

On the matter of fact and fiction of Socrates' real trial and *The Apology* written by Plato, a critical point is lost on many philosophers trying to do history. The point is this: Plato makes very clear in the *Theaetetus* and elsewhere that rhetoric is inferior to philosophy, and that rhetoric is what is done in the court of law —certainly not truth-finding. Given this, we may draw some conclusion about what Socrates did and did not do at his trial. Let's get into the history and the dialogues of Plato to begin establishing that there is discrepancy between the historical facts and what the dialogues purport. Plato, through his mouthpiece, called "Socrates," says:

I mean to say that a philosopher is a gentleman, but a lawyer is a servant. The one can have his talk out, and wander at will from one subject to another, as the fancy takes him; like ourselves, he may be long or short, as he pleases. But the lawyer is always in a hurry; there is the clepsydra limiting his time, and the brief limiting his topics, and his adversary is standing over him and exacting his rights. He is a servant disputing about a fellow-servant before his master, who holds the cause in his hands; the path never diverges, and often the race is for his life. Such experiences render him keen and shrewd; he learns the arts of flattery, and is perfect in the practice of crooked ways; dangers have come upon him too soon, when the tenderness of youth was unable to meet them with truth and honesty, and he has resorted to counter-acts of dishonesty and falsehood, and become warped and distorted; without any health or freedom or sincerity in him he has grown up to manhood, and is or esteems himself to be a master of cunning.¹

Plato emphasizes his lack of respect for the court of law as a place for seeking truth, because of the nature of what a lawyer is (i.e., a servant of a particular function), is intended to do (i.e., convince), and the haste with which it must be done. This effectively means that, before the clepsydra runs out of water, the lawyer must establish a mere δόξα —a "doxa" or "opinion—, which Plato takes great pains to distinguish from truth. The historical point is this: it is exceedingly unlikely that *The Apology* reflects much of what happened, despite the fact that he

¹ Plato. "Theaetetus." Project Gutenberg. Accessed February 2, 2015. <http://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/1726/pg1726.txt>.

was in attendance. When the trial is couched in its historical context, in which Alcibiades, one of Socrates' students and probably his lover, went to the Spartans during the Peloponnesian War (434-1 B.C.E.) and gave away sensitive information; in which a number of Socrates' students were ended up being numbered among the Thirty Tyrants; and in which there was the recent fiasco of Socrates' animus-inducing dissent with Athenian popular opinion to try eight generals collectively², rather than individually (c. 406-5 B.C.E.); in which he was reviled and mocked in a play, *Clouds*, by Aristophanes (c. 423 B.C.E.)—it becomes clear that Socrates didn't need to badger the Athenian jury into convicting and executing him, as *The Apology* portrays. The discrepancy between the reasonably well-established opinion of the Athenians of 399 B.C.E. and the ambivalent Athenian jurors in *The Apology* is gross, considered realistically. Perhaps, one of the most remarkable sleuthing jobs and historical arguments constructed about what happened comes from classicist and philologist, Robin Waterfield, in his *Why Socrates Died: Dispelling the Myths*. One of the salient features of the Plato's version of the trial, which probably is true, is that Socrates wanted to be executed. It was possible for him to go into exile, a finality that many Greek *polis* citizens opted for. That is to say, though Socrates may not have goaded the jury into convicting him and executing him, it seems very much the case that Socrates chose the outcome. Why did he do this, especially at such a late age (approx. 71)? Robin Waterfield's thoroughly argued thesis is that the closing statement of Socrates says it all, if properly understood: at the end of another dialogue, the *Phaedo*, which houses the last dying words of Socrates, he says, "Crito, I owe a cock to Asclepius; will you remember to pay the debt?"³ With incredible historical awareness and a mind toward the facts, such as the fact that Asclepius was the Greek

² Stumpf, Enoch. *Socrates to Sartre and Beyond: A History of Philosophy*. 7th ed. Boston: McGrawhill, 2008. p. 39

³ Plato. "Phaedo." Project Gutenberg. Accessed February 3, 2015. <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/1658/1658-h/1658-h.htm>.

god of healing, Waterfield argues that Socrates' desire to die in this manner was to put everyone at ease, and push the city of Athens toward rebuild—to move past the era of Socrates as a social and political animus and gadfly. This makes even more sense if Socrates held anything like Plato's view on the city being structured like the human soul, as described in the *Politeia*. From all of the preceding, it is fairly certain that Socrates did not dupe the Athenians into convicting him, but they did that on the grounds of their own conviction. This aspect of *The Apology* is almost assuredly a literary embellishment upon what happened.

The question has already been answered, but let's ask it explicitly: Why did Plato make it look like Socrates hoodwinked the fools of Athens into convicting him? The cited passage of the *Theaetetus* contains the answer, that those employing rhetoric to convince, such as lawyers and poets, do not strike upon truth; and this is understood readily when one understand the setup of Plato's divided line. Plato wanted to demonstrate the foolishness of rhetoric in a real-life court, not just the fictitious court. With a mind toward the divided line, one sees that lawyers operate in a verbal fashion that manipulates facts and things to induce belief, and that's all the best that the sensuous world can induce, mere belief. As Plato makes clear throughout his corpus, belief may be true or false, but Truth is not belief that turns out to be true—wishing to go to New York City from Philadelphia, and choosing to go East in belief (for no good reason, but on a hunch), the belief turns out to be true, but it was not knowledge, it was not a truth that was possessed. The consideration that rhetoric yields mere belief, alone, is what connects the lawyers with the arts, the most prominent of the arts at the time being poetry. It should come as no surprise that the abovementioned Aristophanes, a playwright who would have been taken to be a poet by the day's standards, was given the boot from Plato's ideal society; all the poets were given the boot, from the *Republic*. This needs further examination in regard to the previous discussion of logos

and mythos, because the defenestration of the poets from Plato's ivory tower within the republic is thematically significant.

Plato's expulsion of the poets has a larger role in this developing historical narrative. It is a continuation of the split between λόγος and μῦθος, where the primary difference that matters have become heated between those who appeal to principles and those who appeal an anthropocentrically created narrative. The methods for telling explaining and expressing the nature of things is evolving, even at this point, only some century and change after the Milesians. Obviously, classic mythology is still around, but the poets explore the numerous aspects of first-order human experience through stage and other arts. While the manner in which “μῦθος” was used before, in understanding the natural world⁴, has shifted a bit, we will continue to use it to establish continuity of an evolving brand of story-telling and mode of understanding the world. At this point, which begins the Greek Golden Age, the philosophical discussion targeting μῦθος now extends to the aesthetic realm of human experience. The function of the divided line is to let everyone know where the line between λόγος and μῦθος is, and it is an important one, Plato says, because rhetoric, aesthetics, and mythology can only establish opinion —“*doxa*,” in the Greek—, not knowledge, in one's own mind or another's. Philosophy, however, can establish knowledge. It's at this point that the reader must be availed of one surprising component of this story: Plato was a poet, who, upon being influenced by Socrates and philosophy, burned his literary works, devoting himself entirely to philosophy. Is this relevant? Certainly, especially from the political standpoint, in which case Plato may be seen as writing with this approach so as to pump up the status of his discipline, and to conversely deflate the statuses of poets and

⁴ See John Dewey's *Reconstruction in Philosophy* for his hypothesis of how early man developed a panoply of gods through associating one's own causal capacity with effects in the natural world, which likely brought about the conclusion that me-like-entities (i.e., human-like-entities) brought about effects that humans don't bring about, such as moving water in a river.

lawyers. In this light, one should read much of Plato's corpus with this function in mind, with the divided line in mind, and an eye toward how the philosophy increases the distance between mythos and logos, in terms of access to truth and whatnot. Above all, keep in mind that this access to truth hinges upon talking about what is and what is not. Expounding on this, we look to the allegory of the cave.

The cave puts into perspective Plato's opinions of Protagoras and Heraclitus, tout de suite. Heraclitus and Protagoras both present philosophies that hinge on the apparent fluctuation of the observable world. Plato's admission is that, yes, there is flux, but this is because the world is composed of imperfect replicas of eternal and unique forms. The cave illustrates this with the flickering images on the wall: the shadows are not the things-in-themselves, those these things-in-themselves do participate in this replication in the form of shadows, and the analog can even illustrate how one thing-in-itself could participate in numerous perceptions in the real world, since one object can cast multiple shadows onto different areas of the wall. The people in front of the wall, chained and looking at nothing else, are non-philosophers: the Sophists (as Plato would see them as non-philosophers), lawyers, mythologically-minded citizens, and poets. They speak speak on the basis of things and images, which only generates imagination (the lowest form of cognitive content in the divided-line setup) and belief, both taking place in and on the basis of the phenomenal world. Philosophers, through dialectic, obtain access to thinking (as in mathematics) and to forms, and thus to Truth. To live in the cave is to revel in mythos, yet to painfully seek out truths, which hurt our eyes, is the province of philosophy. The pain, one may take it, is a product of a couple of things, one of which, even if not explicitly acknowledged by Plato, is dogmatism. The other, which Plato more immediately and consciously intended, is that

the appetitive part of the soul, comprised of spirit, rationality, and appetite, kept the individual entrenched in the phenomenal world.

One point to take away is that, while Plato shrugged off the title of “poet” and even made the *bona fides* gesture of burning his works, he certainly was ever a poet after. The allegory is proof of his literary brilliance. It is this literary taint that, I will argue, is what most distinguishes Aristotle from Plato, and what will at the fore with examining Aristotle is what Plato minus the poet looks like, in terms of the philosophical textual product. The contrast will be stark, and the product will resemble something like a scientific mind, much more so than even historians tend to remark of the Milesians. Naturally, this is the next place to examine the mythos-logos dichotomy.