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Plato's Biography of Socrates

By

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Fellow of the Academy

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PLATO'S BIOGRAPHY OF SOCRATES

BY A. E. TAYLOR

FELLOW OF THE ACADEMY

Read March 28, 1917

THE paper which I have the honour of laying before my colleagues of the Academy to-day is of the nature of a simple experiment, an experiment which can make no claim to represent the results of extraordinary research or profound speculation, but is, all the same, in my own opinion well worth the making. Its immediate interest is, no doubt, for the special student of the history of philosophic thought, but it should also prove in some degree attractive to every one who has a genuine interest in great literature, inasmuch as it aims at throwing some light on the literary methods of a great philosopher who was at the same time one of the world's greatest literary and dramatic artists. The question of the relation of the Socrates who figures as the protagonist in all the most widely known of Plato's prose dramas to the Socrates who was a prominent figure in the Athens of the last half of the fifth century B.C., is, of course, absolutely critical for the historian of Hellenic thought on the fundamental issues of science, ethics, and religion. It is also a question of interest to the student of the history of literary forms. Even if we are indifferent to the whole history of the actual development of scientific thought, we can hardly as students of literature be equally indifferent to the general problem suggested by the sudden appearance in the early years of the fourth century of a wholly new type of prose composition, the *Σωκρατικὸς λόγος* or 'discourse of Socrates'. About the fact of the emergence of this type of composition just at this particular date there can be no conceivable doubt. Aristotle comments on the fact that the 'Socratic discourse' is a distinct literary form, in the *Poetics* 1447 b 2, where he associates it with the versified 'mimes' of Sophron and Xenarchus and complains that the Greek language possesses no generic name for the type, inasmuch as the word 'mime' implies the use of verse, and is thus only appropriate to one species of a form for which prose is, as a matter of fact, as suitable a medium as verse. What Aristotle took to be the distinctive characteristics of this literary form is clear from the two remarks he makes about it. In the first place the recognition of the community of form between the 'mime' and the 'Socratic discourse' implies that, in Aristotle's opinion, the 'Socratic discourse' is distinguished by its 'realism'. For, as we know from the ancient notices of the 'mimes' and can see for ourselves from Theocritus' brilliant

imitation of a 'mime' in his fifteenth Idyll, and again from the imitation of Herondas, it was just by their 'realism' that they were distinguished from other and earlier kinds of dramatic composition. It is to the same purpose, as I take it, that Aristotle observes in his *Rhetoric* 1417 a 19 that 'mathematical discourses'—presumably he is thinking of such dialogues as that he quotes elsewhere, in which Zeno and Protagoras figured as discussing the difficulties about the infinitesimal—do not exhibit ἡθῆ, 'characters', because they reveal nothing of the προαίρεσις, the walk and conduct of the personages, whereas 'Socratic discourses' do exhibit ἡθῆ 'because it is about such matters that the personages speak'. What this means is made clear by a comparison with the passages of the *Poetics* in which Aristotle explains rather more fully what he understands by ἡθῶς, 'characterization', and why, important as it is to the dramatist, it is less important than 'plot'. To the intending composer of a successful tragedy, the plot or story must be the first consideration, because the primary object of tragedy is to represent an *action* of a certain kind; it only represents the *persons* who do the act or have it done to them because it cannot represent the act in any other way, or, as he also puts it, tragedy is not the representation of a man but 'of action and life, happiness and misery' (1450 a 16 ff.; 1450 b 1 ff.). Or, as we should perhaps prefer to phrase it, tragedy is concerned directly with the tragic *situation*; with the personages who appear in that situation as doing or suffering its concern is secondary. It has to do with them only in so far as their being the sort of persons they are is an indispensable factor in bringing about the tragic situation or determining its issue. Thus it shows us persons acting and by their action contributing to the kind of situation we call tragic. What kind of personality they have should be shown only by what they do. But a man's ἡθῶς is not fully disclosed by the way in which he bears himself in some specially tragic situation. To understand it you require to know not only his acts but his προαίρεσις,—his settled habit of will,—in a word, his personality, and this is why ἡθῶς is only exhibited by 'discourses' in which it is made clear 'what some one chooses or declines'.¹ Thus the *Gorgias* or *Republic*, from this point of view, would be first and foremost a portraiture of ἡθῆ. Socrates, Gorgias, Callicles, Thrasymachus are not exhibited to us by Plato as contributors to some high tragic situation, but as engaged in quiet and peaceful conversation, but from the course of the conversation it is made clear what sort of things each of them would choose or

¹ We might illustrate the point by considering how a modern novelist would be likely to depict such a character as Hamlet.

decline, how each might be expected to bear himself towards the issues between which life forces us all to choose. We do not see the personages 'in act', but from their talk we gather what manner of man (ποιός τις) each of them is. If we put the two observations of Aristotle together we may fairly gather that in his view the Σωκρατικὸς λόγος—and he seems always to mean by the words just those specimens of the type which dwarfed all others by their superior merit, the dialogues of Plato—is first and foremost a highly realistic representation of character or personality. It is just in the fullness with which it reproduces or 'imitates' a character that it differs from drama proper, in which characterization is only valuable so far as it is inseparable from the adequate presentation of the tragic situation. And it is important to remember, what we sometimes forget, that the 'characters' depicted in the 'Socratic discourse' are almost without exception notable personages of the actual history of the half-century from 450 to 400, so that when Aristotle insists upon the importance of making a 'character' ὅμοιον or 'like', he must be taken to mean in the case of a figure in a 'Socratic discourse', not merely that it shall be true to human nature, or consistent with *itself* (*ut sibi constet* as Horace says), but that it shall be like its *original*, faithful to the broad historical truth about the named and known man after whom it is called, just as we should reasonably expect a novelist who introduced Napoleon or Abraham Lincoln by name into one of his works to make the figure not merely possible and self-consistent but true to actual fact, and regard it as a defect in Thackeray that the James III of *Esmond*, though natural enough, is wholly false to history. We may reasonably infer, then, that Aristotle regarded the Platonic account of Socrates as in all essentials a true and trustworthy representation of a great historical figure, just as we may infer from his exclusive use of Plato as a source of information about the teaching of Socrates that he looked on the dialogues as a faithful account of the philosophical tenets of Socrates. In modern times, as we all know, it has been the fashion to reject both these positions and to hold that Plato not only fathered on Socrates a set of doctrines of which he knew himself to be the author, but even provided him with a largely fictitious biography, and invented an unreal personality for him. According to some theorists, things which Plato relates of Socrates, such as e.g. the impression made on him in early life by the work of Anaxagoras, really belong to the life and character of nobody but represent the typical development of the philosophical character; according to others the central figure of the dialogues is a mere convenient 'mask' under which Plato conceals at pleasure himself,

Antisthenes, unnamed disciples or opponents,—in a word any and every one but the person whose name is on the label attached to the ‘mask’. When we set ourselves to answer the question which party is right in this dispute, Aristotle and the mass of ancient readers or the moderns of the last century, we shall find, as Socrates found about a different question in the *Republic*, that a full and final decision requires us to take a long and circuitous path on which every one can hardly be expected to have the leisure or the special vocation to follow. But there is also a ‘short cut’ which may lead to a probable conclusion, and it is by this shorter road that I propose to proceed to-day. Without troubling ourselves with wearisome researches into the history of Greek philosophic ideas and terminology, we may put the issue to ourselves briefly thus. Does the Platonic picture of Socrates, if we study it as a whole, leave the impression of being the delineation of a ‘type’, or the result of superposing several portraits of different men upon one another, or has it the character we should expect in the lifelike dramatic reproduction of a highly complex and individual personality? Are we really dealing with a genre-study, in the style of Menander and the later comedy, or, as Aristotle seems to have taken for granted, with a highly realistic portrait of an individual? The attempt to piece together the biographical statements made in the different Platonic dialogues into a continuous narrative ought at least to leave us in a position to give a probable answer in the one sense or the other. Incidentally also, it may serve to show how much of what is universally retained by the moderns as fact about Socrates has no contemporary authority for it but that of Plato, and ought therefore in strictness to be rejected as of doubtful authenticity if we are sincere with the belief that the so-called ‘Socrates of history’ and the ‘Platonic’ Socrates are two and not one.

Before I proceed to the detailed execution of the task I have set before me, there are perhaps two preliminary points on which a word or two may not unprofitably be said. We may, for one thing, ask what facts may fairly be taken as certainly known about Socrates on authority independent of the assertions of Plato or any other of the ‘Socratic men’. Under this head we may reckon, of course, any information derived from really ancient inscriptions, together with all that is fairly inferable from the caricatures of the Old Comedy, which go back to dates when those Socratic men whose writings have been preserved to us were boys or infants. Well-authenticated traditions of the late fourth century, derived from writers like Demetrius of Phalerum and even Aristoxenus are similarly valuable when they deal with matters not mentioned by the Socratic men, provided that

we are careful to distinguish in the case of biased witnesses, like Aristoxenus, between the facts to which they testify and the interpretations they put upon them. A brief survey of the information still derivable from these sources will show what our knowledge of Socrates would amount to, if we set aside as possibly untrustworthy what we are told on the authority of the two Socratics whose writings have come down to us, or of later writers like Aristotle who appear merely to repeat the Academic traditions.

From inscriptional sources we learn just one fact, which would in any case be certain on the testimony of so good a chronologist as Demetrius of Phalerum. The *Marmor Parium* gives us the year of Socrates' death as a fixed date from which to reason. From Aristophanes and his rival Ameipsias, both of whom produced comedies in the year 423 in which Socrates played the leading part, we gather that at this date, when Socrates was a man of about 47 or 48 he was a sufficiently familiar figure to be made the object of burlesques intended to 'catch on' as topical pieces, and that one notable feature about him was his poverty; since this point was plainly very much insisted on by both poets, we may perhaps go as far as to conjecture with Professor Burnet that the philosopher had recently incurred some notorious losses. From the play of Aristophanes, the *Clouds*, we gather further that he was interested in mathematical, cosmological, and biological studies, and combined these interests with a kind of private religion which enjoined an ascetic rejection of the good things of this life and involved what were commonly regarded as fantastic notions about the soul and the unseen world. From a later notice in the *Birds* (1553 ff.) we may infer that these notions were of such a kind that it was within the limits of legitimate parody to represent Socrates as presiding over spiritualistic séances of the familiar fraudulent kind at which his favourite follower Chaerephon acted the part of the spirits evoked. According to the same play (1282) a taste for Socrates was like wearing long hair and carrying a thick stick, one of the marks of a pro-Spartan at Athens in the middle of the great war. One other vaguer reference we get in the *Frogs* (1492) when the poet falls foul of young folk who neglect the playwright's art to sit chattering over crazy hair-splitting problems with Socrates—by this time an elderly man of some sixty-four or so. We may add to these notices one or two comic fragments of no significance which accuse Euripides—an older man by at least ten or twelve years—of being inspired by Socrates, and may or may not be regarded as evidence in support of the later belief in the personal friendship of the two most remarkable *intellectuels* of the time of the

Peloponnesian war. Beyond this, out of all the anecdotes told of Socrates by later writers from Aristotle onwards there appears to be only one which comes with certainty from a source older than Plato or Xenophon. Ion of Chios related in his memoirs that Socrates had in his youth visited Samos in company with Archelaus, the successor of Anaxagoras, who in the phrase of Diogenes Laertius 'translated physics from Ionia to Athens'. As Ion also recorded anecdotes of his meeting with Sophocles when the poet was one of the generals dispatched to put down the revolt of the year 441-40, it is not unlikely that his reference to Socrates means that Socrates and Archelaus were serving in this campaign. The event would then have occurred when Socrates was about thirty, thirteen or fourteen years before the birth of Plato, and its remoteness will explain why it does not appear among the few necessary absences of Socrates from Athens recorded by Plato (*Ion ap. Diog. Laert. ii. 22*). Thus the total information about the philosopher which can be regarded as coming certainly from sources earlier than the fourth century and independent of the group of much younger admirers whom he left behind him at his death is exceedingly scanty and affords no material for a real biography or an account of the real nature of his influence. He had perhaps served in the campaign against Samos, had been reduced to poverty by a time soon after the battle of Delium, and apparently not earlier; he had a curious stare and an odd way of rolling in his walk, was a great talker, and associated with persons who were supposed to hold 'odd' spiritistic views, was 'the fashion' with the young *μισόδημοι* at the time of the Sicilian adventure, and was perhaps a friend of Euripides. That is in sum and substance all we know independently of information supplied by men who were at least forty years his juniors, and as it will be seen, it does not amount to much. For the rest we have only the statements of Plato and Xenophon, together with any traditions which can be traced back to the 'Socratic men' or to the Pythagoreans with whom Aristoxenus had associated, and in the case of the last-named source of information we have constantly to face the problem of distinguishing between the traditions themselves and the malevolent interpretations put upon them by our *Gewährsmann*, Aristoxenus.

There is indeed just one more statement which should perhaps be included in this summary. According to Isocrates, Polycrates, the sophist who published, a few years after Socrates' death, the defamatory pamphlet which perhaps opened the series of writings about the philosopher's life and character, declared that Alcibiades had been a 'disciple' of Socrates. Isocrates treats this as a gross

and palpable falsehood, thus, as Professor Burnet reminds us, showing himself quite in keeping with the representations of Plato, according to whom Socrates insisted that he had never followed the profession of a teacher, and consequently had never had any 'disciples' or 'pupils' at all. That Alcibiades had been a young friend of Socrates and influenced by him Isocrates does not, of course, deny. (Isocrates xi. 5.)¹

I come now to consider my more immediate subject—the biography of Socrates as we could write it if we took Plato as our exclusive source. Properly I mean, of course, the biography which we could collect from the Platonic dialogues, but we must not omit from consideration the one work in which Plato speaks of Socrates *in propria persona*, the VIIth Platonic Epistle. I do not propose here to make any formal defence of the genuineness of this important document. It is enough to say that the authenticity of the Platonic correspondence—which we must remember was known to Cicero and included in the edition of Plato's works by Aristophanes of Byzantium—has been generally allowed by the best critical and historical students, Bentley, Cobet, Grote, Eduard Meyer, and only denied by writers on philosophy. That is to say, for the letters we have the judgement of those who have no preconceived opinion of their own as to what the philosopher ought to say in his correspondence, against them the judgement of just the persons most likely to be biased, thinkers with pet theories of their own about what is or is not 'Platonic' in philosophy. And for our particular document we have also the verdict of the most important of those who have doubted or denied the authenticity of other items in the collection. Hence I propose to utilize it freely for my present purpose without further discussion.²

The letter, if such a name can be given to what is really a public or semi-public manifesto, was addressed to the Sicilian partisans of Dion after his assassination by Callippus and aims at putting new heart into a party which had lost its leader by an exposition of the fundamental principles for the sake of which Plato had intervened in Sicilian politics. Incidentally, to justify his cause and exhibit the consistency of his conduct, Plato is led into an autobiographical retrospect of his earlier life and the way in which he had been forced, so far as the public affairs of his own city were concerned,

¹ It is noteworthy that Plato never calls himself a 'disciple'. In the careful account of his early years which he sent much later to the partisans of Dion in Sicily he calls Socrates simply an 'elderly friend' of his own (see pp. 8, 9).

² For further discussion of Ep. VII see C. Ritter, *Neue Untersuchungen über Platon*, c. 7; Hackforth, *The Authorship of the Platonic Epistles*, pp. 84 ff.

to desist from direct political activity. The main purport of the narrative is that his original bent had been that of an active social reformer. Twice in life there had seemed to be an opening for such a reformer at Athens, on the reconstitution of the city with an oligarchical constitution after the final extinction of Periclean democratic Imperialism in 404, and again at the restoration of the democracy by Thrasybulus and his friends. Plato would have been ready to co-operate with either party in a real social reform, but had discovered that each was bent on discreditable party ends. In both cases what finally disillusioned him was the unworthy treatment meted out to Socrates—the best and wisest of living Athenians.

Of the oligarchy of the thirty he says: ‘There was a revolution in the existing constitution, which was denounced as faulty on many sides. The consequence of this revolution was . . . the establishment of a body of thirty irresponsible magistrates. Now some of these men were my own connections and relatives, and actually invited me to take what might be considered my proper part in that administration. My feelings were such as might have been expected in so young a man. I supposed their management of affairs would begin with a general reversion from an unprincipled to a righteous policy. Consequently I observed very carefully how they would proceed. But what did I find? Before long they had made the old constitution seem like a golden age. More particularly there was the case of Socrates, an elderly friend of mine, whom I may fairly make bold to call the most upright man of the time. They despatched him and others to arrest a fellow-citizen illegally and bring him to execution, hoping to implicate him in their proceedings *nolentem volentem*. Socrates, however, disregarded the order and put his life in jeopardy rather than make himself an accomplice in such wickedness. When I saw this and other grave indications of the same kind, I was disgusted and withdrew from the evil of the times.’ He then goes on to add that he would have been equally ready to serve the restored democracy, but for their equally reprehensible treatment of Socrates. ‘Not long after this the thirty and the whole system were overthrown, and once more I was attracted, though more slowly, to a life of public political action. The new time was, of course, one of confusion and much happened which caused natural disgust, and it is not surprising that in a revolution there should have been some cases of excessive revenges on private enemies. Yet on the whole the restored party showed notable forbearance. But unhappily certain prominent and influential persons again interfered with my friend Socrates and brought him before the courts on a wicked charge of

conduct wholly foreign to his character. He was prosecuted condemned and executed for impiety—he who had refused to join in the old wicked proceedings in the case of one of their own exiled friends at the time of their own exile and ruin.’¹

The references throughout this passage are, of course, to the incident of the illegal execution of Leon of Salamis, related more fully in the *Apologia*, and thus serve to establish beyond all doubt the historical truth of the story told there, as well as incidentally to confirm the statement that Socrates, whom Plato is careful to mention simply as a friend for whom he had a profound admiration, had no regular ‘disciples’. That this should be the only reminiscence of Socrates in a correspondence which belongs to Plato’s old age is natural enough, since by his own account the affair of Leon was an event which changed the whole current of his life. As a young man he had aimed at the vocation of a practical statesman. He was at first willing to enter public life as a supporter of the government of the ‘Thirty’ until their attempt to make Socrates an accomplice in their breaches of the law opened his eyes to the real character of their administration; later on, he was anxious to serve Athens under the revived democratic régime, but was again disillusioned by the enmity of Anytus and other persons of influence and position to Socrates,—the specially shocking thing about their conduct being, apparently, the ingratitude thus shown to a man who had put his life in peril rather than commit an illegality against one of the democratic partisans when it had been their turn to be under the harrow. For it may be noted that Plato’s indignation does not lead him to deny that Socrates may have done things which would have brought him within the scope of the law against so ill-defined an offence as ἀσέβεια, such as ‘honouring unrecognized divinities’. He does not, like Xenophon, maintain that Socrates had, in any case, been a model of old-fashioned Athenian piety. What disgusts him is that such an accusation should have been laid by the leaders of a party for whose friends Socrates had incurred the heaviest risks in their own time of misfortune. From the point of view of the Athenian law, as Plato of course knew, the moral virtue which Socrates had shown in the affair of Leon could be no defence to an accusation of ἀσέβεια. That real ‘impiety’ is identical with moral turpitude is a maxim not from Athenian law but from Plato’s own philosophy. To borrow an illustration from a later and very different revolution, Socrates might well have been a Girondist but would have had no truck with the ‘Mountain’. We are now in a position to

¹ Plato, *Ep.* VII. 324 c-325 c.

consider the actual statements about Socrates which occur in the dialogues. In presenting them to you I shall do my best to make my narrative as full as possible, so far as the facts go, and shall also, of course, confine myself to statements of biographical fact, to the exclusion of expositions of philosophical convictions except where the omission would make the biography incomplete.

Socrates, then, was the son of Sophroniscus and his wife Phaenarete and belonged to the tribe Antiochis and the deme Alopecae (for Sophroniscus see e.g. *Laches* 180–1, for Phaenarete, *Theaetetus* 149 a, for the tribe, *Apologia* 32 b, and for the deme *Gorgias* 495 d). The year of his birth is not specified, but it may be inferred from the fact that he is made on the first page of the *Apology* to speak of himself as ‘more than seventy’ that we are to suppose him born not later than 470 or the earlier months of 469. As to his social position, we learn from the *Theaetetus*, the only place, except for a passing reference to the *First Alcibiades*, in which any Socratic man mentions his mother, that Phaenarete was a midwife. Her name is suggestive of good family connexions, as we see from its appearance in the mock-heroic genealogy of the ‘immortal’ Amphytheus of Aristophanes’ *Acharnians* (l. 49). Of Sophroniscus we are told rather more. His name occurs more than once in the dialogues, and from the opening pages of the *Laches* we learn that he was a family friend of his fellow demesman Lysimachus, the son of the great Aristeides and, according to Lysimachus, a man of some consequence and of high character. From the jest in *Euthyphro* 11 c where Socrates speaks of his ‘ancestor’ Daedalus, famous in legend for his skill in making statues which could walk about, we see that Sophroniscus must have been a member of an hereditary guild of sculptors. Unless we accept the *First Alcibiades* as a genuine work of Plato, this is his one and only reference to the calling of Sophroniscus, and unfortunately tells us even less about the circumstances of the family than we should learn about those of a modern eminent man in his early years from the statement that his father was a Free Mason. The general impression, however, which Plato’s account leaves on us is quite inconsistent with the popular conception of Socrates as a genius who rose almost ‘from the gutter’ and untouched by the influences agitating the ‘good society’ of his age. The remarks of the *Laches* imply at least that Sophroniscus was a man of weight and influence in the affairs of his deme or township, and there is nothing to bear out the view that because he belonged to a guild which regarded Daedalus as its ‘ancestor’, he must have been something very much like a working stone-mason or bricklayer. And, as we shall see, though with one

notable exception the Platonic dialogues prefer to depict Socrates either in ripe manhood or advanced age, it is regularly assumed in them that he had the entrée to the 'best' society of all kinds, where he was admitted by the most eminent men of the time as an equal, and that he encountered the most distinguished representatives of thought and letters from the non-Attic Hellenic world on terms of perfect equality. In particular it seems clear that we should be wrong if we read into Plato the modern notion of Socrates as having been all through life hampered by poverty. It is true that Plato does depict him as exceedingly poor at the close of his life. He makes him say in the *Apology* that the highest fine he could pay would not amount to more than a mina. But we must recollect that he also expressly ascribes this poverty to his lifelong devotion to a spiritual quest which left him no time to serve tables, and also that the close of the Peloponnesian War had been followed by a financial collapse in which even the richest had suffered badly. To take only two or three familiar instances, the famous wealth of the families of Callias the *λακκόπλουτος*, and of Nicias vanished in the confusion of the year of anarchy, and we find Lysias (xix. 15) dwelling in the peculiar tone of pathos appropriate to the law-courts on the straits to which Phaedrus of Myrrhinus had been reduced. It is true that we begin to hear of Socrates' want of means in the *Republic*, where the scene is laid somewhere in the early years of the Archidamian war, and that the fact of his poverty is treated as notorious by the comic poets in the year 423. But, as Professor Burnet reminds us, Socrates was still serving as a hoplite the year before 423 at Delium and the year after at Amphipolis, and this means that until then at any rate he was decidedly not in any dire poverty. In fact one may reasonably conjecture that he must have suffered some rather sudden and considerable loss between the affair at Delium and the attack of the comic poets on him in the following year. Indeed the iteration with which Aristophanes returns to this topic is rather difficult to explain if the impoverishment of Socrates was not a recent event. There is at any rate no reason to suppose that in his early life he was cut off from sources of culture by want of means or the need to earn his bread. In fact, in the one dialogue in which Plato professes to be dealing with the youth of Socrates, the *Parmenides*, he represents him as having as a matter of course free access to the society of one of the most prominent men of affairs of the period, Pythodorus son of Isolochus, who figures in Thucydides as being in his riper age a person of first-rate importance all through the Archidamian war. Given an initial reverse after the battle of Delium, when we take into account

the growing financial pressure caused by the failure of the great Sicilian expedition, the land-blockade of Athens and the gradual destruction of her sea-power in the Decelean war, and the crazy Terrorism of the 'Thirty', and remember that for many years at any rate before his death Socrates had wholly devoted himself to his spiritual 'vocation', we can readily see that no inference can be drawn from his poverty in 399 to the wealth and social position of his parents or to his own financial position in the first forty years of his career. The more reasonable question would be how such a man, after such a career, could be so much as able to keep himself supplied with food and even in a position to pay a fine of as much as a mina without asking for time. And it is clear that in the *Apology* Socrates means to say that he could pay this much down on the spot, since he does not supplement the offer, as was customary when an offender could not discharge the penalty immediately, by the suggestion of imprisonment until the fine has been paid.

We may, I think, infer that the Platonic notices are probably a sufficient basis for the statements about the family of Socrates which we find in the later writers appealed to by Diogenes Laertius; in particular, there appears to be no real evidence that Socrates himself had ever followed statuary or any other craft. Plato's assertions about his youth and early manhood at least imply that he had from the first abundant leisure to satisfy his passion for 'science', and the late story of the figures of the Graces which were shown to visitors to Athens as the work of Socrates prove only that these figures were shown in a much later time as such, but nothing more.¹ It is also worth while to note that Xenophon, who is still regarded in what may be called 'official' quarters as so trustworthy an authority on the facts of Socrates' life, never refers to his parentage or names either Sophroniscus or Phaenarete, except in the one brief passage in *Hellenica I*, where he refers to the behaviour of Socrates in the affair of the trial of the generals who had commanded at Arginusae. There he speaks of the philosopher for once as *Σωκράτης Σωφρονίσκου Ἀθηναῖος*. In the one other place outside his 'Socratic discourses'

¹ It is true, as Professor Gardner reminds me, that Pausanias appears to have seen these statues (*Paus.* i. 22. 8; ix. 35, 2). But in the former passage all that he says is that the group was currently ascribed to Socrates (*καὶ Χάρικτας Σωκράτη ποιῆσαι τὸν Σωφρονίσκου λέγουσι*), so that he can hardly be presumed to be speaking with certainty on the point. See the full discussion of the point in Frazer, *Pausanias's Description of Greece*, vol. ii, pp. 268-72, where the author comes to the conclusion that Socrates certainly did not execute the 'original relief', though he admits the possibility that he may have made a copy of it.

where he refers to the philosopher—the story in *Anabasis* iii. 1 of Socrates' disapproval of his connecting himself with the adventure of prince Cyrus, he says only 'Socrates the Athenian', evidently presupposing that the person so described will be too well known to his readers to require any further specification. The earliest allusion to the craft of Sophroniscus, outside Plato, is, so far as I know, that of Timon of Phlius, who calls Socrates a λιθοξόος (Timon *ap.* D. L. ii. 19). At the risk of deserting chronological order it may be as well to deal at this point with the one other piece of information Plato gives us about Socrates' family affairs. As we learn from the *Phaedo* Socrates was married to a lady of the name of Xanthippe, who survived him, and had by her three children, two of whom were quite young at the time of his death, and the third no more than a lad (*Apology* 34 d). The names of the children are never mentioned by Plato, and here, for once, we are indebted to Xenophon for a piece of real information. From him we learn that the name of the son who was a 'lad' at the time of his father's death was Lamprocles. (The names of the two younger, Sophroniscus and Menexenus may possibly have been mentioned in the dialogue on distinguished ancestry ascribed to Aristotle, of which I shall have to speak in a moment, or Diogenes Laertius may have got them from the third-century biographical writers to whom he also refers for his statements about the family of Socrates.)

It has very properly been observed that both the name Xanthippe and the names Lamprocles and Menexenus have a highly aristocratic sound. From the opening monologue of Aristophanes' *Clouds* we gather that a name with 'hippos' in it was thought to stamp its bearer as of the caste of 'Vere de Vere', and we may remind ourselves that the masculine Xanthippus was a name in the famous house of the Alcmaeonidae, and was borne by the father of Pericles. When I come to say something about the social connexions of Socrates, it will, I think, be made clear that Plato's account presupposes a close relation with the family and immediate circle of Pericles himself, and this may have something to do with the name of Socrates' wife. It is, as Professor Burnet has pointed out, another indication of the social position of Xanthippe that the second, not the eldest, son of the family bore the name of the paternal grandfather. The name Lamprocles, which obviously belongs to the nomenclature of high society, was presumably bestowed in honour of some relative of Xanthippe,—possibly her father. Thus it seems to be fairly clear that Socrates, to use the vulgar phrase, 'married above him'. I need hardly remind you that the stories of the shrewishness

of Xanthippe find no confirmation in Plato. All that he records of her is her conduct on the day of Socrates' death which, as he describes it, is that of an affectionate woman of ordinary intellectual capacity, who can only take in the one thought that she will never see her husband again. Nor is there anything in the account to suggest that Socrates was indifferent to his wife. Since Xanthippe is said to have been 'discovered' in company with Socrates when his friends were admitted early on the morning of his last day, she had presumably spent the night before with him in the prison, and his famous instructions for her removal appear to be dictated partly by the desire to save her from a complete breakdown, partly, as he himself remarks later on (*Phaedo* 117 d), by the correct anticipation that in any case the actual scene at his death would be almost intolerably trying to the nerves of more than one member of the party. The presence of his wife and child would no doubt have made it quite unbearable. It must be remembered that there is an interval in the Platonic narrative immediately before the execution scene in which Socrates has a last interview with his family, so that the pulpit-rhetoric which has been spent on making out a contrast between the 'hardness' of Socrates and the affectionateness of Our Lord, who provided for His mother in His last moments, is as false to fact as offensive to Christian feeling. Xenophon also says nothing to the discredit of Xanthippe except that, like many devoted mothers, she had a 'temperament' which sometimes called for patience on the part of her husband and her son. The source of the popular conception of Xanthippe seems to be the anecdotes of her high temper told by Diogenes who does not even say where he got them. As he is known to have used the gossiping Alexandrian writers Satyrus and Hieronymus of Rhodes, as well as the deliberate slanderer Aristoxenus, they presumably have no better authority behind them.

It may possibly be that the *Phaedo* throws some light on the quaintest of all the traditions of a later age about the family life of Socrates. There was a story, which we meet both in Diogenes and in Plutarch, according to which Socrates had two wives, Xanthippe and Myrto, who is sometimes called a daughter, sometimes a granddaughter of Aristides the Just. The gossips were undecided whether Myrto was the earlier or the later wife, and some of them said that Socrates lived with both at once, alleging as an explanation a ridiculous story that the Athenians were so badly hit by the decrease in population in the later years of the Peloponnesian war that they legalized bigamy. The story is told by Aristoxenus, Hieronymus and Satyrus, and has usually been dismissed as one of

the characteristic *rhodomontades* of the first-named author.¹ But it also seems to have been related—so far as the mere ascription of two wives to the philosopher goes—in the doubtfully authentic Aristotelian dialogue on Distinguished Ancestry and by Demetrius of Phalerum. The authority of Demetrius seems to me too great to permit of the simple rejection of the tale as a pure fiction. Hence it seems to me not without some significance that according to the *Phaedo*, Socrates at his death left a baby in arms behind him. For we are told that when the friends of Socrates arrived at the prison they found Xanthippe with her *παιδίον* there. The only explanation of the presence of the child that is at all natural is that it was a baby too young to be left by itself. (According to the *Apology* Socrates left two sons who were then *παιδιά*, but we hear only of one who actually spent the last night in the prison.) This indicates two things, the remarkable physical vigour of Socrates, who must have begotten the child when he was well on at least towards seventy, and the considerable disparity of age between himself and Xanthippe. If we bear in mind the age at which a woman of Southern Europe ceases to bear children,—Plato fixes it, as you will remember, at forty,—we may infer that Xanthippe must in all probability have been a good thirty years younger than her husband. As Lamprocles is said in the *Apology* to have been *ἤδη μαιράκιον* at the time of his father's death, it is natural further to suppose that his birth fell in the first year or two of Socrates' married life with Xanthippe. In

¹ We have the following versions of the story :—

D. L. ii. 26. Aristotle says that Socrates married two wives. By the first, Xanthippe, he had Lamprocles, the second, Myrto, *daughter* of Aristeides the Just, he married without a dowry, and by her he had Sophroniscus and Menexenus. (Chronology, as well as the testimony of Plato, shows the falsehood of this version of the tale. Possibly D. L. has quoted 'Aristotle' wrongly, placing Xanthippe first instead of second. But in that case the story becomes inconsistent with the account of Xenophon who refers to Xanthippe as notoriously hard to manage in his *Symposium*, and obviously therefore means her and no other to be the mother of whose high temper Lamprocles complains in *Memorabilia* ii. 2.)

Plutarch, *Aristeides* 27. Demetrius of Phalerum, Hieronymus of Rhodes, Aristoxenus, and Aristotle—if the dialogue *περὶ εὐγενείας* is genuine—say that Socrates cohabited with Myrto, the *granddaughter* of Aristeides. He had indeed another wife, but took Myrto in addition as she was widowed, and in great poverty.

Athenaeus xiii. 556 a. Socrates is said by Callisthenes, Demetrius, Aristoxenus to have had two wives, Xanthippe and Myrto a great-granddaughter of Aristeides; Aristotle *περὶ εὐγενείας* is the common source for the story.

D. L. ii. 26. 'Some' say that Myrto was the first wife, others, including Satyrus and Hieronymus, that he was married to both at once. For the Athenians, anxious to make good the losses in the male population, made a psephism that a man should be legally married to one Athenian woman, but beget children by a second also.

that case Socrates must have been about fifty at the least when he married a wife of probably under twenty. Now in view of the regular practice in Greek communities it is hard to believe that a man intending to marry at all would have waited until this age to do it. Such conduct would be especially surprising in Socrates who had if anything a weakness for pluming himself on the fidelity with which he conformed to the *Nomos* of his city, and is not likely to have forgotten that begetting sons for the city was a universally recognized civic duty. (Even the tale which represents him as having two wives at once is careful to assert that he takes the second to comply with the imaginary special law enjoining bigamy—i.e. as a duty imposed on him by the State.) Hence it seems to me not improbable that, as the data drawn from the *Apology* and *Phaedo* suggest, Socrates was a widower when he married Xanthippe. In that case, in view of the evidence of the *Laches* for the intimacy of Sophroniscus with the family of Aristides, it would not be at all surprising if he was married as a young man to one of its members, as Demetrius of Phalerum, and just possibly Aristotle, asserted. The reason why we hear nothing of such a first wife in Plato or Xenophon would be simply that their knowledge of Socrates of course did not go back to his early manhood. As it is, we should not know from Plato whether Socrates had ever been married to Xanthippe if it had not been necessary to mention her for the purposes of the *Apology* and *Phaedo*.

To return from this digression to the main theme of my argument. Nothing is recorded by Plato of the early boyhood of Socrates beyond the one fact that the famous ‘warning voice’ attended him even in childhood (*ἐκ παιδὸς ἀρχάμενον*, *Apology* 31 d), a fact which has an important bearing on Plato’s ascription to him in later age of other signs of the temperament of a visionary and on Aristophanes’ burlesques of him as an occultist. Beyond this we hear no more of him from Plato until he is already a man though a ‘very young one’, when we get a glimpse of his special interests from the professedly autobiographical narrative of the *Phaedo* and again from the introductory pages of the *Parmenides*. Both sketches agree in representing him as at that time principally interested in the latest mathematical and physical theories of the early science which was just on the verge of eclipse by the new light of sophistic humanism. According to the *Phaedo* he was acquainted with and originally an enthusiast about ‘what they call natural science’ (*ἱστορία περὶ φύσεως*), but much perplexed by the hopeless incompatibility of the results to which it had led in different hands. Thus he knew both the Ionian

cosmology which assumed a flat earth and the theories of the Italian Pythagoreans which required a spherical earth (*Phaedo* 97 e), and was anxious for a true theory of the planetary motions (*ib.* 98 a); he was also hesitating between rival biological theories which we can recognize as those of the Ionian type, represented at the time by Archelaus and Diogenes of Apollonia, and the Italian, of which the *Phaedo* specifies the doctrines of Alcmaeon of Crotona and Empedocles (96 b), and above all was specially interested in the problems raised by Zeno about the one and the many (*Phaedo* 97 a). It was presumably at this period also that he laid the foundations of the knowledge of geometry which Plato consistently ascribes to him in the *Meno*, *Phaedo*, *Republic* and elsewhere, and Xenophon rather admits than denies. In particular, as we all know, it was, according to the *Phaedo* at this date that he came under the influence of Anaxagoras in whose book he expected, for a time, to find a consistent teleological doctrine of astronomy and cosmology, and it was a direct result of his disappointment with the failure of Anaxagoras to carry out the implications of his own principle that mind is the source of the order in the universe, that he, still as a young man, resolved to look for truth 'in propositions' and thought out the method of 'hypothesis' and the doctrine of the participation of things in Forms. These statements are borne out by the *Parmenides*, where we meet Socrates again as a very youthful man and find him expounding this very doctrine about Forms and 'participation' to Parmenides and Zeno as a recent discovery of his own (*Parm.* 130 b *αὐτὸς σὺ οὕτω διήρησαι ὡς λέγεις*; 'did you draw this distinction for yourself?').

As I am not expounding any theory of the philosophy of Socrates in the present paper, it is perhaps more to the point to call attention to the presuppositions of the dialogues just mentioned about the company in which Socrates was at home thus early in life. The *Phaedo* distinctly presupposes acquaintance with the followers of Anaxagoras, who, we must remember, belonged to the Periclean circle, as it also implies in another passage knowledge of the eminent Pythagorean Philolaus; the *Parmenides* shows Socrates to us as an habitu  of the house of Pythodorus son of Isolochus, whose prominence as one of the leading men of affairs in the r gime of the Imperialistic democracy is familiar to the readers of Thucydides. It is from his acquaintance with Pythodorus that Socrates is brought into contact with the Eleatic philosophers, and that the Pythodorus in question is the well-known admiral and politician is made certain by the statement of the *First Alcibiades* that Pythodorus son of Isolochus was

a pupil of Zeno.¹ Most of the dialogues depict Socrates at a later period of life, but they all agree in representing him as well known and highly thought of by the most distinguished society of the Periclean democracy. Thus, in the *Laches*, dated shortly after the battle of Delium, we find Socrates on terms of familiarity with both Nicias and Laches and highly thought of by both of them not only for his personal courage but for his thorough understanding of military professional matters. He is equally familiar, to judge from the *Protagoras*, with the brilliant wits who formed the entourage of Callias son of Hipponicus, and grandson of the famous 'millionaire' of the time of the Persian wars; the *Timaeus* represents him as consorting as an equal with the elder Critias² and the rising, though not yet fully mature, Syracusan statesman Hermocrates as well as with Timaeus himself, who is described as being at the very top of the tree in astronomy and having in his past life filled the most important offices in his native state, apparently before the overthrow of the domination of the Pythagorean order in the cities of Magna Graecia.³ It should be specially noted that he is represented as *persona grata* in the houses of men who are typically representative of the Periclean régime, such as those of Cephalus, and the family to which Plato himself belonged. This would naturally mean that he was welcome in the house of Plato's step-father Pylilampes, whose close connexion with Pericles is proved by the malicious allusions of the comic poets who represented Pylilampes as keeping a *petite maison* for Pericles and his misses. Thus, from Plato's representation, we should conclude that Socrates had been on friendly terms with many of the most prominent 'Whigs', as Professor Burnet has called the party who, without ceasing to be loyal to the democracy, disapproved of the inferior men who guided its fortunes after the death of Pericles. Even the notorious friendship for Critias the oligarch probably comes under this head, as Critias had always figured as a democrat until his moral character was ruined by his entrance into the coterie of the 'Thirty'. The general effect of Plato's account on my own mind is the impression that he wishes us to think of Socrates as being from the first a person of a sound social standing, mingling on equal terms with the best society of the Periclean régime and devoted

¹ *Alcibiades I.* 119 a.

² That Professor Burnet is right in his identification of the Critias of the *Timaeus* should really need no proof.

³ *Timaeus* 20 a, where every word should be read with attention. Even if we could get over the palpable absurdity of supposing that the poems of Solon were the 'last novelty' at any time in the life of Critias *ὁ τῶν τριάκοντα*, what is said here shows that the Critias meant is an old man with a great public career behind him.

from a very early age to the pursuit of science, and certainly not, after the fashion of some modern writers, as a kind of plebeian and illiterate but mysteriously inspired artisan. Hence, though I do not wish here to suggest an opinion either way on the genuineness of that singular work the *Menexenus*, I see nothing out of keeping with Plato's standing 'hypothesis' about the manner of life of Socrates in the suggestion made there of a personal intimacy with Aspasia and consequently with Pericles. The point is not wholly unimportant in connexion with the satire of the *Republic* and *Gorgias* on the Imperial democracy (in the *Gorgias* it will be remembered the person of Pericles is not spared), and the comments of modern expositors on the political attitude revealed by these passages. That this almost unqualified censure of Athenian democracy is meant by Plato to be taken as representing the attitude of Socrates himself seems to me quite certain. The passion which breathes through the passages in question is wholly absent from books like the *Politicus* and *Laws*, where another than Socrates discusses the merits and faults of democracy. It is directed not against democracy in general but against the very special form of democracy which Pericles had created, a democracy which is primarily commercialized, bent on the capture of the world's trade,¹ and, secondarily and by consequence, committed to a policy of Imperialistic expansion, and its bitterness is far too intense to represent the moral verdict of a thinker looking back on a vanished state of things. It is dramatically right only in the mouth of a disillusioned brave old man who has lived himself through the age he is denouncing, has seen and perhaps once believed in its promise and lived to witness its inevitable collapse. It is equally clear that this vehement arraignment of the Imperial democracy—and indeed of Pericles himself—as wanting in respect of a sound moral basis is not meant to be the judgement of an 'outsider' from the lower orders. It is intended as the final pronouncement of one who had known the leaders of the movement and thoroughly understood their purposes, and found them all, on mature reflection, deficient in the one thing needful in a true leader—genuine statesmanship.

What Plato tells us of the early manhood and prime of Socrates is connected with two main topics, his military exploits, and the famous utterance of the Delphic oracle which more than anything else formed, as Professor Burnet has said, the turning-point in his career. The former subject may be dealt with first in a few brief sentences. Socrates, for all his mysticism, was not one of the mystics in whom

¹ Like the 'Imperialism' (so-called) of our own financiers and commercial monopolists, within and without the United Kingdom.

transcendental emotion is most regularly aroused by loneliness and the contemplation of nature. He and Wordsworth, in spite of some marked points of resemblance, are in this respect mystics of radically opposed schools, the urban and the rustic. It was not the 'sleep that is among the lonely hills' that induced in Socrates the mood of interior stillness and reflection of the soul back upon herself, but the busy noise and hum of man. Hence, except when on active service he was the most home-keeping of townsmen, devoted to the crowded streets of Athens with even more than Johnson's devotion to the streets of London. The 'trees of the country side' in his own language 'had nothing to say to him'; even a short excursion to the Isthmus to see the Games was so contrary to his habits, that it is regarded as worth chronicling (*Crito* 52 b). Apart from this one occasion, he was only absent from Athens when his duty as a citizen took him into the stricken field. This seems to me more like the peculiarity of an actual man than the invention of a dramatic genius imagining a fictitious character. It may, of course, be said that the whole modern romantic feeling for nature is a thing unknown to the Hellenic world,—only we have the choruses of Euripides, Socrates' elder contemporary, to prove the opposite, and in particular the lyrics of the *Bacchae* show us how potent in ancient times, as well as in our own, was the association between lonely nature and the spirit of mysticism. Yet there is a type of mind, less common than the other and perhaps not likely to be imagined by one who has had no actual contact with it, in which the roar of traffic, the restless scuffling of the human ant-heap and the 'wilderness of bricks and mortar' are still more potent than the silences of nature to make the soul realize her own essential solitude and render her apt for the communication of the beatific vision. Francis Thompson with his vision of the shining 'traffic of Jacob's ladder pitched between Heaven and Charing Cross' is an example, and Socrates would seem to have been such another. In the *Symposium*, when the vision suddenly overmasters him, he is in the act of making his way along the streets to a dinner-party of the gayest. It is another touch, true enough to our nature, that the visionary quality goes in him hand-in-hand with the soldierly, as it has done with men like Gordon and others. It is from no idle fancy that Plato represents the most famous of these 'raptures' as taking him when he was serving in the trenches before Potidaea. We are meant to feel that in the serene courage of Socrates in the face of the foe, of which Alcibiades is made to say that it far surpassed that of Laches on the disastrous day of Delium, there is just a touch of the unearthly. Socrates is strong and daring and above everything else serene in the

hour of danger, an 'ideal warrior', just because, like Galahad, he is at heart even more saint than man-at-arms. Plato names three of these campaigns, that of Potidaea (431-430), that of Delium (424), and that of Amphipolis (422), and presumably these were the only three (*Apology* 28 e) of any note, though it is curious that we hear nothing of any military service of Socrates after 422. As he would not be officially a *γέρων* exempt from further service until 411, the explanation may be that during the ten years in question there was no land fighting serious enough to demand the calling up of men of advanced middle age. Why nothing is said of service in the Archidamian war itself except in 431, 424, and 422 is a further question. Possibly Socrates may have taken his part in the other years in the defence of Attica against the regular annual invasion of the Peloponnesian forces. Hence Plato would have no occasion to mention the fact in recording the occasions on which his hero left Athenian territory. It is hardly credible to me that the philosopher, who was in the very prime of physical strength when the war began, should have been called on for no military service except in the years specified by Plato.

As for the details supplied about two of these campaigns, we know from the *Symposium* that what seems to have been Socrates' principal experience of the 'illuminative way' came to him in the camp before Potidaea, on the occasion when he stood in a 'rapt' rooted to one spot, through the whole of a summer day and night. Plato, who puts the narrative in the mouth of Alcibiades, further records that Socrates showed the highest valour in actual fighting and saved the life of Alcibiades, who had been wounded in the engagement. The prize for valour was bestowed on Alcibiades, though he himself urged on the generals the claims of Socrates, and ascribes their selection of himself to a rather unworthy reason—regard for his *ἀξίωμα*, i.e. the weight which his name carried with the *δῆμος*, partly no doubt on account of his illustrious birth, and partly because he seemed to be marked out as successor to Pericles in the capacity of uncrowned despot of Athens. Thus Plato at least wishes us to believe that Socrates was more than a mere average good soldier, he was a man who merited what corresponded to our V. C. and only failed to get the distinction by an act of favouritism on the part of the authorities. (For all this see *Symp.* 220 c and e.) In connexion with the famous 'rapt' it is worth noting, as I have said elsewhere, that, unless Plato is falling into a small anachronism the story implies that the nickname *ὁ φροντιστής*, with which Aristophanes makes such play in the *Clouds*, was already commonly given to Socrates as early as 430, for there would be no point otherwise in Alcibiades' statement that the 'word went

round that *Σωκράτης φροντίζων τι ἔστηκε*. We might fairly infer from this that Socrates was already known as the head of a school—for the *φροντιστής* implies the *φροντιστήριον*—at the beginning of the Archidamian War, and the evidence of Aristophanes points in the same direction as he introduces the *φροντιστήριον* as if it was already a well-known and familiar institution, not something invented by himself and requiring an explanation. But the consideration of this point is better deferred for a moment. It is also an excellent touch, which many modern editors have done their ignorant best to remove from the text, that the persons who showed the chief curiosity about Socrates' singular behaviour were 'Ionians'—men from the home of purely secular science where trances and ecstasies were unfamiliar. Of all the mistaken 'emendations' of the passage the worst is that German one which turns the Ionians into Paeonians, inhabitants of a region where 'possession' must have been too familiar a thing for the 'rapt' of Socrates to cause any special remark.

The conduct of Socrates in the panicky retreat of the Athenian forces from Delium is described for us in two passages of Plato. In the *Symposium*—the imaginary date of which dialogue is some eight years after the event,—Alcibiades, speaking of the matter as an eye-witness, says that as he retired himself on horseback he fell in with Laches and Socrates who were, of course, serving as hoplites, that Socrates showed himself much the more self-possessed (*ἔμφρων*) of the pair, bearing himself exactly as Aristophanes had represented him as doing in the streets of Athens, and that it was due to his coolness that Laches himself, as well as Socrates, came off unhurt (*Symp.* 221 b). A similar account is given by Laches himself in the dialogue named after him. Indeed Laches goes further in his commendation for he says, 'He accompanied me in the flight from Delium, and I may tell you that if every one had done his duty as he did, our city would never have fallen on that calamity' (*Laches* 181 b). It is notable that, for whatever reason, Xenophon tells us nothing whatever about any of these military exploits: for all we learn from him Socrates might never have come within sight of a stricken field, though one would think a brief reference to the philosopher's deeds as a brave and loyal soldier would have been much more valuable in a professed *apologia* for his life than many chapters of the moralizing small talk with which Xenophon abounds. Thus Plato is really our only authority for the campaigns of Socrates (the one later story about them, that he saved the life of Xenophon at Delium is plainly only a confused *doublette* of what the *Symposium* says about his rescue of Alcibiades before Potidaea, and is shown to be false by the simple

consideration that if Xenophon was old enough to fight at Delium he must have been between forty and fifty when he joined the enterprise of Cyrus—*ὄπερ ἄτοπον*, as the mathematicians say). The only really consistent position for those who believe Plato to have freely invented biographical incidents for the hero of his prose dramas is that of the extremely 'vigorous and rigorous' German critic who has had the courage to declare that this military record is from beginning to end pure fiction—though what the object of the fiction could be it is not easy to say.

I turn now to the other chief point of interest,—Plato's account of the philosophic 'mission' of Socrates. It is plain that according to Plato the turning-point in Socrates' inner life was the deliverance of the famous oracle which assured Chaerephon that Socrates was the greatest of all the 'wits' of the age (for that is what *σοφώτατος* means in the language of the Periclean age). As we have seen, Plato's account represents Socrates as being in his early manhood an enthusiastic student of science and the author of a philosophical 'hypothesis' by the help of which both the puzzles raised by the doctrine of Anaxagoras and the perplexing mathematical questions first brought into clear light by Zeno might be successfully met. He is careful to let us know that the greatest men of an earlier generation had formed the highest expectations of Socrates' future eminence as a philosopher. Such expectations are put into the mouth of Parmenides with reference to the promise of Socrates' early youth (*Parm.* 130 e, 135 d) and again into that of Protagoras (*Protag.* 361 e), the context in the latter passage showing quite clearly that Protagoras had formed his opinion, which he had 'already expressed to many persons', not from the conversation reported in the dialogue, but during that first visit to Athens on which he had made the acquaintance of Socrates, who figures in the dialogue as already quite well known to him. As Professor Burnet observes, this visit must have been earlier than the foundation of Thurii in 444 B.C., or Protagoras would hardly have been chosen by Pericles to assist in drawing up the constitution of so important a colony. So that we are taken back again to the early manhood of Socrates. And although the imaginary date of the *Timaeus* is shown by the allusions of the *Republic* to the youth of Polemarchus and Lysias—they are both called *νεανίσκοι* according to the best text in *Republic* 328 d—and by the presence of Cephalus in that dialogue—to fall somewhere in the earlier years of the Peloponnesian war, when Socrates would be a man of rather over forty—the way in which he is accepted as an equal by Timaeus, a Pythagorean of

the highest distinction both in science and in politics (*Tim.* 20 a) points in the same direction. The suggestion is that Socrates would as he grew to manhood become distinguished as the central and dominating figure in a regular school or band of associates devoted to the prosecution of science and the higher knowledge in general. According to Aristophanes this is just what he was in the year 423, with Chaerephon as one of the most devoted members of the coterie. Xenophon also knew of the existence of this organization,—which according to Aristophanes had not only common scientific pursuits but a common table,—for it is clearly they, and not the ‘rich and leisured young men’ who collected about Socrates in later life from pure enjoyment of his talk, whom he means when he speaks of the sophist Antiphon as wishing to rob Socrates of his ‘associates’ (*συνουσιαστᾶς*). That the ‘association’ is that of the central personality of the school with less advanced students is distinctly implied in the comment which Antiphon makes on the unwisdom of not charging a fee for the *συνουσία* (*Mem.* i. 6. 11), and more than merely implied when Socrates in his reply describes himself and his friends as in the habit of ‘unrolling together the stores of the old wits which they have left us in the books they have written’ (*ib.* 14). A life of this kind is, in fact, just what Plato makes Parmenides or Protagoras prophesy for Socrates, and it is implied by all the rules of artistic composition that the prophecy had its fulfilment. Thus I think it plain that Plato wishes us to think of Socrates as having been the regular head of an organized school. The natural thing, to quote Professor Burnet again, would be that he should succeed his own teacher Archelaus as the head of the school founded by Anaxagoras. But it is plain, not merely from the character of the special doctrines ascribed to Socrates by Plato, but from the prominence of Pythagoreans like Cebes, Simmias, and Phaedondas among the associates who were still connected with Socrates at the time of his death, from his friendship with Pythagoreans such as Timaeus, Philolaus, Theodorus, and Echebrates, and from the hesitation ascribed to him in the *Phaedo* between the Ionian type of cosmology taught by Anaxagoras and the Italian views of which Philolaus would probably be the source, that the ‘school’ under Socrates must have become more than half Pythagoreanized, not to mention that the burlesque in the *Clouds* seems to mean that many of its members, including Socrates, practised the ascetic Pythagorean ‘rule of life’. In Plato, whose dialogues mostly deal with Socrates as a man either in the early forties or in advanced life, we naturally do not hear much of this side of his activity, and are clearly meant to think of

him as having abandoned the retirement of the study for a general mission to preach 'attention to the affairs of one's soul' to the Athenian public, though the group of special philosophic associates reappear in the *Phaedo* where we see the old man after his mission has been brought to an end by the sentence of the dicastery. As we all know, the change which made Socrates into a missionary to Athenians at large is said in the *Apology* to have been due to the utterance of the Pythian prophetess. So it becomes important to discover, if we can, the date at which Plato assumes this oracle to have been given. Of course the significant thing about the whole proceeding is not the very obvious answer of the oracle, but the fact that the question was asked. I do not know how it may strike any one else, but to my mind the very asking of the question by Chaerephon implies that, when he put it to the god, Socrates was not only already a man with a considerable reputation as one of the 'wits', but the recognized president of a society to which Chaerephon belonged. Hence the very fact that the sense of the oracle was taken by Chaerephon seems to me to indicate that the famous question was asked not merely to gratify Chaerephon's personal curiosity but on behalf of a body of 'associates' anxious to get the approval of a more than human authority for their estimate of their chief. This is a point on which every man must decide for himself according to his own conceptions of the probable in a matter of human psychology, but if my own judgement on the matter is a sound one, it is significant that the associates should attach such special importance to the verdict of the Pythia. This can hardly be explained by the supposed general reverence of the Hellenic world for the oracle at Delphi. At Athens the oracle was for sound political reasons an object of suspicious dislike. It 'laconised' as shamelessly throughout the Archidamian and Deceleian wars as it had formerly 'medised' and was afterwards to 'philippise'. The real ground for the application to Delphi would rather be that the inspirer of the Pythia was Apollo—the central divine figure of Pythagorean religion. (To be sure the god of Pythagoras was the Delian, and it is at least highly possible that Apollo of Delos and Apollo of Delphi were originally distinct deities belonging to different peoples, but the sense of the difference would be lost long before the time of Chaerephon. The poetic legends relating the progress of Apollo westward over Euboea, Attica and Bocotia to the already famous shrine of Pytho, where he entered as a conqueror, in fact, look like a deliberate attempt to fuse two distinct deities into one single figure.) As to the date when the oracle was given, a *terminus ad quem* may be inferred from comparison

of the Platonic *Apology* with the *Charmides* and the *Clouds* of Aristophanes. The *Apology* tells us that the widespread influence of Socrates on the rich and leisured lads, which was one of the excuses for his prosecution, arose accidentally out of his self-imposed mission of detecting the vain pretences of the different professors of special 'knowledge', and that it was the oracle which set him upon this task. Of course, as Professor Burnet says, in the *Apology* Socrates treats the business of the oracle with scarcely veiled humour, but even the humorous version which he is made to give of its influence on his career would be the silliest of jests if the chronological facts about his biography did not admit of such a construction. It follows that the oracle must have been given, according to the view which Plato wishes us to accept, before Socrates had attained his vogue as a Mentor of youth. Now the *Charmides* assumes that he was already known in this capacity as early as 430 B. C., for it opens with Socrates' own statement that as soon as he returned from his service at Potidaea, he at once made for his 'accustomed haunts'—the palaestrae—and made inquiries about the condition of 'philosophy and the young men' during his absence. (Incidentally also, this gives us a date about which Plato is not likely to have been mistaken for the beginning of Socrates' closer acquaintance with Charmides and thus corrects the absurd statement of later writers that Plato, the near relative of Charmides, was twenty years old before he came into contact with an eminent man who had been the friend of his uncles and cousins before his own birth.) The response of the oracle was therefore given before the beginning of the Peloponnesian war, i. e. when Socrates was under forty, and the fact that there were at that date persons who thought it worth while to ask Apollo whether he was not the very foremost of the 'wits' can hardly mean less than that he then held a perfectly definite position as the leader of a group of largely Pythagorean adherents. We need not, of course, suppose that the story of the *Apology* means that Socrates never had any personal influence over any single youth of promise before this date. The famous tale of Alcibiades in the *Symposium* expressly lays stress on the point that the admiration of Alcibiades for Socrates began when the former was a mere child. This, in fact, is the real excuse for the extraordinary methods Alcibiades professes to have attempted in his anxiety to gain Socrates' full confidence and affection. That even a drunken Alcibiades should relate what he does of himself is incredible unless we bear in mind that 'the man can afford to smile at the extravagance of the mere boy'. This particular connexion must thus be much earlier than the relation

of Socrates to the *véoi* in general as an admired Mentor, as is actually presupposed by Plato's story. For a relation which began in the mere boyhood of Alcibiades must go back to a time well before the battle at Potidaea in which Alcibiades was serving in the Athenian cavalry. But if even Charmides had not attracted any special notice from Socrates until 430 we may be sure that at that time the circle of young men and lads who admired him cannot have been a very extensive one, though we see from the dialogue (*Charm.* 153 d) that it already included Critias. Of course it must have required some time for Socrates to extend his personal influence outside the group of lads with whom the friend of Alcibiades would naturally be familiar,—such as the connexions of Pericles' intimate Pyrilampes. In fact in the *Laches* it is distinctly implied that the *public* fame of Socrates as a person widely admired among the *véoi* does not go back beyond the years just after the battle at Delium. That battle is the latest event alluded to in the dialogue and it is natural to suppose from the strength of the impression that Socrates' conduct in the retreat has made upon Laches, that we are to assume the facts to be quite recent. Yet Lysimachus, the son of the great Aristeides, an old friend of Socrates' family, observes (*Lach.* 180 e) that though he had heard a good deal of talk from the 'lads' about a certain Socrates as a wonderful being, it had not yet occurred to him that the Socrates of their admiration was the son of his old friend Sophroniscus. We are thus plainly to suppose that the influence of Socrates on the 'young men of rich and leisured families' began with a connexion with Alcibiades which must go back to some time not much later than 440 B.C. (This point is further implied in the introductory narrative of the *Protagoras*, where Socrates and Alcibiades are already fast friends at a time when Alcibiades is only beginning to show the signs of puberty (*Prot.* 309 b), and also by the tacit assumption in the *Symposium* narrative that Socrates was at the beginning of this friendship still young enough for the romantic offers of Alcibiades not to be a patent absurdity. The whole story is, in fact, thoroughly ill-conceived unless we think of Alcibiades as little more than a romantic child just old enough, as he says himself, to be allowed to go out alone, and Socrates as still quite a young man, at the outside not much over thirty. In the *Protagoras* itself, the date of which must be supposed to be at any rate some years before the great war, we find Socrates standing in a rather similar relation to his young friend Hippocrates, and before 430, he is already on close terms of intimacy with Critias. In 430 he makes the closer acquaintance of Charmides, who is then (*Charm.* 154 b)

a *μειράκιον*. Early in the war—though the year cannot be fixed—we find, as is only natural, that he is a close friend of the step-sons of Pylilampes, Adeimantus and Glaucon, and friendly with two ‘lads’ Polemarchus and Lysias, sons of Cephalus, whom he would naturally know, if I am right in the assumption that he was a member of the Periclean circle, from the fact that Cephalus was an important protégé of Pericles. But it is not until after 424 that we hear of that extensive influence upon which the charge of ‘corrupting the youths’ was ultimately founded. That the very year after Delium should have seen the earliest burlesques of the comic poets on him, and that Aristophanes should have made him double the character of a scientific saint of the Pythagorean type with that of a ‘teacher of the youths’—(there is, in fact, only a forced connexion between his performances as a geometer and hierophant of strange gods and his miseducation of Pheidippides)—seems equally to show that his popularity with the *νέοι* had just been greatly augmented and was a novelty to the average Athenian in the year of the *Clouds*. The topical caricaturist does not select for his subject facts which have already been familiar for years, and if the comedians with one accord fell on Socrates just at a particular time, he must in some way have done or suffered something very recently to recommend himself to their notice. Hence I think we may infer that Plato means us to suppose that at least two of the things made prominent in the *Clouds*, Socrates’ poverty and his popularity with young men at large, were new things in 423. (The same remark would not apply equally to the activities of the *φροντιστήριον*. They were a more private affair, of less interest to the mass of spectators in the theatre, and would hardly have served of themselves for the material of a successful comedy.)

It should, of course, be noted that the construction of the Platonic dialogues as a whole conforms to this conception of the life of Socrates as exhibiting three successive stages, one in which he appears mainly as a student, a second in which his great interest is to bring to naught the pretended wisdom of the ‘wits’, and a third in which he is mainly the counsellor of younger men. Thus the *Parmenides* and the reminiscences put into his mouth in the *Phaedo* belong to the opening of the earliest period, the *Timaeus* and the central books of the *Republic* show us Socrates at a further level of the same development, whereas the *Protagoras*, the *Gorgias*, and the first book of the *Republic* are dramatic exhibitions of his power as a critic of ‘those who pass for wits’; in the *Charmides*, *Laches*, *Euthydemus*, *Meno*, and elsewhere he is chiefly the wise and affectionate older adviser of young men of promise. But Plato plainly means us to understand that the interests

of one of these 'periods' could be continued into another. Thus in the *Timaeus* Socrates listens with absorption to just such speculations as those which, according to the *Phaedo*, had charmed his youth. But that dialogue is represented as being held only two days after the conversations in the *Republic*, where Socrates is partly the unmasker of the pretender Thrasymachus, partly the guide, philosopher and friend of Glaucon, Adeimantus, and the other young folk among *dramatis personae*. Similarly the ecstatic peculiarities of Socrates are said by the *Apology* to go right back to his earliest youth, but we find an intentional stress laid on them in the *Symposium*, the assumed date of which is 416, and the *Phaedrus*, a conversation which must be taken to be held after 416, as it not only criticizes the λόγοι of Lysias, thus implying his return from Thurii to Athens, but dwells on the rising fame of Isocrates as a writer of λόγοι which display a real capacity for philosophy. Just as in the one dialogue Socrates, in advanced middle age, can recapture all the ardour of his first youthful enthusiasm when he speaks to a fit audience about the 'fair among ten thousand and altogether lovely', so in the other, the same topic rouses him into a state of 'inspired madness' at a date when he must be thought of as already an official γέρων; though he died a man of seventy, we are to suppose, he was none the less one of the 'lads who never grow old'.¹ He does not usually speak, when Plato brings him into company with the wise of this world or the eager youth of the last quarter of the fifth century, of his lover-like devotion to Beauty or of the Forms, but the reason is that his audience would not understand, not that he has forgotten; the outbursts of the *Symposium* and *Phaedrus*, like the briefer passionate utterance of the *Republic* about the Form of Good which is our spiritual sun, are reminders which harmonize with the story of the *Phaedo* that in prison, with his public life at a close, the old man's thoughts went wholly back to the theory he had devised for himself in the early days when he haunted the school of Archelaus and sat at the feet of Zeno.

Of the outward facts of Socrates' life after the campaign of Amphipolis down to the year of Arginusae Plato cannot be said to tell us anything. Probably there was not much to tell. A man over fifty was not likely to be called up for what campaigning there was in these years, and, according to the repeated assertions of Plato, Socrates' 'sign' held him back from active politics. We may suppose that as the aims of the Athenian democracy were more and more revealed as irrational and unscrupulous expansion, empire over every

¹ Socrates, too, might have said with that other immortal youthful γέρων, Sir John, 'You that are old consider not the capacities of us that are young.'

one and at any price, Socrates' judgement of the Periclean system, hard as it had long been (to judge from the language Plato thinks appropriate to him in the *Republic*), became harder. In the *Republic* Imperialistic democracy, though declared the worst system of government short of sheer personal tyranny, is in detail treated in the main with a detached humour; Socrates smiles at its licence and jobbery. In the *Gorgias* his language is that of invective, and the name of Pericles appears on the list of those false statesmen who had taught Athens nothing but folly and wickedness. Yet it is curious, and so curious that one feels it must be true, that in the *Symposium* Alcibiades, the very incarnation of the reckless and haughty spirit of the democracy, on the very eve of the fatal and final enterprise in which the ὑβρις of the 'tyrant city' undid itself, is still the loved personal friend of the philosopher, and speaks of the influence Socrates can still exercise over his better nature in the strongest terms. It is even more singular that in the dialogue which passes the heaviest censure on all the democratic ideals and their creators, the *Gorgias*, Socrates definitely declares that whereas the love of Calicles is given to the Demos of Athens and the Demos of Pnyx (Plato's own handsome half-brother), his is reserved for 'philosophy and Alcibiades'. This is all the more significant that the imaginary date of the conversation seems to be the year after Arginusae, as there is an allusion to a recent occasion on which Socrates had 'made himself ridiculous' by not knowing how to put a matter to the vote in the assembly as it was his business to do, being one of the prytanes. (As the *Apology* makes it a capital point that Socrates had never held any office except that he was a member of the βουλή at the time of the trials of the Arginusae generals, this must be the occasion to which the *Gorgias* refers.) The sentiment about Alcibiades uttered at such a time cannot well mean less than that Socrates, like Aristophanes, who produced the *Frogs* in the very year when Socrates was a βουλευτής, was prepared to recall Alcibiades on his own terms—which is as much as to say that he was ready to see him the real monarch of Athens—as the one hope of salvation for the city, a view so distasteful to the mass of the δῆμος that though the *Frogs* is clearly written principally to urge it, Aristophanes has to pretend that his object in the play is to damage the literary reputation of Euripides, and to make his real point only at the very end and, as it were, by accident. (At least this is how I should explain the singular fact that after all that has been said against Euripides' frail heroines, his monodies and metrical licences, Euripides and Aeschylus come out so evenly balanced on their poetical merits that the decision

which of them is to be sent back to the upper world is made, as if by a whim of Pluto, to depend on the sudden and unexpected question what they think of Alcibiades. Aeschylus is really triumphant, not as a better poet—it would be rash to be too sure that even Aristophanes himself really thought him so—but because he advises compliance with the moods of the ‘lion’s whelp.’)

From the time of the battle of Arginusae on to the weeks which saw the actual ‘Passion’ of Socrates, Plato tells us nothing of his doings apart from the two stories of the *Apology* about the affairs of the trial of the generals and of the arbitrary execution of Leon of Salamis, and these two stories are only told for the special purpose of showing that the philosopher was equally ready to risk his life in the cause of righteousness, whether against an angry populace or against a little ring of oligarchs. There is no Platonic dialogue which seems to assume as its imaginary date any year in this unhappy interval, with the probable exception of the *Meno*, which refers (71 c) to a previous meeting between Socrates and Gorgias. As the opening lines of the *Gorgias* (447 a) seem to imply that Socrates is supposed in that dialogue to be meeting the famous rhetorician for the first time, this may be taken as indicating that the conversation with Meno is thought of as subsequent to the interview described in the *Gorgias*, but there is nothing to show how much later it is supposed to be. It cannot be after the departure of Meno from Greece to join the campaign of Cyrus. Now Meno, as we learn from the *Anabasis*, reached Cyrus at Colossae in the spring of 401, and we must presumably allow some time for the collection of the motley band of Highlanders whom he brought with him. Hence we cannot suppose the imaginary date of his conversation with Socrates at Athens to be later than some time in 402, and it may be earlier. The other point to be considered is that Anytus is present at the meeting. As Socrates did not retire from Athens with the democrats who withdrew to the Peiraeus and other quarters, but remained in Athens throughout the anarchy, whereas Anytus went into exile with Thrasybulus, we must date the dialogue either before the end of 404 or after the amnesty of the following year. Since the violent outbursts of Anytus and his solemn warning to Socrates of the danger into which his free criticism of democracy and its leaders is likely to bring him are clearly meant to be indications of the feeling which led to the philosopher’s prosecution, and since this danger was likely to be a very much greater one after the reign of terror and the short civil war than before the oligarchy had shown the lengths to which it was prepared to go, the latest imaginary date assignable to the dialogue

seems to me the most natural. Hence, apart from the dialogues which connect themselves with the actual trial and death of Socrates (*Apology*, *Crito*, *Euthyphro*, *Phaedo*, *Theaetetus*, *Sophistes*, *Politicus*), the *Meno* seems to be meant as the latest 'imaginary conversation' of Socrates among the Platonic dialogues. So far is it from being, as Gomperz fancied, an apology to the δῆμος for the free handling of democratic statesmen in the *Gorgias*, that part of its purpose seems to be to show that the leaders of the restored democracy were even more intolerant than the oligarchs where philosophy was concerned. The oligarchs had attempted to shelter themselves by entrapping the *iustissimus unus* of the age into complicity, the restored democrats were ready to take his life because he criticized their idols.

Of the events connected with the actual prosecution and death of Socrates, Plato has much to tell us which is too well known for repetition here. Only it should be noted that Plato is really the sole contemporary who has anything of importance to tell us. From Xenophon's *Memorabilia* (iv. 4; iv. 8) we learn that the actual prosecutor was named Meletus, that Socrates made no previous preparations for his speech in his own defence, and (i. 1) that the formal accusation was one of religious offences and corrupting the youth. We are also told in Bk. i of certain charges of a general kind, such as teaching his associates to contemn the existing 'laws and usages' by ridiculing the use of the lot in appointments to office, weakening the influence of parents over their children, and saying that no kind of occupation is discreditable, and of the more specific and rational accusation of being responsible for the offences of Alcibiades and Critias; but these accusations are ascribed so loosely to an unnamed 'accuser' that it is not even clear whether Xenophon means they were actually urged by the prosecutors or only figured in the pamphlet-war about the character of Socrates which was started after his death. For the rest the *Memorabilia* throws no light whatever on either the prosecution of Socrates or his death. Even the famous incident of the attempted rescue from prison and Socrates' refusal to avail himself of it, much though it would have been to the writer's apologetic purpose, is not even mentioned. The brief Xenophontic *Apologia*, it is true, mentions this, but in so obscure and hurried a way that we should not know with any certainty what is meant by the four words 'when his friends had a mind to steal him away' (τῶν ἐταίρων ἐκκλέψαι βουλομένων αὐτόν), but for the *Crito* of Plato, which is manifestly the source of the allusion. For the rest the contents of the tract are mainly palpable borrowings from the *Apology*, *Crito*, and *Phaedo* of Plato, except for two not very happy additions

or corrections. The first of these is the remarkable and comical statement, alleged to depend on the authority of Socrates' friend Hermogenes, that Socrates' object in making a defence which was really a defiance was to ensure his own conviction and so escape the weakness and disorders attendant on old age—hardly a creditable motive or one likely in a man vigorous enough to have left a baby in arms behind him. The other is an illuminating example of the author's regard for verisimilitude. Apollodorus, obviously the person described in the *Phaedo* as breaking down in the death-scene and nicknamed the 'softy' (ὁ μαλακός), 'a passionate admirer of the master but otherwise a simpleton', says Xenophon, exclaimed, 'What I cannot bear, Socrates, is the injustice of your execution'. To which it is related that Socrates answered, stroking his friend's head, 'Would you rather see me executed deservedly?' This is, of course, simply a *doublette* of Plato's pathetic little touch about Socrates toying with the curls of Phaedo. But which version of the story is the more likely to be correct? In Plato there is a real point to the incident. Phaedo is a lad who still wears his hair long, and Socrates accompanies a remark that these fine curls will be cut off to-morrow as a sign of mourning by a playful gesture meant to help him to imagine his young friend as he will look when he has lost his locks. Apollodorus the 'softy' is the narrator in Plato's *Symposium*. We then learn that he was a boy (*Symp.* 173 a) or rather 'still a boy' when the famous banquet took place in 416. I.e. he was born some years before that date, but at the time when he repeats the story he is—as the words imply—a man who has been spending some three years in constant and daily attendance on Socrates. This implies that Socrates is still alive and that, consequently, if the 'softy' had ever any curls to lose, they had all been shorn long before the final scene in the prison. The act of Socrates, as represented by Xenophon, is thus pointless, and also has no kind of connexion, as the corresponding act in the *Phaedo* has, with the speech which accompanies it. Such an illustration of Xenophon's methods may fairly justify us in being highly sceptical about any incidents related by him for which we cannot find support in the Platonic dialogues which, as I hold, though this is not the place to argue the point, he has drawn on very freely in all his 'Socratic' writings.¹

¹ For the 'three years' and the long interval between the occurrence of the banquet in 416 and the recital given by Apollodorus see *Sympos.* 172 e. For the evidence that the nickname of Apollodorus was really ὁ μαλακός, not as most editors give it, ὁ μανικός, see Burnet's text of *Sympos.* 173 d, and his remarks in his annotated edition on *Phaedo* 59 a 9, which seem to me quite conclusive. Indeed Xenophon's epithet εὐήθης (*Apolog.* 28) strikes me as an intentional allusion to the nickname μαλακός.

It will be seen, I think, that the result of our examination is that Socrates, as he appears in Plato's dialogues, comes before us as a person with a pretty full biography and a career in which we can quite readily discern the different stages, and a very definite and strongly marked individuality. There are at least five strains combined in his complex personality: (1) from his earliest manhood he has been a votary of science and a haunter of the circle of the 'wits' of the Periclean age, and it is just his prominence in this character which, by prompting the question of Chaerephon to Apollo, has led to his assuming the part, so familiar to us, of apostle of the doctrine that virtue is knowledge of the good and that this knowledge is the one thing needful; (2) he is a man of immense physical vigour, full of life even at the age of threescore years and ten, and has behind him a record of military service and shrewdness of judgement in military affairs which is of the most distinguished kind and caused his opinion to be valued by the military experts of his day; (3) he is a distinct opponent of Periclean 'imperial' democracy, whose opposition hardens into bitterness and something like unfairness as he grows older, and the upshot of a commercialistic imperialism is more visibly manifest in fact; (4) he is a 'saint' of the Orphic type, and an *illuminé*, a seer of visions and subject to 'raptures'; (5) and yet, unlike the mystics of all but the first order, he is kept sane throughout by that sense of humour and the due proportion of things which his enemies mistake for a mere sly pretence, and call his 'irony'. It is this, before anything else, which makes him a sweeter and saner Hellenic prototype of our own Carlyle. Carlyle, in fact, is in many respects a kind of Socrates *manqué*, driven by failure to exercise the gift of seeing things in their right proportion, and above all by failure to exercise 'irony' upon himself, into alternations of high-flown raptures about the eternities and immensities with moods of that unqualified pessimism which the *Phaedo* calls 'misology'. A good deal more might be inferred if it were part of my purpose, as it is not, to take into account what Plato tells us about the doctrines of the man and the known philosophical leanings of the group whom both Plato and Xenophon name for us as his life-long 'comrades'. But, as I have already said, it is Plato's account of the life and personality of his hero, not his statements about his views on science and philosophy, which is my topic this afternoon. The question at issue is just this, whether such a character and such a biography impress us as a vivid and dramatically true reproduction of a living original, or as the free invention of an artist anxious to draw an imaginary picture of an ideal sage. My own thesis is that on the second supposition it is unintelligible why Plato should have imagined such a host of small biographical details and

succeeded in imagining them so well that, though they are scattered through a long series of works the composition of which, as no one denies, must have ranged over the best part of half a century, there are no discrepancies to be detected, and again that the peculiar combination of marked personal characteristics is most unlikely to have been thought by Plato or any one else necessary to the character of a typical and ideal wise man, and is therefore only explicable on the supposition that what Plato has given us is a brilliant reproduction of an actual original who was 'an original' in the colloquial, as well as in other senses, of that word. You may test the soundness of this conclusion, if you wish, very simply. If we want to know how Plato, in the full maturity of his powers, imagined the 'philosophic' type, he has given us the opportunity to do so. The 'Eleatic stranger' of the *Sophistes* and *Politicus* is actually introduced to us in the opening sentences of the former dialogue as an excellent sample of the type, and, as he is anonymous, Plato is not compelled to adjust the portraiture to the known biography or personal peculiarities of any one. This personage is far from being like Berkeley's Hylas or Hume's Cleanthes a mere figure-head, a mouthpiece for a theory propounded for discussion, and nothing more. As any attentive reader will perceive he has a real individual manner of his own—but it is hard to imagine any figure less like the Socrates whom we find *sibi constans* from his youth as described in the *Phaedo* and *Parmenides* to his prime in the *Republic*, his middle age in the *Symposium* and his death in the *Phaedo*. To me the theory that we are dealing in these dialogues with a type or an imaginary figure sounds as wild and unnatural as it would be to maintain e. g. that Whistler's portrait of Carlyle was meant to represent the painter's notion of a typical man of letters, or that Pope had no actual contemporary before his mind when he sketched the character of 'Atticus'.

As a brief pendant to what has gone before, and by way of comment on the dogma which still persists in our own country, that it is from Xenophon we must collect the facts about Socrates, I may subjoin a brief statement of the strictly biographical facts or unfacts recorded by Xenophon. None of them, it will be observed, definitely include anything in the way of biography belonging to the earlier period of Socrates' life which might not have been directly copied from the Platonic dialogues which were indubitably used for Xenophon's *Apologia*, as Xenophon himself all but tells us in the opening sentences of the work. Socrates was the son of Sophroniscus (*Hellenica* i. 7. 15); he had a son who was called Lamprocles, and a wife, with a temper of her own, whose name, Xanthippe, is once occasionally given in the Xenophontic *Symposium* (ii. 10).

A list of his 'associates' is given which seems to be taken direct from the *Phaedo*, only that Chaerephon, who died before the trial of Socrates, as we learn from Plato, is added. Further, he was a friend of Callias, son of Hipponicus (mentioned as the host of Protagoras in the dialogue *Protagoras*), of Glaucon, Plato, Charmides, and, though Xenophon wishes us to think this connexion temporary, of Alcibiades and Critias, whom he sought in vain to correct of their faults of self-will and hatred of discipline. He was well versed in the higher mathematics and astronomy of his time (*Mem.* iv. 7. 3 and 5), though he did not think such knowledge of practical service for most men. He was exceptionally punctilious in performing the ceremonies required by the religion of the state, and 'practised' more than mankind in general in the way of offering prayer and sacrifice on his own account. He believed in oracles and prognostications in dreams, and regarded his own peculiar 'sign' as a kind of oracle private to himself. But when we ask for something more definite than these generalities in the way of biography, the *Memorabilia* furnish us with remarkably little. We learn (*Mem.* i. 1), as we are also told in the *Hellenica*, that Socrates was *ἐπιστάτης*, or chairman for the sitting of the assembly in which the proposal to deal with the Arginusae generals *en bloc* was made, and that he refused to put the proposal to the vote. (This is related without the further details given by Plato in the *Apology*.) That in the oligarchic reign of terror Critias and Charicles, fearing his censures of their proceedings, forbade him to converse with the young, and that Socrates, under a show of deference to their authority, 'chaffed' them about the absurdity of such a vague prohibition, but was dismissed with a threat. Whether he obeyed the order we are not told. That Antiphon the sophist, at some unspecified time, tried to draw away the companions with whom Socrates was accustomed to study the writings of the 'wits of old'. That Socrates admired the apologue of the 'choice of Heracles', which had been worked up into a show-declamation by Prodicus. That he once tried hard to make up a quarrel between Chaerephon and his brother Chaerecrates. That he advised a friend who had lost his means of support in the year of anarchy to set his women-folk at remunerative work. That he found for the wealthy Crito a useful factotum to protect him from blackmailers. That he prevented Plato's brother Glaucon from making himself ridiculous by trying to cut a figure before the *ἐκκλησία* while he was still in his teens. This, says Xenophon, he did from friendship to Charmides and Plato, where the mention of Plato must be an inadvertence, since the Glaucon of the *Republic* is already a young man who has distinguished himself in battle, and a fast friend of Socrates at a date when Plato

must have been a baby, though the statement about Charmides would fit in well with Plato's account that Socrates was attracted to him as early as 430, if it were not for one allusion which seems to show that Xenophon is thinking of the incident as happening during the Decelean war (*Mem.* iii. 6. 15).¹ This is quite incompatible with the assumptions of the *Republic* in which Glaucon is said to have distinguished himself in a battle at Megara fought at a date when Cephalus the father of Lysias was still alive, and Lysias himself a mere νεανίσκος.

It is a more interesting point, and one which might help to explain some things in Socrates' later life that Xenophon says it was he who first persuaded Charmides to enter politics (*Mem.* iii. 7. 1), but when we find that the arguments of Socrates are made to turn mainly on the value of self-knowledge as a preparation for public life we are forcibly reminded of the discussion of self-knowledge in Plato's *Charmides*, and we have also to ask ourselves at what date the advice can have been given. It is definitely stated that Charmides, who was only just old enough to be called μειράκιον in 430 (*Charm.* 154 b), was an ἀνὴρ ἀξιόλογος when Socrates urged him to shake off his shyness, and that Socrates had been struck by the sound advice he had been known to give in private to 'those who are employed in the state's affairs' (*Mem.* iii. 7. 3). Clearly, then, we are to think of him as at any rate a man of some thirty years or more. This brings us down to so late a date that it is incredible that the facts should not have been remembered by the democrats who prosecuted Socrates and have been a much more plausible charge against him than most of the matters which seem to have been brought up at his trial, since Charmides was at the head of the oligarchical Committee set up in 404 to administer the Peiraeus, and with Critias fell in battle against the majority of his fellow-citizens. Yet from Xenophon's own silence it appears that no one had made it a grievance against Socrates that he had actually persuaded the man to take up public life! Hence I fear the incident is probably nothing more than a pleasing story founded on the charming Platonic description of Socrates' interest in Charmides as a youth. Thus the *Memorabilia* are wholly silent about most of the characteristic facts of the life of Socrates, as related by Plato, before the year of Arginusae, and add nothing fresh of a biographical kind except the story that Critias and Charicles tried to restrain his sarcastic com-

¹ Glaucon complains that his uncle (i. e. Charmides) cannot be persuaded to entrust the management of his affairs to him. Charmides is thus thought of as a full-grown man of position at the time when Socrates first came into contact with Glaucon.

ments on their administration, (the much more important incident of the arrest of Leon is not mentioned), and the representation of his wife, who is not named, as a woman with a temperament.

From the *Symposium*, which purports to be an account of a gathering in the year 422, we might gather that Socrates was on friendly terms with the millionaire Callias (as we know from Plato), that his wife's name was Xanthippe, that he used to dance, as Hobbes used to sing, in strict privacy for bodily exercise, that he jestingly professed to be proud of his skill as a pimp and go-between between 'wits' and the pupils by whom they made a living (an idea which seems to be taken directly from Plato's *Theaetetus*) and of his personal attractions. (Here again we seem to have a clumsy development of a theme from the speech of Alcibiades in the *Symposium* of Plato, a work to which Xenophon makes constant and undisguised allusions throughout his own piece.) Further that, just after the production of the *Clouds*, be it remembered, there was a popular jest that he was a *φροντιστής*, who studied 'the things aloft', and a joke of some kind about his studying geometrical problems turning on some point about a flea, and that he spoke eloquently about the difference between the heavenly and the earthly Aphrodite (again a palpable reminiscence of the speech of Pausanias in Plato's *Symposium*). I have not taken into account the rival possibility that it is Plato's dialogue which borrows touches from Xenophon, partly because I do not think any reader of the two works, unaware that such a theory has been mooted, could possibly doubt on which side the indebtedness lies, but partly because I hold that the question can be settled if necessary by a single case in which Xenophon's language is unintelligible except as an allusion to Plato's work. In Xenophon ii. 26 Socrates is made to apologize for a vivid metaphor by saying, *ἴνα καὶ ἐγὼ ἐν Γοργιείοις ῥήμασιν εἶπω*, 'if I too may use the high-flown language of Gorgias.' No one in the preceding part of the work has used any *Γοργίεια ῥήματα* at all; everything has been said in the simplest language of every day. The 'I too' must therefore allude to something in a composition against which Xenophon is pitting his own. He means—though the statement is quaintly untrue—that he, no less than some other, can make his characters talk the dithyrambic language of Gorgias when he sees fit. If he usually makes them speak like men of this world, it is from choice, not of necessity. Against whom the attack is directed is seen at once from a comparison with Plato's *Symposium* 198 b, where Socrates says that the high-flown speech of Agathon, to which he had just listened, reminds him of Gorgias, and pretends to be unable to keep the oratory, now that it has come to his turn to make his panegyric of Eros, at this magnificent level.

Xenophon's *Symposium* thus contributes no single fact to the biography of Socrates, though it is interesting as giving a picture of his outward appearance and his social manner which, so far as it goes, justifies the burlesque of Aristophanes and shows that the writer cannot have thought the brilliant portrait of Plato's *Symposium* a pure invention of the imagination. The *Apologia*, apart from the points for which it has been cited already, mentions the famous response of the Delphic oracle (§ 14) as a matter which Socrates had spoken of in his defence before the dicasts, but makes him treat it quite out of character. He boasts and brags in a fashion which would have been certain to secure his condemnation and is quite out of keeping with the modesty he elsewhere observes in Xenophon's writings no less than with the keen sense of humour ascribed to him by Plato. He is also made (§ 20) to profess, contrary to the tenor of his whole life, to be a 'specialist' in education (*τοῦτο γὰρ ἴσασιν ἐμοὶ μεμεληκόσ*), much in the fashion in which Protagoras makes the same claim in Plato. Presumably Xenophon thought this kind of thing in keeping with the *μεγαληγορία*, the 'lofty tone' which he professes to have found in 'all previous narratives' of the trial and death of Socrates,—that is to say, if he had chosen to be more outspoken,—in the *Apology*, *Crito*, and *Phaedo*. Of genuinely biographical information the little tract is wholly empty.

Finally, we have, of course, in the *Anabasis* the one really valuable addition to the information supplied by Plato, that Socrates (iii. 1. 5-7) doubted the wisdom of Xenophon's volunteering for the expedition of Cyrus and sent him to Delphi to consult the oracle, obviously in the hope that he might change his mind.

If we omit the merely anecdotal from this recital, we are left with the following statements: Socrates, son of Sophroniscus, had a wife called Xanthippe and a son Lamprocles; he exercised a good deal of influence over Charmides and some temporary influence on Alcibiades and Critias. At some unknown date the Delphic oracle told Chaerephon that he was a model of all the virtues. He had some advanced knowledge of science and also claimed to have a peculiar private oracle. He belonged to a circle which studied the writings of the 'older wits'. In 422 it was a popular jest that he had propounded a geometrical problem somehow connected with fleas. In the year of Arginusae he presided over the assembly in which it was proposed to try all the generals together and refused to put this proposition to the vote. In the oligarchic anarchy of 404 he remained in the city but was reprimanded by Critias and Charicles for the imprudence of his sarcasms about their administrative methods. In 402 or very early in 401 he disapproved of Xenophon's Asiatic adventure. He

was put to death after a long life on the charges of religious offences and of having a bad influence upon younger men. In all this only the name of Lamprocles, the reference to the joke about the flea, the story of the reprimand by the Thirty and the personal anecdote about his advice to Xenophon himself add anything to the statements of Plato. It is obvious that Xenophon has really furnished us with no materials from which to make a story of his hero's life. The only datable biographical events of any importance, beyond the mention of a name or two, belong to the last six or seven years of Socrates' career. (The reference to the response of the oracle is undated, and it is not from Xenophon that we obtain the materials for fixing its approximate date.) There is nothing whatever to show us under what influences Socrates had grown up, except a list of his friends from which—again not by any help afforded by Xenophon but by comparison with Plato—we can infer that some of the most intimate of them were Pythagoreans. If we compare these meagre results with the pretty full and careful account of Socrates, his family, and his history already deduced from the dialogues of Plato, we are driven to the conclusion that if Plato's narrative is dismissed as imaginative fiction, not only the doctrines of Socrates but the events of his life, except for one or two which occurred after he was 65, are shrouded in impenetrable mystery. 'Socrates the man'—to speak after the fashion of the modern writer of 'personal paragraphs'—is as much an 'unknown X' to us as 'the Socratic philosophy'. On the other side, if we may trust Plato's accounts we have, I maintain, not only, as Professor Burnet, myself, and others have contended, a coherent exposition of a philosophical theory of high originality, obviously intended to meet just the problems which were perplexing Athenian minds in the middle of the fifth century, the time of Socrates' early manhood, but also a rather full and particular narrative of the life and personal traits of the man who devised this philosophy: the account is contained in a whole series of works written at intervals during a period of probably at least forty years, yet no serious discrepancies are to be found in it, even when we try it by the severe standard of demand for truth not only in casual statements on points of fact but in the inferences which result from combination of such casual statements. Is it necessary to put into words the only conclusion to which all the facts point? The 'historical Socrates', as he has been called, must be found in the full and faithful portrait, drawn with careful attention to fact, of a great thinker by another great thinker who, by God's grace, was also a master of dramatic portraiture. The portrait is that of the actual son of Sophroniscus; nearly every 'historical' touch in it is known to us ultimately only on the faith of Plato.



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