

# The Philosophic Life and Socratic Fatherhood in the *Apology*, the *Crito*, and the *Phaedo*

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## Abstract

Plato's depiction and defense of philosophy were linked to his depiction and defense of Socrates' own life. Notably in the Early Dialogues which gave accounts of Socrates' trial and execution, Plato portrayed his mentor's life as the philosophic life which one ought to aspire for. Yet, Socrates' admission in the *Apology* and the *Crito*'s reproof that the former had neglected his *oikon* or his household presented an image of Socrates that suggested that the paradigm of the philosophic life had been in fact remiss by being an absent father who failed to care for his own children. I indicate that this image of Socrates engendered questions and criticisms against the life devoted to philosophy, especially from those belonging to a family-centered cultural milieu such as the Philippines. I show that Socrates's fatherhood is one that prioritizes the care of the political community over that of his own family.

**Keywords:** Plato, trial of Socrates, Early Dialogues, fatherhood, philosophic life

From Plato we receive the notion that philosophy is not merely an activity, that it is not merely something that a man *does*. Philosophy is an *ethos* in which one's actions are derived ultimately from the soul's virtue. Philosophy, in other words, is a kind of life that is lived.

Plato's portrayal of Socrates in the former's *Dialogues* has immortalized the latter as the personification of what the philosophic life is, and has depicted how it is to be lived. In Plato's writings,

the figure of Socrates emerged as the quintessential *Western* philosopher. Plato's Socratic or "Early Dialogues"<sup>1</sup> were replete with instances wherein the philosophic life is outlined and defended. Often, the depiction of philosophy and its defense are linked to not only what is said about it by Plato's characters in the *Dialogues* (notably by Socrates himself); but more importantly, to what Socrates himself does. Plato's depiction and defense of philosophy are linked to his depiction and defense of Socrates' own life. In Plato, most particularly in the Early Dialogues, the philosophic life *is* the Socratic life.

The figure or image of Socrates, therefore, has its significance in Western thought inasmuch as he assumed the model of the philosophic life, which in the eyes of Plato and his followers, *is* the highest or best kind of life. It is considered the highest because such a life understands not only its purpose and meaning, but the purpose and meaning of everything else.

While Plato's account of Socrates had been subject to critical scrutiny over its historical authenticity, scholars like R. E. Allen and Gregory Vlastos have affirmed that "Plato's Socrates," particularly in the Early or Socratic Dialogues, is quite authentic.<sup>2</sup> From this, we can extrapolate two hypotheses: Plato's Socrates (of the Early Dialogues) is not a sheer idealization of the historical Socrates; and Plato's presentation of the philosophic life through Socrates' own life is not an idealization either. In other words, Plato presents a life that can and was *actually* lived. This proves significant in confronting and

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<sup>1</sup>The Platonic corpus has been traditionally classified, based on chronology and stylometry, into *Early*, *Middle*, and *Late Dialogues*.

<sup>2</sup>In his comment on the *Apology*, for instance, Reginald Allen addresses the issue of whether the speech presented by Plato in the said dialogue is historically accurate. He writes that while the "conventional wisdom" has been to claim that "the *Apology* represents sheer idealization of the master's life, that it is fiction, [he] believe[s] that within such limits of proof as the subject matter admits, this answer is provably mistaken." (Allen, 1984, pp. 76–78)

Meanwhile, Gregory Vlastos has argued for the *historicist view* that in the Early Dialogues, "Plato re-creates views and arguments of the historical Socrates, depicting them in conversations which are, for the most part, dramatic fiction rather than biography." In other words, Vlastos recognizes to a large degree the historical authenticity of Plato's Socrates in the said Dialogues, while at the same time, taking cognizance that Plato's portrayal was not strictly biographical as in the case of Xenophon. See Vlastos (1994, p. 93, note 15) and Vlastos (1991, p. 45–106).

opposing the prevalent charge that the philosophic life found in the Socratic Dialogues is an unattainable ideal.

It is in consideration of the claim that Plato presents the Socratic—and thus, the *philosophic*—life as an existence to be aspired for, and eventually, achieved by one’s life, that this present paper aims to review the image of Socrates as a father, as found in three Early Dialogues: the *Apology*, the *Crito*, and the *Phaedo*. The paper proceeds by initially elaborating on a charge made against Socrates, that of being an absent and negligent father; this charge stems from Socrates’ own confession in the *Apology* and is made explicit in the *Crito*. In its review of the contours of “Socratic fatherhood,” that is, the kind of fatherhood which issues from “a philosophical life,” this paper undertakes to confront the abovementioned charge.

Traditionally, the three Dialogues mentioned are viewed to be Plato’s accounts of Socrates’ trial and conviction (*Apology*), imprisonment (*Crito*), and execution (*Phaedo*). A key presupposition of this paper is that in them, Plato recapitulates the life of Socrates. In them, Plato presents a life worthy of emulation.

### “The absent father”

Plato’s account of Socrates in the *Apology* often leaves readers awed by the moral integrity and courage of an Athenian septuagenarian facing grave charges of impiety and corruption of the city’s youth. The trial was not only about Socrates himself, Plato suggests; it was also about the examined life, the philosophic life, as it bore upon society and the people who composed it. In other words, the trial of Socrates was also the trial of philosophy by people who were confronted by the huge demands that such a life required.

In the said dialogue, defiant of the explicit threat of death, Socrates undertakes the defense of his activities, that is, “the pursuit of wisdom, examining myself and others” (*Apology* 29a)<sup>3</sup>, by engaging his “two sets of accusers . . . those who now lodge their accusations, and those who lodged accusations long since” (*Apology* 18d–18e). In both cases, Plato shows Socrates to be neither fearful nor deprecatory; more importantly, Plato portrays his master not really guilty of the said charges made against him. Plato shows Socrates’ life to be free from blame and fear because of his life’s

<sup>3</sup>Unless indicated otherwise, citations are from Plato (1984).

virtue in pursuing wisdom, and hence, justice. Socrates' response to an anticipated rebuke from his jurors underscores this:

Perhaps someone may say, "Are you not ashamed, Socrates, at having pursued such a course that you now stand in danger of being put to death?" To him I would make a just reply: You are wrong, Sir, if you think that a man worth anything at all should take thought for danger in living or dying. He should look when he acts to one thing: whether what he does is just or unjust, the work of a good man or a bad one. (*Apology* 28b)

In his defense of the philosophic life he had lived, Socrates narrates of his mission to Athens as a justification. This mission, stationed to him by the God (*Apology* 28e), involved being "fastened as it were to the City by the God as, so to speak, to a large and well-bred horse, a horse grown sluggish because of its size and in need of being roused by a kind of gadfly" (*Apology* 30e). According to Socrates, he has been sent by the God "[to] go about doing nothing but persuading . . . [the] young and old, to care not for body or money in place of, or so much as, excellence of soul" (*Apology* 30a–30b). To Socrates, he had a divine mission to exhort the Athenians to live the life of virtue.

A curious thing occurs, however, during Socrates' elaboration of his mission from the God. In the course of his argument that he had done Athens a great service, Socrates admits to disregarding his own familial affairs. He admits to being guilty of neglecting his own family and household.

That I am just that, a gift from the God to the City, you may recognize from this: It scarcely seems a human matter merely, that I should take no thought for anything of my own, *endure the neglect of my house and its affairs for these long years now*. . . (*Apology* 31b) [emphasis mine]

This admission has conjured up an image of Socrates as an absent father to his three sons and a negligent husband to his spouse Xanthippe. It is an image that is obviously not as prominent and vivid as that of the morally courageous philosopher; nonetheless, it is an image that emerges—perhaps in stark contrast to the customary

one—from the said text. Further, this image is lent credence by the depiction of Xanthippe in classical literature as bad tempered and shrewish.<sup>4</sup> For in a virile society such as Athens where husbands are expected to provide for their families while wives are expected to care for the household, the lack of any wherewithal coming from Socrates would understandably cause constant resentment in Xanthippe. Hence, while Socrates' image as a philosopher par excellence is hardly debatable, that he was, at the same time—and based from his own admission—a “bad” spouse and an “absent” father seems unarguable too.

Another passage which can be cited as evoking the said image is found towards the end of the *Apology* where Socrates has already been convicted by a relatively slim majority of the jurors. There, one reads of his request from those who have voted to acquit him to care for his sons' education when they are grown.

When my sons are grown, Gentlemen, exact a penalty of them; give pain to them exactly as I gave pain to you, if it seems to you that they care more for wealth or anything else than thy care for virtue. And if they seem to be something and are nothing, rebuke them as I rebuked you, because they do not care for what they ought, because they think themselves something and are worth nothing. (*Apology* 41e)

Clearly, Socrates entrusts the education of his sons—a task that was presumably his and one which he did for Athens' youth—to friends and sympathizers. Ironically, in his lifetime he attended to the education of others' sons but, it would seem, not of Lamprocles, Sophroniscus, and Menexenus, his own offspring. In his absence brought about by his death, Socrates delegates the duty of educating his sons to others. In his death, he abdicates that responsibility to other people.

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<sup>4</sup>There is a dearth in documentary evidence to support this depiction of Xanthippe in the Platonic corpus itself. In fact, the only explicit mention of her in the Dialogues is in the *Phaedo* where she is seen sitting beside Socrates and bewailing his impending death while she cradles “his child in her arms.” The classicist J. W. Fitton provides an insightful discussion—though indirectly treated—of the origin of Xanthippe's image as a shrew and a nag. Fitton's (1970) essay examines the tradition that Socrates kept two wives at the same time, Xanthippe and Myrto.

It is perhaps in the *Crito*, in a telling exchange between Socrates and his friend Crito from whom the Dialogue is named after, that the explicit charge of familial and parental neglect is made against the philosopher. In the said Platonic work, Socrates has been convicted already and now awaits execution while being imprisoned. Crito visits Socrates at an early hour with the intention of persuading the latter to escape. The considerations Crito employed to persuade Socrates center on “the loss of money and raising children and what people think” (*Crito* 48c). Of much pertinence is Crito’s appeal to Socrates to consider escaping from prison and execution for the sake of his sons:

...I think you’re betraying your sons. You desert them when you could raise and educate them: so far as you’re concerned, they’re to take what comes, and what is likely to come is just what usually comes to orphans in the poverty of their orphanhood. No. Either a man shouldn’t have children, or he should accept the burden of raising and educating them: the choice you’re making is one of the most heedless indifference. (*Crito* 45d)

Crito chides Socrates that as an Athenian citizen, one of his main duties is caring for his sons’ education; but with the latter’s imprisonment and impending death, that duty would be unfulfilled leaving Socrates’ sons orphaned and worse, uneducated. Moreover, Crito’s remark that should a man choose to have children he must care for their nurturance and education, implied that Socrates, in fact, had been remiss in these duties. Hence, although Crito’s intent is to persuade his good friend to escape from an unjust sentence, undeniably, he is also censuring Socrates for neglecting if not abandoning the latter’s responsibility as an Athenian father.

Robert Garland’s discussion of Athenian education in his book *The Greek Way of Life* affords further illumination on the cogency of Crito’s reproach. Garland (1993, pp. 135–136) cites Xenophon’s *Memorabilia* (1.5.2) which depicted Socrates as alluding to “the three chief preoccupations facing a head of household [which] are his son’s education, his daughter’s virginity, and his *oikos*’s prosperity.”<sup>5</sup> While these duties may be challenged as to whether they were

<sup>5</sup>In the meantime, Lacey (1968, p. 111) not only cites but quotes Xenophon’s

widely acknowledged or not (Garland indicated that Solon only prescribed Athenian fathers to teach their sons a skill which the latter would use to support themselves later, without requiring the former to provide a general education), Garland nonetheless argued how the education of the *paides* or citizens' sons was a very important facet of Athenian society. In addition, his reference to Plato's *Laws* wherein the philosopher underscored if not insisted on the *paides*'s education establishes its crucial nature in Plato's own goal of social reformation.

Through Garland's analysis, one can infer that the weight of Crito's plea that Socrates escapes rests, on one hand, on a socio-political duty of the citizen to educate one's sons. On the other hand, the *Crito*—the Socratic Dialogue—can also be viewed as addressing and challenging Plato's own valorization of education within his philosophical project. For in the *Crito*, the problem is subtly raised regarding Plato's Socrates' abdication of the duty to educate his own sons, given that the youth's education is pivotal in Plato's own designs. For as it were, Plato is queried in the *Crito* as to how truly important is the youth's education when his Dialogue's protagonist, Socrates, chooses to eschew educating his own sons.

An answer to this problem, drawn from the *Crito* itself, is forthcoming in the next section. In the meantime, it can be hardly doubted that Socrates' admission in the *Apology* and Crito's reproof present an image of Socrates which suggests that the paradigm of the philosophic life was in fact remiss by being an absent father who failed to care for his own children. Implicitly, this image of Socrates engenders questions and criticisms against the life devoted to philosophy, most especially from those belonging to a family-centered cultural milieu such as the Philippines.

For if the philosophic life is the Socratic life, and the Socratic life exhibits a desertion of familial and paternal responsibilities, must the philosophic life entail a similar abandonment of responsibility to the upkeep of one's home, to the care of one's spouse, and to the raising of one's children? Must it entail a detachment from one's family? Must the life of philosophy result to being an absent father or parent?

While it would seem that philosophy is “so demanding a mis-

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work in the former's explanation of the Athenian citizen's “most important responsibilities.”

truss” that devotion to her requires the renunciation, or at the very least, the supersession of other loves and demands; the existential question of whether being a father (or a parent) is incompatible in pursuing the life of philosophy may receive an answer from the *Dialogues* themselves. In the *Apology*, the *Crito*, and the *Phaedo*, Plato accounts for a type of fatherhood in consonance with the philosophical life that he espouses.

### Socratic fatherhood

To recall, Socrates was charged in the Athenian court for being impious and for corrupting the youth. Another may be added, this time from *Crito* who accuses him of neglect of his family, particularly of his sons.

Earlier, it was asserted that Plato acquits Socrates of the charges made against him by his “old and new accusers.” In the *Apology*, Socrates admits guilt to the charges of impiety (there were two counts, atheism and introduction of new divinities) and corruption of the youth; but only after he had re-defined the said accusations. To the charge that he was an atheist, Socrates’ cross-examination of Meletus exposed the inconsistency and ill-logic of the latter’s accusation (*Apology* 26b–28a). While to the allegation that he introduces new gods, Socrates rehearses the story of how Chaerophon’s inquiry at the Delphic oracle sent him to the path of examining himself if he is truly wise and of examining others if they too have wisdom (*Apology* 20c–24b). Socrates, in effect, makes explicit that his activities which annoy, insult, and threaten the Athenian democracy were actually due to his piety. They were due his obedience to the summons of Apollo, one of Athens’ chief deities. Hence, if indeed he was being impious, it was because piety had been narrowly understood as a dogmatism propagated by convention. Socratic piety, on the other hand, demanded the pursuit of virtue, “the excellence of the soul,” and this Socrates aspired for even to the point of being slandered as being impious.

Socrates’ defense against the allegation that he corrupted the youth, in the meantime, consisted of trapping Meletus in inconsistency once more, and of arguing that Athens’ valorization of wealth, pleasure, and honor are mistaken. He declares that if corrupting the youth meant he has re-directed their pursuits of these ends towards one which is more noble and authentic, namely virtue, then, he was

truly guilty. But, if this re-examination and re-direction amounted to the benefit of the City, then, Socrates implies, he must be thanked and rewarded. Thus he says:

I tell you that virtue does not come from money, but money and all other human goods both public and private from virtue. If in saying this I corrupt the youth, that would be harm indeed. (*Apology* 30b)

This structure of “re-defining” the charges against Socrates may be used similarly in constructing Socrates’ (and the philosophic life’s) defense against the accusation voiced by Crito, that of being an absent and negligent father. Moreover, a review of ancient Greek customs regarding paternal duties aids in not only confronting this charge but also in outlining what may be termed as “Socratic fatherhood.”

In the early part of the *Apology*, Socrates explains away his reputation of being a Sophist or a teacher of young men for a fee. He relates of Callias who as a father was concerned “in making his sons excellent in their appropriate virtue” (*Apology* 20a–20b). Socrates then proceeds to demonstrate that he himself is no Sophist, yet he implies approval of Callias’ effort of performing a father’s responsibility of caring for his sons’ education.

This appears inconsistent of Socrates at first. How can he express approval of a paternal responsibility which he himself later admitted to have neglected? A return to a passage earlier cited might be instructive.

That I am just that, a gift from the God to the City, you may recognize from this: It scarcely seems a human matter merely, that I should take no thought for anything of my own, endure the neglect of my house and its affairs for these long years now and ever attend to yours going to each of you in private *like a father* or elder brother, persuading you to care for virtue. (*Apology* 31b) [emphasis mine]

Socrates sees himself a father whose main responsibility is to care for the education of the Athenian citizens, the sons he now considers to be his. In the *Phaedo*, this is evinced by Phaedo’s revelation

that when Socrates was nearing death after he had drunk the poison given him, his friends who were with him then felt a deep sense of loss “for we felt that he was like a father to us and that when bereft of him we should pass the rest of our lives as orphans” (*Phaedo* 116a).<sup>6</sup>

Similar evidence can be found in the *Crito*, in which Socrates undertakes an imagined dialogue with the Laws of Athens regarding the morality of his possible escape. The arguments put forth by the Laws are, if not Socrates’ own, those to which he subscribed as demonstrated by his explicit assent to them at the end of the Dialogue (*Crito* 54d–54e). One of the Laws’ arguments is from the standpoint of a parent, a father perhaps, who would be injured, if not destroyed, by Socrates’ escape. In this imagined conversation between the Athen’s Laws and Socrates, the former insists and stresses the parental relationship of the Laws and the City with the citizen. Such insistence and stress are exhibited by the repetition—five times—that it is they, the Laws who gave birth to Socrates, nurtured him, and educated him:

Come then, what charge do you lay against us and the City, that you should undertake to destroy us? *We gave you birth*. It was through us that your father took your mother to wife and begot you. . . . (*Crito* 50d)

*We bore you, reared you, educated you*. Can you then say, first of all, that you are not our offspring and our slave—you, and your fathers before you? (50e)

*We gave you birth. We nurtured you. We educated you*. We gave to you and to every other citizen a share of every good thing we could. (51d)

And if he does not obey, we say that he commits injustice in three ways: because he disobeys us, and *we gave him birth*; because he disobeys us, and *we nurtured him*; because he agreed to obey us and neither obeys nor persuades us that we are doing something incorrect—even though we did not rudely command him to do as we bid, but rather set before him the alternatives of doing it or persuading us to the contrary. (51e)

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<sup>6</sup>Citations to *Phaedo* are from Plato (1966).

Socrates, be persuaded by us, for *we nurtured you*. (54b)  
[emphasis mine]

In his acquiescence to these arguments, and hence, identification with their *logos*, Socrates adopts this same parental and paternal relationship with regard the youths who are Athens' future citizens. He assumes the role of a father to Athens' youths. Thus, Socrates' fatherhood is essentially *political*. His paternal responsibility, his fatherhood as it were, stretches beyond that of his family, of his blood relations, for it extends towards those who constitute the Athenian *politeia*. As a consequence, Socrates' or Socratic fatherhood is more expansive and encompassing than conventional fatherhood.

This is not to say, however, that it is incompatible with a *familial* fatherhood. This can be gleaned from another abovementioned passage in which he asks his friends to care for his own sons' education (*Apology* 41e). His impending death announced, Socrates' last thoughts after the trial turn to his sons and their education in virtue. He does not ask his friends to support his sons *economically*, however; but rather and in consonance with an earlier injunction that the care for the soul, for virtue, is more important, appeals to his sympathizers to "give pain to them exactly as I gave pain to you, if it seems to you that they care more for wealth or anything else than they care for virtue" (*Apology* 41e). Found guilty and condemned to die, Socrates here demonstrates *his* care for *his* sons.

Socrates says "give pain to them *exactly* as I gave pain to you" [emphasis mine]. How did he cause others *pain*? By forcing them to confront themselves and their values, and instigating the pursuit of wisdom or virtue. Fatherhood for Socrates entails instilling the discipline of the soul to discourse with itself and to strive for virtue, into one's sons. It entails educating one's sons towards a life of virtue.

Socratic fatherhood's inculcation of discipline towards virtue is not wholly marked by severity, however. The characterizations of Socratic fatherhood discerned in the *Phaedo* reveal this. *Phaedo*'s narration to Echechrates, for example, of "the pleasant, gentle, and respectful manner in which [Socrates] listened to the young men's criticisms" (*Phaedo* 89a) bespeak of affability in Socrates' treatment of his sons who converse with him. Similarly, *Phaedo* intimates of Socrates' affectionate behavior to him during a troubling moment in their philosophical exchanges with Cebes and Simmias. Consider this further account of *Phaedo* which discloses Socrates' tenderness

in his relations with his adopted sons: “He stroked my head and gathered the hair on the back of my neck into his hand—he had a habit of playing with my hair on occasion” (*Phaedo* 89b).

From the above, a reconstitution of fatherhood as *political*, aimed at virtue, employing discipline but tempered by tenderness and affection, emerges. But what of the neglect and absence that is perceived to be attributable to Socrates? To contend directly with the charge raised by Crito that Socrates neglected his paternal duties to his son, specifically on their education, classicists’ accounts of ancient Athenian society and family structure aid in illuminating this matter.

Two of Socrates’ sons, Sophroniscus and Menexenus, were but infants at the time of the philosopher’s death in 399 BC. Their rearing, according to Athenian custom, was not the father’s duty as pointed out by the studies of Lacey (1968, pp. 168–170), Garland (1993, pp. 127–133), and Golden (1990, pp. 96–99). As such, Socrates cannot be blamed for not “being there” for them at the time, as their custom does not proscribe him to be so. The accusation of being an absent father to these two sons of Socrates is hence, an invalid one.

The case of Lamprocles is different, however. He was a *meirakion*<sup>7</sup> at the time of Socrates’ trial, that is, he was a grown-up lad. His education, direct or otherwise, would have been the responsibility of Socrates. And yet, the philosopher seemed tragically absent as a father, even by their customs’ standards. It would appear that while Socrates was busying himself with the education of the youth of noble parentage (an effort from which he charged no amount), his own son, who was almost a young man himself, received none of this from his father. In the *Phaedo*, for instance, when Crito asked him about his last wishes, specifically about his sons, Socrates bid Crito to do “nothing new” and instead urged the latter to care for himself in virtue, for when he did that he would have fulfilled Socrates’ last wishes (*Phaedo* 115b). At the threshold of death and without the benefit of the audience he had during his trial (as was the case in the *Apology*), Socrates this time sought nothing for his sons, particularly for Lamprocles, a young man in need of education. Instead, he persisted in his mission of educating the youth even to the very last moments of his life.

A father to the youth and citizens of Athens, Socrates was

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<sup>7</sup>The stage between the ages of 13 or 14 until 21 years (Strauss, 1997, p. 93).

nonetheless “not there” for his own son. It is thus that Socratic fatherhood necessarily entailed the sacrifice of the familial to the political. For in instances wherein these two demands clash with each other, caring for the city and its youth must supersede the care that was owed to one’s offspring.

How is this justified? Or to couch it in the terms of an earlier problem hinted at in the *Crito*, how does Plato address the seeming inconsistency between his valorization of the youth’s education and Socrates’ neglect of it with his own sons? Plato provides an answer in the concluding part of the *Crito*; for there, the Laws address the concerns utilized by Crito’s rhetoric for escape.

The last of these concerns to be confronted is one regarding the betrayal of Socrates’ duties to his sons. The Laws challenge the argument that by fleeing, Socrates would retain his life and be able to “raise and educate” his sons. The Laws counter this by pointing out that Socrates’ escape and eventual exile would make foreigners of his own sons, hence, depriving them of the benefits of Athenian citizenship. Alive but in exile, the Laws assert, Socrates would do his sons harm not good.

In contrast, they contend that in Socrates’ death and absence, the education of his sons will be taken care of by those who call themselves his friends (*Crito* 54a–54b). His death brings no real harm since friends are there to undertake his duties to his sons. Finally, the Laws enjoin Socrates, whom they claim to have nurtured, to “[p]ut not life nor children nor anything ahead of what is just, so that when you come to the Place of the Dead you may have all this to say in your defense to those who rule there” (54b).

In effect, what Plato has the Laws claim is that Socrates continues pursuing the life of virtue, which involves instilling in others this same pursuit, with the assurance that his obligation regarding his sons’ education is not really neglected. For while personally unable to fulfill this important responsibility, Socrates is nonetheless discharging a more important one: the divine mission of living the life of philosophy. Second, this philosophical life ultimately provides for his sons’ education by having those persuaded by such a life, to care for the education of Athen’s sons, even those other than their own. Plato, in the *Crito* as in elsewhere, justifies the abdication of responsibilities attached to conventional fatherhood for the sake of a more encompassing “Socratic” or philosophical fatherhood.

In retrospect, what does this entail for anyone intent on pursuing the life of philosophy? If as suggested above, that Plato presents Socratic life as the philosophic life actually lived, and raises it as a paradigm for any philosopher, then the kind of fatherhood that Socrates espouses generates enormous difficulty. It is a fatherhood which is not so different from the kind of parenting found in Plato's *Republic*.<sup>8</sup> Like one of the conclusions concerning the tenability of the ideal *polis* in the *Republic*, Socrates' fatherhood which inheres from the Socratic life seems too divorced from the realities of "human nature" that for many, it is very difficult to aspire and live it.

Nonetheless, one must bear in mind that the *Republic* and the other Dialogues precisely challenge so-called conceptions of "human nature" which are largely conventional. Whatever the case, Socratic fatherhood, despite being suggested as an ideal that is attainable, seems to be not for everyone.

Due this—and perhaps, sadly enough—so is Plato's philosophic life.

### Epilogue

In his address at the graduation of candidates in Classical and Modern Languages and Literatures at the University of California at Berkeley on 20 May 1987, the late Prof. Gregory Vlastos, the prominent Plato scholar, set out to question whether Socrates was indeed the most just person as Plato described him in the *Phaedo*. Examining the claim at the end of the Dialogue that Socrates was "the best and wisest and most righteous man" (*Phaedo* 118a), Vlastos challenged this age-old truth about one of Western civilization's revered figures.

He considered evidences from Platonic and non-Platonic texts (Thucydides' *Histories*) and found Socrates—despite remaining Vlastos' "philosophical hero" and inspiration—wanting. Socrates, Vlastos rued, was not, in fact, "most just." Socrates failed in caring for Athens, the city for which he abandoned his familial responsibilities, by "[keeping] silent when his own participation might have saved Athens from the vilest crime yet perpetrated in war between Greek states, and [by keeping] silent again and again when Athens was to commit just such a crime against Torone, Scione, and Melos."

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<sup>8</sup>*Republic* V.

(Vlastos, 1994, p. 130)

Vlastos (1994, p. 131) pointed out that Socrates' philosophy was limited by its methodology of one-to-one elenctic argumentation. As such, it could not extend itself beyond the personal and interpersonal, and reach towards the realm of the social. Restricted by an overriding concern for one's personal virtue and that of the intersubjective other, Socrates neglects to attend to the virtue of the city *as a whole*. As a consequence, Socrates could not *or did not* participate in Athens' deliberations and hence, did not prevent the city from eventually committing inhumane atrocities. Consequently in Vlastos' estimation, Socrates cannot be said to be "most just."

Like Vlastos, many philosophers and students of philosophy consider Socrates as their hero and paradigm. His life of incessantly searching for wisdom, for the answer to the question of what makes one's life morally worthy, has been a source of inspiration and direction. His integrity and courage, comparable to that of Jesus', challenges one to be less petty, to be more daring in living one's principles amid unfavorable conditions.

However, like Vlastos, one must depart ways from the Socratic vision of what constitutes "an examined life," of what consists in "a life devoted to philosophy." For no matter how exalted Socrates' position is in the philosophic pantheon, one must desist from the kind of philosophic life Socrates had lived for it remains narrow: it does not take into account the family as a value in itself. The family is not simply a means to a political end, no matter how noble that end may be. An intuition within urges that one must not abandon one's responsibilities to one's children and family for the sake of society's over-all benefit.

In stating this, the nobility of Socratic fatherhood remains affirmed but at the same time, the extremely high price it demands is sought for re-evaluation. For the sacrifices entailed by Socratic fatherhood require a justification in the face of *the faces who are sacrificed*.

As a conclusion, the philosophic life has been said to be "a full life": it includes embracing one's identity as a father, a mother, a student, a sibling, a son or a daughter. A vision of the philosophic life which denies this risks being incomplete and limited, if not inauthentic.

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