

Essay

The Education of Socrates: The Three Self-Fulfilling Prophecies of the *Apology*

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Abstract

I discuss a view derived from philosophers such as Nietzsche, Heidegger, and Derrida, which sees language as presenting reality itself rather than representing things distinct from it. I give a reading of the *Apology* according to this Presentational Model of Language, organized around the three prophecies that it gives and that itself is the fulfillment of. All three prophecies bring about that which they predict in their very predicting of it. This reading finds the dialogue to be self-referentially about the nature of interpretation and about Plato's writing of it. Its climax comes in the only recorded dialogue between Socrates and Plato, which I accord far more significance than most. Presentational language avoids Plato's criticisms of language in general and writing in particular, allowing them to speak philosophy by his own lights.

Keywords: Plato; Socrates; *Apology*; hermeneutics; language; representation

1. Introduction: The Presentational Model of Language¹

The traditional philosophical understanding of language views world and words as wholly separate, with the latter standing in for the former. We place words on things as labels in order to communicate about them, especially in the absence of them or each other. Things are first, chronologically and logically, wholly different and independently from language, and words get their significance from them. Labels have no effect on what they label; a rose by any other name would smell as sweet, as well as roses unnamed and unspoken. The correspondence theory of truth is the standard epistemology that goes along with this metaphysico-linguistic doctrine. Statements are true if the words represent them correctly so that things are the way they say they are, false if they do not.

I will call this the Representational Model of Language. What is extraordinary about this conception of language and its relationship to reality is how ordinary it is. It seems so overpoweringly obvious, so undeniably inevitable that one wonders about even the possibility of an alternate view. What else could language be? What else could it do? How else could words relate to world?

In the late 19th and 20th centuries, prominent continental philosophers such as Nietzsche, Heidegger, and Derrida came to see this view of language as a nexus point where essential ideas about central topics cross and reinforce each other². This contributes to the difficulty of getting away from the Representational Model. Escaping from the long shadow of grammar would seem to require a reformation of core notions such as reality and truth along with their correlative branches of philosophy. In the other direction, however, this dense interrelatedness also means that pulling on this thread could begin to unravel our entire theoretical outlook, clearing or even leading the way to new ways of speaking and writing, of thinking about speaking and writing, and of thinking more generally.



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I will call the alternate form of language that I see these philosophers exploring and enacting the Presentational Model. They use language not to stand in for things in the world, but to *be* things. Their writings *bring about* states of affairs rather than merely describing them, or rather, they bring them about *by* describing them. This blurs the lines of many binary distinctions traditional thinking treats as cleanly distinct and mutually exclusive, affecting such basic laws of thought as the Law of Identity and of Non-Contradiction³.

As it makes general claims about how language and especially writing occur, we should be able to see the Model in many texts, not just those strangely written writings by these modern and postmodern thinkers. We should be able to apply it to older, more traditional and familiar works. Where better to test this hypothesis than on the most familiar text in the canon, perhaps the most-read book in philosophy—the *Apology*? The themes we will look for in this reading are the central importance of hermeneutics; the nature of language as presentational rather than representational; propositions as self-referential and self-realizing, i.e., as creating their own truth rather than corresponding to an already existing reality; and polysemy and the inherent obscurity or concealment of language.

Socrates' defense against his first, more dangerous accusers (18a–c) is that he has been commanded to conduct his offending behavior by a prophecy from the gods, albeit one that required considerable scrutiny before he understood it this way⁴. Thus, the very title of the dialogue—the *Apologia* or *Defense of Socrates*—focuses our attention on the topic of prophecies and their correct interpretation from the start. This same topic was touched on in the *Euthyphro* which portrays the events immediately preceding the *Apology*⁵, recurs throughout the *Apology*, and continues into the dialogues that lay out Socrates' subsequent fate⁶, as well as others⁷. My reading of the *Apology* will focus on the dialogue's three prophecies.

2. The First Prophecy: The Oracle of Delphi

An oracular statement laid the foundation of philosophy. The Oracle's decree that no one is wiser than Socrates is what began his quest, which led him to develop his method of *elenchus*—the examination of beliefs for contradictions. Whereas the Pre-Socratics are alien to us, this method is continuous with how we do philosophy today: evaluate arguments, raise and respond to objections, etc. From this perspective, the Oracle's statement represents the inciting incident of the 25 centuries of Western philosophy.

Oracular statements are famously obscure, their surface sense often hiding a second sense that gets fulfilled due to the listener's taking it in its first. King Croesus of Lydia, to take a famous example, was told that if he attacked Persia, he would “destroy a great empire.” He took this to denote Persia, thus promising him victory, but the great empire that was destroyed was actually his own. The irony, typical of oracular pronouncements, is that he lost the war because of the confidence in his victory given him by his misinterpretation. The misunderstanding was what caused the true sense to come about; the statement established its own truth by creating the reality it described—by describing it.

This same kind of ironic self-foiling self-fulfillment also occurs with Socrates' oracular statement. He found the pronouncement that no one was wiser than him deeply puzzling, leading him on a quest to interpret it.

I asked myself: “Whatever does the god mean? What is his riddle?...” For a long time I was at a loss as to his meaning; then... I went to one of those reputed wise, thinking that there, if anywhere, I could refute the oracle and say to it: “This man is wiser than I, but you said I was”. (21b–c)

It was this attempt to decipher the statement that led to his inventing *elenchus*, arguably the defining activity of philosophy. Thus, at the very foundation of Western philosophy lies an attempt to interpret a confusing statement, i.e., hermeneutics⁸.

His investigation consisted of seeking the counter-example of a wise person. Success would refute the claim, but his failure to do so ended up accomplishing the reverse—proving it, as he says. “I must give you an account of my journeyings as if they were labors I had undertaken to prove the oracle irrefutable” (22a). His interpretation underwent the kind of ironic reversal typical of oracular statements where attempts to foil them end up fulfilling them. Perhaps the most famous example of this is when both Oedipus and his father, Laius, took steps to prevent their oracular prophecy from coming true—that Oedipus would kill his father and Laius would be killed by his son—yet these very steps are what inescapably led to the very incident they were attempting to avoid. Socrates transcribed this ironic reversal from tragedy to epistemology. The actions he meant to disprove the prophecy were, unbeknownst to him, the very deeds needed “to prove the oracle” (22a); his attempts to “refute the oracle” (21c) showed her to be “irrefutable” (22a).

The Oracle’s statement purports to correspond to a present state of affairs—Socrates’ superior wisdom—but it is in fact about the future—the state that Socrates will be in once he has fully interpreted this statement. Just as Oedipus’ attempt to defy the prophecy that he would kill his father put him on the path towards doing so, it was attempting to refute his title of the wisest of men that led Socrates to the insight that *made* him the wisest of men—the insight that humans can have no genuine wisdom.

His oracular response meant that human wisdom is worth little or nothing. . . as if he said: “This man among you, mortals, is wisest who, like Socrates, understands that his wisdom is worthless”. (23a-b)

The Oracle’s statement thus has a self-realizing structure, a literally self-fulfilling prophecy. It creates its own truth, realizing the situation that it describes by describing it because the insight into the insignificance of human wisdom, which resulted from Socrates’ interpretation of the statement, is what turned him into the wisest of men.

As many have pointed out, the Oracle did not actually state this conclusion, nor did she bid Socrates to do anything, yet Socrates has so little doubt that this is its true meaning that he dedicates his entire life—and beyond—to following the instructions he attributes to it. “Some people. . . enjoy hearing those being questioned who think they are wise, but are not. . . . *To do this has, as I say, been enjoined upon me by the god, by means of oracles and dreams, and in every other way that a divine manifestation has ever ordered a man to do anything. This is true, gentlemen, and can easily be established.*”⁹. This fits Heraclitus’ description of the Oracle’s form of communication: “the Lord whose oracle is at Delphi neither speaks nor conceals but gives a sign” (B93). The Oracle neither directly said the meaning Socrates came to see there—for this would not have set him on a quest to interpret its sense, which led to its fulfillment—nor fully concealed it—in which case he wouldn’t have been able to know what to do. She gave a sign that, by going between these options, inspired Socrates to interpret, implement, and thereby realize it.

A Harmony of Epistemologies

One peculiar feature of Plato’s *oeuvre* is that at different points you find Socrates positing two distinct epistemologies: Socratic Ignorance and Platonic Recollection. More than just conflicting, they are complete inversions of each other. The former concludes that no one knows anything, the latter that everyone knows everything¹⁰. The dialogues that a standard chronology considers early depict a Socrates who tells people that they do not know what they think they know; the middle dialogue Socrates, however, tells people that they actually *do* know that which they think they do not. The early Euthyphro’s misplaced

confidence in his expertise in piety¹¹ is the mirror image of the slave's quickly dispelled ignorance of geometry in the middle Meno¹².

Yet here, in the *Apology's* recounting of his birth as a philosopher, Socrates harmonizes the two seemingly incompatible epistemologies. The reason that he begins his journey in the first place is that he knows that he knows nothing. This is the source of the confusion, the resolution of which gives rise to the method of *elenchus*, which both reveals and realizes the riddle's solution. "When I heard of this reply I asked myself: 'Whatever does the god mean? What is his riddle? I am very conscious that I am not wise at all'" (21b). However, the conclusion he reaches after his attempts to dis-prove the oracle is the same—that "his wisdom is worthless" (23b).

The conclusion Socrates reaches is the premise he began with. He *must* start with this belief in order to reach it, for it is what initiates and fuels the investigation towards that conclusion. The difference is that at the beginning he does not fully understand his lack of understanding. He begins with a roughly grasped sense of his lack of wisdom and then the process of Socratic questioning brings him to fully grasp the reasons and significance of that ignorance. This is precisely how Recollection works: one begins with a correct but crude notion which one comes to a deep comprehension of through questioning.

For true opinions. . . are not worth much until one ties them down by [giving] an account of the reason why. And that, Meno, my friend, is recollection, as we previously agreed. After they are tied down, in the first place they become knowledge. (*Meno* 97e–98a)

It is just that in this case the recollecting is occurring on the other side of the questioning. Here, it is the questioner who comes to know his ignorance, whereas the questioned remains as ignorant of their ignorance as when they began. Is it an accident that the *Apology of Socrates* is the only dialogue in which Socrates' name appears in the title, the place traditionally held by the interlocutor who comes to a new understanding through the dialogue's questioning?

What Socrates recollects in the *Apology* is that he knows nothing, returning now to his complete lack of knowledge with complete understanding. The origin of Socrates' philosophizing is a Platonic Recollection of Socratic Ignorance. The latter theory requires the early dialogues to end in *aporia* with their central question unanswered; there, the *aporia* or lack of wisdom *is* the answer to the question. This origin story brings the two epistemologies of knowing and not-knowing into a peculiar kind of harmony that resembles the notion of strife central to the thought of Heraclitus, a man "extraordinary from boyhood. When young, he used to say that he knew nothing; as an adult, that he knew everything" ([10], Book 9:5).

3. The Second Prophecy: The Succession

After receiving his sentence of execution, Socrates himself offers the dialogue's next prophecy. He is able to give this second prophecy because of his proximity to death (cf. *Republic* 330e), itself caused by the first prophecy that set him on the quest that brought him to trial. Socrates directs it to the members of the jury who voted for his conviction.

Now I want to prophesy to those who convicted me, for I am at the point when men prophesy most, when they are about to die. . . . You did this in the belief that you would avoid giving an account [ἐλεγχον, *elenchon*] of your life, but I maintain that quite the opposite will happen to you. There will be more people to test you [οἱ ἐλεγχοντες, *hoi elenchontes*]. . . . They will be younger and you will resent them more. (39c-d)

Once again we see the oracular structure of an ironically reversed fulfillment: these jurors voted for his death in order to avoid giving an account of their lives, but “quite the opposite will happen.” There will instead be more people, younger people, to test them.

We must realize here that for Socrates, philosophizing simply is *elenchus*—testing beliefs for contradictions¹³. Thus what the convicts believe they have snuffed out is in Socrates’ eyes philosophy itself—which means that this is what they have inadvertently created. By trying to end philosophy, they brought it into existence as a tradition carried forward by the “younger” or next generation. They will be forced to give an “*elenchon*” to “*hoi elenchontes*,” both versions of *elenchus*: future examiners will come to demand examinations of them.

Throughout the *Apology*, Socrates is not concerned with his own fate¹⁴ but rather for the task assigned him by the god, the best benefit for the city and its inhabitants possible¹⁵. The titular *apologia*, or defense, is therefore not of himself but of Athens, as he informs them.

Indeed, men of Athens, I am far from making a defense now on my own behalf, as might be thought, but on yours, to prevent you from wrongdoing by mistreating the god’s gift to you by condemning me; for if you kill me you will not easily find another like me. I was attached to this city by the god—though it seems a ridiculous thing to say—as upon a great and noble horse which was somewhat sluggish because of its size and needed to be stirred up by a kind of gadfly. It is to fulfill some such function that I believe the god has placed me in the city. I never cease to rouse each and every one of you, to persuade and reproach you all day long and everywhere I find myself in your company. (30d-e)

His warning to the jury not to kill him is for their sake, not his, which is why he refuses the offer he imagines the court making him of being let off as long as he stops philosophizing.

If, as I say, you were to acquit me on those terms, I would say to you: “Men of Athens, I am grateful and I am your friend, but I will obey the god rather than you, and as long as I draw breath and am able, I shall not cease to practice philosophy, to exhort you”. (29d)

He compares his service to the city to a post he has been assigned in wartime, which he must not abandon just as he courageously remained at his post in literal battles for the city.

This is the truth of the matter, men of Athens: wherever a man has taken a position that he believes to be best, or has been placed by his commander, there he must I think remain and face danger, without a thought for death or anything else, rather than disgrace. It would have been a dreadful way to behave, men of Athens, if, at Potidaea, Amphipolis, and Delium, I had, at the risk of death, like anyone else, remained at my post where those you had elected to command had ordered me, and then, when the god ordered me, as I thought and believed, to live the life of a philosopher, to examine myself and others, I had abandoned my post for fear of death or anything else¹⁶.

Manning his post to perform the greatest service possible as ordered by the god in the first prophecy is the most important thing he can do, and Socrates will make sure his duty is done.

But there is a catch. He can only perform his duty “as long as I draw breath and am able;” his execution will stop that breath, which both keeps him alive and enables him to speak. He would not be voluntarily abandoning his post in cowardice but would nevertheless be leaving it unmanned. This is what truly worries him, especially because, as he says a number of times, it will be hard to find a replacement¹⁷.

However, his prophecy is that this elusive task will be taken care of, that future “younger” people will continue the questioning whose beginning he recounts here as his

defense. The claim I want to defend in this section is that because replacements to carry on his service are hard to find, he will create them—right here in the *Apology*, with the *Apology*. We can see the beginnings of this plan at the very start of the dialogue.

3.1. Redefining the Corresponding Roles of Speaker and Jury/Judge

Socrates opens his speech by redefining what it means to be a good speaker. Rather than a master rhetorician who can successfully persuade people regardless of the truth¹⁸, a genuine speaker is one who tells the truth regardless of the outcome. The former is what the Sophists were selling¹⁹, what Strepsiades, the main character of *The Clouds*, was seeking for his son in Socrates' Thinkery²⁰, and it is how Socrates describes his accusers²¹. He, on the other hand, aspires to the latter

when I show myself not to be an accomplished speaker at all. . .—unless indeed they call an accomplished speaker the man who speaks the truth. If they mean that, I would agree that I am an orator, but not after their manner, for indeed, as I say, practically nothing they said was true. From me you will hear the whole truth, though not, by Zeus, gentlemen, expressed in embroidered and stylized phrases like theirs, but things spoken at random and expressed in the first words that come to mind, for I put my trust in the justice of what I say. (17b-c)

At the same time, he also redefines what it means to be a jury or judge (δικαστοῦ/*dikastou*), there being no distinction between the two words or roles in Athenian courts.

An excellent judge will ignore the defendant's manner of speech, which will be the same as he normally employs, and concentrate only on whether what he says is just.

This is my first appearance in a lawcourt, at the age of seventy; I am therefore simply a stranger/foreigner [ξένος (*xenos*)] to the manner of speaking here. Just as if I were really a stranger/foreigner, you would certainly excuse me if I spoke in that dialect and manner in which I had been brought up, so too my present request seems a just one, for you to pay no attention to my manner of speech—be it better or worse—but to concentrate your attention on whether what I say is just [δίκαια λέγω (*dikaia legō*)]²² or not, for the excellence of a judge [δικαστοῦ (*dikastou*)] lies in this, as that of a speaker lies in telling the truth. (17c-18a)

After this opening speech, however, he never refers to them as jurymen, the traditional standard form of address in court, but rather as “men of Athens”—until the end. There he does use this now honorific term, but only for those who voted for his acquittal.

Socrates is quite convinced that he proved his case, so anyone who listened to the arguments fairly would have voted for his acquittal. Those men who did so have demonstrated “the excellence of a judge” (18a), the challenge issued at the beginning of the dialogue, and so have evolved from mere men of Athens into true judges.

I should be glad to discuss what has happened with those who voted for my acquittal. . . . I want to show the meaning of what has occurred. A surprising thing has happened to me, jurymen—you I would rightly call jurymen. (39e-40a)

Socrates knows that emotional appeals are the norm for speakers in his position²³, but in his definition of “the purpose of a jurymen's office,” this is wholly inappropriate. His commitment to speaking in his usual way—following arguments where they lead rather than employing rhetorical tricks or emotional pleas—puts him at a disadvantage for those lacking “the excellence of a judge,” just as he prophesied a number of times in other dialogues²⁴.

Socrates sums this up at the end of his cross-examination of Meletus, having easily exposed the latter's contradictions.

I do not think, men of Athens, that it requires a prolonged defense (*ἀπολογία/apologia*) to prove that I am not guilty of the charges in Meletus' deposition, but this is sufficient. On the other hand, you know that what I said earlier is true, that I am very unpopular with many people. This will be my undoing, if I am undone, not Meletus or Anytus but the slanders and envy of many people. (28a, see also 24a)

This is his verdict on the men of Athens: those who vote for his guilt are not listening to the arguments with their reason but rather to "the slanders and envy of many people" with their emotions²⁵. Indeed, the fact that his earlier accusers "approached you at the most impressionable age, when some of you were children or adolescents" (18c), i.e., before their rational faculties were fully formed, made their influence particularly effective and nefarious. Some, however, have grown since then and did their duty here to "judge according to law,"²⁶ i.e., impartially, rationally, according to the justice of the arguments presented. Those are the ones he addresses as those "I would rightly call jurymen" for they possess "the excellence of a judge" as outlined at the start of the dialogue²⁷, as much as he himself fulfills the duty of a good speaker by speaking only the truth, as he insists twelve times²⁸. These "true jurymen" (41a) have taken at least their first steps into philosophy by philosophizing with training wheels, following along with Socrates as he conducts an *elenchus* in their presence.

This transition is effected in a specific, intentional way in the dialogue—by a dialogue.

3.2. The Meletus (24c–28b)

Socrates tells the story of the first prophecy as his response to the first accusers because he cannot practice his *elenchus* on them: "one cannot bring one of them into court or refute him; one must simply fight with shadows, as it were, in making one's defense, and cross-examine when no one answers" (18d). He can, however, practice it on his more recent accusers as represented by Meletus in an exchange (24c–28a) that occurs, as he had warned the jury, "in the same kind of language as I am accustomed to use in the marketplace" (17c). Indeed, this cross-examination is so typical that we can virtually treat it as an early dialogue in miniature: the *Meletus*. It is, however, unusual in one way. Because it takes place within a speech that Socrates himself is giving, he simultaneously supplies a running commentary to the jury on what he is doing as he does it²⁹. Socrates' questions demonstrate Meletus' reckless indifference to the charges he brought by revealing his contradictions³⁰, while his statements demonstrate how to demonstrate such matters. The former are directed to the prosecutor, the latter to the jury to lead them through the method of *elenchus* that constitutes the philosophical activity that he is defending and that is his defense.

He begins the cross-examination by listing their charge and then announcing his intention, not by saying, "I will examine it," but rather "let us examine it point by point" (24c). He will of course be the one presenting the questions to Meletus, but recall his opening definition of the excellence of judges/juries as judging the justice of the speakers' claims. In getting the judge/jury to evaluate his interlocutor's beliefs for their justness along with him, he is training the men of Athens in the practice of rationally judging arguments for logical soundness which will make some of them true jurymen. In a line that appears innocuous but is actually one of the dialogue's most important lines for my reading, Socrates explicitly states this invitation and its goal, differentiating the two distinct audiences he is simultaneously addressing: "Examine with me, gentlemen, how he appears to contradict himself, and you, Meletus, answer us" (27b)³¹.

In addition to the *elenctic* search for contradictions, the other type of reasoning Socrates employs the most is argument by analogy³². This occurs a number of times in the *Apology*, including within the *Meletus* where he compares improving the youth to training horses

(25a-b). A frequent subject of these comparisons is philosophizing itself, with the *Apology*'s own image of a gadfly stinging a horse being the most famous (30e).

I submit that cross-examining a witness in a courtroom is an outstanding analogy for philosophizing qua examining a person's claims to expose contradictions; indeed, the word "*elenchos*" named that act in an Athenian court. Determining whether or not the person holding those beliefs has contradicted themselves or not—the job of the true jury/judge—represents an essential component of philosophizing, one reason why philosophy majors do so well on the LSAT. At the very beginning of his speech, Socrates advises us of the continuity between what he will do in court and his philosophical examination of people in the agora (17c), a warning he recalls during his cross-examination of Meletus on the witness stand immediately following his important invitation: "Examine with me, gentlemen, how he appears to contradict himself, and you, Meletus, answer us. Remember, gentlemen, what I asked you when I began, not to create a disturbance if I proceed in my usual manner" (27b, see also footnote 13 above).

Socrates ties philosophizing even more directly to the courtroom in the *Phaedo*, where he compares his argument for a positive after-life—an important topic at the end of the *Apology*, as we will see—to his courtroom defense. When Simmias and Cebes initially raise their questions, Socrates responds,

You are both justified in what you say [δίκαια, ἔφη, λέγετε (*dikaia legete*)], and I think you mean that *I must make a defense* [ἀπολογήσασθαι (*apologēsasthai*)] *against this, as if I were in court.*

You certainly must, said Simmias.

Come then, he said, *let me try to make my defense* [ἀπολογία (*apologian*)] *to you more convincing than it was to the jury* [δικαστᾶς (*dikastas*)]. . . . *I want to make my argument* [λόγον (*logon*)] *before you, my judges* [ὁ δικασταὶ], as to why I think that a man who has truly spent his life in philosophy is probably right to be of good cheer in the face of death and to be very hopeful that after death he will attain the greatest blessings yonder. (*Phaedo* 63b-d, all italics added)³³

Socrates begins by judging their arguments to be just (*dikaia legete*), thereby displaying the excellence of the true jurymen himself. Then, as *Phaedo* the narrator of the dialogue says, Socrates "turned us around to join him in the examination of their argument," noting, "I have certainly often admired Socrates, Echecrates, but never more than on this occasion" (*Phaedo* 89a). They must now be the judges of the justice of his rebuttal as he gives his "defense [ἀπολογία (*apologian*)]. . . as if I were in court" to his closest philosophical followers who have gathered around him at his death, whom he calls "my judges" [ὁ δικασταὶ], the same word as in the *Apology*.

However, the *Apology* is not addressed to those who are philosophers alongside him but rather to those who might become so, who might yet learn the art of rational questioning. That some *will* succeed is the object of his prophecy: "There will be more people to test you" (39c). That some *do* succeed by the end of the dialogue is shown by his addressing the "men of Athens" as those "I would rightly call jurymen" (40a). At the beginning Socrates defines a true judge as one who is able to analyze arguments rationally, philosophically, and at the end he tells some of them that they have achieved this status. Socrates' defense is not for him because he is not on trial; he knows he is innocent and is not concerned with what happens to him. It is the jury that is on trial to determine whether they can become true jurymen or not. Just as the oracle's proclamation did not *describe* Socrates' superior wisdom but *brought it about*, so the trial does not discover true jurymen. It is itself the process that gives some men of Athens the skills to continue his questioning duty.

In fact, this process had already begun in the self-realizing sentence that initially redefined true jurymen: “my present request seems a just one, for you to pay no attention to my manner of speech—be it better or worse—but to concentrate your attention on whether what I say is just or not, for the excellence of a judge lies in this, as that of a speaker lies in telling the truth” (18a). The task Socrates assigns to the excellent judge is to determine “whether what I say is just or not,” but he introduces this assignment by proposing it itself as a just claim—“my present request seems a just one.” Thus, before they can decide whether or not to take up the assignment of determining “whether what I say is just or not,” they must first determine whether *the request to do so* is just or not—which is itself an instance of the activity they are considering whether or not to engage in. Rejecting it as unjust would commit the very action they are rejecting, so that even refusing to commit the act exercises the activity they seek to escape—philosophizing. In this one sentence laying out the task of the philosopher by analogy, Socrates obliges his listeners to begin philosophizing; he presses them into the service of philosophy *by* describing it.

The first prophecy was the god’s “riddle,” the interpretation of which led Socrates to create his philosophical method of *elenchus*³⁴. The second prophecy of future practitioners of this method can also be traced to the hermeneutic unravelling of a riddle, as this is how he half-jokingly imagines Meletus’ motivation for mounting such obviously self-contradictory charges against him.

You cannot be believed, Meletus, even, I think, by yourself. The man appears to me, men of Athens, highly insolent and uncontrolled. . . . *He is like one who composed a riddle* and is trying it out: “Will *the wise Socrates* realize that I am jesting and *contradicting myself*, or shall I deceive him and others?” I think he contradicts himself in the affidavit, as if he said: “Socrates is guilty of not believing in gods but believing in gods,” and surely that is the part of a jester!

Examine with me, gentlemen, how he appears to contradict himself, and you, Meletus, answer us. Remember, gentlemen, what I asked you when I began, not to create a disturbance if I proceed in my usual manner. (27a-b, all italics added)

Socrates must ask what this too means since it “cannot be believed,” any more than the god’s attribution to him of unsurpassed wisdom. Where the first riddle about “the wise Socrates” led him to discover *elenchus*, the second provides the opportunity for him to teach it as he leads the “men of Athens” through the examination of Meletus’ contradictions. They will learn this technique of judging the justice of arguments if they listen with open minds rather than angrily creating a disturbance upon hearing the same type of discourse that angered Athenians enough to bring Socrates to trial.

In another instance of the two registers that dialogue simultaneously takes place in, the cross-examination of *Meletus* enacts exactly the kind of questioning that Socrates describes drawing crowds of “young men who follow me around.”

These sons of the very rich, take pleasure in hearing people questioned; they themselves often imitate me and try to question others. I think they find an abundance of men who believe they have some knowledge but know little or nothing. The result is that those whom they question are angry, not with themselves but with me. They say: “That man Socrates is a pestilential fellow who corrupts the young”. . . . They mention those accusations that are available against all philosophers, about “things in the sky and things below the earth,” about “not believing in the gods” and “making the worse the stronger argument”. (23c-d)

If we examine this description, we see that it describes the *Apology* point for point, especially the *Meletus*, which it immediately precedes. Here, the jury is the crowd “hearing people questioned”—i.e., Meletus, standing in for all three contemporary accusers. The

questioning exposes him to be a man who “believe[s he has] some knowledge but know[s] little or nothing:” “I say that Meletus is guilty of dealing frivolously with serious matters, . . . and of professing to be seriously concerned with things about none of which he has ever cared, and I shall try to prove that this is so” (24c). The result of these past questionings has been to anger people enough to level the exact charges that Socrates now faces.

The past activity he recounts as what brought him into the courtroom is precisely what is recurring now in the courtroom as he demands an account from his accuser. Socrates’ speech represents it; his mini-dialogue presents it³⁵. Hearing Meletus being questioned places the jury into the same position as the “young men.” If the questioning has the same effect on the questioned (here, Meletus)—provoking angry accusations—it stands to reason that those hearing it will also have parallel reactions: they will either erupt in the outraged disturbances Socrates repeatedly (six times) warns them against³⁶ when “those whom they question are angry, not with themselves but with me” (23c), or “they themselves often imitate me and try to question others.” Socrates is giving men of Athens the training to become true jurymen who will go on to take the place of the “young men” who will examine those who failed the test³⁷.

Socrates’ questions to Meletus about who makes “our young men be as good as possible” (24d) end in aporia, with Meletus’ inability to give a substantive answer revealing his thoughtlessness. In fact, *these very questions* are the improvement of the “young men” represented by the jury. As with the question about piety from the *Euthyphro*, Socrates does not *say* the answer; *he is* the answer³⁸.

3.3. The Second Person

As a speech to the jury, the apologia of Socrates is written in the second person, and this has a broader rhetorical effect. It is a truism which is nevertheless true that interlocutors in Platonic dialogues serve as stand-ins for the reader. This splits the audience such that while Socrates is questioning Euthyphro or Crito, the dialogue as a whole is vicariously questioning us, the reader. The text assumes a double meaning where that which happens *within* the text also occurs—as the same but different—*with* the text. “The *Apology*” can function both as a common noun referring to the speech Socrates gives within the text and as proper name for the text that we are reading—each sense functioning due to the other³⁹.

Along with the jury, then, Socrates’ courtroom speech also speaks to us readers. The effect that his speech has on the internal audience, I have been arguing, is that it trains them to be true judges by teaching how to listen to arguments for justice or validity based on reason rather than emotion. The entire dialogue is an *action* that converts its listeners into philosophers by inducing them to cross-examine Meletus’ beliefs along with Socrates. He is doing what he can to ensure that the task that God has given him will continue to be served, his assigned post guarded after he has stopped drawing breath, by making followers who can do it for him. This action too is doubled for its two audiences—the intra-textual jury and the readers of the text.

For here is where the author appears within his own writing, one of only three times Plato’s name is mentioned in all of his dialogues (we will discuss the others below). Socrates names him as one of the followers whose relatives can serve as witnesses to his ostensible corrupting influence (34a). Identifying Plato as one of his young followers, along with the large amount of money that he later joins in on offering to pay Socrates’ fine in the second mention of his name (38b), strongly suggests that Plato is one of the “sons of the very rich [who] take pleasure in hearing people questioned; they themselves often imitate me and try to question others” (23c) mentioned earlier. These are presumably the “younger” examiners who will fulfill the second prophecy by continuing this Socratic questioning after his death (39d). Bringing these three passages together shows Socrates’ prophecy to

be about, among others, Plato. He is not just the dialogue's author, nor should his two brief appearances be taken to indicate a trivial status within it. Plato represents the main fulfillment of the *Apology*'s second prophecy, which, as the way Socrates ensures that his god-given task continues, is itself the full fulfillment of the first.

As postmodern authors know, placing yourself within your own writing creates strange effects. Plato splits himself between character and author. There is the younger Plato present at the events of the dialogue, and there is the older looking back on them in his past. Plato is both the effect of what transpires within this dialogue, forever formed by Socrates' fate, and as that effect becomes the cause of the dialogue's existence.

As the one character inside the dialogue who is also coming to it from its textual and temporal outside, he is the only one who actually knows Socrates' fate. Socrates' predicted future passes onto the page as now Plato's past memory. Plato places foreshadowings of Socrates' trial in the mouths of characters in several other dialogues⁴⁰, and he knows that the action he is taking at the moment of writing the *Apology* is the ultimate fulfillment of Socrates' prophecy in the actual trial. The author's immediate present, in which he is recollecting his past, is the implementation of the future that his character Socrates foresees occurring—in the text, as the text. Socrates' apologia only reached the 501 people of the jury and any others who happened to be present, a small pool of candidates to recruit his younger examiners from. The *Apology of Socrates*, on the other hand, is available to all who follow where it can have its intended effect on countless generations to come ("they will be younger" (39d)).

In other words, now that Plato has written it down, the speech's "you" does not just speak to the men of Athens; it also addresses anyone who reads it. *Now* the invitation to "examine with me, gentlemen, how he appears to contradict himself" (27a), the guidance that Socrates offers in the *Meletus* in order to pass on to others the method of *elenchus* that the oracle enjoined upon Socrates, is an open invitation to all of humanity. And those he "rightly call[s] jurymen" (40a) at the end, those who have acquitted themselves before the tribunal of philosophy, will not be merely the successful "men of Athens" among whom Socrates is a foreigner [ξένος (*xenos*)] who "spoke in that dialect and manner in which I had been brought up" (17d)—what was then the foreign tongue of rational discourse. Anyone who reads the dialogue critically and engages with it rationally by examining the arguments with him will begin learning this new discourse and will join his realm of ends which transcends the limitations of time, space, or nationality. As in postmodern writings, this blurs the line between inside and outside the text, fiction and non-fiction. Socrates' inculcation of "the excellence of a judge" (18a) in "you" emerges *from* the page to have a direct effect on contemporary readers while conversely bringing us *into* the text by making us members of the rightly defined jury judging the justice of his words.

Plato's inscription of Socrates' speech alters it while leaving it the same, fulfilling the prophecy by changing its subject from Socrates' immediate followers and the men of Athens to now denoting any reader who reads it well. Such an alteration of significance is the signature of oracular fulfillments, such as the way Croesus' realization changed the significance of "a great empire" and Oedipus "my own father" ([16], 793). While the spoken prophecy that there will continue to be examiners denotes a specific group of young people, the *written* prophecy functions as open-ended training that enacts its predicted fate, writ large. It makes itself true, bringing the subject matter it describes into reality by describing it. These words are a deed, an action, by remaining a description⁴¹. They are a literally self-fulfilling prophecy by literarily bringing about the future they foretell, for surely this writing has made more people philosophers than any other.

Plato, though, took greater measures than this to ensure its realization. In addition to writing down Socrates' words so that people could keep reading them, he also created the

very institution of education that teaches people *how* to read them. Plato's Academy is the genuine reality of which Aristophanes' Thinkery is the faint, distorted image; it provides an innovative solution to the *Meno*'s concluding aporia by substituting an institution for "the kind of statesman who can create another like himself" (*Meno* 100a). It does the same thing that Socrates does here—instructing people in how to follow his cross-examination of people like Meletus—on a vastly expanded scale. It creates philosophers by teaching how to philosophize, constituting an even greater "defense" of Socrates' legacy by ensuring philosophy as a tradition. Socrates' guidance of the men of Athens through how to examine beliefs for contradictions in the mini-dialogue in the courtroom stands in for Plato's teaching students how to read the dialogues as a whole in his Academy. What the former does with a dialogue with Meletus the latter does with the dialogue *Meletus*, one offering an apologia, the other the *Apology*. Plato created the institution of creating people who will continue the process of examining arguments for contradictions, fulfilling Socrates' prophecy more fully than Socrates could have imagined.

The oracle's prophecy thus assigned Socrates the task of examining people's beliefs for the men of Athens. Socrates' prophecy passes this on to Plato now that he will no longer be drawing breath, charging this younger son to instill wisdom in future, younger generations through imitations of his questioning⁴². The oracle created Socrates as the philosopher who conducts dialogues; Socrates created Plato as the philosopher who will write the dialogues that he conducted—including the *Apology* which tells the prophecies that led Socrates to become the philosopher of dialogues and himself the author who wrote this dialogue retelling these foretellings. Socrates' prophecy describes and creates the person who would come to make it true when Plato made it come true by writing down the prophecy predicting him. Socrates' presaging of future examiners came into its fullest truth when his greatest young examiner wrote it down; in direct opposition to Plato's standard views of writing, it became really real (*óntōs ón*) in being written down.

The oracle's foretelling created Socrates as philosopher; Socrates' telling of that as his courtroom defense created Plato as philosopher; Plato's retelling of Socrates' telling of the oracle's foretelling brings *us* into existence. Prophecy begets prophecy as philosopher begets philosopher in an unending torchlight race of pedagogical enlightenment. We philosophical readers, we sons and daughters of Socrates' *elenchus*, exist and so can fulfill Socrates' prophecy in no small part because of Plato's writings—including, tellingly, this dialogue which prophesies our existence. Indeed, what am I doing now if not reading through Socrates' words, examining their consequences to find that they entail this demand to listen to them for precisely this, this demand that recurs in the beginning, middle, and end of the dialogue?

Concentrate your attention on whether what I say is just or not, for the excellence of a judge lies in this. (18a)

Examine with me, gentlemen, how he appears to contradict himself. (27b)

When my sons grow up... reproach them as I reproach you... If you do this, I shall have been justly treated by you, and my sons also. (41e-42a)

And what are you doing to my paper at this very moment but living out the legacy of this text that hands down that legacy by yourself doing what it demands?

Inscribing the *Apology* makes it the self-fulfillment of the prophecies it is describing.

4. The Third Prophecy: The After-Life

The third prophecy comes at the end of the *Apology*. Its source is neither the god nor Socrates himself but rather his prophetic sign, his *daimonion*—another source of his prosecution (*Euthyphro* 3b-c). This sign opposes him when he is about to do something

wrong, yet it has maintained silence throughout all he has said and done during the trial, despite its eventuating in his death. Socrates interprets this silence as proof that his death is a good thing.

His making this claim is a little peculiar given that Socrates had earlier singled out his acknowledgment of complete ignorance of the afterlife as the single best instance of his wisdom/ignorance.

It is perhaps on this point and in this respect, gentlemen, that I differ from the majority of men, and *if I were to claim that I am wiser than anyone in anything*, it would be in this, that, as *I have no adequate knowledge of things in the underworld*, so I do not think I have. (29a-b, all italics added)

He bases his defense against his first, more important accusers on his claim to being “wiser than anyone,” which he here rests on admitting his specific ignorance of “things in the underworld,” which should make him extremely wary of making any speculations on the subject whatsoever. While his final speech does contain some qualifications, he also offers some rather strong epistemological warrant: “What has happened to me may well be a good thing, and those of us who believe death to be an evil are *certainly* mistaken. I have *convincing proof* of this, for it is *impossible* that my familiar sign did not oppose me if I was not about to do what was right” (40b-c, all italics added).

Socrates gives two distinct but related arguments for regarding death positively, the first being the sign’s silence during his speech.

To you, as being my friends, I want to show the meaning of what has occurred. A surprising thing has happened to me, jurymen—you I would rightly call jurymen. At all previous times my familiar prophetic power [μοι μαντική ἢ τοῦ δαιμονίου], my spiritual manifestation, frequently opposed me, even in small matters, when I was about to do something wrong, but now that, as you can see for yourselves, I was faced with what one might think, and what is generally thought to be, the worst of evils, my divine sign [θεοῦ σημεῖον] has not opposed me, either when I left home at dawn, or when I came into court, or at any time that I was about to say something during my speech. Yet in other talks it often held me back in the middle of my speaking, but now it has opposed no word or deed of mine. What do I think is the reason for this? I will tell you. What has happened to me may well be a good thing, and those of us who believe death to be an evil are certainly mistaken. I have convincing proof of this, for it is impossible that my familiar sign did not oppose me if I was not about to do what was right. (40a-c)

As with the first prophecy, we once again have a prophetic source that Socrates feels the need to interpret for his audience⁴³.

This hermeneutic imperative is due to the fact that his sign never gives positive directions as to what to do but only warns him against doing certain things, like a Socratic Spidey-sense. In the present case, it is its absence that is informative. Because it did not stop him, it tacitly endorsed this course of action as well as its consequence—his death. Socrates feels it is speaking quite clearly—he’s betting his life on it—but it is speaking precisely by not speaking. Its silence is its statement; its communication, the lack thereof. So once again, the prophet neither speaks (quite literally) nor does it conceal but rather commits a distinct combination of the two opposites: its lack of speaking is revealing. Socrates’ divine sign (θεοῦ σημεῖον) communicates just as Heraclitus’ Fragment B93 says an oracular σημάζειν is supposed to.

The second argument is that death is either a dreamless sleep, which would be pleasant, or a journey to Hades. He spends some time describing the latter and how positive it should be: “what greater blessing could there be, gentlemen of the jury?” (40e)⁴⁴. This would

enable him to continue doing after his death the very thing that brought death to him: “most important, I could spend my time testing and examining people there, as I do here, as to who among them is wise, and who thinks he is, but is not” (41b). Just as he maintains the same form of discourse in the courtroom that he practiced prior to his case (17c), so he will keep it up long afterwards. In such an afterlife he could continue doing “the greatest good for a man to discuss virtue every day and those other things about which you hear me conversing and testing myself and others” (38a). Examining beliefs not only makes life worth living; it makes death worth dying for and living ever after as well.

As his afterlife lies in the future at the time of the speech, this description of it is a prophecy, if one qualified and hedged by “ifs” and “it would be.”⁴⁵ The first prophecy created Socrates as a philosopher; the second created those who would follow him to perform the duty that the first charged him with if death prevented him from doing so. The third now speaks of Socrates continuing this activity himself despite his death. And, as with the second prophecy, we have a witness to his future, his literal after-life, i.e., what occurs after he stops living. Plato’s position as author gives him retroactive prophetic powers; he knows the future that Socrates speaks of, for it lies in *his* past.

The same act that fulfilled the second prophecy fulfills the third, the act that defines the Plato we know today: his writing of the dialogues. Recall the truism that the interlocutor is a stand-in for you, the reader, though the *Apology* thins this veil by directly addressing the reader in the second person. Reading a dialogue with the excellence of a reader corresponds to that of the jury—judging the justice of what Socrates says:

as long as I draw breath and am able, I shall not cease to practice philosophy, to exhort you and in my usual way to point out to any one of you whom I happen to meet: ‘...Are you not ashamed of your eagerness to possess as much wealth, reputation, and honors as possible, while you do not care for nor give thought to wisdom or truth, or the best possible state of your soul?’ Then, if one of you disputes this and says he does care, I shall not let him go at once or leave him, but I shall question him, examine him, and test him, and if I do not think he has attained the goodness that he says he has, I shall reproach him. (29d-e)

Both addressees of the speech’s “you” must judge the justice of these accusations that define the “usual way” of speech, which begins by promising/warning to continue here (17c). The reader must take Socrates’ questions seriously, as directed at *you*, demanding that you answer for yourself. Reading the dialogues excellently means letting his questions genuinely question you, forcing you to reexamine your own assumptions as the interlocutor is supposed to do within the dialogue. The dialogue between characters initiates a second dialogue between itself and the reader. The text literally examines your beliefs.

When a first-year college student today reads the *Euthyphro*, for example, they should not passively look on but rather accept Socrates’ invitation: “examine with me.” Since the interlocutor is a stand-in for the reader, this means allowing themselves to be examined, asking themselves the questions put to the interlocutor. “What *is* piety? What do *I* think about this? *Why* do I think that? Do *I* have any contradictions among *my* beliefs?” The writing literally—and literarily—initiates a dialogue that asks questions of you, the reader. This means that every time someone reads one of the dialogues, Socrates in a very real way questions people philosophically—after his life is over.

He said that he would continue practicing philosophy as long as he drew breath, which seemed like it would end with the hemlock. But in ancient Greece, reading was done aloud such that a reader lends their breath back to the words Socrates spoke so that he may speak them again. We are in a sense pushing our breath through his mouth in a recitation respiration resuscitation⁴⁶.

In line with the Presentational Model of Language, Socrates is not talking about this society but calling into existence one whose citizens lie in the future: “they will be younger” (39d). Transferring his philosophizing into the after-life completes the establishment of actual jury/judge/philosophers, as the first thing he notes about the underworld is that there “true jurymen” would take the place of the false jurymen who populate our sadly shaded world.

Anyone arriving in Hades will have escaped from those who call themselves jurymen here, and will find those true jurymen who are said to sit in judgment there. (41a)

It is after his life that he will find himself in the company of those who will engage with him on the basis of reason rather than emotion. “It would be an extraordinary happiness to talk with them, to keep company with them and examine them. In any case, they would certainly not put one to death for doing so” (41c). Socrates is foreshadowing a time when he will no longer be the only one liberated from the cave’s shadows.

We readers are the fulfillment of this divination, who came about *because* of it; we readers who fulfill it *by* reading it. Socrates presages far into the future, just as Heraclitus had foretold in his prophecy of prophecies.

The Sibyl with raving mouth uttering mirthless [and unadorned and unperfumed phrases, reaches a thousand years in her voice on account of the god]. (B92)

The opening sentences of the dialogue draw attention to the fact that Socrates is not “an accomplished speaker at all. . . . From me you will hear the whole truth, though not, by Zeus, gentlemen, *expressed in embroidered and stylized phrases* like theirs, but things *spoken at random* and expressed in the first words that come to mind, for I put my trust in the justice of what I say” (17b-c, all italics added). His phrases will not be “embroidered and stylized” but rather “unadorned and unperfumed,” “spoken at random.” This *will* be beautiful rhetoric if we accept his redefinition and “call an accomplished speaker the man who speaks the truth” (17b), similar to Heraclitus’ recoining of beauty: “the most beautiful kosmos. . . a pile of things poured out at random” (B124). And it is through these unadorned phrases that Socrates’ prophecy does in fact reach beyond a thousand years, performing “my investigation in the service of the god” (22a). Indeed, it is obedience to his interpretation of the Sybil that sets him on his path towards this after-life.

I realized, to my sorrow and alarm, that I was getting unpopular, but *I thought that I must attach the greatest importance to the god’s oracle*, so I must go to all those who had any reputation for knowledge to examine its meaning. (21e, italics added)⁴⁷

It is his “unadorned and unperfumed” defense that the actions that angered Athenians were done “on account of the god,” that angered the men of Athens enough to condemn him to death—a death which then immortalized him.

The *Apology* as a text is what fulfills its final prophecy, conducting Socrates safely into the underworld to become a literary shade who comes back to life when read⁴⁸. He describes it mythologically as the underworld, but every time a reader asks if Socrates was right or if they should obey an unjust law, Socrates actually is examining their beliefs. He is doing exactly what he said he would do in his afterlife, what he did in his life—forever.

It would be an extraordinary happiness to. . . examine them. . . . For the rest of time they are deathless, if indeed what we are told is true. (41c)

By writing it down, Plato turned the moment when Athenians condemned Socrates to death into the moment that gave him eternal life—the ironically reversed fulfillment of the third prophecy. It is the *Apology*’s prophecy of becoming immortal in asking people questions that *makes* him immortally ask questions of people. Like the first two, the third prophecy is also self-creating, self-realizing. It has been going on for 25 centuries, and, as

perhaps the most common book to start people into philosophy, there is no sign of it ending any time in the foreseeable future.

Standing Surety

Here is where the second appearance of Plato's name becomes relevant. It occurs during Socrates' proposal of a counter-punishment to the death penalty proffered by the prosecution. He first suggests getting free meals at the Prytaneum since the great benefit he has rendered deserves a considerable reward, and then moves on to a fine since at least that would not harm him (38b). Given his poverty, invoked repeatedly throughout the dialogue (including as evidence of his serving the god), he proposes a modest amount that he could afford, one mina of silver. It is at that moment that he is interrupted.

Let us note this moment well.

This is the only moment in all of his writings that Plato and Socrates talk to each other. These two philosophers dedicated themselves to dialogue—one only philosophized in dialogue, living his life for it and dying his death for it; the other only wrote in it and perhaps taught with it—and this brief exchange is the only time an actual dialogue between them takes place⁴⁹. Plato was very young when Socrates died, so he could never meet and talk with him as an adult, as a fully formed thinker, something he must have keenly felt, like people whose parents died before they could form an adult relationship with them⁵⁰.

But here they speak. While the *Apology* is on the surface one of the least dialogical of Plato's works, consisting almost entirely of a speech, it can also be seen as the most important dialogue he ever had. Plato is writing this as an adult, placing himself into his writing as a character who can meet Socrates as a character in the scene, because writing can do one of the most important things that Plato looked to philosophy to do: it can overcome time. It can allow them to meet and talk even if real life cruelly denied them the chance. Unlike the unhappy recipients of the oracle's pronouncements, Plato will defy the tragic destiny allotted him by putting himself into the past where he can speak to his master, the greatest man he ever knew⁵¹.

Coming to him from his future, knowing his destiny, what did Plato journey through time to say to him?

Plato here, men of Athens, and Crito and Critobulus and Apollodorus bid me put the penalty at thirty minas, and *they will stand surety* [ἐγγυῶσθαι (*engousthai*)] *for the money*. Well then, that is my assessment, and *they will be sufficient guarantee* [ἐγγυηταὶ ἀξιόχρεοι (*enguetai axiochreoi*)] *of payment*. (38b, all italics added)

It seems innocuous—showing Plato's loyalty, that he did not abandon his teacher but tried to help him, as Socrates says twice⁵². But examine this with me, reader, a little more closely.

Socrates does not fear his own death but that of philosophy. He is not worried about his welfare but that of the people who will no longer have anyone to question them⁵³. This is the worry that haunts him as he is led off to die. In this crucial moment in Socrates' life, in the history of Western civilization, at his condemnation to death, Plato returns to him. He tells him, "go ahead and pledge more—I will stand surety for you." The definition of "standing surety" is "to agree to be legally responsible if another person fails to pay a debt or to perform a duty."

As we have seen, Socrates uses the analogy that he has been commanded to man a post by the god, the abandoning of which would be shameful for him and harmful for Athens. His death, the end of his drawing the breath that allows him to live and speak, would seem to force him to evacuate that post, leaving it empty, his charge unprotected. This most religious of men would no longer be able to perform his god-given duty. I think Plato is turning back time, returning to his master to tell him,

I will guarantee your pledge. I will make sure your duty is done if you cannot. Your post will not be abandoned. This quest that you have given your whole adult life to, that you are now giving your life *for*, will succeed. I know that it succeeds because I have become your successor. I have written down your words. I have created the institution and practice that teaches people how to think by teaching them how to question just as you did in your defense. I have made your prophecies about your followers and about your afterlife true by relaying your prophecies.

Plato is using his art to overcome time, to win out over fate, to beat death like Sisyphus did⁵⁴ so he can reassure his beloved master who did so much for him that he can rest peacefully, knowing that he will never rest⁵⁵.

It is so very sad.

It is so very beautiful.

He is telling his master that the torch he lit will not gutter out but will be passed down through generations, like the “torchlight race. . . in honor of the goddess”, where the riders “carry torches and pass them along to one another” (*Republic* 328a), like a chain of freed prisoners each returning to free the next. This is how Plato describes true teaching in the *Seventh Letter*:

I certainly have composed no work in regard to [knowledge of the subjects to which I devote myself], nor shall I ever do so in future, for there is no way of putting it in words like other studies. Acquaintance with it must come rather after a long period of attendance on instruction in the subject itself and of close companionship, when, suddenly, like a blaze kindled by a leaping spark, it is generated in the soul and at once becomes self-sustaining. (*Letter VII* 341c-d)

Plato is writing the reason his subject cannot be written—a semantic tragedy—or perhaps ironically reversed fulfillment⁵⁶. Only person-to-person contact can pass the spark of enlightenment—the very kind of contact he is capturing in writing here in the *Apology*, the one recorded moment of contact between Plato and Socrates when Plato assures Socrates that his teaching has taken root, that his wisdom will be passed on in this writing. This is the paradigmatic moment of education, the education of the first educator, of which every subsequent moment is an instantiation participating in it.

The specific *type* of surety offered is significant, too. Plato tells him that he will give him money for his survival—two things Socrates waves away as unimportant⁵⁷. But there was another, more portentous function that money served in ancient Greece. In funeral rites, the dead’s friends and family’s highest obligation was to make sure they got into the underworld, the topic of the third prophecy. The way to ensure safe passage into Hades was to give them a coin for Charon the ferryman to take them across the river Styx that separates the world of the living from that of the dead. They would place it in the corpse’s mouth—where one breathes and talks⁵⁸.

Plato is giving Socrates what any Greek needed to safely pass into the underworld, a coin in his mouth, and that coin is the *Apology* itself. The *Apology* stands surety for Socrates, performing the duty he needed to do and conducting the activity he yearned to continue after his death—inspiring people to philosophize and teaching them how to do it by questioning them. Socrates will forever talk *about* talking forever because Plato’s coin ensures Socrates’ transition from flesh and blood into words and page, the kind of immaterialization he defines as the death proper to a philosopher in the *Phaedo*. He will die and be reborn every time someone reads this work, his *Apology* defending him against the death that it sentences him to. “Whether you acquit me or not, do so on the understanding that this is my course of action, even if I am to face death many times” (30c). At the end of the dialogue, Socrates connects his commitment to repeated deaths to two of ancient

Greece's greatest authors: "what would one of you give to keep company with. . . Hesiod and Homer? I am willing to die many times" (41a).

Plato inserted himself into the text, into the past, to pass a message to Socrates, a message about the message he is sending—which is ultimately nothing other than the message itself. "My dearest friend, my greatest benefactor, my philosophical father, look—I have placed my coin into your mouth that you may still speak, still question. Your legacy lives on, your post remains guarded and your land kept safe; you are still with me as I am with you as we will be together forever, our words having slipped the bonds of time that bound our bodied selves." This one recorded exchange of words between the two—when Plato gratefully tells Socrates he will "stand surety for" him, a guarantee that Socrates gladly accepts—is safeguarded between pages for all time, defended *from* all time. Plato will always assure Socrates that the coin ensuring his crossing into immortality is secure; Socrates will always appreciatively acknowledge this gift from the future, the gift *of* a future—as they exchange the gift that is nothing beyond the endless continuance of their mutual giving of their gift. He is telling Socrates that he can sink into that "dreamless sleep" (40d) he welcomes because the text sustains a dream of Socrates that has now become our dream, yours and mine, passed from teacher to student through ages of questions in a continuously renewing reenactment of this very moment in the *Apology*, every instance participating in the paradigmatic pedagogical relationship formed here for the first time, for all time, between the man who created philosophical dialogue and the man who invented academia.

What Plato sees when he looks backwards in time towards Socrates is his beloved teacher looking forward, his second prophecy foretelling future followers carrying forward the questioning he created—which is *just what Plato is doing with the writing of this text*, the text that tells Socrates' foretelling of this future retelling of his foretelling, now forevermore. Socrates' third prophecy looks further forward to all of *us* looking back to him, reanimating him by resuscitating⁵⁹ his speech, keeping him forever at his task like a happy Sisyphus. Plato's writing of this dialogue *is* his recollection of the presaging that *is* the thing that created us as the kind of people who could keep Socrates and his practice alive by maintaining our dialogue with it. Socrates glimpses a shadow of his fate cast backwards in time within the speech forecasting his paged passage to deathlessness. Ignorant of the success of his defense of philosophy, he remains assured by his successor's recollected surety.

The main topic of *The Apology* is *The Apology*. It is as much about Plato as it is about Socrates, as much about the author's writing as the subject's speech. It is Plato's inscription of his own origin into the underside of Socrates' description of his, as the story of Socrates' education *is* Plato's. Perhaps an appropriate subtitle for *The Apology of Socrates* would be *The Education of Plato*, in both senses of the genitive in both titles. Or just the title, *The Education of Socrates*: reading the genitive objectively (how Socrates was educated) refers to the first prophecy; subjectively (how Socrates educated), the second and third. Reading this ostensibly straightforward dialogue the way this paper does reveals an intricate structure that folds in on itself, multiplying itself endlessly by being about nothing but itself.

All three prophecies address the central topic of the dialogue, the efficient and final cause of Socrates' life, and death and afterlife: his philosophizing. The first prophecy traces its cause from Socrates' past up to its result in the present trial. The second's foretelling of his future followers reaches through time and page from Plato's past into our present to draft disciple, and readers from his future into carrying his mission forward. The third projects him into our presence, helping us recollect his ignorance again and again that we may learn it ever anew into our future. The text describes, addresses, foretells, and creates—all at once, all with the same words.

This moment of writing is a nexus where past and future, foresight and revision, foretelling and retelling, teacher and student, ignorance and wisdom, prediction and recol-

lection all gather and cross. Not a self-contained bygone now-moment but an interweaving of opposing tenses into a Heraclitean strife of interdependent harmony as these historical figures look at each other across time, from opposite sides of the page to reassure each other about the succession of the philosophizing they are each conducting at that very moment, the philosophizing by pen and by breath that even in death they “shall not cease to practice” (29d). Socrates is speaking about Plato writing about us reading about him, prospectively conjuring us into existence so that we may retrospectively summon him back to life like a shade who will continue serving his divine mission from after his death, through an after-life forever recounting the philosophical birth that condemned him to an immortal death, in a Möbius strip of time and prophecy.

5. Conclusions: The Coin and the Key

The *Apology of Socrates* itself presents the fulfillment of the prophecies of Socrates it contains. It solves the Oracle’s riddle which called forth Socrates’ wise ignorance by calling him wise, his wisdom brought about by his ironic dis-proof of its perplexing prediction of it. He carries out its divine command in this very speech about it *by* speaking about its issuance and the process of interpretation that led him to his method of *elenctic* questioning and then displaying that method in his exposure of Meletus’ ignorant ignorance. The *Apology* fulfills the second prophecy of future examiners by turning some “men of Athens” into “true jurymen” who assess arguments rationally after participating in the cross-examination presented to them in his and its and their defense. When the most important of those young rich followers who “imitate me and try to question others” (23c) writes down this prediction as well as the mini-dialogue of his *apologia*, the *Apology* goes on to question countless readers, generating generations of “younger” (39d) examiners of Socrates’ examinations far into his future—all the way to this examination we are conducting right here, right now. The telling of its foretelling brings about that which is foretold. And the writing achieves the third prophecy by itself constituting Socrates’ foreseen continuation of his examination of beliefs after his life ends, after his breath ceases, as we question after his manner. The *Apology*’s representation of the dialogue with Meletus enclosed within the dialogue with the jury simultaneously questions us, presenting a dialogue with the reader⁶⁰ so that, “deathless” (41c) in his literary afterlife, Socrates may continue inculcating the examined life ever after.

Writing is what saves Socrates and fulfills his prophecies yet, in what is perhaps the Platonic irony, the great writer Plato scorns it. He writes that writing, sometimes language as a whole, cannot serve as a vehicle for philosophical teaching, sometimes that it cannot faithfully contain ideas at all, scolding those who commit their thoughts to words⁶¹. The reasons for its inadequacy are:

- (1) Names are a far-removed representation of reality, occupying a fifth place behind or beneath something like the four levels of the Analogy of the Divided Line (*Republic* 509d-11e)⁶².
- (2) Language’s inherent instability prevents it from being able to speak of the really real, which does not change⁶³.
- (3) Writing cannot discern or direct itself to its proper audience but rather addresses anyone who reads it in the same manner⁶⁴.
- (4) Writing can only say the same thing over and over again, never changing, and so cannot participate in an intelligent dialogue⁶⁵.

Problem 1 shows the Representational Model of Language to be the foundation of Plato’s objections. Viewing language as a representation at a remove from what it represents is what leads to Problem 2 since stability lessens the further we get from true reality.

However, the criticism’s basis on the Representational Model means that it only applies if we understand writing that way. An alternate model could give us a language that escapes

these four problems and thus could by Plato's own lights be capable of philosophizing, conversing, and educating.

In the Presentational Model, language *is* its own reality; it creates what it talks about by talking about it. This removes Plato's fundamental issue with language (Problem 1) by showing it not to be at a remove from reality. A language that brings about and presents its subject is what it speaks about, eliminating the separation betwixt word and world that allows in error and distortion.

Presentational language also solves Problem 3. The *Apology* does not need to *seek* its proper audience because it *creates* it. The text presents the ur-technique of philosophical examination of beliefs for consistency, inspiring Socrates' greatest follower to form the institution of education that trains future followers to examine texts. This brought into being the tradition that makes the false jurymen's attempt to end philosophy backfire with oracular irony—the tradition that Socrates is creating in speaking his *apologia*, that Plato is instituting in the moment he captures it in writing the *Apology*, and that we are carrying on in this moment in which we are examining it in reading it.

Socrates articulates Problem 3 in the *Phaedrus*, perhaps his best-known critique of language, where he complains that

once a thing is put in writing, the composition, whatever it may be, drifts all over the place, getting into the hands not only of those who understand it, but equally of those who have no business with it; it doesn't know how to address the right people, and not address the wrong. (*Phaedrus* 275d-e)

This critique *precisely* does not apply to the *Apology*. This writing is a device for *transforming* the “wrong” people who “who have no business with” such work—the men of Athens who react with emotion and commotion in the courtroom—into true jurymen—the “right people” “who understand it” as demonstrated by their just verdict. Far from not knowing “how to address the right people,” its use of the second person is an ingenious technique that can polysemously address different audiences with distinct messages within the same words⁶⁶—the same method used by the oracle (“a great empire,” “my own father,” “this man among you, mortals, is wisest” (23b)). The false jurors present at the trial in 399 BCE heard one defense, the true jurymen another, and readers ever after read others. Each time someone reads the work it happens afresh, speaking anew to new audiences, giving it an inexhaustible future—the strange fate Socrates embraces near the end of the dialogue: “I am willing to die many times” (41a).

Plato's critique of writing gives a somewhat conflicted status to change. Language's ability to change is one of its conspicuous flaws according to Problem 2, but an essential virtue it lacks according to Problem 4⁶⁷. Polysemy is distinctly suited to square this circle because it enables the “same” words to both change and not change, changing the notion of change by not employing the same old meaning of “same.” On the one hand the words literally remain the same words, while on the other hand they alter their significance for distinct audiences⁶⁸. Thus, from one perspective they do not change, solving Problem 2. But from another, their polysemy enables them to speak differently to different audiences, solving Problem 3. The text's ability to polysemously say ever new things to new readers also escapes Problem 4's criticism that writings just “go on telling you just the same thing forever” (*Phaedrus* 275d).

Thus, by Plato's own reasoning, the *Apology*, read as employing the Presentational conception of language, solves his four problems. It makes writing uniquely suited to philosophizing.

The *Apology* presents us with an education in how to philosophize—the topic of the Analogy of the Cave, Plato's second most famous passage⁶⁹. This writing represents—it is an analogy or likeness⁷⁰ that depicts the falsity of likenesses—while also presenting, for it itself *is* the education it describes. Reading it can start liberating us from the realm

of representations, drawing us into the presence of the true by putting us onto the path of “that ascension to reality of our parable which we will affirm to be true philosophy” (*Republic* 521c).

The Analogy of the Cave is an anti-representationalist representation that is itself what it represents, doing what it describes by describing it, presenting the education that transcends the representations it represents with its words and images, enacting the liberation it tells. As it draws us up out of representations so that we may be presented with the real, the story transforms itself from a linguistic representation of liberation into a liberating force of language. And it has a direct connection with our topic.

The Analogy of the Cave makes a veiled prophecy about the specific events that transpire in the *Apology*. It describes how badly someone who had had true Justice presented to him would fare with its meager representations in a courtroom⁷¹. Socrates foresees his death at the hands of those trapped in representations, foretelling the very death sentence issued by the men of Athens that will unlock his future foretelling powers⁷². The *Apology* presents a fuller version of the education merely pictured in the Cave Analogy. The way Socrates walks the men of Athens through the process of examining questions⁷³ must have set the pattern for how Plato taught initiates in the Academy, reading through or performing the dialogues while providing enlightening commentary or provocative questions. Socrates’ simultaneous questioning-commentary in the *Apology* presages Plato’s method of education in the Academy as foreshadowed in the Cave, a pedagogical lineage of ever more defined versions of the same idea.

The *Apology* is the coin that Plato goes back in time to give to Socrates for surety, and it is also the key foretold in the *Republic* that Socrates gave to Plato and that Plato now gives to us to unlock our fetters. It is the education of language, turning it around to draw the Presentational Model out of Representational writing. It is the key to the strange conclusion of the *Republic*, the tale of Er the warrior slain in battle who returns from death. This return allows him to tell of what happened in the underworld, “and so, Glaucon, the tale was saved, as the saying is, and was not lost. And it will save us if we believe it, and we shall safely cross the River of Lethe. . . . Thus both here and in that journey of a thousand years, whereof I have told you, we shall fare well” (*Republic* 621b-d). The tale was saved because Er drank less of the waters of “the River of Forgetfulness” than those who drank too much, “not saved by their good sense” (*Republic* 621a). This tale closing the *Republic* parallels Socrates’ third prophecy that ends the *Apology*, predicting his afterlife in the underworld. Socrates, slain in his own battle for courageously remaining at his god-given post, has “safely cross[ed] the River of Lethe.” He has been saved from forgetfulness to begin his ongoing journey, returning to us from the grave to bring us the tales that can save us. Both tales tell of themselves and of the dialogue they end while simultaneously rendering them endless.

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Notes

¹ Unless otherwise cited, all quotations are from *The Apology* in [1].

² Heidegger said, “tell me what you think of translation, and I will tell you who you are” ([2], 63). Derrida argues that Plato’s attack on writing in the *Phaedrus* is “the philosophical movement par excellence” ([3], 316; see also *ibid.* 311), and that “the

meditation upon writing and the deconstruction of the history of philosophy become inseparable" ([4], 86; see also [5], 111). Nietzsche famously said, "'reason' in language: oh, what a deceptive old woman this is! I am afraid that we have not got rid of God because we still have faith in grammar" ([6], 5).

For more on this topic, see [7,8].

"To do this has, as I say, been enjoined upon me by the god, by means of oracles and dreams, and in every other way that a divine manifestation has ever ordered a man to do anything. This is true, gentlemen, and can easily be established" (33c).

Euthyphro attributes the accusation that Socrates is "a maker of gods" to his *daimon* or "divine sign," which Euthyphro compares to his own ability to "foretell the future:" "This is because you say that the divine sign keeps coming to you. So [Meletus] has written this indictment against you as one who makes innovations in religious matters. ... The same is true in my case. Whenever I speak of divine matters in the assembly and foretell the future, they laugh me down as if I were crazy; and yet I have foretold nothing that did not happen" (*Euthyphro* 3b-c).

In prison, Socrates has a dream which correctly foretells the day of his execution (*Crito* 44a). Before his death, he compares himself to swans who possess the power of prophecy, which reassures them before their own demise: "I believe that as [swans] belong to Apollo, they are prophetic, have knowledge of the future, and sing of the blessings of the underworld, sing and rejoice on that day beyond what they did before. As I believe myself to be a fellow servant with the swans and dedicated to the same god, and have received from my master a gift of prophecy not inferior to theirs, I am no more despondent than they on leaving life" (*Phaedo* 85a-b).

Phaedrus 244a-d, 278e-79b, *Theaetetus* 179a, *Republic* 427a-c, 617d-18a, *Symposium* 202d-3a, *Ion* 533c-34e.

"The words were simple: *oudeis sophoteros Sokratous*—'no one is wiser than Socrates.' It would seem that such a small text should produce a very simple task for reading. And yet, in fact, it was the project of Socrates' entire adult life to interpret these three words. ... How much, indeed, was contained in those few words: those words both demanded and defined the practice of philosophy, with all its ramifications for the subsequent history of the West. We would have no tradition of philosophy without Socrates—but we would have no Socrates without the text. Socrates is a singular figure, font of our tradition, and the oracle, a singular text" ([9], xiii).

33c, italics added. "Even now I continue this investigation as the god bade me. ... I come to the assistance of the god and show him that he is not wise" (23b, see also 22a, 28d-e, 29d, 30a, 30e, 38a).

"As the soul is immortal, has been born often, and *has seen all things* here and in the underworld, *there is nothing which it has not learned*; so it is in no way surprising that it can recollect the things it knew before, both about virtue and other things. As the whole of nature is akin, and *the soul has learned everything*, nothing prevents a man, after recalling one thing only—a process men call learning—*discovering everything else for himself*, if he is brave and does not tire of the search" (*Meno* 81c-d, all italics added).

"Socrates: By Zeus, Euthyphro, you think that your knowledge of the divine, and of piety and impiety, is so accurate that, when those things happened as you say, you have no fear of having acted impiously in bringing your father to trial? Euthyphro: I should be of no use, Socrates, and Euthyphro would not be superior to the majority of men, if I did not have accurate knowledge of all such things" (*Euthyphro* 4e-5a).

"Socrates: If he acquired [the knowledge of geometry he now possesses], he cannot have done so in his present life. Or has someone taught him geometry? ... Meno: But I know that no one has taught him" (*Meno* 85e).

Xenophon twice tells the story that when Hermogenes asked Socrates why he wasn't preparing more on the defense for his upcoming trial, Socrates responded, "'Don't you think that I have been preparing for it all my life?' And when I asked him how, he said that he had been constantly occupied in the consideration of right and wrong, and in doing what was right and avoiding what was wrong, which he regarded as the best preparation for a defence" (*Memorabilia* IV. viii. 4-5; cf. *Apology* 2-4). I found these passages due to [11], 26-7n. 2.

He makes several arguments for why one's own welfare should not be the primary consideration in decisions: we do not know whether death is harmful or beneficial (29a-b), we should not focus on our own welfare but only on what is honorable in making decisions (28b-d, 38e-39b), we must do our duty regardless of the consequences for ourselves (28d-29a, 32b-e), good people cannot be harmed by worse (30d).

"Be sure that this is what the god orders me to do, and I think there is no greater blessing for the city than my service to the god" (30a). "I am the kind of person to be a gift of the god to the city" (31a). "I went to each of you privately and conferred upon him what I say is the greatest benefit, by trying to persuade him not to care for any of his belongings before caring that he himself should be as good and as wise as possible" (37c). "It is the greatest good for a man to discuss virtue every day and those other things about which you hear me conversing and testing myself and others" (38a).

28d-e. "Neither I nor any other man should, on trial or in war, contrive to avoid death at any cost. Indeed it is often obvious in battle that one could escape death by throwing away one's weapons and by turning to supplicate one's pursuers, and there are many ways to avoid death in every kind of danger if one will venture to do or say anything to avoid it" (38e-39a). "It is to fulfill some such function that *I believe the god has placed me in the city*. I never cease to rouse each and every one of you, to persuade and reproach you all day long and everywhere I find myself in your company" (30e, italics added). Socrates uses this idea in the *Crito*

to argue against escaping after he has been convicted: “one must not give way or retreat or leave one’s post, but both in war and in courts and everywhere else, one must obey the commands of one’s city and country, or persuade it as to the nature of justice” (*Crito* 51b–c).

- 17 “If you kill me you will not easily find another like me” (30e). “Another such man will not easily come to be among you, gentlemen, and if you believe me you will spare me. . . . You could easily kill me, and then you could sleep on for the rest of your days, unless the god, in his care for you, sent you someone else” (31a). Crito grieves that Socrates’ death will leave him “deprived of a friend, the like of whom I shall never find again” (*Crito* 44b). The point also arises in the *Phaedo* (*Phaedo* 76b, 78a).
- 18 “The function of oratory is in fact to influence men’s souls. . . . There is, they maintain, absolutely no need for the budding orator to concern himself with the truth about what is just or good conduct, nor indeed about who are just and good men whether by nature or education. In the law courts nobody cares a rap for the truth about these matters, but only about what is plausible” (*Phaedrus* 271c–72d).
- 19 *Protagoras* 312d, *Republic* 365d.
- 20 “Clever souls live here: it’s their Thinking Institute! . . . These people will teach anyone who pays them a fee. How to argue and win, regardless of right and wrong” ([12] 94–99).
- 21 “I was almost carried away in spite of myself, so persuasively did they speak. And yet, hardly anything of what they said is true” (17a).
- 22 The criterion of justice rather than truth for evaluating speech could be a reference to the climax of *The Clouds* where the weaker Unjust Argument [Ἄδικος Λόγος (*Adikos Logos*)] beats the stronger Just Argument [Δίκαιος Λόγος (*Dikaios Logos*)] in a personified battle. As one of the three charges against him is that he “makes the worse argument the stronger” (18b, 19b, 23d), his alignment with “just” [δίκαιον (*dikaion*)] arguments is of great relevance.
- 23 “I am saying this not to all of you but to those who condemned me to death, and to these same ones I say: Perhaps you think that I was convicted for lack of such words as might have convinced you, if I thought I should say or do all I could to avoid my sentence. Far from it. I was convicted because I lacked not words but boldness and shamelessness and the willingness to say to you what you would most gladly have heard from me, lamentations and tears and my saying and doing many things that I say are unworthy of me but that you are accustomed to hear from others. I did not think then that the danger I ran should make me do anything mean, nor do I now regret the nature of my defense. I would much rather die after this kind of defense than live after making the other kind” (38d–e).
- 24 Socrates prophesizes, one could say, pessimistically of his fate should he ever go to court for this very reason. “I think that I am one of very few Athenians, not to say the only one, engaged in the true political art, and that of the men of today I alone practice statesmanship. Since therefore when I speak on any occasion it is not with a view to winning favor, but I aim at what is best, not what is most pleasant, and since I am unwilling to engage in those ‘dainty devices’ that you recommend, I shall have nothing to say for myself when in court” (*Gorgias* 521d–e, see also *Republic* 517a–e).
- 25 “You might easily be annoyed with me as people are when they are aroused from a doze, and strike out at me” (31a). “He might feel resentful towards me and, angry about this, cast his vote in anger” (34d).
- 26 “I do not think it right to supplicate the jury and to be acquitted because of this, but to teach and persuade them. It is not the purpose of a juryman’s office to give justice as a favor to whoever seems good to him, but to judge according to law, and this he has sworn to do” (35b–c). Note that Socrates commits his defense (ἀπολογητέον (*apologēteon*)) to this same standard, despite the fact that he believes this will doom it to failure. “I wish this may happen, if it is in any way better for you and me, and that my defense may be successful, but I think this is very difficult and I am fully aware of how difficult it is. Even so, let the matter proceed as the god may wish, but I must obey the law and make my defense [ἀπολογητέον (*apologēteon*)]” (19a).
- 27 “My present request seems a just one, for you to pay no attention to my manner of speech—be it better or worse—but to concentrate your attention on whether what I say is just or not, for the excellence of a judge lies in this, as that of a speaker lies in telling the truth” (18a).
- 28 17b, 18a, 20d, 22a, 22b, 24a, 24b, 28d, 31e, 33c, 34b, 38a.
- 29 Here I disagree with one point in Strauss’ taxonomy of Plato’s dialogues. He distinguishes between narrated dialogues which are related by a narrator with “I said,” “then he said” throughout, versus performed dialogues which present themselves immediately to the reader as if occurring. One point of distinction that Strauss draws between the two is that, “in the narrated dialogue. . . a participant in the conversation gives an account directly or indirectly to nonparticipants and hence also to us, while in the performed dialogue there is no bridge between the characters of the dialogue and the reader; in a narrated dialogue Socrates may tell us things which he could not tell with propriety to his interlocutors, for instance why he made a certain move in the conversation or what he thought of his interlocutors; he thus can reveal to us some of his secrets” ([13], 58, all italics added). The *Apology*’s use of the second person enables it to speak as a performed dialogue while addressing both the present jury and the future reader, explaining to us what he is doing, and why and how.
- 30 “You have made it sufficiently obvious, Meletus, that you have never had any concern for our youth; you show your indifference clearly; that you have given no thought to the subjects about which you bring me to trial” (25c). “Meletus has never been at all concerned with these matters” (26b).
- 31 Note, the word translated here as “examine,” σκέψασθε (*skepsasthe*), is not *elenchus*.

- 32 “Beside the negative elenchus leading to contradiction (as in the cross-examination of Meletus), the old Socratic tool-box seems to have contained only one form of positive argument, the *epagoge* or inference by analogy from parallel cases” ([14], 98).
- 33 Socrates repeats this description when he concludes: “This is my defense, Simmias and Cebes, that I am likely to be right to leave you and my masters here without resentment or complaint, believing that there, as here, I shall find good masters and good friends. If my defense is more convincing to you than to the Athenian jury, it will be well” (*Phaedo* 69d-e).
- 34 “When I heard of this reply I asked myself: ‘Whatever does the god mean? What is his riddle?’” (21b).
- 35 John Sallis makes a similar point, albeit for quite distinct ideas. “This way of affirming who he is constitutes, not only a refutation of the counter-images and an assertion over against them of a truthful image, but also a *concrete exhibition* of that very practice which defines who Socrates is. The very way in which Socrates constructs his image—in the course of confronting, testing, and refuting the opinions embodied in the accusations—exemplifies the image constructed. Consequently, the question ‘Who is Socrates?’ is answered in the *Apology* not only by *what* Socrates says but also by his *way* of saying it, by what he does; Socrates’ speech is a testimony not only in speech but also in deed (cf. 32 a)—not only in *logos* but also in *ergon*” ([11], 26). Here is Charles Kahn: “Plato’s motive in writing. His principal aim, above all in the earlier works, is not to assert true propositions but to alter the minds and hearts of his readers. Plato’s conception of philosophical education is not to replace false doctrines with true ones but to change radically the moral and intellectual orientation of the learner, who, like the prisoners in the cave, must be converted—turned around—in order to see the light. It is, I suggest, with this end in view that most of the early and middle dialogues were composed. Accordingly, the dialogues in question must be interpreted primarily from the point of view of this intended impact on the reader, an impact designed to be provocative, stimulating, and bewildering” ([14], xiv–xv).
- 36 17c–18a, 20e, 21a, 27b, 30c, 31e.
- 37 He even tries at the very end to recruit those who failed the test by voting for his execution, asking them “When my sons grow up,... reproach them as I reproach you. . . . If you do this, I shall have been justly treated by you” (41e–42a). Even if they failed to recognize the justice of his words, justice will ultimately be served if they continue practicing his legacy on his progeny. I submit that all philosophers are this spiritual progeny.
- 38 This also occurs at the end of the *Meno*. The search for a teacher of virtue fails to find any since only a virtuous person who could “create another like himself” could be considered a teacher of virtue and they can find no one capable of this. The obvious answer is that Socrates is teaching virtue in this very discussion by showing Meno how to seek it. Furthermore, the existence of the text testifies to his having created Plato as a philosopher in his image. The dialogue ends with an intriguing exchange: MENO: Our friend Anytus may be annoyed with you for saying so. SOCRATES: I can’t help that. We will talk to him some other time. If all we have said in this discussion, and the questions we have asked, have been right, virtue will be acquired neither by nature nor by teaching. Whoever has it gets it by divine dispensation without taking thought, *unless he be the kind of statesman who can create another like himself*” (*Meno* 99e–100a, italics added). Immediately following it, closing the dialogue, is Socrates’ prophetic warning about one of the three accusers of the *Apology*: “You convince your guest friend Anytus here of these very things of which you have yourself been convinced, in order that he may be more amenable. If you succeed, you will also confer a benefit upon the Athenians (100b). The person who could teach virtue would also represent the answer to the first question that Socrates puts to Meletus which ends in aporia: “You see, Meletus, that you are silent and know not what to say. . . . Tell me, my good sir, who improves our young men?” (24d). In direct inversion of Meletus’ contention that “All the Athenians, it seems, make the young into fine good men, except me, and I [Socrates] alone corrupt them” (25a), the *Meno* suggests that Socrates is the sole Athenian who alone improves the young. He is trying, however, to expand that circle. The person who could teach virtue would also represent the answer to the first question that Socrates puts to Meletus which ends in aporia: “You see, Meletus, that you are silent and know not what to say. . . . Tell me, my good sir, who improves our young men?” (24d). In direct inversion of Meletus’ contention that “All the Athenians, it seems, make the young into fine good men, except me, and I [Socrates] alone corrupt them” (25a), the *Meno* suggests that Socrates is the sole Athenian who alone improves the young. He is trying, however, to expand that circle.
- 39 Derrida makes a similar point about Baudelaire’s story, “Counterfeit Money” in [15], 92–95.
- 40 For example, *Meno* ends with Socrates talking to Meno about one of his future accusers, asking him to “convince your guest friend Anytus here of these very things of which you have yourself been convinced, in order that he may be more amenable. If you succeed, you will also confer a benefit [ὠφελησεί] (*ōphelēsei*) upon the Athenian” (*Meno* 100b). In the *Gorgias*, Socrates employs an elaborate analogy to describe the doom he would face “if I were brought into court. . . . If I should meet my death owing to a deficiency of flattering rhetoric, I am confident you would find me taking my death calmly” (*Gorgias* 521e–22c). “I appreciate your forethought on my behalf, Socrates. A man has to be careful when he visits powerful cities as a foreigner, and induces their most promising young men to forsake the company of others, relatives or acquaintances, older or younger, and consort with him on the grounds that his conversation will improve them. Such conduct arouses no small resentment and various forms of hostility and intrigue” (*Protagoras* 316c–d). We will examine the Cave Analogy’s prognostication (*Republic* 517 a–e) below.
- 41 There is an obvious similarity here with Austin’s speech act theory according to which words can do things rather than just state or describe. However, Austin distinguishes the functions of language that merely say versus those that do things—constative, illocutionary, and perlocutionary—whereas the point here is that these texts do things *by* stating or describing. While Austin’s

conclusion is that the different forces go together, they remain more distinct than in the Presentational Model. Language doesn't have a distinct additional power to exert force which accompanies its stating function, but rather acts by stating. Furthermore, many of Austin's examples exert power through established institutional structures (the preacher can pronounce a couple man and wife because of accepted practices of state and church). The Presentational Model on the other hand considers these creative powers intrinsic to language itself, enabling it to spontaneously create unanticipated effects.

- 42 "The sons of the very rich [who] take pleasure in hearing people questioned; they themselves often imitate me and try to question others" (23c).
- 43 Compare Socrates' interpretation of the first prophecy and insistence on passing it on, "When I heard of this reply I asked myself: 'Whatever does the god mean? What is his riddle? I am very conscious that I am not wise at all'" (21b). "I must give you an account of my journeyings" (22a). "What is probable, gentlemen, is that. . . his oracular response meant that. . ." (23a) with what he says here about the third, "I want to show the meaning of what has occurred. . . What do I think is the reason for this? I will tell you" (40a-b).
- 44 This phrasing tellingly recalls the wording of his claim to specific ignorance of the afterlife—"no one knows whether death may not be *the greatest of all blessings* for a man" (29a, italics added)—as well as that of his own god-given service of *elenchus*—"if one of you disputes this and says he does care, I shall not let him go at once or leave him, but I shall question him, examine him, and test him. . . Be sure that this is what the god orders me to do, and I think *there is no greater blessing* for the city than my service to the god" (29e-30a, italics added).
- 45 Socrates concludes his description of the underworld in the *Phaedo* with a similar qualification while still endorsing its belief: "no sensible man would insist that these things are as I have described them, but I think it is fitting for a man to risk the belief—for the risk is a noble one—that this, or something like this, is true about our souls and their dwelling places, since the soul is evidently immortal, and a man should repeat this to himself as if it were an incantation" (*Phaedo* 114d).
- 46 All of the gods that Socrates invokes in *The Clouds* are air-based, a pantheon which includes Respiration: "In the name of Respiration, of Chaos, and Air!" ([12], 627).
- 47 "It is impossible for me to keep quiet because that means disobeying the god" (38a). "Be sure that this is what the god orders me to do, and I think there is no greater blessing for the city than my service to the god" (30a). "Indeed, men of Athens, I am far from making a defense now on my own behalf, as might be thought, but on yours, to prevent you from wrongdoing by mistreating the god's gift to you by condemning me" (30d). "Even now I continue this investigation as the god bade me" (23b).
- 48 In the beginning of his dialogue recounting Socrates' death, *Phaedo* describes how he found it "an astonishing experience" which did not fill him with pity, for "even in going down to the underworld he was going with the gods' blessing and that he would fare well when he got there, if anyone ever does" (*Phaedo* 58d-59a).
- 49 It strikes me as odd that this is not treated as the momentous occasion I find it to be. Granted, the actual exchange appears rather innocuous, but if there is one thing we know about Plato it is that apparently insignificant details and asides can carry great significance. For instance, the extraordinarily sensitive reader of Plato Leo Strauss writes, "one cannot take seriously enough the law of logographic necessity. Nothing is accidental in a Platonic dialogue; everything is necessary at the place where it occurs. Everything which would be accidental outside of the dialogue becomes meaningful within the dialogue. In all actual conversations chance plays a considerable role: all Platonic dialogues are radically fictitious. The Platonic dialogue is based on a fundamental falsehood, a beautiful or beautifying falsehood, *viz.* on the denial of chance" (Strauss 60). Yet he also states, "in none of his dialogues does Plato ever say anything" and "there is no Platonic dialogue in which Socrates converses with Plato" ([13], 50, 55). Alexander Nehamas praises the author, "in one of the greatest literary feats of which I am aware, Plato implicitly admits (since *he never appears in his dialogues*, he could have done so in no other way) that he does not understand the character he has constructed" ([17], 12, italics added). Charles H. Khan writes, "as a result of Plato's choice of this form of discourse, *in which he himself never appears*, his thought is presented to us in a manner very different from that of a treatise. The task of the interpreter is inevitably compounded by the fact that the exposition of Plato's philosophy in the dialogues is deliberately indirect, ingressive, and incomplete" ([14], xiv, italics added). "Plato's use of this form, *in which he himself never appears*, creates formidable difficulties for the interpretation of his thought" ([14], 36, italics added). At the beginning of a book dedicated to exploring neglected facets of the dialogues, opening with a chapter on the *Apology*, John Sallis comments on the "peculiar difficulties that are attendant upon such reading merely by virtue of its being a reading of Platonic writings" due to the fact that "*the author does not appear as a speaker in any of the dialogues*. There are only two references to Plato in the dialogues: one is *little more than a simple reference to his presence along with other companions of Socrates at the master's trial* (*Apol.* 34 a); the other is a simple reference to his absence (on account of illness) from the scene of Socrates' death (*Phaedo* 59 b). Thus, *Plato never speaks* in his own name—except perhaps in the letters. . . Regardless of how one deals with the letters, the fact remains that in the dialogues *Plato never says any thing*" ([11], 1996, 2, all italics added except for the final). I will argue in this final section of this paper that Plato's entrance into the *Apology* is far, far more than "a simple reference to his presence along with other companions of Socrates at the master's trial."
- 50 "There is no Platonic dialogue among men who are, or could be thought to be, equals" ([13], 55).

- 51 Plato ends the *Phaedo*, the story of Socrates' end, with this epitaph in the mouth of the teller of the tale: "Such was the end of our comrade, Echecrates, a man who, we would say, was of all those we have known the best, and also the wisest and the most upright" (*Phaedo* 118a). In his own voice, Plato describes Socrates as "the justest man of his time" (*Letter VII* 324d). He also calls Socrates the most pious, which makes one of the charges he died for particularly ironic: "some of those in control brought against this associate of mine, Socrates, whom I have mentioned, a most sacrilegious charge, *which he least of all men deserved*. They put him on trial for *impiety*" (*Letter VII* 325b, all italics added).
- 52 Crito argues that acquiring the shameful reputation of not having helped Socrates avoid his death sentence would be a significant cost for his friends, relating it to money. "If you die, it will not be a single misfortune for me. Not only will I be deprived of a friend, the like of whom I shall never find again, but many people who do not know you or me very well will think that I could have saved you if I were willing to spend money, but that I did not care to do so. Surely there can be no worse reputation than to be thought to value money more highly than one's friends, for the majority will not believe that you yourself were not willing to leave prison while we were eager for you to do so" (*Crito* 44b-c). Interestingly, he mentions Simmias and Cebes, the two who raise objections to Socrates' arguments for the immortality of the soul in the *Phaedo*, as "strangers here ready to spend money" (*Crito* 45b).
- 53 "Do not create a disturbance, gentlemen, but abide by my request not to cry out at what I say but to listen, for I think it will be to your advantage to listen. . . . Be sure that if you kill the sort of man I say I am, you will not harm me more than yourselves. . . . Indeed, men of Athens, I am far from making a defense now on my own behalf, as might be thought, but on yours, to prevent you from wrongdoing by mistreating the god's gift to you by condemning me; for if you kill me you will not easily find another like me" (30c-e). "Be sure, men of Athens, that if I had long ago attempted to take part in politics, I should have died long ago, and benefited neither you nor myself" (31d-e).
- 54 Sisyphus is one of the ten people Socrates names as those he is especially looking forward to examining in the underworld (41c). One of the reasons for Sisyphus' eternal punishment was that he captured death, rendering all life deathless for a time. He also devised a scheme by which he returned to life briefly because he told his wife not to bury him with the proper rituals.
- 55 The third mention of Plato's name only notes his absence at Socrates' death (*Phaedo* 59b). Is it going too far to see this as Plato's self-reproach for abandoning his friend in his time of need, for which he is now making amends by assuring his passage into the afterlife which will keep his post from ever being abandoned?
- 56 "Hence no intelligent man will ever be so bold as to put into language those things which his reason has contemplated, especially not into a form that is unalterable—which must be the case with what is expressed in written symbols" (*Letter VII* 343a).
- 57 23b, 31b-c, 33a, 36b, 41c
- 58 There are a number of times that Plato describes rhetoric as possessing supernatural powers, especially in regards to the after-life. "This consciousness of dignity lasts me more than three days, and not until the fourth or fifth day do I come to my senses and know where I am—in the meantime *I have been living in the Islands of the Blessed. Such is the art of our rhetoricians*, and in such manner does the sound of their words keep ringing in my ears" (*Menexenus* 234c-5c, italics added). In the *Republic*, he gives philosophizing this power such that those who have achieved wisdom "believ[e] that while still living they have been transported to the Islands of the Blessed" (*Republic* 519c). "It fills me with amazement, Gorgias. That is why I have been asking you all this time what the power of oratory consists in. When I look at it like this *its greatness seems practically supernatural*" (*Gorgias* 456a, italics added). "I exhort the friends of Dion to publish my words of advice to all the Syracusans as the joint counsel of Dion and myself. *I will act as interpreter of the message which he, if he were alive and able, would now address to you*" (*Letter VIII* 355a, italics added). "And now, perhaps, you may wonder what argument Protagoras will find to defend his position. Shall we try to put it into words?" (*Theaetetus* 165e).
- 59 The Greek word for soul, *psyche*, has the same root as breath.
- 60 I owe this way of putting this idea to Sabela Martínez-González.
- 61 "I certainly have composed no work in regard to [the subjects to which I devote myself], nor shall I ever do so in future, for *there is no way of putting it in words like other studies*. Acquaintance with it must come rather after a long period of attendance on instruction in the subject itself and of close companionship, when, suddenly, like a blaze kindled by a leaping spark, it is generated in the soul and at once becomes self-sustaining. . . . There is a true doctrine, which I have often stated before, that *stands in the way of the man who would dare to write even the least thing on such matters*" (*Letter VII* 341c-42a, all italics added). "It is a very great safeguard to learn by heart instead of writing. It is impossible for what is written not to be disclosed. That is the reason why *I have never written anything about these things, and why there is not and will not be any written work of Plato's own*. What are now called his are the work of a Socrates embellished and modernized [*kalos kai neos* (καλός καί νέος); other translations: young and beautiful, beautiful and new, idealized and youthful]" (*Letter II* 314b-c, italics added). "Anyone who leaves behind him a written manual, and likewise anyone who takes it over from him, on the supposition that such writing will provide something reliable and permanent, must be exceedingly simple-minded; he must really be ignorant of Ammon's utterance, if he imagines that written words can do anything more than remind one who knows that which the writing is concerned with" (*Phaedrus* 275c).

- “Nothing that has ever been written whether in verse or prose merits much serious attention. . . . In reality such compositions are, at the best, a means of reminding those who know the truth” (*Phaedrus* 277e, italics added).
- 62 “These four [names, descriptions, bodily forms, concepts] do as much to illustrate the particular quality of any object as they do to illustrate its essential reality because of the *inadequacy of language*. . . . One might, however, speak forever about the inaccurate character of each of the four!... The result of this is to make practically every man a prey to complete perplexity and uncertainty” (*Letter VII* 342e–43a, italics added). “Any work, in the past or in the future. . . whether composed in a private capacity or in the role of a public man who by proposing a law becomes the author of a political composition, is a matter of reproach to its author. . . if he regards it as containing important truth of permanent validity. For ignorance of what is a waking vision and what is a mere dream image of justice and injustice, good and evil, cannot truly be acquitted of involving reproach, even if the mass of men extol it” (*Phaedrus* 277d).
- 63 Names, I maintain, are in no case stable. Nothing prevents the things that are now called round from being called straight and the straight round, and those who have transposed the names and use them in the opposite way will find them no less stable than they are now” (*Letter VII* 343c, italics added).
- 64 “Once a thing is put in writing, the composition, whatever it may be, drifts all over the place, getting into the hands not only of those who understand it, but equally of those who have no business with it; *it doesn’t know how to address the right people, and not address the wrong*” (*Phaedrus* 275d–e, italics added).
- 65 No intelligent man will ever be so bold as to put into language those things which his reason has contemplated, *especially not into a form that is unalterable—which must be the case with what is expressed in written symbols*” (*Letter VII* 342e, italics added). “Written words. . . seem to talk to you as though they were intelligent, but if you ask them anything about what they say, from a desire to be instructed, *they go on telling you just the same thing forever*” (*Phaedrus* 275d, italics added).
- 66 Strauss makes a similar point, though for very different reasons. “Plato’s Socrates discusses the literary question—the question concerning writings—in the *Phaedrus*. He says that writing is an invention of doubtful value. He thus makes us understand why he abstained from writing speeches or books. But Plato wrote dialogues. We may assume that the Platonic dialogue is a kind of writing which is free from the essential defect of writings. Writings are essentially defective because they are equally accessible to all who can read or because they do not know to whom to talk and to whom to be silent or because they say the same things to everyone. We may conclude that *the Platonic dialogue says different things to different people—not accidentally, as every writing does, but that it is so contrived as to say different things to different people*, or that it is radically ironical. The Platonic dialogue, if properly read, reveals itself to possess the flexibility or adaptability of oral communication” ([13], 52–3, italics added).
- 67 On this topic, see [18].
- 68 On this topic, see [19–22].
- 69 Socrates introduces the Analogy of the Cave like this: “Next, said I, compare our nature in respect of education and its lack to such an experience as this. Picture men dwelling in a sort of subterranean cavern. . . .” (*Republic* 514a).
- 70 “This image then, dear Glaucon we must apply as a whole to all that has been said. . . . This, I take it, is likely if in this point too the likeness of our image holds” (517a–d).
- 71 “Do you think it at all strange, said I, if a man returning from divine contemplations to the petty miseries of men cuts a sorry figure and appears most ridiculous, if. . . he is compelled in courtrooms or elsewhere to contend about the shadows of justice or the images that cast the shadows and to wrangle in debate about the notions of these things in the minds of those who have never seen justice itself?” (*Republic* 517 d–e).
- 72 “If it were possible to lay hands on and to kill the man who tried to release them and lead them up, would they not kill him?” (*Republic* 517a), like the lazy horse of Athens swatting the gadfly (30e). “Now I want to prophesy to those who convicted me, for I am at the point when men prophesy most, when they are about to die” (39c).
- 73 “Let us examine it point by point” (24c); “examine with me, gentlemen, how he appears to contradict himself” (27b).

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