PHIL 115

Lecture #7: The Apologia

Socrates’ Apologia
&
The Nature of Philosophy

Socrates’ Mission I

• The Oracle at Delphi
  – The Oracle was an ancient oracle at which Apollo was believed to give answers to various political & personal questions.
  – The answers given were often ambiguous, or at least not clear.

Lydia & Delphi

• About 560, it told King Croesus of Lydia that if he attacked Persia, he would destroy a great kingdom.
• He attacked, & lost his kingdom.

Athens & Delphi

• About 480, it told the Athenians in defending themselves against the Persians “a wall of wood alone shall be uncaptured.”
• Athens was captured & burnt, but the Athenian navy which Themistocles had built defeated the Persians decisively at Salamis (“the battle that saved Greece—& Western civilization”—Barry Strauss)

Socrates’ Mission II

• What the Oracle told Chaerephon
  – No one is wiser than Socrates.
• Socrates’ Interpretation
  – The oracle’s comment must be a riddle
  – Socrates is perhaps not really attempting to refute the oracle
  – Perhaps rather, he is attempting to show that a superficial understanding of what the oracle said is wrong
    • Partly because he thinks that he is not wise
    • Partly because the Oracle always speaks in riddles.
Socrates’ Activity

- Socrates’ Method—Ελέγχος (elenchus)
  - “cross-examining, testing, scrutiny, especially for purposes of refutation”
  - a practice Socrates shared with the Sophists
  - For the Sophists, it was inherently competitive
  - Refuting someone was the whole point
  - For Socrates, it was a means to attaining the truth.
  - See his comment about his readiness to be refuted (next slide).
- Consider an analogy to the adversarial system in American courts.
- Ελέγχος (elenchus) (< α “without” + παρά “a way of achieving, accomplishing, discovering”)
  - The result of conversation with Socrates was “perplexity,” not knowing what to say next.
  - This was progress over being confident about what is not so.
- Socrates’ Bad Arguments: Why does he make them?
  - Socrates the Sophist (or the hypocrite)?
  - That’s what Callicles (in the Gorgias) & Thrasymachus (in the Republic) say
  - Socrates the Imperfect?
  - But these are not transcripts
  - They are Plato’s literary products
  - [See Socrates’ three metaphors]

Socrates on Himself: Three Metaphors

- Socrates as Gadfly (Apology 30e-31c)
- Socrates as Torpedo Fish (Meno 80c)
  - from Latin torpere, to be stiffened or paralyzed
  - they can deliver a strong electric shock that can stun their prey
- Socrates as Midwife of Ideas (Theaetetus)

Socrates as Torpedo Fish

Meno: Socrates, I used to be told, before I knew you, that you were always doubting yourself and making others doubt; and now you are casting your spells over me, and I am simply getting bewitched and enchanted, and am at my wit’s end. And if I may venture to make a jest upon you, you seem to me both in your appearance and in your power over others to be very like the flat torpedo fish, who torpifies those who come near him and touch him, as you have now torpified me, I think. For my soul and my tongue are really torpid, and I do not know how to answer you; and though I have been delivered of an infinite variety of speeches about virtue before now, and to many persons—and very good ones they were, as I thought—at this moment I cannot even say what virtue is.

—Meno 80 a-c

Socrates to Gorgias on Being Refuted

- “I am one of those who are very willing to be refuted if I say anything which is not true, and very willing to refute any one else who says what is not true, and quite as ready to be refuted as to refute. I for one hold that this is the greater gain of the two, just as the gain is greater of being cured of a very great evil than of curing another. For I imagine that there is no evil which a man can endure so great as an erroneous opinion about the matters of which we are speaking and if you claim to be one of my sort, let us have the discussion out, but if you would rather have done, no matter—let us make an end of it.”—Gorgias 458

Socrates as Gadfly

“If you kill me you will not easily find another like me, who, if I may use such a ludicrous figure of speech, am a sort of gadfly, given to the state by the God; and the state is like a great and noble steed who is tardy in his motions owing to his very size, and requires to be stirred into life. I am that gadfly which God has given the state and all day long and in all places am always fastening upon you, arousing and persuading and reproaching you. And as you will not easily find another like me, I would advise you to spare me. I dare say that you may feel irritated at being suddenly awakened when you are caught napping; and you may think that if you were to strike me dead, as Anytus advises, which you easily might, then you would sleep on for the remainder of your lives, unless God in his care of you gives you another gadfly.”

—Socrates in Plato’s Apology 30e-31c

Socrates as Midwife of Ideas

Socrates: And have you never heard, simpleton, that I am the son of a midwife, brave and burly, whose name was Phaenarete?

Theaetetus: Yes, I have.

Socrates: And that I myself practise midwifery?

Theaetetus: No, never.

Socrates: Let me tell you that I do though, my friend; but you must not reveal the secret, as the world in general have not found me out; and therefore they only say of me, that I am the strangest of mortals and drive men to their wits’ end. Did you ever hear that too?

Theaetetus: Yes.

...
Socrates' Doctrines

- On Definition
  - See the Euthyphro

- On Ethics
  - Doing injustice is the greatest of evils
    - See the Apologia and the Crito
  - Wrongdoing is always due to ignorance.
    - See also the Gorgias

- But not
  - The Theory of Forms (coming in the Phaedo)

Finding Arguments in the Apologia

Is Socrates Eloquent?

- “they certainly did appear to be most shameless in saying that you jurors should not let yourselves be deceived by the force of my eloquence, unless by the force of eloquence they mean the force of truth; for then I do indeed admit that I am eloquent.” (17b)

- So, Socrates admits that (in one sense) he is eloquent
  - Make his conclusion: “Socrates is eloquent”
  - What is his argument?
    - Form:
      - Anyone who (is) ___ is eloquent
      - Socrates (is) ___.
      - So, Socrates is eloquent
    - Categorical Syllogism: Barbara (AAA-1)

The Old Accusation

- “Socrates is an evil-doer, and a curious person, who searches into things under the earth and in heaven, and he makes the worse appear the better cause; and he teaches the aforesaid doctrines to others.” (19b)

- The charge: Socrates is an evil-doer
  - The argument form:
    - Anyone who (is) ___ is an evil-doer
    - Socrates (is) ___.
    - So, Socrates is an evil-doer.
    - Categorical Syllogism: Barbara (AAA-1)
  - The middle term:
    - “a person who searches into things under the earth and in heaven, and makes the worse appear the better cause; and teaches the aforesaid doctrines to others.”

Interpreting the Oracle

- “What can the god mean? and what is the interpretation of this riddle? for I know that I have no wisdom, small or great. What can he mean when he says that I am the wisest of men? And yet he is a god and cannot lie; that would be against his nature.” (21b)

- Three possible understandings of what the oracle said:
  - it’s true or it’s false or it’s a riddle
  - “if I have no wisdom, then it’s not true”
  - “if it was said by a god, it’s not false”
  - “it was said by a god.”
Accusations against the New Accusers

- At 24d-e, Socrates says
  - Meletus … never really had the smallest interest in the improvement of the youth.
- What reason does he have for thinking that?
  - Meletus does not seem to be able to answer Socrates’ questions (e.g., about who improves the youth).
- Argument
  - Anyone who cannot answer questions about who improves the youth does not have the smallest interest in the improvement of the youth.
  - Meletus cannot answer questions about who improves the youth.
  - So, Meletus does not have the smallest interest in the improvement of the youth.

Socrates’ Argument that He does not Corrupt the Youth

- “I cannot justly be held responsible for the good or bad conduct of [the people who listen to what I have to say], for I never promised to teach them anything and have not done so.” (33b)
- Socrates’ conclusion:
  - I cannot justly be held responsible for the good or bad conduct of the people who listen to what I have to say.
- Why not?
  - Form
    - Anyone who does _____ cannot justly be held responsible for the good or bad conduct of his listeners.
    - Socrates does _____ .
  - Content
    - Anyone who does not promise to teach and does not do so cannot justly be held responsible for the good or bad conduct of his listeners.
    - Socrates does not promise to teach and does not do so.

Meletus is Lying

- How does Socrates prove that Meletus is lying?
  - Meletus had said Socrates intentionally corrupts the youth.
  - Socrates replies: “Either I do not corrupt the youth, or I corrupt them unintentionally, so that on either view of the case you lie.” (26a)
  - What is the argument form here?
- Symbolization
  - \(~C \lor U\)
  - \(~C \rightarrow \neg M\)
  - \(U \rightarrow \neg M\)
  - \(\therefore \neg M\)
- Form: Dilemma

Socrates Denies that He is an Atheist

- Socrates says (at 27c):
  - “you [Meletus] say that I believe in spiritual things and teach about them … and to this you have sworn in your deposition. But if I believe in spiritual things, I must … believe in spirits. Is not that so? … Do we not believe spirits to be either gods or the children of gods?”
- Argument
  - if Socrates believes in spiritual things, he must believe in gods.
  - Socrates does believe in spiritual things.
  - So, Socrates must believe in gods.
- Symbolization
  - \(S \rightarrow G\) (\(G = \) Socrates believes in gods)
  - \(S \rightarrow (S = \) Socrates believes in spiritual things)
  - \(\therefore G\)
- Form: Modus ponens

Achilles

- The text (28d)
  - When Achilles’ goddess-mother said to him, in his eagerness to slay Hector, that if he avenged his companion Patroclus, and slew Hector, he would die himself.
  - “Fate,” as she said, “waits upon you next after Hector.” …
  - “Let me die next;” he replied, “and be avenged of my enemy, rather than abide here by the beaked ships, a scorn and a burden of the earth.” Had Achilles any thought of death and danger?
- Obviously, a rhetorical question. Socrates’ view:
  - “Achilles had no thought of death and danger.”
- Socrates’ argument?
  - Form
    - Anyone who ____ gives no thought to death and danger.
    - Achilles was ____.
  - Content
    - Anyone who was willing to avenge his friend’s death even if it would cost him his own life gives no thought to death and danger.
    - Achilles was willing to avenge his friend’s death even if it would cost him his own life.
Why Socrates Rejects Exile

- “Into whatever place I go, as here so also there, the young men will come to me; and if I drive them away, their elders will drive me out at their desire: and if I let them come, their fathers and friends will drive me out for their sakes.” (37 d-e)

  - Socrates’ conclusion:
    - He will be driven out of any city to which he goes
  - Socrates’ argument:
    - if he drives the young men of that city away, then their elders will drive him out of the city (at the request of the young men)
    - if he lets the young men listen to him, their fathers and friends will drive me out for their sakes.
  - Form:
    - Dilemma

How Socrates knows that he is doing the right thing (at court)

- “My divine sign has not opposed me, either when I left home at dawn, or when I came into court, or at any time when I was about to say something during my speech. ... It is impossible that my familiar sign did not oppose me if I was not about to do what was right.” (40c)

  - Socrates’ conclusion
    - He conducted his defense rightly
  - Socrates’ argument
    - If he had been about to do it wrong, his divine sign would have corrected him.
    - It did not.
  - Form:
    - Modus tollens

Socrates on Death

- “There is great reason to hope that death is a good, for one of two things: Either death is a state of nothingness and utter unconsciousness, or, as men say, there is a change and migration of the soul from this world to another.

  - “Now if you suppose that there is no consciousness, but a sleep like the sleep of him who is undisturbed even by the sight of dreams, death will be an unspeakable gain. For if a person were to select the night in which his sleep was undisturbed even by dreams, and were to compare with this the other days and nights of his life, and then were to tell us how many days and nights he had passed in the course of his life better and more pleasantly than this one, I think that any man, I will not say a private man, but even the great king, will not find many such days or nights, when compared with the others. Now if death is like this, I say that to die is gain; for eternity is then only a single night.

  - “But if death is the journey to another place, and there, as men say, all the dead are, what good, O my friends and judges, can be greater than this? ...” (40 c-e)

  - Conclusion:
    - Death is a good
  - Argument
    - Either death is unconsciousness or it is a journey to where all the dead are.
    - If the former, then death is a good.
    - If the latter, then death is a good.