
JUSTICE AS VIRTUE AND HARMONY: A SOCRATIC ACCOUNT¹

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I

The importance of Socratic philosophy, understood as a radical shift of philosophic interest from *cosmos* to *anthropos* and from *physis* to *psyche*, has been recognised and honoured properly. The history of Hellenic philosophy is traditionally divided into two main periods, the Pre-Socratic and the Socratic. Unlike Presocratic philosophers, Socrates did not discuss the big questions: What is the nature of the universe, how did it come into being, and how does it work? Rather, according to Xenophon, "His own conversation was ever of human things. The problems he discussed were: What is godly, what is ungodly; what is beautiful, what is ugly; what is just, what is unjust; what is a state, what is a statesman; what is government, and what is a governor."² That much at least is clear and agreed upon.

But the demarcation line is not as clear concerning Socrates and the other Socratics, especially Plato, with whom Socrates and Aristotle constitute a kind of higher trinity of Hellenic wisdom. It is no accident that these great philosophers were connected to each other by the close bond of teacher and favourite student.³ The philosophic bond between Plato and Socrates is so strong that even after centuries of philological scholarship and critical scrutiny of the texts, it is not easy for the reader of a Platonic Dialogue to tell precisely where Socrates' philosophy ends and Plato's philosophy begins. The fact that Socrates left no writing for posterity has set him apart from his contemporaries, poets, historians, sophists, philosophers, and all other devotees of Hermes who were honoured in Athens and Greece as great writers, but it does not help us resolve the so-called "Socratic Problem."

The reason for Socrates' aversion to the written word, as opposed to the spoken word of which he was a master, was his ironic lack of knowledge worth mentioning in writing, as he used to say, unless he meant by this the possible ignorance of the difficult art of writing, as Porphyry had suggested long ago, and Eric Havelock has rediscovered and reintroduced recently.⁴ However,

the Platonic Socrates has a different explanation of this historic puzzle, which he ironically relates to the different assessments of the value of the art of writing by the wise Egyptian Theuth or Hermes who invented it, and by the King Thamus who appraised it critically:

Socrates: And can we suppose that he who knows the just and good and honourable has less understanding than the husbandman about his own seeds?

Phaedrus: Certainly not

Socrates: Then he will not seriously incline to 'write' his thoughts 'in water' with pen and ink, sowing words which can neither speak for themselves nor teach the truth adequately to others?

Phaedrus: No, that is not likely....

Socrates: But nobler far is the serious pursuit of the philosopher, who, finding a congenial soul, by the help of science sows and plants therein words which are able to defend themselves and him who planted them, and are not unfruitful, but have in them a seed which others brought up in different soils render immortal, making the possessors of it happy to the utmost extent of human happiness.⁵

Clearly, then, Socrates followed King Thamus' advice not to trust the written word when it comes to the pursuit of wisdom. The search for "congenial souls," in which to plant the potent seed of the love of wisdom left Socrates no time and no appetite for the pursuit of the art of writing and the production of philosophical treatises to be read indiscriminately by anyone regardless of the condition of his or her soul. Philosophy for Socrates was a serious business connected with the health, harmony, and happiness of the human soul, not to be treated lightly, and not to be written down on lifeless papyrus. A more suitable "material" for such a purpose would be the souls of promising young Athenians, men like Xenophon, Crito, Alcibiades and Plato. So by "Socratic Account" in the title of this paper is meant the account of virtue and justice, and their relation to the human soul and its happiness, as presented in Socratic conversations with the Master himself as immortalised by Xenophon and Plato in their works.⁷ Special emphasis will be placed on the *Republic*, of course, which is devoted to the virtue of justice, characterised by the Socratic Aristotle as "the perfect virtue," and praised by him as "the sum of all virtues."⁸

In what follows, therefore, I would like to try to draw your attention to certain passages from Plato and Xenophon which are indicative, I believe, of the Socratic way of philosophising as it relates to his novel conception of justice as virtue and harmony both

in the ideal *polis* and in the well-ordered souls of ideal citizens. It will become clear, I hope, that Socrates' paradoxical politics of the human soul in search for true happiness through a virtuous life, and his conception of justice as an internal personal affair, contrasts sharply with the external and social theory of justice in its long history from Glaucon and Thrasymachus in antiquity, to Locke and Rousseau in modern times, to John Rawls in our times.⁹

II

The mature man Socrates who inspired Plato and Xenophon, the philosopher whose intellectual presence was felt in the symposia, the gymnasia, and the streets of Athens, certainly had something very new to say to his fellow citizens. But it seems that he lacked the "right method" of conveying his urgent message to the Athenians who, in spite of the sharpness of his dialectic questioning, were not willing to heed Socrates' and Apollo's call to virtue via self-knowledge. Consequently, the meaning of the Socratic enigmatic message to his fellow Athenians and to the rest of humanity has been never easy to decipher, and has been interpreted differently by different persons at different times and cultural settings. To bypass the so-called Minor Socratic Schools and their respective emphasis on logical dexterity with the Megarics, moral rectitude with the Cynics, and pleasurable experiences with the Cyrenaics, we may consider a few cases which are characteristic of how non-Hellenic minds and souls have seen the enigma that was Socrates.¹⁰

For Cicero, the Roman statesman and philosopher, for example, the importance of Socrates was found in the heroic effort to bring philosophy down to earth from the heavens where the Presocratic speculations about the cosmos had placed it; while for Kierkegaard, the existentialist and Christian philosopher, it was found in the "Socratic standpoint" which "accentuates the fact that the knower is an existing individual," and "a centre in which the entire world centres." For Nietzsche, the German philosopher with hammer in hand and twisted ways of looking at philosophy's past, "Socrates was the buffoon who got himself taken seriously;" for he represented "decadence," "sickness," and "the tyranny of reason," which had against it all the healthy "instincts of the older Hellenes" and yet, paradoxically, it succeeded in killing off the Dionysian "spirit of tragedy," which had animated primitive Greece and was to be revived again in the unrestrained pursuit of pleasure and power, which became the new gospel for younger Sophists, like Callicles and Thrasymachus, who were much admired by Nietzsche and the

Germany of his time. For a representative of the analytical tradition in philosophy, such as Gregory Vlastos, the Socratic secret was to be sought in the efficiency of his "method of investigation" which seems to make "moral inquiry open to everyone" and yet "it makes it easy for no one;" while, more recently, for Martha Nussbaum in her plea for the "fragility of goodness" it was his unmitigated intellectualism and his forgetfulness of "our animality" and "moral vulnerability," which set him apart from the "human community" providing a clear target for her Aristotelian criticism of the Platonic Socrates.¹¹

Each of these points of view is perhaps partially correct but, in my view, none can reveal the true meaning of the Socratic vital λόγος in its philosophic fullness and profundity. It would seem, then, that only if we were to listen very carefully to the voices of ancient sources, especially Plato and Xenophon, with all our mind and soul, we might be able to grasp the point and the urgency of the Socratic call as it persistently invites his listeners, to turn their attention inward, that is, away from the external chaotic discord and towards an inner possible harmony of the soul; away from the many so-called goods promised by the Sophistic greedy pursuit of bodily pleasure and political power, and towards the one thing inside, the most valuable and the most vulnerable of all, and usually the least taken care of, the human tragic soul in search for fulfilment and happiness. Inwardly, if anywhere, Socrates seems to suggest from the depths of his personal experience as a Hellenic philosopher, mortal man can discover a way to happiness through virtue (ἀρετή), especially the most perfect virtue of all ethical virtues, the virtue of justice (δική, δικαιοσύνη).¹² I would like to submit to you that the discovery of "the inner man," is "the Socratic secret," "the Socratic revelation," that sets him apart from all the Sophists, as his concern with human affairs distinguishes him from the Presocratic natural philosophers.¹³

III

Well, then, how did Socrates stand with regard to justice? Was he an unjust and dangerous man, corrupter of the youth and atheist, as his enemies claimed? Or, rather, was he a virtuous man who inspired others to become good and just persons, as his friends believed? The indictment was clear and categorical: ἄδικεῖ Σωκράτης... (Socrates commits an injustice); and the jury's verdict and the outcome of the trial with Socrates' death shocked his friends and have puzzled his admirers since then. Apollodorus, one

of Socrates' friends was very upset and inconsolable with the outcome of the trial and cried out: "But, Socrates, what I find it hardest to bear is that I see you being put to death unjustly!" To which Socrates responded with a smile, "My Beloved Apollodorus, was it your preference to see me put to death justly?"

I would like now to cite a few samples of texts by Xenophon and Plato which seem to capture accurately both the character of Socrates and his way of philosophising, not with a hammer, but with a smile, an ironic Hellenic smile which is, simultaneously, a playful seriousness and a serious play. The same texts make clear that Socrates was innocent of the unjust charges brought against him, and had a new conception of justice as a foremost personal affair, a matter of the soul, and not a mere social convention:

Hermogenes: Socrates, ought you not to be giving some thought to what defence you are going to make?

Soc. Why, do I not seem to you to have spent my whole life in preparing to defend myself?

Her. How so, Socrates?

Soc. Because all my life, my friend, I have been guiltless of wrongdoing; and that I consider the finer preparation for a defence.

Herm. Do you not observe that the Athenian courts have often been carried away by an eloquent speech and have condemned innocent men to death?

Xenophon proceeds with a description of Socrates' beneficent influence on the young men of Athens:

No less wonderful is it to me that some believed the charge brought against Socrates of corrupting the youth. In the first place, in control of his own passions and appetites he was the strictest of men; further, in endurance of cold and heat and every kind of toil he was most resolute; and besides, his needs were so schooled to moderation that having very little he was yet very content. Such was his own character: how then can he have led others into impiety, crime, gluttony, lust, or sloth? On the contrary, he cured these vices in many, by putting into them the desire for goodness, and by giving them confidence that self-discipline would make them gentlemen. To be sure he never professed to teach this; but, by letting his own light shine, he led his disciples to hope that they through imitation of him would attain such excellence. Furthermore, he himself never neglected the body, and reproved such neglect in others. Thus over-eating followed by over-exertion he disapproved. But approved of taking as much hard exercise as is agreeable to the soul; for the habit not only insured good health, but did not hamper the care of the

soul.... And so, in contemplating the man's wisdom and nobility of character, I find it beyond my power to forget him or, in remembering him, to refrain from praising him. And if among those who make virtue their aim any one has ever been brought into contact with a person more helpful than Socrates, I count that man worthy to be called most blessed."

Thus spoke Xenophon, the tough Athenian general, of Socrates, the teacher of virtue by word and deed. In Plato, we find echoes of the same message and the same moral character:

Well, supposing, as I said, that you should offer to acquit me on these terms, I should reply, Gentlemen, I am your very grateful and devoted servant, but I owe a greater obedience to God than to you, and so long as I draw breath and have my faculties, I shall never stop practising philosophy and exhorting you and elucidating the truth for everyone that I meet. I shall go on saying, in my usual way, My very good friend, you are an Athenian and belong to a city which is the greatest and more famous in the world for its wisdom and strength. Are you not ashamed that you give your attention to acquiring as much money as possible, and similarly with reputation and honour, and give no attention or thought to truth and understanding and the perfection of your soul?.... For I spend all my time going about trying to persuade you, young and old, to make your first and chief concern not for your bodies nor for your possessions, but for the highest welfare of your souls, proclaiming as I go, Wealth does not bring goodness, but goodness brings wealth and every other blessing, both to the individual and to the state.

Now if I corrupt the young by this message, the message would seem to be harmful, but if anyone says that my message is different from this, he is talking nonsense. And so, gentlemen, I would say, You can please yourselves whether you listen to Anytus or not, and whether you acquit me or not, you know that I am not going to alter my conduct, not even if I have to die a hundred deaths.¹⁴

Thus spoke Socrates, according to Plato's report, during his trial in his defence against the maliciously motivated accusations of corrupting the young and not believing in the gods of Athens. A few days later when he found himself in prison awaiting the preparation of the hemlock which was to send his pure and innocent soul to join the company of the Olympian Gods, Socrates had the last opportunity, while conversing with his friends, to praise the power of philosophy to set the human spirit free from the bondage of bodily desires and worries. He calmly stated:

I will explain. Every seeker after wisdom knows that up to the time

when philosophy takes it over his soul is a helpless prisoner, chained hand and foot in the body, compelled to view reality not directly but only through its prison bars, and wallowing in utter ignorance. And philosophy can see that the imprisonment is ingeniously effected by the prisoner's own active desire, which makes him first accessory to his own confinement. Well, philosophy takes over the soul in this condition and by gentle persuasion tries to set it free....

After such training, my dear Simmias and Cebes, the soul can have no grounds for fearing that on its separation from the body it will be blown away and scattered by the winds, and so disappear into thin air, and cease to exist altogether.¹⁵

No wonder, then, that the Socratic preoccupation with the soul, its need of constant care and purification, the loftiness of his thought and the urgency of his message, disturbed, perplexed and annoyed many Athenians for whom the philosopher and his questioning became a thorn in their side, a reminder that they could do better. Let us listen to the moving confession of young Alcibiades about the effect of Socrates' teaching on this aspiring Athenian man:

And there's one thing I've never felt with anybody - not the kind of thing you'd expect to find in me, either - and that is a sense of shame. Socrates is the only man in the world that can make me feel ashamed. Because there's no getting away from it, I know I ought to do the things he tells me, and yet the moment I'm out of his sight I don't care what I do to keep in with the mob. So I dash off like a runaway slave, and keep out of his way as long as I can, and then next time I meet him I remember all that I had to admit the time before, and naturally I feel ashamed. There are times when I'd honestly be glad to hear that he was dead, and yet I know that if he did die I'd be more upset than ever - so I ask you, what is a man to do?¹⁶

What is a man to do with Socrates and his questioning? That is the question. Coming from Alcibiades in his confessional mood as portrayed by Plato it indicates not only the frustration, humiliation, and uneasiness which men, like Alcibiades, Euthyphro, Thrasymachus, Meno, and others, felt as a result of the Socratic elenchus; but also the agonising moral choice between virtue and vice that men must make at some point of time and abide with it. Which road are we to take, the uphill road of virtue, like the young Heracles, or the downhill of vice and political intrigue? The choice would seem easy to someone who knows the respective ends to which these two roads of opposite destinations ultimately lead, the apotheosis and glorification of Hercules and the condemnation of Alcibiades serve as clear markers for anyone to see and judge.

History has proven that Socrates was right when he advised the young Athenians not to aspire to rule their country before they had become masters of themselves and had succeeded in putting their house in order.¹⁷

IV

In this light, I believe that Plato's *Republic* will make better sense if we read it, not simply as a treatise on politics or poetics, psychology or epistemology, ontology or eschatology, but Socratically. That is, if we see it as true ψυχαγωγία, a leading of the soul, a great drama presented as a battleground where Sophistry and Philosophy fight over the soul of a representative Athenian, Glaucon, Plato's brother and Socrates' good friend. Philosophy is victorious in this match at the end, which contrasts with Sophistry's victory at another moral battle for the soul of young Pheidippides, son of Strepsiades as immortalised by Aristophanes's art in the *Clouds*. At the end of the *Republic*, Plato's brother, a thinly disguised Plato himself, is saved by Philosophy personified by Socrates, and he is able to see clearly that the just life of the philosopher who contemplates the eternal Forms with a healthy and well-ordered soul is preferable to the life of a tyrant spent in the pursuit of bodily pleasure and political power unjustly gained in the Machiavellian manner by fraud or by force.

And then, said I, he not only will not abandon the habit and nurture of his body to the brutish and irrational pleasure and live with his face set in that direction, but he will not even make health his chief aim.... but he will always be found attuning the harmonies of his body for the sake of the concord in the soul.

By all means, he replied, if he is to be a true musician.

And will he not deal likewise with the ordering and harmonising of his possession? He will not let himself be dazzled by the felicitations of the multitude and pile up the mass of his wealth without measure, involving himself in measureless ills.

No, I think not, he said.

He will rather, I said, keep his eyes fixed on the constitution in his soul, and taking care and watching lest he disturb anything there, either by excess or deficiency of wealth, will so steer his course and add to or detract from his wealth on this principle, so far as may be.

Precisely so, he said.

Clearly then, justice, Socratically understood, is not a kind of social contract, as European philosophers from Rousseau to Rawls have claimed; nor is it even an Aristotelian mean to be prudently found

somewhere between giving too little and taking too much of valuable things, or between distributing proportional benefits and penalties to different persons according to their moral merit and their legal liabilities respectively; but rather it is an internal harmony of the soul resulting from a proper ordering of the various parts and their respective functions, giving to each what is due to them to be determined by the right reason and always in accordance with Nature which itself is a product of the creative Divine *Nous*.

The Platonic Socrates had to work hard to win Glaucon over and persuade him that, contrary to Thrasymachus's claim, if we wish for true human happiness and fulfilment, reason requires that the life of justice be chosen over the life of injustice and its ephemeral pleasures. He had to try hard to clarify his novel meaning of justice as harmony of the soul, and to distinguish it from the traditional, poetic, and sophistic conceptions of δίκη (justice in accordance with custom) and δικαιοσύνη (justice in accordance with the law), represented by Cephalus, Polemarchus and Thrasymachus respectively. For the Platonic Socrates, unlike pious old Cephalus, it is not good enough to equate justice with paying your debts to men and to Gods, especially towards the end of your life on earth, out of fear that you may have to give an account to the judges in Hades. Unlike Polemarchus and the poet Simonides, Socrates cannot accept as justice the customary claim that one owes to help his friends and to harm his enemies, no matter how common sense and patriotic such a claim may appear to be. And unlike Thrasymachus and his fellow Sophists, Socrates cannot find satisfactory the pragmatic claim that justice is only conventional and serves the interests of whoever happens to have the power to make the laws to his liking. It is not that Socrates does not see the expediency of these views or their social utility and convenience; rather he is convinced that the question of "what is justice?" is very fundamental and equivalent to the question "what kind of life is worth living?" Should we live the life of justice and virtue or its opposite, and which of the two is more likely, and reasonably, to lead us to human happiness in this life and in the lives to come, if the prospect of reincarnation is not just wishful thinking but a real possibility?

Let us consider Socrates' response to Polemarchus and Thrasymachus and, then, compare them with his reply to Crito, when the latter tried to persuade him to run away in order to see his consistency:

It is not then the function of the just man, Polemarchus, to harm

either friend or anyone else, but of his opposite, the unjust.

I think that you are altogether right, Socrates.

If then anyone affirms that it is just to render to each his due and he means by this that injury and harm is what is due to his enemies from the just man and benefits to his friends, he was no truly wise man who said it. For what he meant was not true. For it has been made clear to us that in no case is it just to harm anyone.

I concede it, he said.

We will take up arms against him, then, said I, you and I together, if anyone affirms that either Simonides or Bias of Pittacus or any other of the wise and blessed said such a thing.

I, for my part, he said, am ready to join in the battle with you. (Republic, 335e-336a)

Again:

Thrasymachus, instead of replying, said, Tell me, Socrates, have you got a nurse?

What do you mean, said I. Why didn't you answer me instead of asking such a question?

Because, he said, she lets her little snotty run about drivelling and doesn't wipe your face clean, though you need it badly, if she can't get you to know the difference between the shepherd and the sheep.... But when in addition to the property of the citizens men kidnap and enslave the citizens themselves, instead of these opprobrious names they are pronounced happy and blessed not only by their fellow citizens but by all who hear the story of the man who has committed complete and entire injustice. For it is not the fear of doing but of suffering wrong that calls forth the reproaches of those who revile injustice. Thus, Socrates, injustice on a sufficiently large scale is a stronger, freer, and more masterful thing than justice, and, as I said in the beginning, it is the advantage of the stronger that is the just...

I am surprised at you, Thrasymachus. After hurling such a doctrine at us, can it be that you propose to depart without staying to teach us properly or learn yourself whether this thing is so or not? Do you think it is a small matter that you are attempting to determine and not the entire conduct of life that for each of us would make living most worth while? (Ibid. 343a-344d)

And again:

Do we say that one must never willingly do wrong, or does it depend upon circumstances? Is it true, as we have often agreed before, that there is no sense in which wrongdoing is good and honourable? Or have jettisoned all our former convictions in these last days? Can you and I at our age, Crito, have spent all these

years in serious discussions without realising that we were no better than a pair of children? Surely the truth is just what we have always said. Whatever the popular view is, and whether the alternative is pleasanter than the present one or even harder to bear, the fact remains that to do wrong is in every sense bad and dishonourable for the person who does it. Is that our view, or not?

Yes, it is.

Then in no circumstances must one do wrong.

No.

In that case one must not even do wrong when one is wronged, which most people regard as the natural course.

Apparently not...

So one ought not to return a wrong or an injury to any person, whatever the provocation is. Now be careful, Crito, that in making these single admission you do not end by admitting something contrary to your real beliefs. I know that there are and always will be few people who think like this, and consequently between those who do think so and those who do not there can be no agreement on principle; they must always feel contempt when they observe one another's decisions. I want even you to consider very carefully whether you share my views and agree with me, and whether we can proceed with our discussion from the established hypothesis that it is never right to do a wrong or return a wrong or defend oneself against injury by retaliation, or whether you dissociate yourself from any share in this view as a basis for discussion. I have held it a long time, and still hold it, but if you have formed any other opinion, say so and tell me what it is. If, on the other hand, you stand by what we have said, listen to my next point.¹⁸

In the light of these passages, we should not be surprised to find in the heart of Plato's *Republic*, these Socratic words:

But the truth of the matter was, as it seems, that justice is indeed something of this kind, yet not in regard to doing of one's own business externally, but with regard to that which is within and in the true sense concerns one's self, and the things of one's self. It means that a man must not suffer the principles in his soul to do each the work of some other and interfere and meddle with one another, but that he should dispose well of what in the true sense of the word is properly his own, and having first attained to self-mastery and beautiful order within himself, and having harmonised these three principles.... he should then and then only turn to practice if he find ought to do either in the getting of wealth or the tendency of the body or it may be in political action or private business....

What you say is entirely true Socrates....

Virtue, then, as it seems, would be a kind of health and beauty and good condition of the soul, and vice would be disease, ugliness, and weakness."¹⁹

In passages like the above, the paradoxical conception of justice as persistently envisioned by the Platonic Socrates is consistently stated. It is clearly in opposition, not only to the Sophistic theories of his time, but also to the great poets of the past, Homer, Hesiod, Pindar, the Tragedians, and the traditional proverbial wisdom of the seers and sages of Greece.²⁰ In Socrates' view, justice is something personal, an internal harmonious ordering of the human soul seen in its complex tripartite nature, and not an external social convention to keep some order and peace in the everyday dealings of the partners in a given political association. It is that healthy and harmonious *ἔξις ψυχῆς* (state of the human soul) from which naturally flow all those praiseworthy manifestations of ethical and political virtues, that is, the acts of temperance, courage, prudence, fairness, piety etc.²¹

Consequently, a citizen whose soul has been shaped by the care of Socratic *paideia*, will have a stronger incentive to avoid all actions of vice and violence to others than the reasonable concern about common social life and utility. His own soul and its health and happiness are at stake at any time and in any action performed. With the Socratic internalisation of justice, even the intention and the thought of doing the right or the wrong thing counts positively or negatively in determining the moral worth of a human being, an ethically responsible person. Only the person who has established the harmony within his/her soul and has put his/her own house in order, will have the will and the ability to deal with his fellow citizens in a manner which is fair and just; and only such a person will have the right to rule in the city with justice, himself being ruled by right reason alone. Such a noble goal inspired and justified the demands of the recommended special education in the *Republic* designed to turn the human soul towards the light of the Good and the harmony radiating from it:

And if you assume, dear Glaucon, that the ascent and the contemplation of the things above is the soul's ascension to the intelligible region, you will not miss my surmise, since that is what you desire to hear. But God knows whether it is true. But, at any rate, my dream as it appears to me is that in the region of the known the last thing to be seen is the idea of good, and that when seen it must needs point us to the conclusion that this is indeed the cause for all things of all that is right and beautiful, giving birth

in the visible world to light, and the author of light and itself in the intelligible world being the authentic source of truth and reason, and that anyone who is to act wisely in private or public must have caught sight of this.... If this is true, our view of these matters must be this, that education is not in reality what some people proclaim it to be in their professions. What they aver is that they can put true knowledge into a soul that does not possess it, as if they were inserting vision into blind eyes.

They do indeed, he said. (517b-518d)

We can continue quoting passages like this beautiful one from Plato's *Dialogues* and from Xenophon's *Memoirs*, but the point should be clear by now as to where Socrates stood regarding the politics on the inner harmony to be built in the depths of the human soul, and to serve as a solid foundation for building the just *politeia*.

V

In conclusion and as we look at Socrates in the light of Platonic insights, it becomes evident that by rising above the common interest of the business-as-usual mentality of the multitude in the market place (ἀγορά), the Socratic call could have an appeal to the few who were prepared to turn their attention inward in search for the real self, to try to see the soul within, cultivate it with care, and lift it upwards in an earnest search for the true, the good, and the beautiful, that is, the divine element within us.²² At the highest level of the purified soul, the wise man can teach only by his life and example, for words are of no avail. His life in philosophy becomes a model for other to emulate and to follow. He becomes, in a sense, the ideal teacher who can inspire the chosen few by his exemplary life, but inevitably he is bound to irritate the many.²³ Those who can look at such a model and listen to the Socratic call may themselves take the road to philosophic enlightenment as lovers of true wisdom and justice.

In his philosophic and uncompromising spirit, Socrates was, in my judgement, such a man and such an enlightened teacher. Plato and Xenophon, the late Stoics and the late Platonists, all saw in Socrates the enlightened man and the inspired teacher who was able to inspire others by his way of living in truth and dying for it. There is good hope today that, if this aspect of Socrates' spirit were to be revived, it could perhaps serve as a bridge between East and West, as they seek a common ground to build a better world on a global understanding of humanity with some philosophic sanity. But before that possibility becomes reality, the Socratic last call for the

harmonious *polis* within, the health of the soul of the human being, and the spirit of Socratic philosophy, would have to be revived. May we be more fortunate than the Renaissance Humanists and Platonists of Mistra and Florence in the task of reviving the spirit of Hellenic philosophy and its Socratic virtues as they apply to external politics and to the inner *polis*, that is, the freedom to theorise without restrictions and the responsibility to care for our souls Socratically.

May we follow his advice and: "Hold ever to the upward way and pursue righteousness with wisdom always and ever, that we may be dear to ourselves and to the gods both during our sojourn here and when we receive our reward, as the victors of the games go about to gather in theirs. And thus both here and in that journey of a thousand years, whereof I have told you, we shall fare well."²⁴ May we grasp the meaning of Socrates' words and live accordingly: "They live best, I think, who strive best to become as good as possible; and the pleasantest life is theirs who are conscious that they are growing in goodness;"²⁵ and, remembering Apollo's aphorism, "Justice is noblest and health is best," may we become just and wise enough to pray to our Gods simply and nobly as he did to his: "Dear Pan, and all ye other gods who dwell in this place, grant that I may become fair within, and that such outward things as I have may not war against the spirit within me."²⁶

Notes

1. The title of this study was inspired by an inscription at Delos, quoted by Aristotle (NE 1098a 27-28), with his disapproval because he believed that "the best activities possess all of the qualities" praised in the Deleian distich:

"Justice is noblest, and health is best,
but the heart's desire is the pleasantest."

2. Xenophon, *Memorabilia*, Li, 16-17.

3. Regardless of their differences in details, the fact remains that the three share a common philosophical outlook which is purely Hellenic, dialectic and humanistic. The differences between Plato and Aristotle have been noticed more often than their similarities because of Aristotle's habit of emphasizing the points on which he diverges from his teacher's doctrine. But even this is done in the name of ἀλήθεια, a purely philosophical and very Hellenic consideration. Hence the proverbial: "Amicus Plato sed magis amica Veritas," that paraphrases Aristotle's statement in NE 1096a M 16.

4. According to Porphyry, "[Socrates] did not know even how to read and write well; but he was laughable any time he had to read or write something, babbling like a child" (*Historia Philosophiae, Fragmenta*, A. Nauck, ed., in *Opuscula selecta*, Leipzig: Teubner, 1886, p. 10, translation mine). One should compare this remark with *Vita Plotini* 4-8, where Porphyry mentions the difficulties which Plotinus encountered in putting his thoughts into writing, although as a teacher he was very inspiring and could handle the dialectic method almost as skillfully as Socrates. Without reference to Porphyry, Havelock argues persuasively that Socrates was an "oralist" who grew up in Athens just before the transition from non-literacy to literacy, which was greatly influenced by the Sophists. See his "The Socratic Problem: Some Second Thoughts" in *Essays in Ancient Greek Philosophy*, vol. II, J. Anton and A. Preus eds., Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1983, pp. 147-173; and for a more detailed treatment, *The Literate Revolution in Greece and Its Cultural Consequences*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1982.

5. *Phaedrus* 276e-277a. This conclusion comes at the end of a long story which, in part, runs like this:

"Socrates: At the city of Naucratis in Egypt there was a famous old god whose name was Theuth [Hermes]; the bird which is called Ibis is sacred to him, and he was the inventor of many arts, such as arithmetic and calculation and geometry and astronomy as well as draughts and dice, but his great discovery was the use of letters.

[Regarding this discovery Theuth said to the king Thamus:]

"O king, here is a study which will make the Egyptians wiser and give them better memories; it is specific both for the memory and for the wit. Thamus replied: O most ingenious Theuth, the parent or inventor of an art is not always the best judge of the utility or inutility of his own inventions to the users of them. And in this instance, you who are the father of letters, from a paternal love of your own children have been led to attribute to them a quality which they cannot have; for this discovery of yours will create forgetfulness in the learners' souls, because they will not use their memories; they will trust to the external written characters and not remember of themselves. And so the specific which you have discovered is an aid not to memory, but to reminiscence. As for wisdom, it is the reputation, not the reality, that you have to offer to those who learn from you; they will have heard many things and yet received no teaching; they will appear to be omniscient and will generally know nothing; they will be tiresome company, having acquired not wisdom, but the show of wisdom."

6. The fact is that many of his friends and a few of his foes wrote much about Socrates each portraying him and his odd way of philosophizing differently. So it is not at all surprising that scholars have tried to discover "the historical" Socrates and his "real contribution" to philosophy by providing ingenious solutions to the so-called "Socratic Problem." For the present state of the problem and relevant bibliography, see V. de Magalhaes-Vilhena, 1952, *Le probleme de Socrate*, Paris; C.J. de Vogel, "The Present State of the Socratic Problem," *Phronesis* 1 (1955): 26-35; M. Montuori, 1981, *Socrates: Physiology of a Myth*, Amsterdam: J.C. Gieben; and E. Havelock, *op.cit.*, above note no. 1. Even G. Vlastos' *Socrates: Ironist and Moral Philosopher* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991) is, in a sense, an attempt of solving the "enigma;" see my review of his book in *Journal of Neoplatonic Studies* I (1992): 132-141.

7. Xenophon's portrayal of Socrates as presented in the *Memorabilia* is compatible and complementary to the Plato's picture of Socrates. Even Aristophanes exaggerated caricature of Socrates in the *Clouds* is essentially not different from the historical Socrates for one who can see through the satirical effects of comic dramaturgy.

8. "In Justice is all Virtue found in sum." Quoted by Aristotle from Euripides' *Melanippe*, according to a scholiast, in the context of his discussion of justice in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, V 1129b 20.

9. It is interesting that in his *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press, 1973), John Rawls refers to Aristotle frequently, quotes with approval the Aristotelian definition of justice, and even devotes a whole section (#65) to what he calls the Aristotelian Principle, but mentions Socrates only once and only because Nietzsche had included him together with Goethe in his list of great men! (p. 325) Plato does not fare any better than Socrates in Rawls' long book. He is mentioned briefly only twice in the footnotes (p. 454n and p. 52ln). The one refers to "Plato's Noble Lie," and the other relates him to the strange Hegelian notion of something called "private society." Surprisingly, there is no mention of the Platonic Socrates who discussed with Glaucon the origins of justice as a kind of social contract in Book II of the *Republic*. Yet, Rawls book extends to more than 600 pages and is supposed to be an elaboration and an upgrading of the social contract theory. He states, e.g., "My aim is to present a conception of justice which generalizes and carries to a higher level of abstraction the familiar theory of the social contract as found, say, in Locke, Rousseau, and Kant." (p. 11)

10. For a recent appraisal of Socrates' influence on Hellenistic philosophy, I refer to G. Reale, 1985, *The Systems of Hellenistic Age*, translated by J.R. Catan, Albany, NY: SUNY Press. Reale beautifully sums up this influence as follows: "But profoundly Socratic above all was the conviction which was like a minimum common denominator for all the systems of the Hellenistic Age according to which the true philosopher is such only if and to the degree that he achieves a complete coherence (a "harmony" and an "accord," said Socrates) between doctrine and life, or better yet, between theory and a way of living and dying" (pp. 11-12).

11. Cicero, *Tusculanae disputationes*, 5. 4. 10; *A Kierkegaard Anthology*, R. Bretall, ed., (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973), pp. 156, 217; F. Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, R.J. Hollingdale, trans., (New York: Penguin Books, 1985), pp. 29-34; *The Philosophy of Socrates*, G. Vlastos, ed., (Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, 1971), pp. 1-21; M. Nussbaum, *The Fragility of Goodness: Luck and Ethics in Greek Tragedy and Philosophy*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), pp. 85-235; and my review of the book in *Skepsis* I (1990): 210-216.

12. This is the thesis of J. Burnet and A.E. Taylor which has been accepted by W. Jaeger, F.M. Cornford, W.K.C. Guthrie, E. Ballard and, recently, L.E. Navia to whose

excellent work, *Socrates, the Man and his Philosophy*, (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1985), I refer for the relevant bibliography. I think that, compared with Vlastos' and any analytic treatment of the subject, it is a more meaningful approach to understanding Socrates who made the Delphic precept of "know thyself the motto of his mission.

13. These expressions have been used by many but more often by J. Sykouris, the most enthusiastic of the modern Greek students of Platonic Socrates, in his collected works, *Μελέται και "Αρθρα*, (Athens: Aigaeum Publishers, 1956), pp. 210-139, and 261-274.

14. *Apology* 29c-30b.

15. *Phaedo* 82e-84c.

16. *Symposium* 215e-216c.

17. President Clinton, not less than Alcibiades, could have learned something from Socrates' wise advice regarding the perils of power and the snares of sexual pleasure!

18. *Crito* 49a-e.

19. *Republic*, 443c-444e. Analytic philosophers, who are always in the look out for logical fallacies and invalid arguments, have had a feat day on this particular claim of the Platonic Socrates (yet, they invariably criticize Plato!) See for example, *Plato: A Collection of Critical Essays*, vol. II, Gregory Vlastos, ed, (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1978), especially the related essays of David Sachs, Raphael Demos, and Gregory Vlastos; and compare them with R. Kraut, ed., *The Cambridge Companion of Plato*, (Cambridge: University Press, 1992), especially, Chapter 10, "The defence of Justice in Plato's *Republic*," by the same author.

20. For a detailed discussion of the historical development and transformations of the concept of justice, see E.A. Havelock, *The Greek Concept of Justice: From Its Shadow in Homer to Its Substance in Plato* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1978).

21. Aristotle, who has built into the definition of justice the concern "for others," can recognise the application of justice to the inner soul and even to the household only as metaphorical and analogous to the proper application of justice understood as a political virtue regulating the acts of individuals which have a bearing on the welfare of other citizens. By extension the doctrine can be applied to the relations between city-states, of course:

"Now all the various pronouncements of the law aim either at the common interest of all, or at the interest of a ruling class determined either by excellence or in some other similar way; so that in one of its senses the term 'just' is applied to anything that produces and preserves the happiness, or the component parts of the happiness, of the political community... And justice is perfect virtue because it is the practice of perfect virtue; and perfect in a special degree because its possessor can practice his virtue towards others and not merely be himself; for there are many who can practice virtue in their own private affairs but not in their relations with others." NE 1129b 14-35, compare it to 1133b.

22. In this respect, it seems to me that both the wisdom of the Platonic Socrates and the wisdom of Aristotle the Platonist are very close to the Indian wisdom which is expressed in the Vedantic *Tat tuam asi*, as I have argued elsewhere. See "On Western Rationality and Its Alleged Relation to Aristotle." *Journal of Indian Council of Philosophical Research* XII, No. 1 (1995): 49-77.

23. Consider Socrates's many masks: The gadfly of the *Apology*, changes to the stingray in *Meno*, to midwife in *Theaetetus*, to pedagogue in the *Republic*, to Silenus in the *Symposium*, to cicada in *Phaedrus*, and to swan singing its last sweet song in *Phaedo*.

24. *Republic* 621c-d.

25. *Memorabilia* IV, viii, 6-7.
26. *Phaedrus* 279b-c.