubris* the humility of measure and restraint, could confer on anyone a prize that praised his own wisdom. (Montuori 1981, 133)

On the other hand, there are many stories of the following kind. Someone powerful, grand, famous for his wisdom, or in some other way noteworthy for his accomplishments asks the oracle to say who is wisest, most pious, happiest, or what have you, expecting that he himself will be named. But the oracle names some unknown person living in humble and quiet obscurity. The person whose offerings are most pleasing to the god is not the wealthy Magnesian who brought Apollo a hecatomb of victims, but Clearachus of Methydrium, a poor and unknown farmer. The happiest man is not Gyges, the ruler of Lydia, but Aglaus of Psophis, an obscure Arcadian, who has never left his tiny plot of land. Chilon the Spartan and Anacharsis the Scythian are each famous for wisdom, but Myson of Oeta, a humble peasant living in a backward part of Greece, "is provided with sounder brains" than either of them.[39]

What we know about the oracle, then, makes it very unlikely that it was praising Socrates for his contributions to science, ethical theory, or dialectic, and very likely that it was using him, in the way that it used Clearachus, Aglaus, and Myson, as an example of someone who was wise because he made no hubristic claims to wisdom. And this is Socrates' own view of the matter; for he understands the oracle to be using him as an example to make a general deflationary point about human wisdom (23a5–b4). On this showing, it is as wrongheaded to ask after the nature of the significant positive achievements in knowledge which commended Socrates to Delphi as it would be to ask the parallel questions about Clearachus, Aglaus, or Myson.

Nonetheless, if, as we are supposing, Delphi was relying on evidence in making its response to Chaerephon, it must have had some reason to believe that Socrates was like Myson, not like Chilon or Anacharsis. What might that reason have been?

Socrates does not say that he began to examine people only after he heard what the oracle had said.[40] Instead, he implies that he began his examination of those with a reputation for wisdom at that point (21b9–23b4) and that, having completed it in a systematic fashion and having come to a conclusion about what the oracle meant, he then extended his examination to "anyone, citizen or alien, whom I think wise" (23b5–6). Hence there is nothing here to exclude the possibility

39. These stories are collected in Parke and Wormell (1956, 1: 378–392).

40. See Strycker (1975, 46).

that Socrates engaged in elenctic examination (or prototypical elenctic examination) prior to the oracle. To the contrary, there is good reason to believe that he did precisely that.

When Socrates heard Chaerephon's news, he already knew that he was "wise in neither a great nor a small way" (21b4–5). He already knew that he possessed none of the knowledge that the politicians, poets, and craftsmen claim. How did he know this? The most plausible explanation is that he knew it in precisely the way that he subsequently came to know the parallel fact about other people, namely, by means of the elenchus or its intellectual predecessors. For elenctic examination is always self-examination (*Ap.* 38a4–5; *Chrm.* 166c7–d2; *Grg.* 506a3–5). It is these pre-oracle activities, leading as they did not to hubristic claims to wisdom but to modest human wisdom, that offer us a credible basis, if one is needed, for the oracle's pronouncement.

But if this is right, what made Chaerephon believe that Socrates was wise? Surely, *he* cannot be supposed to have been a partisan of mere human wisdom any more than the friends of Myson are likely to have thought him to be the wisest of men. Are we not, then, forced to search once more for some Socratic wisdom which is not human wisdom? We are not. There is another explanation.

We have seen reason to believe that Socrates used the elenchus before he heard the oracle. Chaerephon, his "friend from youth" (20e8–21a1), must often have seen Socrates use it on people he thought wise and, perhaps, have been a victim of it himself. As a result, he could have come to believe, as so many of his fellow Athenians did (23a1–5), that Socrates was a very wise man indeed.[41] Then, in his enthusiasm, he went to Delphi to ask whether anyone was wiser than Socrates and received the response, typically Delphian in its power to mislead the overconfident, that no one is wiser.

Provided, therefore, that human wisdom really is just the antihubristic recognition of one's own limitations in wisdom, and that is something we are about to investigate, the oracle to Chaerephon is intelligible whether as the product of chance or as an estimate of Socrates based on actual knowledge of him. But if human wisdom turns out to be something different, then only the possibility that Chaerephon consulted the lot oracle saves the oracle story from the incoherences which scholars have repeatedly found in it.

41. A similar view is suggested by Kraut (1984, 271 n. 43). We need not suppose, however, that the people Socrates examined were "major figures" in order to explain Chaerephon's enthusiasm.

1.6 Human Wisdom

Having examined his first politician, Socrates concludes: "So it is likely that in just this one little thing [*smikrōi tini autōi toutōi*] I am wiser than he is, that what I do not know, I do not suppose that I know" (21d6–7). Then he identifies the thing in question with what makes him wiser than the poets: "So I went away from there too thinking that I was superior to them in the very same way that I was to the politicians [*enteuthen tōi autōi oiomenos perigegonenai hōiper kai tōn politikōn*]" (22c6–8). Finally, having examined the craftsmen, he identifies what makes him wiser than them with what makes him wiser than the poets:

> But, men of Athens, the good craftsmen also seemed to me to make the same mistake as the poets [*hamartēma hoper kai ho poiētai*]: each of them, because he performed his craft well, thought himself wisest in the other things, the most important things [*talla ta megista*], and this error of theirs seemed to overshadow the wisdom they had. (22d4–e1)

Working backwards through this chain of identities, we see that human wisdom has to do exclusively with "the most important things" and with Socrates' recognition of his lack of knowledge about them.

But what are the most important things? Socrates leaves us in no doubt about his answer:

> If one of you disputes this and says he does care [about wisdom, truth, and the best possible state of the psyche; 29e1–3], I will not immediately let him go, nor will I go away myself, but I will speak with him, examine him, and use the elenchus on him, and if he does not seem to me to possess virtue but only says that he does, I will reproach him, saying that he attaches least importance to the most important things [*ta pleistou*] and treats the less important things as more important. (29e3–30a2; cf. *Alc. 1* 118a7–12)

The virtues are the greatest and most important things. And the reason they are most important is that without them nothing else—not even other apparently good things such as wealth—is unequivocally good: "Wealth does not bring about virtue, but it is virtue that makes wealth and everything else, both public and private, good for a man" (30b2–4; 3.4).

Now we have seen already that Socrates is wiser than the poets and politicians in the very same way that he is wiser than the craftsmen who falsely believe they know about the most important things—the virtues.

It follows that the things the poets write about (22a8–c8) and the fine and good things the politicians think they know about (21d2–6) must be the virtues. And this makes good sense. For the poets are the traditional teachers of virtue, and the politicians are supposed to be its shepherds and guardians (*Euthphr.* 2c2–3a5; *Euthd.* 292b4–c1; *Grg.* 515b6–517c4; cf. *Lg.* 650b6–9).

But if human wisdom has to do exclusively with the virtues in this way, it cannot be an achievement of human wisdom on Socrates' part to recognize that he has none of the kind of knowledge of science and oratory attributed to him in *Clouds* (19a8–d7); for the latter is not knowledge of virtue.[42] And what is true of science and oratory is even more obviously true of the ordinary crafts. Socrates recognizes that he does not have knowledge of these. But this recognition does not make him wiser than the craftsmen. What makes him wiser is, as we have seen, one thing alone: they falsely believe that they have knowledge about the virtues, while he knows that he does not have it. Knowing that one is neither potter nor tanner is not an achievement of human wisdom either.[43] Again, this makes good sense: Athens must have been full of people who realized that they knew neither craft, nor oratory, nor science. But, if Socrates is right, it contained scarcely anyone, beyond himself, possessed of human wisdom.

Besides disclaiming the knowledge of virtue claimed by the politicians, poets, and craftsmen, Socrates also disclaims the knowledge of virtue claimed by professional sophist teachers of it—*expert knowledge* as we may call it:

> I, men of Athens, have acquired this name [of being a sophist teacher of virtue] through nothing but a sort of wisdom. What sort of wisdom? Just the sort which is, no doubt, human wisdom [*anthrōpinē sophia*]; for it looks as though in this I am really wise [*tō onti gar kinduneuō tautēn einai sophos*]. But those of whom I spoke just now [Gorgias, Prodicus, Hippias, and Evenus] are wise in a wisdom that is more than human—I do not know how else to speak of it; for I at least do not know it [*ou gar dē egōge autēn epistamai*], but whoever says that I do speaks to slander me. (20d6–e3; cf. 20c1–3)

42. This important fact is overlooked by Vlastos (1985, 27 n. 68). Burnet (1924, 88–89) gets it more or less right: "Socrates is not here speaking of natural science, but of the teaching of the great 'sophists' in the more restricted sense given to the word by Protagoras."

43. See Kraut (1984, 239–240 n. 83); Irwin (1977, 73, 296 n. 28).

Appearances to the contrary, this is not a disclaimer of something new; for the politicians, poets, and craftsmen do not think that they have just a little knowledge of virtue; they think that they have the kind of significant knowledge of it that makes them *wisest* of men (22c4–6, 22d6–8). Moreover, Socrates argues that he got the reputation for having the kind of knowledge about virtue that Gorgias, Prodicus, and the other sophists claim because people attributed to him the very wisdom he showed the politicians, poets, and craftsmen to lack (20c4–23a5). Hence the wisdom he showed them to lack must be more or less the same as the knowledge of virtue claimed by the sophists. When it comes to ethics and the virtues, we may infer, most people think they are something of an expert.

Human wisdom seems, then, to consist, at least in part, in recognizing that one does not possess any expert knowledge of virtue when one does not. But there must, surely, be more to it than that. Otherwise it seems that anyone who recognized that he lacked such knowledge would possess human wisdom and be as wise as Socrates, even if his recognition was a result of general skepticism or below-normal intelligence. What is the missing ingredient?

Socrates came to the recognition that he lacked expert knowledge of virtue through examining himself and others (28e4–6, 38a2–6). But, as we shall see in 1.8 and 3.4, an elenchus is not an entirely negative process. In many cases, it disabuses someone of the hubris of thinking that his confident beliefs constitute expert knowledge of virtue by convincing him of a proposition about virtue which conflicts with those beliefs. Successful elenctic examination removes ethical hubris by refuting the confident claims which embody it. But it refutes those claims by defending other ethical claims. The latter differ significantly from their predecessors, however, in two crucial respects. First, they are and are recognized as being not expert knowledge of virtue but at best *nonexpert knowledge* of it. Second, because they are entailed by propositions almost everyone believes, they themselves are implicitly believed by everyone.

It is this second fact that explains why Socrates is wiser than the politicians, poets, and craftsmen in just the "one little thing" we began this section by trying to identify. His positive convictions do not make him wiser than these men, because they are the common possession of all (normal) human beings. That is why Socrates denies that he teaches anything to those he examines (3.8). Nonetheless, these positive convictions surely do distinguish Socrates from people who recognize that they lack expert knowledge of virtue out of general skepticism or below-normal intelligence.

There are two sides to human wisdom, then, corresponding to the two sides, negative and positive, of an elenchus. Through having one's confident ethical convictions refuted, perhaps on a daily basis (*Grg.* 513c7–d1), one is disabused of the hubris of thinking that one has expert ethical knowledge and simultaneously convinced of other ethical propositions which one recognizes as having at best the status of nonexpert knowledge and which are implicitly believed by all (normal) human beings.

Socrates registers his initial response to the oracle as follows: "For I know myself to be wise in neither a great nor a small way [*egō gar dē oute mega oute smikron sunoida emautōi sophos ōn*]" (21b4–5). Even very careful writers think he is making the claim, popularly attributed to him, that he knows only that he has no wisdom whatsoever, that he knows "absolutely nothing" (Vlastos 1985, 6 n. 13). But this seems an implausible interpretation of what he says. For Socrates is hardly denying that he knows lots and lots of such humdrum facts as that he has two hands, that the sun is in the sky, that he lives in Athens, that he fought at Delium, that he is puzzled by the oracle, and so on. Indeed, within a page, he explicitly says that he had such knowledge: "I knew [*ēidē*] that I would find that they [the craftsmen] knew many fine things" (22d1–2). All he is denying, it seems certain, is that he is in any way noteworthy in wisdom, that he has any expert knowledge of virtue which the ordinary man in the street does not have, that he knows anything that could possibly justify Delphi in thinking him wiser than his fellows.

Having deciphered the oracle, moreover, Socrates decisively revises this self-assessment. One writer has charted the course of revision as follows:

> Having finally understood what the oracle means, Socrates presumably realizes that his initial reaction to it . . . is self-contradictory. You cannot know that you have no knowledge, and similarly you cannot know that you are not wise even in a small way; for to know something is to have a small amount of wisdom. By putting his initial reaction to the oracle into the form of a self-contradiction, Socrates is telling his audience that he should have realized from the start that he was wrong to disavow all claims to knowledge and wisdom. (Kraut 1984, 272 n. 44)

But this account now seems mistaken. What Socrates actually discovers is that he was right to believe that he had no expert knowledge or wisdom but that the god was also right in saying that he was the wisest of men. For he discovers that there is "one little thing" which distinguishes him from all other men and makes him wiser than them:

they hubristically believe that they possess expert knowledge of virtue, whereas he knows that he does not possess it. This "one little thing" is human wisdom, which we can now see is precisely the sort of non-hubristic or deflationary wisdom we would expect Apollo and Delphi to commend.[44]

1.7 Expert Knowledge

Piecing together the various remarks Socrates makes about expert knowledge of virtue in the course of disavowing any share in it, we arrive at the following partial portrait.

First, expert knowledge seems to be, or to be relevantly like, craft-knowledge (*technē*). The only thing Socrates found in the course of his examination of the reputedly wise that he treats as making its possessors to any extent noteworthy in wisdom or knowledge is the craft-knowledge possessed by the various craftsmen (22c9–d4). Moreover, he presents Evenus as allegedly possessing a craft (20c1) which would enable him to make men virtuous, just as those who have mastered the crafts of horse-training or farming are able to make horses or calves virtuous or excellent.

Second, expert knowledge of virtue enables someone to teach people to be virtuous. In Socrates' view, that is what the relevant sophists claimed to be able to do (*Grg.* 519c3–d1; *Hp. Ma.* 283c2–5; *La.* 186c2–5; *Prt.* 319a3–7). Gorgias, Prodicus, Hippias, and Evenus are mentioned precisely in regard to the question of who Callias should engage to teach his sons virtue (20a4–c3).

Third, expert knowledge is explanatory. Socrates argues that the poets do not compose by the kind of wisdom he is seeking, "but by some-

44. Misunderstandings of human wisdom have led some scholars to doubt that Socrates is a true Apollonian. Montuori (1981, 127–128) claims that human wisdom is skeptical "not only towards that wisdom of which the god is wise, but also towards the very existence of the divinity." Socrates has no share in expert knowledge of virtue, the wisdom which the god possesses. But he is not in the least skeptical about its nature or about whether or not there are gods who have it. See 1.10. Burkert (1985, 148) also goes wrong here. *Gnothi sauton*, know yourself, he argues, "is not intended in a psychological sense or in the existential-philosophical sense of Socrates, but in an anthropological sense: know that you are not a god. An ethics of the human emerges, but it is closer to pessimism than to a programme for human progress." Socrates' views about human wisdom are "anthropological," however, and do register something approaching pessimism about our capacity, as humans, to master our fates and to cease to be at the mercy of chance or luck.

thing in their nature and by inspiration," because they cannot adequately explain what it is their products, their poems, say or mean (22b2–c3).[45]

Fourth, if someone falsely believes that he has expert knowledge of virtue, it seems that, no matter what other wisdom he has, he will be less wise than someone who recognizes that he does not possess it. Socrates believes that his human wisdom makes him wiser than the craftsmen, on the grounds that their error in thinking they possessed expert knowledge of virtue "seemed to overshadow the wisdom they had" (22d8–e5).

Fifth, expert knowledge of virtue seems to be the sort of knowledge it is reasonable to suppose a god, and perhaps only a god, really possesses. Socrates refers to it as "a wisdom that is more than human" (20e1), never finds anyone who possesses it, even after years of searching, and claims that part of the message of the oracle is that "it is really the god who is wise and that in his oracle he is saying that human wisdom is worth little or nothing" (23a5–7).

Finally, Socrates presupposes throughout the *Apology* that those who cannot successfully defend themselves against the elenchus do not have expert knowledge of virtue. He never says in so many words, however, that what they cannot defend in particular is an account (*logos*) of what a virtue is. The famous "What is X (*ti esti*)?" question, so prominent a feature of many early Platonic dialogues, is not explicitly mentioned. Nonetheless, if, as is surely reasonable, we suppose that accounts of the virtues are among the targets of the elenchus in the *Apology* as well, then expert knowledge of virtue must enable someone to give an account of what a virtue is and to defend his account against the elenchus.

Although these facts about expert knowledge do not immediately tell us what it is, they point us in a fruitful direction; for the evidence we have concerning the roughly contemporary notion of a craft—stemming from such fifth-century Hippocratic treatises as *On Ancient Medicine* (*Med.*) and *On Craft* (*Cft.*), from Plato's other writings, and, of course, from Aristotle—strongly suggests that expert knowledge is precisely craft-knowledge.[46] And this, in fact, would make good sense: just as science is our paradigm of expertise, craft was the paradigm of expertise in Socrates' Greece. Fifth-century Greek physicians tried to prove that

45. See Irwin (1977, 296 n. 28).

46. The close relationship between ancient medicine and philosophy is discussed in Frede (1987, 225–260). Jaeger (1939, 3: 4) notices the analogies between "the ethical science of Socrates" and Greek medicine. The connections between *technē* and *epistēmē* in Plato are discussed in Lyons (1963, 139–228) and Schaerer (1930).

medicine is a craft, just as present-day psychiatrists try to prove that their discipline is a science.[47] It would be quite reasonable, therefore, for Socrates to suppose that those who claimed expertise or authority in ethics were claiming to have craft-knowledge of it.

What, then, is craft-knowledge? How did Socrates' intellectual contemporaries and near-contemporaries characterize it?

Craft-knowledge is, in the first place, *explanatory*. One must understand "the explanations [*ta aitia*]" of disease, if one is to give "proper care" (*Med.* 23). Knowledge of their explanations is necessary for both prevention and cure of diseases (*Cft.* 11). Flattery "has no rational account [*logon*] . . . and so it does not have the explanation [*aitian*] of each thing; and I do not call anything a craft which is without an account [*alogon*]" (Plato, *Grg.* 465a2–6). "Men of experience know that the thing is so but do not know why, while the others [who possess the relevant craft] know the 'why' and the explanation" (Aristotle, *Metaph.* 981a28–30).

Second, and perhaps as a consequence of being explanatory, crafts are *teachable*. "Anyone can be trained to be an expert who is lacking neither in education nor intelligence" (*Cft.* 9). Crafts are a form of knowledge, and all and only knowledge is teachable (Plato, *Prt.* 356e2–361b7). "Craftsmen can teach; men who rely on experience only cannot" (Aristotle, *Metaph.* 981b9–10).

Third, crafts have no need of luck or chance (*tuchē*); they are *luck-independent*. "They [the sick] did not want to look on barefaced luck, so they entrusted themselves to craft instead" (*Cft.* 4; 5–6; *Med.* 1, 12).[48] When wisdom, which is identified with the craft of politics, is present in someone, "the one in whom it is present is not still in need of good luck" (Plato, *Euthd.* 280b2–3; cf. *Grg.* 448c5–7). "Experience made craft, as Polus says, inexperience luck" (Aristotle, *Metaph.* 981a1–5; *EN.* 1140a16–20; *Po.* 1454a10–12).[49]

Crafts have other features, of course, some of which we shall examine below. But with just this much to hand, we can make considerable

47. Cf. Frede (1987, 233–234).

48. See Vlastos (1975, 406–407 n. 82).

49. Cf. Xenophon (*Mem.* III.ix.14): "When someone asked Socrates what he thought was the best pursuit for a man, he answered, Doing well [*eupraxia*]. Questioned further, as to whether he thought good luck [*eutuchian*] a pursuit, he said, On the contrary, I think that luck [*tuchēn*] and doing [*praxēn*] are opposites. To hit on something right by luck without search [*mē zētounta*] I call good luck; to do something well after study and practice I call doing well [*eupraxian*]; and those who pursue this I think do well [*eu prattein*]."

headway with expert knowledge. Crafts are explanatory and teachable. If expert knowledge of the virtues is craft-knowledge of them, then, we have an immediate explanation of why Socrates believes that it enables someone to teach virtue and to explain what he teaches. But, in addition, we have promising explanations of the other more mysterious features he attributes it.

Because "it is virtue that makes wealth and *everything else*, both public and private, good for a man" (30b3–4), virtue makes the knowledge of anything else, including the knowledge of the ordinary crafts, an unequivocally good thing for someone to have. Without virtue—or, worse, with a pretender in its stead—the possession of such knowledge, since it encourages false confidence, is a greater disaster than its nonpossession (*Euthd.* 279a1–281e5; *Men.* 87d11–89a3): not to know that one lacks craft-knowledge of virtue is culpable ignorance—the "most blameworthy ignorance of thinking that one knows when one does not know" (29b1–2). By leading the examined life, by submitting oneself to elenctic examination every day, one can avoid such ignorance and the vice to which it leads and "prepare oneself to be as good as possible" (39d7–8). That is why Socrates is really better off with just his human wisdom than all those craftsmen who, because they possess knowledge of their crafts, initially seem so much wiser.

Again, if virtue has the property of making life and its other components good and if craft is luck-independent, anyone who has craft-knowledge of virtue surely has a godlike power. For it does seem reasonable to suppose that only a godlike being could both reliably make himself virtuous and insulate the good he would thereby achieve from the threatening effects of bad luck (cf. *Men.* 100b2–4; *R.* 497b7–c3; 3.4).

One two-part feature of expert knowledge remains to be explained: Expert knowledge enables one to give accounts, and those accounts are elenchus-proof. It is hardly in doubt that, at least as far as Socrates is concerned, this is one of expert knowledge's most important features. But before we can decide whether craft-knowledge has it, we need to understand the feature itself somewhat better. We need to understand what it takes for a kind of knowledge to be elenchus-proof. And to do that we need to understand something about what it is supposed to be proof against.

A "standard elenchus" is an argument of the following form (Vlastos 1983b, 38–44; 1.8):

> The candidate for the elenchus, C, produces a sincere belief, P, about a virtue (often a belief about what it is).
>
> Under questioning, C accepts Q and R (or Q, R, S etc.).

Q and R entail not-P.

C's commitment to Q and R is sufficiently strong that, faced with the contradictory conclusion, he finds P to be problematic, not Q or R.

P is refuted.

What would it take for a belief to be proof against such an argument? The natural answer is that C's belief that P is elenchus-proof only if nothing in the universal set of his beliefs, to which his commitment is greater than it is to P itself, entails a proposition inconsistent with P.

The issue before us, then, seems to be twofold. Must some member of the set of beliefs which partly constitute someone's craft-knowledge of X be an account of what X is? Must that belief be elenchus-proof in the requisite sense?

In the Hippocratic treatises, form (*eidos*, *idea*), craft, and knowledge of what something is (*ti esti*) are found in close conceptual proximity. But the relations between them seem to be still largely implicit. *Med.* 22 distinguishes powers (*dunameis*) from structures (*schemata*). The former are "the intensity and strengths of the humours." The latter are anatomical properties of bones, organs, tissues, and the like. Both powers and structures seem to be included, however, in the wider class of forms: because hot things possess other *powers*, such as being insipid or astringent, it cannot be the case that they "participate in no other form [*eidei*]" than the hot (*Med.* 12); "there are many forms of structures [*eidea schematōn*] both inside and outside the body" (*Med.* 23). In *Med.* 20–24, we are told that part of the knowledge of "what man is [*ho ti estin anthrōpos*]," which a perfected medicine will provide, is knowledge of the powers of various diets and regimens and their effects on people whose bodies have different structures and powers. Medical knowledge of what man is seems, then, to involve knowing the form of a man and the forms of the various things which affect his health.[50]

In Plato's writings the equivalence between knowing the answer to Socrates' "What is X?" question and knowing the form of X is established from early on:[51]

50. For further discussion of the uses of *eidos* in the Hippocratic treatises see Baldry (1937); Gillespie (1912); Taylor (1911, 178–267).

51. This does not imply that the full-blooded "theory of forms," developed in such dialogues as the *Meno*, *Phaedo*, and *Republic*, is also present from the beginning. See Reeve (1988, 101–110).

> Do you [Euthyphro] remember that I did not ask you to give me one or two examples of piety, but to explain that very form [*eidos*] which makes all pious things to be pious [*hōi panta ta hosia hosia estin*]? Do you not remember that you said that there was one form [*ideai*] which made impious acts to be impious, and pious things to be pious? . . . Tell me, then, what this form is [*tēn idean tis pote estin*], so that by looking to it and using it as a paradigm I may say that any act done by you or another which is of that sort is pious, and any act that isn't is impious. (6d9–e6)

The virtues, "even if they are many and various, all have one and the same form [*eidos*] which makes them virtues, and it is right to look to this when one is asked to make clear what virtue is" (*Men.* 72c6–d1). Craft and form are also related: the craftsman looks to the form in order to make particular things which have that form:

> To what does the carpenter look in making the shuttle? Does he not look toward the thing it is the nature of a shuttle to be [*ho epephukei kerkizein*]? . . . And suppose the shuttle to be broken in the making, will he in making another look towards the broken one? Or will he look towards the form [*eidos*] he looked towards in making the other? . . . And might not that justly be called what the shuttle itself is [*auto ho estin kerkis*]? (*Crat.* 389a6–b6; cf. *R.* 596b5–8)

It seems, then, that someone who has craft-knowledge of X must know, in the requisite Socratic sense, what X is.

This same conceptual scheme also appears in Aristotle's writings:

> From craft come the things whose form [*eidos*] is in the psyche of the producer—and by form I mean the essence [*to ti ēn einai*] of each thing and the primary substance [*ousian*]. . . . For example, health is the account in the psyche, the knowledge [of the form]. So the healthy thing comes to be when the physician reasons as follows: Since health is *this*, necessarily if the thing is to be healthy *this* must be present—for example, a uniform state—and if the latter is to be present, then there must be heat, and he goes on, always thinking like this, until he is led to a final this which he himself is able to make. Then the process from this point onward, toward health, is called production [*poiēsis*]. (*Metaph.* 1032a32–b10)

Indeed, the connections between craft, form, and knowing an account of what something essentially is, implicit in the Hippocratic treatises and explicit in Plato, have for Aristotle become literally definitive of craft.

The idea that someone who possesses craft-knowledge of X must know what X is is a persistent feature, then, of Greek thought about craft. The question is whether this knowledge must be elenchus-proof. Only Plato seems to claim explicitly that it must.[52] But his view is intelligible and might recommend itself to anyone. Craft-knowledge is explanatory. Someone who possesses it ought, therefore, to be able to express it (*Chrm.* 158e6–159a10; cf. Xenophon, *Mem.* IV.vi.1). Craft-knowledge, being knowledge, is consistent. A successful elenctic refutation could not, therefore, draw only on the interlocutor's craft-knowledge. But it seems certain that anyone who possessed craft-knowledge would be more committed to his craft beliefs than to any noncraft beliefs the elenchus showed to be inconsistent with them. An interlocutor who possessed craft-knowledge of virtue could answer Socrates' questions, then, and his answers would be elenchus-proof.

So far we have discovered that Socrates' near contemporaries are agreed that crafts are explanatory, teachable, and luck-independent. And in terms of these features we have been able to explain, at least in a provisional way, why Socrates says what he does about expert knowledge. This is strong evidence—which will be further strengthened in 3.4—that expert knowledge is indeed craft-knowledge. In the remainder of this section, we shall use this conclusion to determine whether expert knowledge has another feature thought to be definitive of the kind of knowledge Socrates disclaims.

The feature in question is *absolute certainty* or *infallibility*:

> When declaring that he [Socrates] knows absolutely nothing he is referring to that very strong sense in which philosophers had used them [the words for knowing] before and would go on using them long after—where one says one knows only when one is claiming certainty. (Vlastos 1985, 12; cf. 11-20).

The relevant notion of certainty or infallibility may be roughly characterized as follows. We have *fallible* knowledge that P if the evidence we have for P, though reasonable, does not entail P, does not preclude the possibility that P is false. We have *absolutely certain* or *infallible* knowledge that P if the evidence we have for P does entail P, does preclude the possibility that P is false. The question is, then, first, whether craft-knowledge is certain or infallible in this sense and, second, whether the knowledge Socrates claims is fallible.

52. Aristotle (*A. Po.* 72b3–4) does claim, however, that knowledge (*epistēmē*) must be elenchus-proof: "He who has unqualified knowledge [*epistamenon haplōs*] must be immovable by persuasion."

The starting points in medicine are "the observations made in the past" (*Med.* 2). The method is one of drawing on these to refine treatments, using "no other measure [*metron*] than bodily feeling" (*Med.* 9)—that is, how individual patients feel as a result of them—to determine their success. But because the relevant measure is bodily feeling, rather than something quantifiable, "exactness is difficult to achieve and small errors [*smikra hamartanein*] are bound to occur here and there" (*Med.* 9). Crafts strive for certainty, but "certainty [*atrekes*] is rarely seen" (*Med.* 9).

In Plato, the gap between crafts and certainty has widened and become more theoretical. Crafts (such as flute-playing) that use rather than produce can achieve certainty; for they yield knowledge, and knowledge is "infallible [*anamartēton*]." The productive crafts, however, cannot yield knowledge or certainty. The most we can hope for from them is true belief, and that only when their practitioners are guided by knowledgeable users (*R.* 477e4–478a1, 534b8–c5, 601d1–602a10).[53]

In Aristotle, this separation is all but complete. Full-blown knowledge is absolutely certain demonstrative knowledge of what is necessary or unalterable (*A. Po.* 71b9–72a14). Craft involves such knowledge and hence sometimes gets called *epistēmē* (*Metaph.* 981a5–7; cf. 981a10–12). But it also involves knowledge of particular things, which are neither necessary nor unalterable (*Metaph.* 981a16–17; *EN.* 1140a10–16, 1140a31–b4). Hence craft as a whole does not have the kind of demonstrative certainty required for full-blown knowledge (*EN.* 1140a31–b4; *MM.* 1197a33).

The story so far is one of increasing separation between craft and certainty. But we have omitted a crucial chapter. In Plato's Socratic dialogues, Socrates repeatedly makes the following four claims:

(1) Virtues are, or are closely analogous to, crafts (*Chrm.* 173a7–175a8; *Grg.* 460a5–461b2).

(2) Virtues must be always good, fine, and beneficial to their possessor, guaranteeing him happiness (*Euthd.* 278e5–279d6; *Men.* 88c2–5; 3.4).

(3) Only wisdom possesses these features, so that "wisdom is clearly virtue, either the whole of it or a part" (*Men.* 89a3; *Prt.* 351b4–362a4; 3.4).

(4) Wisdom would not be wisdom if it could make errors: "Wisdom everywhere makes men be of good fortune. For

53. See Reeve (1988, 58–95).

> wisdom, I presume, could not make a mistake [*ou hamartanoi*] but must always do the right thing and achieve its end; for otherwise it would not be wisdom any longer" (*Euthd.* 280a6–8).

It seems clear, therefore, that Socrates is committed to the view that craft-knowledge is certain or infallible. That is why, when Thrasymachus claims that a craftsman "insofar as [*kath' hoson*] he is what we call him never makes errors [*oudepote hamartanei*]" (*R.* 340d7–e1), Socrates, unlike Thrasymachus' modern critics, accepts what he says without question.[54]

Socrates' near-contemporaries had doubts about the certainty of craft-knowledge. But Socrates himself seems to have had none. He did not disclaim craft-knowledge, however, simply and solely because it is certain; for he does not utterly disclaim certainty: "It is certain [*dēlon*]," he says at *Ap.* 41d3–6, "that it is now better for me to be dead and to leave my troubles behind" (3.11). And the expert craft-knowledge he does disclaim has other defining features besides certainty alone.

Expert knowledge seems to be craft-knowledge, then: that is to say, it is explanatory, teachable, luck-independent, elenchus-proof, certain knowledge.

1.8 Nonexpert Knowledge

Thus far we have uncovered three distinct but related stages in Socrates' elenctic activities:

> *First Stage*: Socrates examined himself and some others. This led him to the conclusion that he had no significant or noteworthy wisdom, and led Chaerephon to Delphi.
>
> *Second Stage*: The Delphic oracle's response to Chaerephon—perplexing because of the negative outcome of the first stage—led Socrates to examine those with a reputation for wisdom, seeking to uncover in this way the true proposition which was the oracle's hidden meaning.
>
> *Third Stage*: Having deciphered the oracle and found in it an Apollonian mandate to purge "himself and others" (38a4–5) of the hubris of thinking that they possessed expert knowledge of virtue, Socrates began his mission to Athens as servant to Apollo.

54. See Reeve (1985, 250–251).

We do not know the precise goal of first-stage examining, if it had one beyond intellectual exploration. But we know that its outcome was partly negative: "I know myself to be wise in neither a great nor a small way" (21b4–5). The goal of second-stage examining was to uncover the meaning of the oracle. The outcome was, again, partly negative (Socrates shows each reputedly wise person "that though he supposed himself wise, he was not"), but also partly positive (Socrates uncovered the meaning of the oracle and realized that he possessed human wisdom). The goal of third-stage examining was one part negative (to show people who think otherwise that they do not possess expert craft-knowledge of virtue) and two parts positive (to cure them of their hubris and to get them to care about wisdom, truth, and the best possible state of their psyche more than about money and honour).

In this section, we shall focus on third-stage elenctic examining. Our aim will be, by reflecting on its negative goal and on its antihubristic positive goal, to explain the existence and nature of Socrates' nonexpert ethical knowledge. In 3.4 and 3.10, we shall discuss the other positive goal of third-stage examining.

Socrates speaks in the *Apology* of examining people (21c3, 23b3–6, 28e4–6, 29e4–5, 38a4–5) and their lives (38a5–6; cf. 39c6–8) rather than of examining their beliefs about virtue. He makes it clear, nonetheless, that the examined life is precisely one in which elenctic discussion of virtue has a central place: "It is the greatest good for a human being to discuss virtue every day and the other things about which you hear me conversing and examining both myself and others, for the unexamined life is not worth living for a man" (38a2–6). Hence beliefs about the virtues, which have a profound effect on the lives of those who hold them, are the *primary* focus of an elenchus: "What I chiefly examine is the proposition [*logon*]. But the consequence may be that I the questioner and you the answerer may also be examined" (*Prt.* 333c7–9).

Only *sincere* beliefs have such profound effects, however; only their refutation counteracts hubris. Insincere beliefs have little effect on the lives of those who hold them and are abandoned without any humility-inspiring loss of self-esteem. It is easy to see, then, given the aim of third-stage examining, why Socrates often instructs his interlocutors to answer his questions only with their own sincerely held beliefs (*Cri.* 49c11–d2; *Grg.* 495a8–9, 500b5–c1; *Prt.* 331c4–d1; *R.* 350e5).[55]

55. See Vlastos (1983b, 27–38). Thrasymachus refuses to go along with this requirement: "What difference, he said, does it make to you whether I believe it or not? Isn't it my account that you are refuting?" (*R.* 349a9–10). The significance of this refusal for Plato's criticisms of Socratic ethical theory is discussed in Reeve (1988, 21–24).

Sincerity is one thing; dogmatism is another. And implicitly, at least, the difference between them is marked in the Socratic dialogues. Some interlocutors, like Polus in the *Gorgias*, exhibit dogmatic confidence in their ethical opinions. They are already hubristic and need to be cured through forceful refutation. Others, like Cleinias in the *Euthydemus* or Lysis and Menexenus in the *Lysis*, are sincere but modest and undogmatic. With them Socrates is gentler and more exploratory, aiming to counteract hubris by encouraging the intellectual openness and awareness of difficulties in received opinion which prevent its formation.

Let us imagine now that a candidate for an elenchus, C, produces a sincere belief P about a virtue. Provided Socrates believes that P is false, his initial goal is to refute P in a way that C will find compelling. Under what circumstances can Socrates honestly achieve his goal? There are essentially three. First, P might entail a contradiction just by itself. But that would be a very rare occurrence; most people do not have beliefs of this obviously self-contradictory sort. Second, C might accept a proposition Q which conflicts with P. That is more likely to happen but is still not all that common. Third, C might accept a set of propositions, Q and R (or Q, R, S, and so on), which entail not-P. This is much more likely to happen; people are often unaware of the concealed entailments of sets of propositions they accept.

Suppose that Socrates has found such a set of propositions and has demonstrated to C's satisfaction that they entail not-P. Must C accept that he was mistaken to believe P? No. For all that has been said so far, C might decide instead that he was wrong to accept Q or R (as Critias threatens at *Chrm.* 164c7–d3). To prevent this happening, Socrates must be sure that C's commitment to the set of propositions from which he derives not-P is greater than his commitment to P itself.

Given its goals and these few facts about logic and psychology, we would expect a standard third-stage elenchus to fit the following schematic description:

> Under questioning, the candidate for the elenchus, C, produces a sincere belief P about a virtue.
>
> Under questioning, C accepts Q and R.
>
> Q and R entail not-P.
>
> C's commitment to Q and R is sufficiently strong that, faced with the contradictory conclusion, he finds P to be problematic, not Q or R.
>
> P is refuted.

An elenchus, then, is typically an argument directed against one of a person's sincere ethical beliefs, the premises of which are drawn from other propositions to which his commitment is greater: "the target is an opinion held by the respondent of the moment and the only worthwhile form of attack is through premises which have and keep his assent" (Burnyeat 1971, 214).

Day after day, Socrates must use an elenchus of this form to refute a wide variety of people he does not know. What would he need in the way of equipment to insure success? First, he would need as values for Q and R propositions which almost everyone would find it difficult to deny but which entail propositions which contradict likely values for P. Call the values for Q and R *acceptable propositions*.[56] Second, he would need *unacceptable propositions*. These are propositions which most people will reject because they contradict likely values for P but which are entailed by acceptable propositions. After nearly a lifetime of elenctic examination, then, Socrates should be in possession of both sorts of propositions. And, indeed, he is.

Socrates' favourite unacceptable proposition is this:

(A) It is better to suffer injustice than to do it.

He knows that most people will reject it on sight: "I know that only a few people believe this view or will believe it. And there is no common counsel between those who hold this view and those who do not, but of necessity they despise each other's views" (*Cri.* 49d2–5). But even though most people would reject (A), Socrates argues in the *Gorgias* that everyone implicitly believes it: "I think that I and you and other men believe that doing injustice is worse than suffering it" (474b2–5). Why does he think this? To find out we must look at the argument he uses to establish it.[57]

56. "The most conspicuous characteristic of Meno's answers is their conventionality and lack of originality" (Stokes 1986, 16). The same could be said for the views expressed by the majority of Socrates' interlocutors. When Thrasymachus rejects the acceptable proposition that justice is a virtue (*R.* 348b8–350c11), Socrates says (revealingly) that he cannot then refute him "by appeal to conventional principles [*kata ta nomizomena*]" (348e8–9).

57. Socrates' claim that everyone implicitly believes (A) and his later claim (479e8) that he has proved by elenctic argument that (A) is true are without exact parallel in the other Socratic dialogues. See Vlastos (1983c). But they are implicit in those dialogues. Socrates' frequent disclaimers of teaching are intelligible only if he presupposes that the conclusions of elenctic arguments are always implicitly believed by an interlocutor who accepts their premises (3.8). His injunction to

Polus claims that the contrary of (A) is true:

(1) Suffering injustice is worse [*kakion*] than doing it (474c5–6)

He also agrees, however, that

(2) Doing injustice is more shameful [*aischion*] than suffering it (474c7–8).

By presenting Polus with various cases or examples, Socrates then gets him to accept

(3) Something is fine [*kalon*] because it is pleasant or beneficial [*ōphelimon*] or both (474e5–475a1).

Since the shameful is the opposite of the fine, and the bad the opposite of the beneficial, Polus agrees that

(4) Something is shameful because it is painful or bad [*kakon*] or both (475a4–5).

On the basis of (3) and (4), he agrees that

(5) When one of two fine things is finer than the other, it is finer by being more pleasant or more beneficial or both, and when one of two shameful things is more shameful, it is more shameful by being either more painful or worse or both (475a5–b2).

On the basis of (2) and (5), he accepts

(6) Doing injustice is either more painful than suffering it or worse than suffering it (475b5–8).

But Polus also accepts

(7) Doing injustice is not more painful than suffering it (475b8–c3).

Hence he is forced to accept

the jury at *Ap.* 30c6–8, which we shall discuss below in 3.6, is intelligible only if he thinks that elenctic arguments can lead to knowledge. Given the form of such arguments, this is good evidence that he considers at least some of them to be proofs. It seems legitimate, therefore, to use these aspects of the *Gorgias* to illuminate elenctic argument generally. For further discussion of the *Gorgias* see Cooper (1982); Irwin (1986c). The argument with Polus which follows is discussed in Irwin (1979, 152–159); Vlastos (1967, 454–460).

(8) Doing injustice is worse than suffering it (475c7–9).

Socrates is now ready to justify his claim that everyone believes (A).

(9) Now didn't the mass of people [*tōn pollōn anthrōpōn*] and you yourself agree with us earlier that doing injustice is more shameful than suffering it? (475d1–3)

Socrates concludes that the mass of people believe (A).[58] He admits later, however, that repeated refutation may be necessary to convince them of this (513c7–d1).

Socrates' claim that most people believe his prize unacceptable proposition is based, then, on his belief that they would all accept (2)—together, no doubt, with the other propositions Polus accepts along the way. And, in fact, propositions like (2) and these others very frequently occur as premises in elenctic arguments.[59]

What epistemic status does Socrates attribute to these acceptable propositions? He does not tell us. But a plausible answer can be derived from what he does say. First, as (9) makes explicit, Socrates thinks that everyone really does accept or believe them. Second, he thinks that everyone will find them sufficiently compelling that they will continue to believe them even when they are shown to lead to something as antecedently unacceptable as (A)—otherwise he could not hold that even those people who deny (A) really believe it. Third, he thinks that (A) is true and that he has proved this: "In reality, then, agreement between you and me will finally reach the goal of truth" (*Grg.* 487e6–7); "And hasn't it been proved [*apodedeiktai*] that it [A] was said truly [*alēthē elegeto*]?" (479e8). Fourth, Socrates strongly implies that he *knows* (A): "I know well that [*eu oid' hoti*], if you agree with what my psyche believes, these very

58. What Socrates actually concludes is stronger. From (9) together with

(10) No one would choose the worse and more shameful over the less (475d4-e3)

he infers

(11) No one would choose injustice over suffering it (475e3-6).

But (10) and (11) presuppose that people believe (A).

59. Inferences from good or beneficial to fine are common (*Cri.* 48b8–9; *Prt.* 351b7–c3, 359e4–7). Virtues must be good (*agathon*), fine (*kalon*), and beneficial (*ōphelimon*) (*Chrm.* 159c1; *Euthd.* 278e5–282d3; *La.* 192c5–7; *Men.* 87e1–3; *Prt.* 349e3–5, 359e4–7). Virtues are, or are exactly analogous to, crafts (*Chrm.* 173a7–175a8; *Grg.* 460a5–461b2; *R.* 332d2–3). See Irwin (1977, 37–101).

beliefs are the true ones" (486e5–6). And in the *Apology* he represents a proposition with the same status as (A) as something known:

> (B) For know well [*eu gar iste*] that if you kill me, since I am the sort of man that I say I am, you will not harm me more than yourselves. (30c6–8)[60]

It seems reasonable to conclude that those acceptable propositions Socrates uses to establish unacceptable ones are, in his view at least, obvious truths. For unless they have this status, we cannot easily explain why they are generally believed, why they are found very compelling, and why as premises of proofs they can yield knowledge of the conclusions.[61]

It seems, then, that Socrates claims to know the conclusions of some of his arguments. But he is explicit that his knowledge of the conclusions is no more certain or secure than the arguments used to establish them:

> These things [(A)], having thus become evident [*houtō phanenta*] in the foregoing argument to be as I state them, have been clamped down and bound by arguments of iron and adamant which if you, or someone more energetic than yourself, is not able to undo, then it will not be possible for anyone to speak rightly unless he speaks as I do now. (*Grg.* 508e6–509a4; cf. 474a2–b2)

Polus has not been able to resist Socrates' argument, but another interlocutor might succeed where he has failed and manage to undo the

60. Like (A), (B) is an unacceptable proposition. But, as we shall see in 3.6, it follows from acceptable propositions rather similar to those Socrates uses to support (A).

61. Gulley (1968, 43–44) argues that acceptable propositions must be self-evident. Kraut (1983, 65) argues that they "must be so eminently reasonable that they are *as yet* in no need of justification." Xenophon (*Mem.* IV.vi.15) claims that they must be "the most generally accepted opinions"—a view more recently defended in Polansky (1985, 247–253). Vlastos (1983b, 38–44) argues that a proposition is acceptable if it is sincerely held by the person being examined. Kraut, Xenophon, and Polansky are right to think that acceptable propositions must have a broad appeal. Vlastos is right that they must be sincerely believed. But it is not enough that they have these features; they must have them because they are obviously *true*. Truth and not just acceptability or reasonableness must enter the picture. To that extent Gulley is right. But he exceeds the evidence in suggesting that the truths in question must be self-evident.

"arguments of iron and adamant" which seem to establish (A). It would be hubris, therefore, to claim that (A) has been established with absolute certainty, once and for all, or to refuse to reexamine it or the premises on which it rests. In an elenchus, the interlocutor is under examination, but so is Socrates himself: "How could you think that I would refute you for any reason other than the one for which I would refute myself, fearing lest I might inadvertently think I know something when I don't know it?" (*Chrm.* 166c7–d2; cf. *Grg.* 506a3–5; *Hp. Ma.* 298b5–c2; *Prt.* 348c5–d3).

Moreover, Socrates couples his claim that he has proved that (A) is true and the strong implication that he knows that it is true with a version of his characteristic disclaimer of knowledge:

> But as for me, my position is always the same: I do not know how these things are [*tauta ouk oida hopōs echei*], but [I do know] this, that of all those I have encountered, as I have now, no one has been able to speak differently without coming off covered with ridicule. (509a4–7)

Socrates knows *that* (A) is true. But he does not know *how* it can be true, how it can be better to suffer injustice than to do it.[62]

Socrates claims not to know (A) with certainty, then, and not to be able to explain why it is true. Presumably, he would make parallel claims about (B). It follows that Socrates cannot have expert craft-knowledge of these propositions; craft-knowledge is certain and explanatory. Yet he implies that he knows (A) and claims that he knows (B). His knowledge of (A) and (B) must, therefore, be *nonexpert* knowledge. We must now try to determine what it is and whether it lacks all the features of expert craft-knowledge or only some of them.

Socrates does not know (A) and (B) with absolute certainty; he acknowledges the possibility that they might be overturned by arguments presented in the future. For the same reason, he does not have elenchus-proof knowledge of these propositions but only *elenchus-resistant* knowledge of them. Thus far they have proved irrefutable, but there is no guarantee that they will not be refuted in the future. Neither is Socrates'

62. In the *Republic*, Adeimantus says that he does not want a proof that justice is more choiceworthy for its own sake than injustice (367b2–3, 367e2–3). Like Glaucon, he already believes that (368a7–b3). What Glaucon and Adeimantus want is an *explanation* of how, in the face of Thrasymachus' arguments, justice can be more choiceworthy. Elenctic philosophizing alone cannot provide this sort of explanation. See Reeve (1988, 33–41).

knowledge luck-independent; bad luck may insure either that he does not notice the flaws in his own arguments or that he never meets someone who could in fact point them out to him. We are left with explanatoriness and teachability. Socrates claims explicitly, as we have just seen, that he does not know how (A) can be true: proofs are one thing; explanations are another. He also claims that elenctic examination is not teaching because it imparts no beliefs not already "in" the person being examined: (A) and (B) follow from propositions that the mass of people find acceptable and that are, in Socrates' view, (implicitly) believed by the mass of people. Thus nonexpert knowledge has none of the features definitive of expert craft-knowledge.

Turning back to human wisdom, we might characterize it more adequately as follows. Someone has human wisdom only if he recognizes that he has no explanatory, teachable, luck-independent, elenchus-proof, certain knowledge of virtue but that he does have some knowledge, of the sort (implicitly) possessed by all human beings, which, though elenchus-resistant, is nonexplanatory, unteachable, luck-dependent, and uncertain.

We have seen why, given the aims of third-stage examining, Socrates would need a supply of acceptable and unacceptable propositions. We have seen that he claims to know these. We have seen, too, that this claim does not compromise his characteristic disclaimer of expert craft-knowledge. These conclusions have not, certainly, been clamped down by arguments of iron and adamant. But perhaps enough has been said to show how the account of human wisdom developed in 1.6 might accommodate Socrates' initially perplexing claims to nonexpert ethical knowledge.

1.9 Socrates' Disclaimer of Knowledge

Armed with these findings of 1.6–8, we are ready to discuss one of the central puzzles about Socrates, namely, the paradox of Socratic ignorance or the *disclaimer-of-knowledge paradox*. Socrates claims that he is wiser than others because he neither has knowledge of virtue nor thinks that he does. But he also frequently seems to claim or imply that he does have knowledge of virtue. These claims seem contradictory. Hence the paradox. The foregoing discussion suggests, however, that the contradiction is only apparent, that properly interpreted both claims are true. What Socrates is disclaiming is the craft-knowledge of virtue; what he is claiming is nonexpert knowledge. We must now test this potential resolution of the paradox against the text of the *Apology*.

The most significant of Socrates' disclaimers of knowledge (D*n*) are already familiar:

(D1) I know [*epaiō*] neither a lot nor a little [about oratory or natural science]. (19c2–5)

(D2) Certainly, I would pride and preen myself, if I knew [*ēpistamēn*] these things [the craft of teaching virtue]. But I do not know them [*all' ou gar epistamai*], men of Athens. (20c1–3; cf. 20d6–e3)

(D3) I know [*sunoida*] myself to be wise in neither a great nor a small way. (21b4–5)

(D4) They [the craftsmen] knew things that I did not know [*ouk ēpistamēn*]. (22d2–3)

To these we may add:

(D5) I have no adequate knowledge [*ouk eidōs hikanōs*] of things in Hades. (29b5)

(D6) I do not know [*ouk eidenai*] whether it [death] is a good thing or a bad thing. (37b6–7)

Clearly, then, Socrates makes other disclaimers of knowledge beyond the canonical one which registers his possession of human wisdom. Provided all of them are sincere, however, this need not trouble us.

But are all of them sincere? Most seem to be. (D1) is sincere, as we saw in 1.3. (D4), (D5), and (D6) are not controverted in the *Apology* or elsewhere. (D3) is sincere when it is uttered, otherwise it would hardly have led Socrates to examine the Delphic oracle's pronouncement at such length and personal cost. It is more circumscribed than it might seem, however, amounting, as we saw, to no more than a disclaimer of expert craft-knowledge of virtue. The ultimate sincerity of (D3) depends, then, as does that of (D2), on the question of whether or not Socrates ever manifests or implies that he possesses the craft-knowledge of virtue.

To settle that question we need a list of the things Socrates claims to know (K*n*):

(K1) I knew [*ēidē*] that I would find that they [the ordinary craftsmen] knew many fine things. (22d1–2)

(K2) And yet I know more or less [*oida schedon*] that I incur hatred by these very things. (24a6–7)

(K3) Know well [*eu iste*] that this [K2] is true. (28a6)