

interpretation

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Volume 11 Number 1

- 1 Thomas Payne The *Crito* as a Mythological Mime
- 25 Eve Adler The Invocation to the *Georgics*
- 43 William D. Richardson Melville's "Benito Cereno": Civilization, Barbarism and Race
- 73 Thomas G. West Marx and Lenin
- 87 Robert Sacks The Lion and the Ass: a Commentary on the Book of Genesis (Chapters 31-34)

Book Reviews

- 129 Joseph M. Bessette *Bureaucrats, Policy Analysts, Statesmen: Who Leads?* edited by Robert A. Goldwin
- 134 Robert F. Smith *Masters of International Thought and Morality and Foreign Policy* by Kenneth W. Thompson

interpretation

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The *Crito* as a Mythological Mime

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The *Crito* begins with an exchange of information between Socrates and Crito.¹ After Socrates asks Crito if it is yet morning and how Crito got into the prison, he goes on to inquire why Crito did not awaken him upon entering. Answering with an oath, Crito says that he would not wish to be awakened himself if he were in Socrates' situation and that he admires how pleasantly Socrates sleeps in the face of death. Socrates responds by reminding Crito that it would be unseemly for men of their age to be angry at the need of dying. The mention of death brings Crito to the point; he must tell Socrates hard and grave news. Socrates anticipates Crito's news by asking if the ship from Delium has arrived. Crito answers that it has not arrived, but will arrive tomorrow. Socrates disagrees; he believes that it will arrive the day after tomorrow. Crito, who had been responding to Socrates' questions, now asks Socrates how he knows this. Socrates answers that a beautiful, white-clad lady, appearing to him in a dream, has prophesied: "On the third day shalt thou arrive in fertile Phthia."² The white-clad lady's message is a second-person paraphrase of words spoken by Achilles in the first person in *Iliad IX*, the Embassy. Socrates could have interpreted the dream's message to mean that in three days he would be in exile in Phthia. Instead, he understands that it means that he will die. This interpretation proves correct. Three days after the dream, Socrates drinks the hemlock and goes to "the hateful gates of Hades," as Achilles might say, or to "fertile Phthia," as the white-clad lady would have it, if Socrates has interpreted her correctly.

This introductory exchange presents three contrasts. First, Socrates' preference for being awake is contrasted with Crito's preference for being asleep; Crito is like the nonphilosophic many who need the stinging of the philosophic gadfly.³ Closely related to this first contrast is the second. Socrates' composure in the face of death is contrasted to Crito's fear of it. Socrates' calm is explicitly said to be due to his advanced old age, but it is also a reasonable result of his not knowing whether death is an evil or not.⁴ The third contrast is between Crito's prediction of the time of Socrates' death and Socrates' prediction.⁵ Crito's calculations are based upon knowledge of events outside the

1. *Cr.* 43a1-44b6.

2. *Cr.* 44b6. The line from the *Iliad* which this line paraphrases is at IX.363.

3. *Ap.* 31e1-10.

4. *Ap.* 29a4-b1.

5. For other examples of Socrates' predictive power in the face of death, see Xen. *Ap. Soc.* xxx. For other examples of angry prediction see *Il.* XVI.851ff.; XXII.358ff.

2 · Interpretation

prison, while Socrates' prediction is based upon his interpretation of a dream. Nonetheless, Socrates is correct; in three days, he goes to Hades, not into exile. His predictive power is superior to Crito's, if he has understood the lady correctly.

However the lady intended Phthia to be understood, whether as death or as exile, her choice of a Homeric passage to convey her message suggests that there is something Achilles-like in Socrates and in the journey he is to undertake. His arrival at his destination will be a sort of homecoming, for Phthia was Achilles' "dear native land."⁶ Achilles, however, never saw Phthia again, but went to Hades instead. In addition, the lady's message also suggests that Socrates will succeed in an Achilles-like endeavor in which Achilles failed. These suggestions and observations present a number of questions. Is Socrates' superior predictive power connected with the openness towards Hades which enables him to conceive of the nether world as fertile? How can Socrates in the prison be likened to Achilles in his tent? And how can it be said that Socrates was a success and Achilles a failure? Finally, if Socrates is successful where Achilles has failed, is his superiority to Achilles also rooted in his openness toward Hades?

This essay will address itself to these questions by attempting to show that the *Crito* as a whole is a mime of *Iliad IX* in which Crito and Socrates ironically re-enact and philosophically revise both the ambassadors' plea that Achilles, giving up his quarrel with Agamemnon, return to the battle line and Achilles' haughty spurning of that plea.⁷ In order to demonstrate this, it must also be shown that Socrates' trial is the equivalent of Achilles' quarrel with Agamemnon and that Crito's reenactment of the role of the ambassadors is an attempt to reconcile Socrates to a political authority with which he had quarreled. Further, Socrates, for his part, must be shown to imitate Achilles' refusal of reconciliation to political authority by his resistance to Crito's proposal for escape. However, these anticipated corollaries to the central thesis of this essay are almost the exact opposite of the impressions which a first reading of the dialogue creates, because Crito urges disobedience to the verdict of the Athenian jurymen and Socrates argues for obedience. In maintaining them and the central thesis itself, this essay will argue that the keys to understanding this reversal are suggested in the three contrasts of the introductory exchange. The imitation of *Iliad IX* is not straightforward, but ironic and revised by the influence of philosophy. This influence manifests itself in Socrates' composure in the face of death and informs the exchanges between him and Crito; Achilles, however, the chief actor of *Iliad IX*, is a hater of Hades. The polar attitudes

6. *Il.* IX.101.

7. Homer's account of the Embassy is divided into three speeches, plus an introduction (ll. 205–224). Odysseus is the first speaker, and it is he who offers Agamemnon's gifts (ll. 225–306). He is answered by Achilles (ll. 307–429), who is followed by Phoenix (ll. 430–605). The Crito's re-enactment is similarly tripartite, its divisions being Crito's exhortation, Socrates' rejoinder, and the dialogue with the laws.

toward death of Socrates, on the one hand, and of Crito and Achilles, on the other, form the axis upon which Socrates revolutionizes Achilles' answer and thus reaps success from it. In order to present the argument for these conclusions, and in order to avoid the awkwardness of attempting to interpret two works simultaneously, this essay will begin with an analytical summary of the *Crito*. This will be followed by a discussion of the context of *Iliad IX* and of the special significance of Achilles' boastful intention to return to Phthia. Finally, the essay will conclude with an analysis of the imitation and revision of the Homeric story.

I

After Socrates tells him about the white-clad lady, Crito begins his exhortation⁸ by pleading that the impending execution will work a twofold loss upon him. In the first place, Crito will lose a friend of such a sort that he is not likely to find again; in the second, he will lose face, for the many, who do not know them well, will think Crito could have saved his friend, but that he was unwilling to spend the money. The word used by Crito for friend is *ἐπιτήδειος*, the useful one, not *φίλος*, the dear one. Xenophon records how Socrates had been useful to Crito when the sycophants had threatened him with a bad reputation among the many and its consequences.⁹ Again, in the prison this time, Socrates serves as Crito's counsellor about the opinion of the many by advising him that they should not care about the opinion of the many; the most decent men will know how the business was handled. Crito objects that the many can do not only the smallest evils, but the greatest, as well, if someone has a bad reputation among them. In answer, Socrates dismisses the opinion of the many for a second time. It would be good, he says, if the many could do the greatest evils, because they would be able to do the greatest goods as well, but they do neither, for they cannot make a man wise or foolish. Socrates does not say who can do this. Crito ignores Socrates' interruption and goes on to what he deems more serious considerations. Although worried about the loss of reputation, Crito is not worried about the loss of property. He tells Socrates not to worry about any heavy fines which might be levied against him through the instigation of the sycophants. He can handle them; they can be

8. *Cr.* 44b5–46a7. Because of the “backwardness” of the mime, Crito's exhortation corresponds to Phoenix's exhortation, the last speech in Homer's account of the Embassy. In his exhortation to Achilles to come to the aid of the Greeks, Phoenix tells his former ward the story of Meleanger, the boar-hunter. Meleanger was angry at his relatives, refusing to come to their aid when their city was attacked. Finally, he came to their aid as the enemy was climbing the walls and firing the city. The point of the story is that Meleanger was forced to aid fellow citizens with whom he was angry, but received no honor thereby. It is a tale designed to show the justice and the inevitability of coming to the aid of one's own.

9. Xen. *Mem.* II.ix.

4 · Interpretation

bought off cheaply. Socrates answers that he is considering possible financial loss to Crito and many other things as well. The useful Crito's wealth seems to be more important to Socrates than his friend's reputation. However, one does not know what are the other things on Socrates' mind; perhaps they concern Socrates' reputation, which will be harmed by an escape, according to the personified Laws who appear at the end of the dialogue.¹⁰ Crito does not inquire about these other things, but, mindful only of Socrates' mention of cost, tells Socrates not to worry about money, because Simmias and Cebes are in town and will defray expenses. This said, Crito turns to considerations of justice and nobility. He accuses Socrates of treating his children unjustly by begetting them and then abandoning his duty of raising them. No mention of duty to the city is made. Such conduct is ignoble, according to Crito, and gives the appearance of vice and "lack of manliness" (*ἀνανδρία*, also "cowardice"). Indeed, Crito scolds, Socrates' failure to prevent the trial from coming on, his unsuccessful defense and his ridiculous counter-penalty also appear unmanly. This view of manliness is closely related to Crito's view of justice; both assume that a man's first duty is to resist harm to himself and to his own. This appeal to manly duty ends Crito's exhortation, and Socrates then responds.

On the surface, Socrates' rejoinder considers only the questions of justice and nobility and ignores the preservation of friends, reputation and property.¹¹ He begins by telling Crito that his zeal (*προθυμία*, eager *θυμός*) is worth much, if properly directed, but if not, is hard to bear. Subtly contrasting his own calm to Crito's agitation, Socrates describes himself as the "sort of man, not now for the first time, but always, as to obey the reason (*λόγος*) which upon calculation seems best to me."¹² The reasons which Socrates will accept as a result of his calculating are not necessarily unchangeable. He will exchange old reasons for new and better ones, but he has already taken into consideration the power of the many to kill him. He reminds Crito that they had agreed many times before that some opinions are to be honored, others dishonored, and he tells Crito that it would be unseemly for men of their age to change their agreed opinions because of the approach of death. The opinions of the many are not among those to be honored, according to what Socrates and Crito have previously agreed, but only good and useful opinions. These are the opinions of the sensible, who are few.

After Crito again agrees that the opinions of the many are not valuable,

10. Cr. 53a8–54d1, esp. 53e3–54b1. Reputation, family and money are also concerns in the *Euthydemus*, a dialogue in which Crito is Socrates' principal interlocutor. Crito wishes to spend money to send his son to the sophistic brothers. Socrates wants Crito to spend money so that he can enroll in their classes; his object is to learn how to appear wise without arousing envy. Crito refuses to pay, reminding Socrates that it would be unseemly for him to study with the young. In the prison, however, Socrates has already fallen victim to envy because of his reputation for wisdom. See Leo Strauss, "On the *Euthydemus*," *Interpretation* I, No. 1, pp. 1–20.

11. Cr. 46b1–50a5.

12. Cr. 46f1–6.

Socrates turns his rejoinder toward greater specificity by means of an example. In matters of health, he says, the opinion of one man only, the trainer, is to be valued; the opinion of the many is worthless. Therefore, everyone, not just the athlete in training, should submit to the opinion of the trainer for the sake of the body. Similarly, with respect to the just and the unjust, the base and the noble, the good and the bad, the opinion of one only is beneficial, the opinion of the many is harmful. Therefore, with respect to the just, the noble and the good, one should submit to the expert in these things, if he can be found. Socrates does not indicate who this expert is or what ought to be done if he cannot be found.¹³ The alternative to following the opinion of the one who is expert is to follow the opinion of the many, but the argument implies that the opinion of the many in matters of justice, nobility and goodness is harmful. However, Socrates avoids saying exactly to what it is harmful; he confines himself to such circumlocutions as “that which is helped by justice, but harmed by injustice.”¹⁴ This phrase could mean that it is the city or the soul of a man which is harmed by attending to the opinion of the many.

Not attending to the opinion of the many, however, can be harmful to the body, because the opinion of the many about justice is the law. Perhaps in recognition of this, the final part of Socrates’ rejoinder, immediately before the personified Laws appear, addresses itself to the possibility that the opinion of the many should be respected because of their power, especially the power to kill.¹⁵ Again he reminds Crito of what they had always agreed upon, by asking him if he still remains of the opinion that to live well is more important than to live. Crito assents to this, thus agreeing that the power of the many is less than the greatest.

Socrates then gives content to the concept of living well by identifying living well with living justly. If to live well is to live justly, then the only question before Crito and Socrates is whether or not it is just to escape without the permission of the Athenians. All else is irrelevant. Socrates then explains what it means to live justly: justice never does wrong; therefore, it is never just to do evil to anyone, even in return for evil. This conclusion is very radical, and Socrates emphasizes its gravity by telling Crito that only a few will agree with it. Between those who believe this and the many who would do harm in return for harm, there can be no common deliberations, but they must despise one another when each sees how the other thinks (deliberates).¹⁶ When Socrates previously discussed the distinction between the wise few and the foolish many, he drew no explicit political consequences from it, but the explicitly mentioned consequences of the distinction between the harm-doing many and the harmless

13. See Leo Strauss, “On Plato’s *Apology of Socrates and Crito*,” in *Essays in Honor of Jacob Klein* (Annapolis, Md.: St. John’s College Press, 1976), p. 166.

14. *Cr.* 47d3–5. See below, n. 17, for a corresponding circumlocution.

15. *Cr.* 48a10–11.

16. *Cr.* 49c10–d3.

6 · Interpretation

few are very serious. If there is no common deliberation between the few and the many, but rather contempt, citizenship between them is difficult, if not impossible. For this reason, one wonders if a belief in harmful, or vengeful, justice is not a prerequisite for citizenship in the ordinary sense, for being part of the many. One also wonders if the division of mankind according to knowledge is also the same as the distinction according to opinions about justice.

Socrates suggests no answer clearly. Instead, he mitigates the harsh political implication of the relations between the harmless few and the harm-doing many by telling Crito that the question which they must now examine in common has become whether or not, in escaping without persuading the city, “we [Crito and Socrates] do harm to some, and especially to those whom we ought to harm the least.”¹⁷ This circumlocution matches the one encountered earlier, when Socrates spoke of what is harmed by the opinion of the many about justice, etc. The most obvious meaning of the new circumlocution is the city, but if it is the city which Socrates would harm by escaping, then Socrates’ position with respect to the power of the many is much different than his position in the prison of the many, awaiting execution, would suggest. It is not in the power of the many to do the greatest evils to Socrates, but it is in the power of Socrates to harm the city, the community of the many, by avoiding the worst evil of which the many are capable.

However, the meaning of Socrates’ circumlocution need not be the city exclusively. It might mean his own soul, since that certainly is something which least of all should be harmed and which is helped by justice and harmed by injustice. It might mean Crito’s property or reputation or any one of the things which he was considering when he interrupted Crito’s discussion of financing the escape. Or he might mean his own reputation, how things will look “to the most decent men,” who know Crito and Socrates and who will know that miserliness and unmanliness were not the reasons why Socrates remained in the prison to die.

Socrates and Crito do not themselves consider directly the issue of the harmfulness of the escape, but they examine it through a dialogue between Socrates and the personified “Laws and community of the city.”¹⁸ When Crito shows himself unable to grasp how escape might entail harm to anyone, Socrates asks him to imagine the Laws stopping them as they were about to run away and demanding of them what they intended to do by fleeing “besides destroying us the Laws and the whole city as far as in you lies (for your part).”¹⁹ The city will be destroyed if private men overturn public judgments, according to the Laws. Socrates then asks Crito if they should retort by saying that the judgment of the city was wrong, and Crito agrees with an oath. With this oath,

17. *Cr.* 49e9–50a3. See above, n. 14.

18. *Cr.* 50a6–54e2.

19. *Cr.* 50a8–b6.

his second, Crito expresses anger against the city and the injustice of its verdict and adds vehemence to his resolve not to be injured by the many, even if it means injuring them. His first profane outburst took place in the introductory passages and had expressed his annoyance at the prospective frustration of his desire to sleep and his vexation at the thought of approaching death. However, neither Socrates nor the Laws attempts to defend the justice of the verdict of the many. The matter is irrelevant, if it is wrong to do injury, even in return for injury. Instead, the Laws ask Socrates if he had not agreed with them to obey the judgments which the city makes. They command him not to be astonished at this question, but to answer, since he is accustomed to asking and answering. From this point on, the Laws press Socrates with a series of extended, rhetorical questions which constitute the bulk of the final part of the *Crito*. Their original and ostensible purpose is to demonstrate to Socrates that he has agreed to abide by the city's judgments. The Laws do not attempt further to show either Socrates or Crito how escape will work harm; that demonstration gives way to a broad discussion of Socrates' relationship to the Laws which supports their contention of agreement. Therefore, if one assumes that the answer to the later question is also the answer to the question it replaces, it is reasonable to suppose provisionally that, by running away, Socrates and Crito would harm those whom they ought to harm the least, and that this harm is done by doing violence to the relationships which the Laws claim constitute agreement.

The body of the dialogue with the Laws is divisible into three major parts, the divisions being marked by very short answers given by Crito when Socrates, dropping the *persona* of the Laws, asks him questions directly.²⁰ In the first part of their dialogue with Socrates, the Laws pretend to a sort of patriarchal authority over him. They ask if it is because he blames the Laws concerning marriage and education that he is trying to destroy them. Arguing that it was through them that his father wed his mother and generated him, they assert that he stands in the same unequal relationship to them as a child does to its parents. Going beyond even this, they claim him as a slave, asking finally: "But towards the fatherland and toward the Laws, is it permissible for you that if we try to destroy you, supposing it to be just, you should try to destroy the Laws and the fatherland . . . ? Or are you so wise that you have forgotten that the fatherland is more to be honored than father and mother, and more sacred and holier before gods and men who have understanding?"²¹ Because the fatherland is sacred, the Laws say that "one is bound either to persuade it or to do what it commands. And one must not surrender, nor give way nor leave the battle line, but, in war and in the courts and everywhere,

20. These occur at 51c5 and 52d7.

21. *Cr.* 51a2–b3.

8 · Interpretation

one must do what the city and fatherland command, or one must persuade it of what is just."²²

After Crito agrees to what the Laws have said, they ease into their second argument by telling Socrates that if the laws concerning marriage, or any other law, were displeasing to him, he could have left the city. Since he did not run away, the Laws conclude that they pleased him differently from others (more than others) and that he had "agreed to be a citizen according to us in deed, but not in speech."²³ As further proof of his satisfaction with them, the Laws, which become more and more the spokesmen for Socrates as they continue their argument, say to Socrates that "you never went out of the city for a *theoria*, except once to the Isthmus, unless it was to be a soldier; . . . nor did the desire to know another city and other laws seize you [Socrates]."²⁴

In the third part of their argument, the Laws become entirely spokesmen for Socrates as they brush aside his obligations to the city, family and friends and speak solely of his duty toward himself and his reputation. Two alternatives are open to Socrates: either he may live and go into exile or he may die and go to Hades. According to the Laws, two types of exile are available: he may go to a well-governed place, such as Megara or Crete, or he may go to the disorderly and immoderate Thessaly. In either place, the reputation which he would earn by running away would be such that he could not continue to philosophize. In Thessaly, the barbarous chieftains would receive him, but they would make sport of him and his ignominious flight from Athens; serious conversation about justice and virtue could not prosper in this atmosphere. In the well-governed cities, proper parents, knowing that Socrates had been condemned for corrupting the young, would keep their sons from him; he would be considered an enemy of the Laws. Only in the kingdom of Hades would it be possible for Socrates to be received graciously. By dying in the prison, Socrates would earn a good reputation with the laws of Hades because their brothers, the personified Laws of the dialogue, would put in a good word for him. Since Socrates must soon go to Hades anyway, even if he goes into exile, it is best to go with a good reputation. This conclusion having been reached, the dialogue ends as Crito is unable to make any answer to Socrates, and the Corybantes drown out any answer which he might make.

This completes the summary of the text of the *Crito*. Common to both Crito's exhortation and Socrates' rejoinder are discussions of harm-doing and of reputation. Crito seeks to avoid harm to himself and his reputation, even at the cost of harming others. Socrates would harm no one, and his concern with reputation is ambiguous. Harm-doing without being harmed and as a means to reputation is also the theme of *Iliad IX*, as the following analysis of that work will show.

22. *Cr.* 51b3-c1.

23. *Cr.* 52d4-6. See n. 38.

24. *Cr.* 52b2-c1.

II

The purpose of the ambassadors in coming to Achilles was to calm his anger, satisfy his outraged honor and persuade him to return to the battle line. The wrath of Achilles, which is the theme of the *Iliad* as a whole, was kindled by Achilles' quarrel with Agamemnon, and it set in motion a course of events which ultimately led to Achilles' death.²⁵ The quarrel arose when Agamemnon deprived Achilles of his prize of honor, Briseis, who was dear to him. This questionable, possibly unjust deprivation proved very costly to the Greeks. As a result of it, Achilles withdrew his obedience to Agamemnon, and, in order to avenge the insult, asked his mother to intercede for him with Zeus so that the Trojans might prevail in battle as long as he remained absent from the battle line. When Zeus granted this request, the Greeks were forced back to the wall which protected their ships, suffering heavy losses. As Hector pressed the attack and threatened the ships with fire, Agamemnon was prevailed upon to send Odysseus and Phoenix to Achilles to offer him the return of Briseis and many fine gifts, if he would return to the fighting. Achilles, however, spurned the gifts, saying that in the tent of Agamemnon, "noble and base in like honor stand."²⁶ Rather than facing the Trojan onslaught, he would return to Phthia to wed and to live a long life in his father's house. The line in which Achilles informed the ambassadors of his intention to return home was the line which the white-clad lady paraphrased in Socrates' dream.

Achilles' intended homecoming and marriage must be understood in reference to the decree of fate that Achilles' life would be either short and glorious or long and obscure. Achilles thought that by coming to Troy, unbound by the oath of Tyndarus, he had chosen the former alternative,²⁷ but Agamemnon had dimmed his glory by depriving him of Briseis and by showing ingratitude for his war-like service in the cause of the Greeks. This, far more than the loss of Briseis, was the cause of his anger against Agamemnon.²⁸

Therefore, when Achilles sent his mother to Zeus, he was seeking to vindicate his honor by showing the Greeks that they would be defeated without him. Hector's burning of the Greek ships would have been the consummation of Achilles' quest for glory and the perfection of his plans of vengeance. Of course, such a reburnishing of Achilles' tarnished glory would have cost him his life, if the old prophecy was to be believed. Therefore, it seems that by spurning Agamemnon's gifts and abandoning the ships to Hector, Achilles had again chosen glory over longevity. In fact, Achilles' calculations and the re-

25. The interpretation of *Iliad IX* here developed is based upon the interpretation of the plot of the *Iliad* as a whole set forth by Jacob Klein in "Plato's *Ion*," *Claremont Journal of Public Affairs* II, No. 1 (Spring 1973), pp. 23-37.

26. *Il.* IX.319.

27. *Il.* IX.410-416.

28. *Il.* IX.363.

sulting choice are more complicated. By returning to Phthia as Hector vicariously earned him glory, Achilles planned to cheat his fate by achieving glory before Troy and a long life in his father's house. Thus, by returning to Phthia, Achilles would achieve a perfect vengeance not only against Agamemnon but also against fate, if by perfect vengeance one understands the infliction of the maximum of harm on enemies with no cost to oneself or to one's property or friends.

What then upset Achilles' calculations and sent him to Hades instead of Phthia? The answer lies in the fact that Achilles did not know that, when Zeus granted his request to favor the Trojans in battle, his fate had been sealed. He did not know this because he did not know himself and his limitless appetite for glory and vengeance. It was this hunger which induced Achilles to grant Patroclus' request, made on the day after the embassy, to lead the Myrmidons forward against the advancing Trojans. The stated cause for this decision was that such action was necessary to save Achilles' own ships;²⁹ considerations of Agamemnon or the other Greeks had nothing to do with it. But such a last-minute rescue would surely add to the humiliation of Agamemnon. (Between the Embassy and the sending forth of Patroclus, Agamemnon had distinguished himself in battle; this must have piqued Achilles.) Moreover, Achilles permitted Patroclus to wear his own armor, although cautioning him not to fight with Hector but to confine himself to frightening the Trojans by showing himself and imitating Achilles' war-cry. By this admonition, Achilles hoped to gain a bonus in glory and vengeance against Agamemnon, by showing to all that his voice and form alone were sufficient even against Hector in the fullness of his might. He also hoped to save Patroclus' life, since the decree of Zeus had made the Trojans invincible, as long as Achilles stayed out of battle. This investment in additional glory went sour, however, when Patroclus, the image of Achilles, was himself moved to gain glory by challenging Hector. Hector, invincible because of Achilles' withdrawal from the fighting, slew Patroclus, thus bringing the awful wrath of Achilles away from Agamemnon and down upon himself.

In order to avenge the loss of his friend, Achilles again went to his mother for help, asking her to persuade Hephaestus to provide armor to replace that which Hector had stripped from Patroclus. Thetis, who knew that Achilles was renewing his choice for glory over a long life, reminded her son of the decree of fate, saying: "Short-lived, I ween, must thou be, O my boy, for straightway after Hector is death appointed unto thee." Achilles answered by cursing his wrath and accepting his death, crying out: "Straightway may I die, since I did not succor my comrade at his slaying. . . Therefore, I go not back to my dear native land [Phthia], nor have I at all been succor to Patroclus nor to all my other comrades that have been slain by noble Hector. . . Now go I forth,

29. *Il.* XVI.49–100, especially 80–83.

that I may light on the destroyer of him I loved, on Hector; then will I accept death whensoever Zeus willeth to accomplish it. ³⁰ On the next day, the third after the embassy, Achilles slew Hector. Thereby, Achilles assured his glory for ever—or so he thought, but this gave him no cause for rejoicing. He also had sealed his doom. From the death of Hector onwards, Achilles, the hater of Hades, was destined to go to Hades, not Phthia. His vengeance and his glorification were purchased at the highest price, not cheaply, contrary to his plans in *Iliad IX*.

In the light of these considerations, the embassy emerges as a critical midpoint in the course of the events which constitute the last days of Achilles. If Achilles had gone home to Phthia, none of the subsequent, tragic events would have occurred; Achilles would have triumphed over Agamemnon, over death and over fate, without tragedy. The *Crito* is similarly a midpoint within the Platonic corpus, its events standing between Socrates' trial, as reported in the *Apology*, and his death, as reported in the *Phaedo*. Therefore, in order to establish and elaborate the likeness of the tragic, harm-doing hero of the *Iliad* to the philosophic, harmless hero of the *Crito*, it is necessary to begin by discussing the context within which Socrates refused to collaborate with Crito in the jail-break.

III

Socrates' imitation and revision of the great deeds of Achilles, like the great deeds themselves, begin with a quarrel with political authority. As Achilles defied Agamemnon, "king of men," over the loss of Briseis, Socrates defied the authority of the Athenians over the possible loss of philosophy. Socrates began the quarrel at his trial with a self-conscious comparison between Achilles and himself. Having refuted both the old and the new accusers and having accounted for his service to the Delphic god, Socrates adduced an anonymous and hypothetical accuser to ask him if he is not ashamed to be engaged in a business from which he ran the risk of dying.³¹ Socrates contemptuously answered that such considerations are irrelevant; one must only consider if one's actions are just or unjust, those of a good man or those of a bad man. He then called upon the example of Achilles, who, according to Socrates, thought little of the risk of dying compared to the risk of dishonor. In making the comparison, he quoted exactly the words used by Thetis to remind her son of the deadly consequences of killing Hector, but he amended the passage spoken by Achilles to read: "Straightway may I die *and bring judgment upon the wrong-doer*, lest I remain here beside the hollow ships, a laughing-stock and a

30. The exchange between Thetis and her son is *Il.* XVIII.95–116.

31. *Ap.* 28b3–5.

12 · Interpretation

burden on the earth.”³² From Achilles’ example, Socrates extracted a principle which he applied to himself as well: “whenever someone stations himself, believing that it is best, or is stationed by a commander, there he must, as it seems to me, remain and run risks, in no way taking into account either death or anything else before disgrace.”³³ According to Socrates, obedience to this principle had made him a good citizen, holding him to his assigned station at Potidaea, Amphipolis and Delium. It would likewise lead him to continue to philosophize, even if he must run the risk of dying. The oracle of the Delphic god had commanded him to philosophize, examining himself and others; to do otherwise, even at the command of the Athenians, would be to leave the post assigned him by a better. It would also be to assume impiously that he knew what most people think they know, but do not, that death is the greatest evil. Therefore, Socrates told the jury that if it were to release him and spare his life upon condition that he not philosophize, he would not obey them, but the god instead. Thus, Socrates defied the Athenians on two grounds, first the requirements of his service to the god, and second what he has learned from that service: human wisdom, especially wisdom about death, is worth little or nothing.³⁴

However, even though he defied the Athenians in a most dangerous way, Socrates was not completely indifferent to self-preservation. He told the jurors that his disobedience would be a benefit to them, not an injustice, for, by his service to the Delphic god, he had exhorted them to virtue, stinging them like a gadfly. He did this as his civic duty rather than going into politics in the conventional sense. In politics, he would have made many enemies; therefore, his *daimonion*, which has always kept him from harm, has kept him out of public life so that he could render his beneficial service. Thus the refutation of the anonymous accuser, which began with such contempt for considerations of self-preservation, ended with concern with self-preservation, but as a condition of philosophy, not an obstacle to it.

Even after his conviction for impiety, Socrates continued the quarrel, by raising these issues in his proposals for a counter-penalty to the death sentence urged by his accusers. Because his stinging service to the city was meritorious but had left him in great poverty, he proposed lifetime maintenance in the Pyrtanaeum. He refused to consider the option of exile, an option which the many expected him to take. He knew exile to be an evil, but he did not know death to be an evil. Therefore, it was impossible for him to go into exile and be silent, for that would be to disobey the god. And it was undesirable to go into exile, because the unexamined life of exile would not be worth living.³⁵

32. *Ap.* 28d2–5. Emphasis added. The original lines (Il. xviii.98–99) had read: Straightway may I die since I might not help my slain comrade.” Socrates substitutes a concern for justice for a friend.

33. *Ap.* 28d6–10.

34. *Ap.* 28d6–29c1, especially 29a4–6, b1–7.

35. *Ap.* 37e3–38b5, especially 38a5–6.

Socrates did say that he was willing to pay a fine, but only because he did not consider the loss of money an evil, and he was not accustomed to consider himself deserving of evil. Because Socrates' proposals left the jury with no alternative to the death penalty consistent with its own dignity, it voted to condemn him by a greater majority than it voted to convict him.

Perhaps it is difficult to see the similarity of Socrates' quarrel with the Athenian people to the quarrel of *Iliad I*, especially since Socrates showed no anger in provoking it. The qualities common to both are insolence and defiance. Both Socrates and Achilles challenge political authority, Socrates by telling the Athenians that he will not obey a ban on philosophy and by setting up the authority of the Delphic god over that of the Athenians, Achilles by demanding that Agamemnon return Chryseis. When Agamemnon answered Achilles' insolence by depriving him of Briseis, Achilles defied him, withdrew his obedience and plotted vengeance; when the Athenians reproved Socrates' insolence by convicting him, Socrates refused to propose a serious counter-penalty. The counter-penalty they expected him to propose, exile, would have deprived him of philosophy, his Briseis, as it were. By proposing it, Socrates would have recognized the authority of the jury to effect such a deprivation. Instead, he denied their authority by proposing nonpenalties.

Still, there are many important differences between the two quarrels, differences which are similar in their terms to the contrasts of the opening exchange of the dialogue. The most important differences are reflected in the changes Socrates made in the Homeric text used to compare himself explicitly to Achilles. Socrates made no plans for vengeance or harm-doing, and no mention of anger. More importantly, the text as spoken by Achilles himself was not spoken during the quarrel with Agamemnon, but much later, after Patroclus' death and the events of *Iliad IX*. When he spoke them, Achilles had at last become 'wise to himself,' realizing that his wrath had been the cause of all his misfortunes, that it would at last exact the penalty of death, and that his plans for achieving vengeance, glory and longevity had failed. In revising, as well as imitating Achilles, Socrates mimed Achilles' words in reverse order. This backwardness is part of the ironic playfulness of the mime. From the start of his last days, the wise servant of the Delphic god knew that he would die and accepted the possibility of it without clever plans to avoid it or angry attempts to avenge it.³⁶ His superior predictive power antedated the appearance of the white-clad lady, and again was manifested in a calm acceptance of approaching death.

After the trial, the next event in the chain leading to Socrates' death was his refusal to escape from prison. As noted above, this refusal, like the refusal of *Iliad IX*, marked a crisis: if Socrates had escaped, if he had chosen a *pro-*

36. See Xen. *Ap. Soc.* 1–v. Xenophon begins by writing, "I think it worth while to remember Socrates and how he planned for his defense and the end of his life." Several lines later, Xenophon's Socrates says, "But, by Zeus, twice already when I tried to think about my defense, my *daemon* opposed it. Apparently, Socrates planned the end of his life by not planning a defense."

longed life, he would probably have forfeited his place in history, because the greatest lesson of Socrates' life was his death.³⁷ By dying as he did, he dramatized the superiority of the examined life to mere life without philosophy. Crito renewed Socrates' option for the unexamined life, by proposing escape and exile. In rejecting Crito's plans, Socrates re-affirmed his obedience to the Delphic god over the authority of the Athenians.

This analysis supports the truth of the difficult and paradoxical corollaries to the central thesis of this essay which were mentioned at its start. By refusing to escape, Socrates continued the defiance of the Athenians begun at his trial, even as he appeared law-abiding; Crito, who appears to be law-breaking, offers Socrates a reconciliation to the authority he had spurned. However, before the truth of these paradoxes can be fully accepted, a number of questions which they raise about the imitation of and revision of *Iliad IX* must be explored. One set of questions concerns Crito. If Crito is to be seen as the ambassador of the Athenians, how did he obtain his commission? What loss was pending against his principal through Socrates' execution? Another set concerns Socrates' imitation of Achilles. If, in rejecting reconciliation, Achilles calculated a perfection in vengeance and glory, did Socrates as well calculate the consummation of some project? And what was this project? Did it aim at vengeance or glory or at some other ends? A closer examination of Crito's exhortation and Socrates' rejoinder will provide the answers.

Crito's exhortation begins and ends with talk about reputation, how things will look, especially to the many. This seems to be his chief concern, as befits a gentleman, and he seems unconcerned with possible harm to his family, friends and wealth. However, this is only superficially true. Crito values reputation not for its own sake, but as a means of protecting his private affairs. He fears a reputation for being contemptible, a man unable to protect his own, and hence, easy to victimize. His position presents a double paradox. Out of concern for the opinion of the many, he would disobey the verdict of the many, and out of concern for his reputation as a means of protecting family, friends and wealth, he would put these things in danger. These paradoxes are joined by a third. When Crito says that he would lose face by appearing to care for money more than for friends, he implies that those who condemned Socrates would also blame him for not arranging an escape. Like Crito, the many too believe that a man's first duty is to protect his own from harm. They share Crito's opinion about manliness and justice. "The good man succeeds and helps his friends . . . ; justice is helping friends and harming enemies,"³⁸ or, if not

37. See Ernest Barker, *Greek Political Theory: Plato and His Predecessors* (London: Methuen, 1947). p. 96. For a collection of testimonials concerning the death of Socrates see *The Socratic Enigma. A Collection of Testimonies through Twenty-Four Centuries*, Herbert Spielberg, ed. (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1964). Also see Eva Brann, "The Offense of Socrates: A Re-reading of Plato's *Apology*," *Interpretation* VII, No. 2 (May, 1978), p. 1.

38. R. E. Allen, "Law and Justice in Plato's *Crito*," in "Symposium: Plato on the Language of

harming them, avoiding harm from them, by gaining a reputation for being harmful oneself and able to take care of one's own. It is in this sense, therefore, that Crito is commissioned to represent the many: he is the ambassador of the opinion of the many concerning justice. In addition, Crito is the ambassador of the opinion of the many as to what things are of value, and he is the representative of the fear of death or, what is the same thing, of the opinion that death is the greatest evil. Crito's three commissions are closely related. According to what Socrates says not only in the *Crito*, but in the *Apology* and the *Phaedo* as well, the fear of death, the love of property and honor, and the opinion that justice is helping friends and harming enemies are all characteristic of the nonphilosophic many. True lovers of wisdom, on the other hand, do not fear death, because they do not know whether or not it is the greatest evil, and they are of the opinion that justice is never harmful.³⁹ Moreover, in the *Phaedo*, Socrates goes beyond the *Apology*'s professions of ignorance about the evil of death to say that philosophers practice nothing so much as dying and being dead; therefore they are of good cheer when they are about to die, and to be angry at the necessity of dying is a sign that one is not a philosopher, but a lover of property and honor, like the many.⁴⁰

The many's fear of death and their opinion about justice are reflections of the perishability and scarcity of money and honor, the things which the many love. The acquisition of these goods requires competition, and their continued enjoyment requires that they be defended and that there be retaliation against all who threaten their secure possession. The many direct anger and hatred against those who frustrate the acquisition, or jeopardize the possession, of these goods. Therefore, the nonphilosophic many fear and hate death especially, because it is the thief who robs them of all. Death is the ultimate loss, and the hatred of death epitomizes the resentment of the many towards the mortality of the things which they hold dear.

Philosophers, on the other hand, do not fear death, but practice it, although they do not practice death as the many conceive it.⁴¹ It would be beyond the scope of this essay to discuss fully the philosopher's practice of death, but it can be said that their practice entrails two activities. Metaphysically, the death of the philosophers is the journey they take in thought from the senses in order to seek wisdom through the contemplation of "each of the beings, itself by itself . . ."⁴² Practically, the death of the philosophers is an indifference to the

Justice," *Journal of Philosophy* LXIX (October 5, 1972), p. 560. Allen anticipates this essay's thesis about Crito's commission when he writes that "the argument of the *Crito* rests upon a revolution in morals . . . Men acting by the standards of popular morality condemned Socrates to death for impiety; another man, acting by the same standards, urges him to escape" (*op. cit.*, p. 566).

39. See above, n. 16 and n. 35.

40. *Ph.* 61c8-68c3, especially 64a4-6 and 68b8-c3.

41. *Ph.* 64b10-c1.

42. *Ph.* 64c4-69e5, especially 65a9-66a8, and 78b4-80c1.

things of the body, to property and to honor, and to all the things which the many love and which they think make life worth living.⁴³ The philosopher concerns himself with these things only as long as they contribute to, or distract from, the pursuit of wisdom. (Thus Socrates concerns himself with the opinions of the most decent, who may know something about justice and injustice, and with self-preservation, by heeding the advice of the *daimonion*.) Anger, whose root is in an attachment to perishable things, does not contribute to the pursuit of wisdom, and because wisdom cannot be destroyed by enemies, the threat of vengeance is unnecessary to protect it. Therefore, by urging Socrates to disobey the verdict for the sake of reputation, family and friends, Crito proposes to Socrates a reconciliation with an authority more fundamental than the verdict of the many. He proposes submission to the imperatives of the loves and fears of the many.

The perishability of the things which the many love is also responsible for Crito's paradoxical willingness to risk money and other private goods for the sake of reputation, and it is the cause of his anxiety over reputation as a means of protecting private affairs. This perishability is also at the root of the more interesting paradox of Achilles' hatred of death, together with his willingness to die for the sake of honor. The preservation of one beloved but perishable thing is often inconsistent with the preservation of other beloved things. The lover of property and honor, whether in the battle line or in the law courts or at home on his estate, must risk or give up certain things in order to gain others. It is, of course, desirable that things of little worth be traded off for things of greater worth. This requires that the man of practical excellence be aware of some ascending standard of value whereby he may judge if his transactions are profitable. At the beginning of his exhortation, Crito seems to be willing to trade money for the sake of reputation and friend. At the end of it, he refers to a criterion of manliness which would sacrifice all to reputation. Achilles' actions are also informed by the same standard of manly excellence. But if reputation itself is to be valued for the sake of the protection it affords—and this is clearly the case with Crito's valuing of reputation—of what benefit are such transactions? Crito himself expresses an ill-articulated awareness of this problem in the middle of his exhortation, when he tells Socrates that Simmias and Cebes are willing to foot the bill for the escape and cover-up. Success in the preservation both of Crito's reputation and of his friend's life would then cost Crito nothing, just as Achilles' return to Phthia would have purchased vengeance and glory cheaply and without the sacrifice of longevity. The criterion of manliness shared by Achilles and Crito assumes that the greatest manliness is a matter of shrewd calculation and superior trading so as to gain the greatest goods, while giving up little or nothing of worth thereby. However, according to Socrates speaking in the *Phaedo*, this is profitless trading

43. *Ph.* 66b1–67b5, 80c2–84b8.

done in the false coinage of counterfeit virtue.⁴⁴ What Achilles and Crito think of as manliness (*ἀνδρεία*, courage or manliness) is but an example of the false courage of the many. The many, according to Socrates, are manly out of cowardice and fear. Fearing loss, they are emboldened to take risks; fearing death, they stand fast in the battle line in order to save themselves. The true economy, according to Socrates, is to exchange all things for wisdom. This trading alone is truly profitable, because it exchanges perishable things of little worth for what is supremely valuable and imperishable. It alone is manly because it is not motivated by fear of death or loss.

The conclusion to which this discussion leads is that Socrates' revision of Achilles' speeches and deeds amounts to the substitution of a true courage for a fool's courage and the replacement of quarreling over petty vanities with the pursuit of wisdom. It seems unfair to reduce the courage of Achilles to cowardice and to compare Crito's desire to save money in arranging the jail-break to Achilles' attempt to vindicate his honor by returning to Phthia. Such comparisons seem to ignore the distinction between the love of honor and the love of wealth. They appear oblivious to the difference between a heroic youth facing an early death and an old man nearing a natural death apart from impending execution. One must remember, however, that Achilles' anger and courage, his hatred of death and his love of honor, all have a common source, his "great *thymos*," as Homer calls it. Aquinas calls *thymos* the irascible appetite, the soul's response to an arduous good. It is aroused by frustration or loss, and it generates the anger needed to risk death and other dangers in overcoming obstacles to the fulfillment of desires. *Thymos* is also the seat of pride and the love of honor, as the angry soul compares itself first to the obstacles to be overcome and then to all other things. The original object of desire and the original cause of frustration can be forgotten as the angry soul becomes engrossed in the new desire to overcome. Achilles' quarrel with Agamemnon over Briseis and his subsequent indifference to her return; his anger first with Agamemnon, then with Hector, then at anger itself—all illustrate this point. Moreover, fear of death as the ultimate loss and love of honor as the most worthy good are the obverse and reverse sides of the same coin. By seeking a glory which he thought immortal, Achilles hoped to triumph over death by gaining what could not be lost. His courage and his anger are the passions required to face the sacrifice of life necessary to this victory. The ultimate value of this triumph can be doubted, and was denied by Achilles himself. In *Odyssey XI*, he tells Odysseus that he would rather be a serf to a pauper than lord of all the dead.⁴⁵ If Odysseus is to be believed, the dead whose love of honor is rooted in love of property come to prefer dishonor to death.

The grounds for Achilles' dissatisfaction with glory as the greatest good are revealed by the angry hero himself in spurning the conciliatory gifts offered by

44. *Ph.* 68a11–69e1, especially 69a6–b5.

45. *Od.* xi.489–91

Agamemnon through Odysseus. In the tent of Agamemnon, “noble and base in like honor stand,” according to Achilles. In other words, Agamemnon and those under his sway are not competent to judge who is noble and who is base, and, therefore, they cannot be the sources of honor. By accepting back Briseis, his prize of honor, from Agamemnon, Achilles would have conceded the king’s right to be the judge of honor. But if Agamemnon is a “drunkard with the eyes of a dog and the heart of a deer,” then to be honored by him would be to be dishonored. The appropriate attitude for Achilles to take toward him would be the same indifference to him and his opinions as Socrates adopted toward the opinion of the many concerning justice. Nonetheless, it was to ‘show’ and to show up Agamemnon that Achilles planned to return to Phthia and that he sent Patroclus into battle. Achilles’ path to glory is necessarily through comparisons between himself and his rivals made by other men—either men like Agamemnon, whom Achilles despised, or men such as Homer, who sing not only of Achilles but also of his rivals. But whoever their source, the opinions of men lacking knowledge are changeable, mixing truth with error together. Although these opinions may be the source of glory, the glory is never untarnished and is always fleeting. The opinions of men cannot provide the immortality on which Achilles set his heart.

Achilles’ rejection of Agamemnon’s gifts of reconciliation shows a dim awareness of the limits upon the competence of nonphilosophic opinion. Socrates’ rejoinder to Crito mimes Achilles’ answer to Odysseus, and consistent with these observations about Crito’s commission as ambassador of the opinion of the many, Socrates’ answer to his friend is an attack upon the authority and competence of Crito’s principal. Not only is the opinion of the many about the body harmful to the body, but also their opinions about the just, the noble and the good are incompetent, like those of Agamemnon. They harm that which is “helped by justice, but harmed by injustice.” Incompetent as Agamemnon’s opinions may be, however, the sting of his insults goaded Achilles into planning a perfect revenge as the means of self-glorification. Socrates, on the other hand, abjures vengeful justice. Instead of calculating how to do the most harm to enemies with the least harm to himself, Socrates, together with the Laws, calculates how to avoid harm to “those whom we should harm the least.” If Socrates intends to accomplish something by dying unreconciled to the opinion of the many, that is, if he intends to succeed where Achilles failed, he must do it by not doing harm by escaping. The key to understanding Socrates’ revision of Achilles’ project is to understand the ambiguous object of Socrates’ concern, “that which is helped by justice and harmed by injustice.” To penetrate this enigma, it will be necessary to examine the two circumlocutions which Socrates uses to discuss that which he might harm, and to reexamine the “reasons which upon calculation seem best,” in order to determine what he seeks to avoid harming and what is to be achieved by not harming it.

That which is helped by justice but harmed by injustice could be either the

soul of an individual man or the city, the community of the many. It is quite clear that, by going into exile, Socrates would harm his own soul by cutting it off from philosophic conversation. However, the opinion of the many about justice, as Crito represents it, requires that Socrates escape, preferring the sleepy, unexamined life to the wakeful, examined life. Therefore, the requirements of Socrates' soul and the requirements of reconciliation to the opinion of the many are contradictory. The contradiction cannot be resolved by pointing out that Socrates obeys the verdict of the jury, which is an opinion of the many. Socrates does not obey the verdict, but the Delphic god and the results of his own calculation. He depreciates the opinion of the many about justice, saying that it is not to be honored. Thus, by remaining in the prison to die, Socrates runs the risk of doing harm by dishonoring the opinion of the many. This latter sort of harm is quite serious potentially. The opinion of the many about justice is the foundation of regimes and their laws, what the personified laws call "the fatherland and the laws and the community of the city," in whose name they interdict Socrates' proposed escape. To dishonor the opinion of the many can result in harm to the body, property and reputation, especially the civic reputation, if the many choose to punish their detractors. It can also lead to harm to the body politic, if men act upon their rejection of the opinion of the many. The case of Socrates' condemnation for impiety and that of Crito, if Socrates had taken him up on his offer of escape, are examples of the first sort of harm which dishonoring the opinion of the many causes. The cases of Critias and Alcibiades are examples of the second sort. In sum then, Socrates would harm himself, if he were to run away, but in staying, he risks harming the many by dishonoring their opinion, preferring philosophy to the commands of the law and teaching this preference to others. Some way must be found to navigate this Scylla and Charybdis, and so the statesman-like Laws appear in the prison to assist Socrates to chart his course.

When the Laws accuse Socrates of violating their patriarchal authority, their charge is most serious. As patriarchs, their authority is more majestic than that which would stem from biological parentage. They claim Socrates as a slave, not merely as a son. Their holiness reflects the need for wisdom in politics, for their claim to obedience is founded upon the opinion, vital to any political community, that its laws and customs are wise and direct men in the right way of life. This sanctity is the sign of political authority in its purest form, because "authority's hallmark is unquestioning recognition by those who are asked to obey: neither coercion nor persuasion is needed."⁴⁶ Thus the Laws as patriarchs seem to be the spirit, which gives life to a regime, impressing their form upon the citizens and fathering their souls.

For this reason, one may question the simple identification of the Laws personified by Socrates with laws in the ordinary sense of the term, and espe-

46. Hannah Arendt, *On Violence* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1970), p. 45.

cially with the laws of Athens. Although despots, these personified Laws are open to persuasion and change in a way in which the basic constitution of a regime is not. Their persuasibility and mutability are reminiscent of the authority of the “reason which upon calculation seems best” to which Socrates appealed at the beginning of the rejoinder. In their despotic demand that Socrates not leave the battle line or the law courts, they remind one of the language used by Socrates at his trial in justifying his philosophic service to the Delphic god. And in their pretension to honor above all human things, they also suggest the place assigned to the soul by the Athenian Stranger in *Laws V*:

Listen then, all ye who gave ear to our discourse of gods and well-beloved sires. Of all a man’s possessions, the most divine thing after the gods, and the most truly his own is his own soul. Now things which pertain to a man are always of two sorts, a stronger part to be sovereign, and a weaker part to be subject. So a man should ever prefer those that are sovereign in honor before those that are subject. Therefore, when I bid men honor their own souls next to the gods, I am giving the right command.⁴⁷

Thus on the surface, the Laws’ charge to Socrates not to run away is made in the name of the despotic element of the authority of a political community, while on a deeper level they represent the uncompromising demands of the philosopher’s soul and of philosophy as the alternative to the citizen’s way of life.

In the second part of their dialogue with Socrates, the Laws temper their despotism, becoming less imperious in their demands as they become more transparently ironic and progressively more specific in applying themselves to Socrates and his relationship to Athens. Although Socrates may never have left the confines of the city “in deed,” he went abroad often “in speech.” In the *Republic*, his *theoria* “in deed” to see the rites of a foreign goddess was interrupted by a *theoria* “in speech” from the city of pigs to the city of beauty. Although Socrates knew other cities “in speech,” he preferred to live in Athens, the city whose democratic marketplace of regimes provided him with ample theoretical material for investigation and the freedom to use it. Therefore, the Laws’ second argument against running away is based upon considerations of the particular circumstances which permitted Socrates to philosophize for seventy years. More generally, the second argument discusses the reciprocal requirements of philosophy for freedom and of politics for an ironic mitigation of the implications of the philosophic way of life. Since the trial, however, the special circumstances which permitted Socrates to philosophize no longer exist. (Recall that the *daimonion*, Socrates’ old political adviser, has been silent since the indictment.) The city is no longer tolerant of Socrates, and he has antagonized the city into condemning him. If the philosophic and the political ways of life are to coexist without harming one another, a new relationship between

47. *Leg.* v.726e–727a.

them must be established to replace the fortuitous relationship between Socrates and Athens. This new relationship is the subject matter of the Laws' third argument.

In their third argument, the Laws discuss the alternatives open to Socrates in his last days: exile in a well-governed city, exile in a barbarous place, or a journey to Hades by way of obedience to the verdict. The three alternatives point to the three political requirements for philosophy: freedom, culture, and a good reputation for the philosopher. In Thessaly, there would be freedom, but cultivated interlocutors would be lacking. Crete offered civilization, but freedom would be restricted. Athens had provided both freedom and culture, but the third requirement, a good reputation with the citizens, is available only by going to Hades in obedience to the verdict of the Athenians. The Laws' mention of Hades and of their brothers, the laws of the underworld, is Socrates' third speculation about his fate after death since his condemnation. In his first speculation, he spoke of death as a dreamless sleep, the cessation of all activities.⁴⁸ When he speculated about it a second time, he said that, by going to Hades, he could continue to philosophize by conversing about justice with others unjustly condemned, but without the possibility of further condemnation.⁴⁹ The image presented is one of philosophy continuing under utopian conditions, without the constraints of the legal and political order. Such conversations would be purely theoretical with nothing at stake. In the *Crito*, however, Socrates speaks of Hades as political, as having laws which will receive him well or ill, according to his deserts. This third mention of Hades presents the alternative both to the continuation of mere life without philosophy and to the continuation of philosophy without politics. Therefore, it is possible to conclude with some confidence that Socrates' gracious reception by the laws of Hades is intended to signify the continuation of philosophy beyond the death of Socrates in a new and friendly climate of opinion. This new atmosphere will be made possible because Socrates has acted to earn for philosophy a reputation for lawfulness, by his obedience "in deed" to the verdict of the many. Although he rejects Crito's plea on behalf of the opinion of the many, he mitigates the full implications of that rejection with the aid of the Laws and under the cloak of apparent lawfulness.

The new atmosphere created by Socrates is the triumph of nonvengeful justice, surpassing in glory Achilles' triumph over Hector and achieving what Achilles could not achieve, a triumph over death. By dying, Socrates avoids harming those whom he ought to harm the least. He does no harm to himself, because he does not consider death an evil. Death can not deprive him of that which he most desires, to seek wisdom, although a prolonged life could. Nor does he do any harm to the city and its laws. Instead, he teaches the friends of philosophy to defer to the laws, resorting only to persuasion when the in-

48. *Ap.* 40c9–e3.

49. *Ap.* 40e–41c7.

competence of the many causes injustice. Indeed, Socrates' death not only avoids harm but also is beneficial. By means of it, Socrates gains for philosophy a new interlocutor, "the Laws and community of the city," and thus he opens the city to the ameliorating influence of philosophy. In comparison, Achilles' attempt at a perfection of vengeful justice was a failure. It cost him all that was dear to him, bringing destruction upon him and his friends; nonetheless, it did not give him what he truly wanted, victory over Hades, his great enemy, to whose hateful gates he delivered himself on the third day after the Embassy.

In sum, Socrates' competitive imitation of Achilles can be judged a victory for Socrates on a number of counts. Socrates shows himself superior to Achilles in predicting events and in calculating his advantage. He surpasses Achilles in courage because he is not courageous out of fear, but out of love for what is supremely worthy. Moreover, his courage does not bring desolation upon himself or that which he loves. Although he does not hate death, he triumphs over it in both of the ways open to nonphilosophers, but mutually exclusive in the case of Achilles. Not only did Socrates live to an old age, but he is at least as well known to the ages as Achilles. However, before one can call the contest between the two heroes a complete victory for Socrates, one must ask whether or not the reasons for undertaking it were grave enough to justify it. The same questions can be formulated in different terms by asking why Plato chose to present the story of Crito's visit to Socrates and to recount it as a mime of *Iliad IX*. Although Xenophon is at great pains to prove the piety and lawfulness of Socrates, nothing quite like the *Crito* appears in his writings. His account of Socrates' trial does not contain anything comparable to Socrates' likening of himself to Achilles in refusing to give up philosophy, but it does show Socrates predicting that philosophy would be perpetuated after him by others.⁵⁰ Such predictions of vengeance in the face of death are characteristic of Homeric heroes, but Xenophon's suggestion of any element of epic heroism in Socrates is subdued, if it can be said to exist at all. In the *Crito*, however, Plato not only defends Socrates as law-abiding and pious, but also as heroic, hence worthy of imitation. The *Crito* and those parts of the *Apology* in which Socrates compares himself to Achilles seem to be prime examples of Plato's peculiar treatment of Socrates. The old and ugly philosopher becomes young and beautiful, and his words become great deeds. The effects of the resulting drama have been powerful. The manner of Socrates' death, especially as Plato recounts it, has elicited admiration for many centuries, even in the face of occasional rejections of his arguments for remaining in the prison. It might be said that the greatest lesson of his life was his death,⁵¹ and Hegel considers the event of critical significance for the course of world history. His understanding

50. See above, n. 5. See also *Ap.* 37c1-7.

51. Ernest Barker, *Greek Political Theory: Plato and His Predecessors* (London: Methuen, 1947), p. 96.

of the place of Socrates in history is consistent with the interpretation which this essay has developed of the exchange between Crito, as ambassador of the many, and Socrates. According to Hegel, Socrates' service to the Delphic god represented the subjectivization of human consciousness and was in opposition to the objective consciousness of the laws of the ancient city. Critias and Alcibiades carried the lawlessness implicit in the subjectivization of consciousness into action, but Socrates took a different direction. After his death, however, the seed which had flowered in Socrates took root in the Athenians themselves. This awakening of the subjectivity of thought constituted Socrates as the main turning-point of the World Spirit, and the implanting of it in a political community made the personality of Socrates the vortex of World History.⁵² What has been said here about the last days of Socrates shows that at least one of the ways in which the implanting of subjectivized consciousness was achieved was by the engrafting of the poet's art on to philosophy. The reasons for such a wedding can best be appreciated in reference to the imagery of the *Cave* of the Republic. The Cave is the place of the nonphilosophic many, whose opinions are governed by the shadows on the wall and those who interpret them. Once the philosopher has left the Cave, he does not wish to return. Like Achilles, he would rather remain above as "the serf of a portionless man rather than be king over all the dead."⁵³ But return he must, and return to rule, since his experience outside the Cave invalidates all that is seen within the Cave. Still, all the Cave-dwellers cannot be made to leave the Cave, nor can the sun be carried below. The philosopher must learn to act politically. If he cannot make the Cave-dwellers see by the light of the sun, at least he can control the interpretation of the images on the wall. The image of Socrates as hero and the effect of this image upon Western civilization is the great achievement of Plato.

52. G. W. F. Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Geschichte der Philosophie, Werke XIV* (Leipzig: Meiner, 1923), pp. 39, 91–92, 102; *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Geschichte, Werke IX*, pp. 279–80.

53. See above, n. 45.