ideology or belief, but as his last act of teaching, the final fulfilment of his divine mission.

By refusing to flee from Athens, by allowing his fellow citizens to kill him, Socrates makes them aware that it is wrong to silence critics. A free society, an open society must have critics and must protect them. Socrates' death remains as one of the most significant acts of teaching in the history of Western civilization.

ROBERT R. WELLMAN*

The Apology of Socrates: A Response

Professor Perkinson's thesis — that by submitting to death Socrates demonstrates that a free and open society must have its critics — rests upon three closely related assumptions, one explicitly stated, another obvious throughout the paper, and a third implied although not stated. The first is that Socrates has no knowledge, at least of virtue or excellence. His only knowledge is a recognition of his and others' ignorance when it comes to matters of signal import in conducting one's life. The second assumption is that the Socratic method is simply a critical attitude toward men's opinions and nothing more. Since Socrates has no knowledge, his characteristic practice of questioning persons does not result in knowledge but in elenchus. Hence the method he uses is negative and critical, not positive in the sense of resulting in knowledge. The third assumption is that the Socrates of Plato's dialogues is easily distinguishable from Plato himself, and that the demarcation between them is defined precisely by the two earlier assumptions.

It is clear, I believe, how Perkinson's thesis stands or falls with these assumptions. If Socrates died to teach his fellow Athenians the importance of a critical tradition, it follows that he cannot possess knowledge in the usual sense. For if he knew what was right and wrong for men, he should have told them rather than demolishing their most deeply held convictions without any effort to replace them with sound ones. Short of accusing Socrates of outright dishonesty we must assume with Perkinson he possessed no knowledge himself. This, in turn, means that the outcome of the Socratic method of questioning is not and cannot be positive in character. That is to say, it cannot result in knowledge since Socrates has none and presumably would not even recognize it if he saw it. But since Plato appears in other dialogues, especially the later

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ones, to propound positive knowledge to his fellow Athenians, Socrates and Plato are distinguishable on this point of the possession of knowledge. Hence the Socratic problem is solved: when positive knowledge is propounded which either stands up under examination or remains unchallenged it is Plato speaking; when otherwise it is Socrates.

I wish to challenge these assumptions; at my present state of thinking I disagree with all three, although to varying degrees. For reasons that will become obvious in the sequel, I will deal with them in inverse order.

The Socratic Problem

Regarding the issue of Socrates in Plato and Plato in Socrates, I am inclined to comment with Protagoras that there are many factors preventing our knowing anything about the subject: the obscurity of the subject and the shortness of human life. Regardless, there is a wealth of literature on the Socratic problem attempting to separate Socrates from Plato in the dialogues.

Modern scholarship on the Socratic problem is best dated from Schleiermacher[1] who posed the question, "In addition to Xenophon's portrayal, what can Socrates have been without contradicting the characteristics Xenophon definitely ascribes to him; and what must he have been to provide Plato with the justification to portray him as he does in his dialogues?" Nearly a century later Maier[2] provides a minor but important modification to this question: "What must Socrates have been to account for the fact that the Socratics, for all their divergence, could each claim to be authentically Socratic or at least to continue Socrates' work, elaborating the implications of his theories?" And a few years ago Versényi[3] modifies Maier by insisting that whatever view we construct of Socrates from Maier's question must be consistent with Aristotle's comments (Maier dismisses Aristotle's comments as incorrectly based on Xenophon) and it must also make plausible the views and accusations of Socrates' opponents.

During the intervening century and a half, the answers to these questions, as might be expected, vary considerably. Maier, for example, concludes that most of Plato's Socrates is Plato's invention; the historical Socrates is a questioner without answers who represents a new attitude toward life, an attitude of human freedom. In Maier's view Socrates is simply an "ethical inspiration, a hero of the moral life." At the other end of the spectrum, John Burnet[4] and A. E. Taylor[5] argue that the

[1]F. Schleiermacher, "Ueber den Wert des Sokrates als Philosophen," in *Abhand. Berlin. Akad.*, 1818, 50 ff.

[2]H. Maier, *Sokrates* (Tübingen, 1913).

[3]L. Versényi, *Socratic Humanism* (New Haven, 1963).

[4]J. Burnet, *Greek Philosophy* (London, 1914) and "Socrates" in Hastings' *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics* (New York, 1928).

[5]A. E. Taylor, *Varia Socratica* (Oxford, 1911), *Socrates* (Edinburgh, 1933) and "Plato's Biography of Socrates," *Proceedings of the British Academy, 1917-18* (London, 1918).

Platonic Socrates is the historical Socrates. The other portrayers of Socrates were not intellectually up to following him to the heights of his philosophical speculation, and it is left to Plato to faithfully record the thoughts of the first great metaphysician in Western philosophy. For Burnet and Taylor, Plato really meant what he said about Socrates.

Between these extremes a variety of viewpoints have been propounded. Zeller[6] concludes from an Aristotelian basis that Socrates was the founder of the philosophy of conceptions, the reformer of method, and the originator of a scientific doctrine of morals. Versényi decides that Socrates is just about everything Xenophon and Plato say he is, except a metaphysician. And Jaeger[7] believes Socrates is the "man of his time"; a Solon or Aeschylus of the fifth century, exploring the moral crisis of his time — as Solon explored the political crisis earlier — and finding the answer in the tendance of the human soul.

Jaeger's conclusions, incidentally, are characteristic of many other scholars, for example Karl Popper, G. C. Field, A. K. Rogers,[8] and others; it is also characteristic of Perkinson's approach. Essentially this approach amounts to accepting Plato's *Apology* as a faithful record of Socrates' words before the jury during his trial, and refusing to accept anything as genuinely Socratic that departs radically from it. There is fairly general agreement within this group that the early elenctic dialogues of Plato are genuinely Socratic as well as Alcibiades' speech in the *Symposium,* but anything that hints of metaphysics, the theory of Ideas, and positive statements of knowledge are dismissed as Platonic additions.

But why, one might ask, accept the *Apology* as our starting point for reconstructing the historical Socrates? Why not the *Alcibiades Major* which Olympiodorus views as the gateway to Plato's *Dialogues?* Or the *Charmides* which contains all the essential element of Socratic thought? Or the *Laches* which is perhaps the finest illustration of Socratic method in any of the *Dialogues?* Indeed, why accept the *Apology* as history at all? At least one recent scholar, Gilbert Ryle, doubts the *Apology* has much to say about the historical Socrates. In a dramatic departure from traditional Platonic scholarship, Ryle argues that the *Apology* is not a faithful reproduction of Socrates' speech at his trial, but an effort to vindicate Plato's own methods of teaching:

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[6]E. Zeller, *Socrates and the Socratic Schools,* trans. O. J. Reichel (London, 1885).

[7]W. Jaeger, *Paideia,* trans. G. Highet (New York, 1943), vol. ii.

[8]K. Popper, *The Open Society and its Enemies* (London, 1945); G. C. Field, *Plato and his Contemporaries* (London, 1930); A. K. Rogers, *The Socratic Problem* (New Haven, 1933). In this very brief review of the Socratic problem I have mentioned only a few works; the list is by no means complete or even nearly complete. For an exhaustive treatment of the subject see V. de Magalhães-Vilhena, *Le Problème de Socrate* (Paris, 1952); a good beginning can be made in C. J. de Vogel's "The present state of the Socratic problem," *Phronesis,* I (1955), pp. 26-35.

> Plato was not writing even a romantic history of the trial of the real Socrates in the *Gorgias*, the *Meno* or even the *Apology*. . . . The bulk of Socrates' defence is no more historical than Thucydides' speeches are historical. The *Apology* is for the most part a defence of the Socratic Method against an attack which was not made in 399, but was made well on in the 370's. The martyr's name was not 'Socrates' but 'Plato,' [who was defending himself against a charge of] the defamation of some senior persons of social and political importance.[9]

All this leads me to conclude that Perkinson is on rather tenuous historical grounds when he assumes a clearcut distinction between Socrates and Plato; when he assumes, for example, that Socrates but not Plato is a true believer in the free and open society, or that Socrates died to demonstrate the necessity of social criticism, or that Socrates was without knowledge and simply a gadfly driving his victims into contradiction and aporia. These are, after all, historical-biographical statements as to what Plato and Socrates respectively believed and how they acted.

Can we then say nothing of the historical Socrates? Gigon[10] presented just such a provocative thesis in 1947, contending that hardly anything can be known of Socrates, and certainly not that he adhered to a particular philosophical point of view. For our present purposes, however, I believe even this mis-states the question. Questions concerning the biography of Socrates are certainly historically meaningful but in my opinion largely irrelevant for educational historians and philosophers. Our concern is with a series of ideas relating to the conduct of education traditionally associated with the name of Socrates. And central to these ideas is a particular educational method traditionally called Socratic. What we wish is to reconstruct from Plato's writings — and other sources as well — a consistent picture of Socratic method and Socratic education generally. The picture which emerges may or may not represent the thinking of the historical Socrates — it probably does not. Nor does it necessarily represent the ideas which have influenced Western man since the Classical period. Rather it represents what we can reasonably call Socratic based upon the available sources.

I do not propose here, of course, to completely reconstruct Socratic educational ideas. I shall only indicate briefly and tentatively their general outline as I deal with Perkinson's other assumptions.

Socratic Method

I turn now to Perkinson's second assumption, that the Socratic method is a critical attitude towards men's opinions and nothing more. If anything is universally accepted as Socratic, it is the method of critically examining ideas by questions demanding agreement or disagreement. As Ryle states it in his aforementioned study of Plato, the Socratic method is simply "the rule governed concatenations of questions, answerable by 'yes' or 'no,' which are intended to drive the answerer into self-contradiction."[11] The object of this method, judging from the

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[9]Gilbert Ryle, *Plato's Progress* (Cambridge, 1966), pp. 152-53.
[10]O. Gigon, *Sokrates* (Bern, 1947).

Apology and many of the early *Dialogues,* is not simply aporia but the recognition of ignorance, the recognition that one does not know what he thought he knew.

So much, I imagine, is agreed: The Socratic method is elenctic and its issue is awareness of ignorance. But there is more. I have suggested elsewhere that if we analyze closely the conduct of the Socratic method in the *Dialogues* we realize that an integral aspect of it is a love relationship between the participants; without love or *eros* there is no genuine Socratic interchange. It is not easy to admit ignorance, but if a love relationship obtains honesty and integrity are required of the participants; one must speak the truth to his beloved or the relationship will break down. It is also only within the love relationship one bares his inner soul without fear of a total disintegration of the self. It is only at the end of the *Alcibiades Major,* for example, when Alcibiades has succumbed to the erotic Socrates, that the young man can genuinely admit he is ignorant of the most important matter of life. The internal evidence of many other *Dialogues* also leads to the conclusion that love is an inseparable component of the Socratic method: the intense eroticism of the *Charmides* when Socrates sees inside the boy's cloak, the relationship between Hippothales and Lysis in the *Lysis,* the love between Alcibiades and Socrates in the *Symposium* and, more briefly, in the opening lines of the *Protagoras,* as well as other instances.

What is this *eros* or love requisite for the Socratic method? In the *Symposium,* especially in Diotima's speech, we learn that *eros* is a *daimon* mediating between gods and men, a basic life energy driving us toward what we lack but desire. What do we desire? Good or beautiful things — beautiful boys, beautiful laws, beautiful knowledge. Why? Because the possession of good things will bring us happiness or well being.

Integral to the Socratic method, therefore, is a desirous longing for good things which we lack but, once achieved, will bring happiness. But how do we discriminate good things from bad things; that is, what criteria do we use to adjudge goodness or, more simply, what is the good? At this point Perkinson claims from his reading of the *Apology* that Socrates declines to answer the question: his wisdom is in realizing he does not know what constitutes the good; he is ignorant of the knowledge that is virtue or excellence. But it is one thing to claim ignorance of the Good as a metaphysical entity,[12] and quite another to be able to discriminate in our day to day lives what is good and what is bad for our happiness. One does not need cognitive knowledge of a supposed absolute Good in order to decide whether it is right or wrong to involve oneself in the Tyranny of the Thirty (*Apology,*

[11] *Op. cit.,* p. 119.

[12] For example A. E. Taylor: The Form of the Good "is exactly what is meant in Christian philosophy by the *ens realissimum* . . . metaphysically the Form of Good is what Christian philosophy has meant by God, and nothing more." *Plato, the Man and his Work* (New York, 1956), p. 289.

32b-c). Perkinson, it seems to me, at least implicitly takes the practical moral question actually raised by the conduct of the Socratic method and elevates it to a metaphysical question: What is the Good as such? And on this question the Socratic method and Socratic thought are silent. This is, of course, a nearly universal propensity of commentators: whenever the question of goodness is raised in the context of Plato's writings one immediately refers to the *Phaedo* and the central books of the *Republic*: the theory of Ideas, the Idea of the Good, and all that presumably constitutes Plato's metaphysics. And if there is anything that seems un-Socratic to commentators, with a few exceptions such as Burnet and Taylor, it is Plato's metaphysics.

I suggest we err seriously, however, if we jump so directly into the web of metaphysics. The Socratic method, as I suggested earlier, raises a practical moral question, not a metaphysical question — how do we discriminate those things good for us from those things bad. The answer to the question is found not so much in the *Republic* and the later *Dialogues* as in the earlier *Dialogues* and in Xenophon. In the *Memorabilia,* Xenophon has Socrates say: "The good is whatever is advantageous relative to the individual" (IV, vi, 8). In other words, one discriminates between good things and bad things by determining the relative advantage or disadvantage of these things vis-a-vis oneself. What is advantageous and hence useful for ensuring happiness? That which one needs to fulfill his nature as an individual. It is not necessarily what one imagines he needs; it is what is demanded by his nature for happiness.[13]

Now satisfying these needs is pleasurable. Not pleasurable in a naive sense of immediate gratification of whatever one thinks he desires, as is made clear in the *Gorgias* and *Philebus,* but pleasurable in the truly hedonistic sense of ensuring genuine pleasure for the longest time. Thus the Socratic method, from its erotic basis, leads directly to the Socratic ethic of hedonism properly understood. Nor is this all, for one cannot be a proper hedonist without in some sense knowing one's own nature — knowing the needs demanded by one's nature that must be fulfilled to ensure long term pleasure. Hence, as Socrates is fond of saying, one must know oneself. This leads us to Perkinson's last assumption concerning Socrates' lack of knowledge.

Socratic Knowledge

Perkinson's final assumption is that Socrates has no knowledge, specifically knowledge of virtue or excellence. Rather, the wisdom suggested by the Oracle is a recognition that true and complete wisdom is beyond man's purview. I agree with this statement, if we understand knowledge in the metaphysical sense I suggested earlier. The Socratic ignorance is surely an explicit recognition that absolute knowledge is unattainable.

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[13]See Versényi, *op. cit.,* p. 81.

We must bear in mind equally, however, that the Pythian Apollo admonishes us to self-knowledge, and it seems unlikely that Socrates would malign the god by accusing him of commanding the impossible. There must be some sense, then, in which one possesses knowledge within terms of the Socratic method.

If my earlier analysis of the Socratic method is persuasive, I believe it suggests an answer to the problem. The Socratic method, I argued, requires a knowledge of oneself to ensure the appropriate determination of good things. What kind of knowledge? Knowledge of the needs of one's individual nature. But we have already seen that these needs change from individual to individual and from time to time; the Sophists teach us as much. Hence the knowledge we seek is not set and settled; it is contingent upon time and place.

I have argued elsewhere, based upon the philosophical and philological researches of several scholars, such as R. B. Onians, Paul Natorp, and John Gould, among others, that a careful scrutiny of the development of certain key terms in Plato's writings — e.g. *episteme, sophrosyne,* etc. — discloses that a good deal of his philosophy should be interpreted in a functional sense; that is, when Socrates claims that knowledge is excellence, for example, this should be understood in the sense that man has the ability to think correctly in concrete moral situations. The doctrine of reminiscence in the *Meno* and the *Phaedo* suggests that right reasoning operates in human situations. In addition, as Perkinson suggests, man is corrigible or fallible; he can and does make mistakes but he has the ability to recognize these mistakes and correct them. Even further, he has the ability to recognize that a correct judgment in one situation is not correct in another. In this sense, Socrates has knowledge — he has the ability to be rational and correct his errors. Thus Perkinson is correct in referring to the Socratic fallibilism as critical in character, but I believe he goes too far in rejecting any kind of knowledge or any authority for the Socratic life; the authority is rationality itself — absolute knowledge in its most meaningful sense for Plato.

We must also recall that for all his rejection of metaphysical knowledge, Socrates claims knowledge of at least one thing — love matters (*Symposium,* 177d-e; *Lysis,* 204d; *Charmides,* 154b; *Phaedrus,* 257a; *Theages,* 128b; Xenophon's *Memorabilia,* II, vi, 28 and *Symposium,* viii, 2). If my foregoing analysis of the various dimensions of the Socratic method is convincing, it follows that the claim to knowing about love matters entails, as a consequence, self-knowledge in the sense I have suggested. The Socratic ignorance is a guard against the excesses of metaphysics, but Socratic knowledge — self-knowledge — is a re-affirmation of the primacy of reason as man's unique and universal ability in the face of a changing and unstable universe.

NOTE: In a modified version, these papers were originally presented as a Symposium at the annual History of Education Society Meeting, in conjunction with NSCTE, Conrad Hilton Hotel, Chicago, February 28, 1969.