

SOCRATES: PROPHET OR KING?

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The Historical Socrates

The search for the real Socrates, it seems, is one consummate task. But to the consummate and the untiring, Socrates can provide a moving story without end.

To the Socratiphilia, this Athenian can be addicting and contagious. There are rigorous conditions at his port of entry, but there are no indications of destination and port of embarkation.

The trip is announced with a discouraging caution: Strictly For Adults Only. Or at least — With Close Parental Guidance.

Blessed with a face which defied the rules on symmetry, he nonetheless, after a period of mature discernment, mesmerized the strong-hearted. Pot-bellied, popeyed, and thick lips. No problem though, the magnetism of his soul, the pleasure of his instructive presence and the magic spell of his words, more than compensated his lack of endowments. If beauty were made to function, then Socrates was, and still is qualified for that which was made for being. Ergo Socrates possessed both qualities of brains and functional symmetry!

The Sources

The historical Socrates was a both mystery and an enigma, a paradigm to those who understood him, the contemporary mind almost by reflex reaction, realizes the ominous mirage in the journey ahead. The roadmap is secondhand. He was a talker, not a writer. And the spellbinding oral discourse was scripted by his listeners. We have to distill Plato, Xenophon, Aristotle and Aristophanes. Four major sources forming a quadriga pulling the Socrates wagon. Worse still, the four sources were all of different breeds.

If landmines were omnipresent, there was hardly any assurance that the quadriga would pant and haul with uniform speed and cadence.

It is quite obvious that characterizations will inevitably betray the writer as a painting does to a painter. The 'signature' of the writer is obviously projected even though unconsciously.

Xenophon was an Athenian considered to be almost Plato's contemporary. What he lacked in profound insight he complemented with his literal-mindedness, so that his absence from the trial and death of the man he admired so much was filled in by his interviews of his friends who happened to be at the frontlines. Being what he loved to busy himself with, an outdoor life, he admired Socrates' intellectual capacities besides the courage and risk-taker of the man. His attachment to Socrates shows in his encomiums, which profusion he manifests, that he will not accomplish anything for his idol half-heartedly.

Plato was the student of Socrates whose awesome gift for philosophy was to extrapolate a hundredfold beyond perhaps the wildest of dreams of his mentor. Noble in blood, he was even nobler in brains. Taking all things equal, he appears to be the most credible of the trial's what-really-happened account not so much perhaps of the most impressionable years of observing the oral rays from the very mouth of Socrates, but more of his being an *alter et plus* Socrates. Philosophically, Socrates pales less than an iota compared to the rare matrices achieved by his students. Hypothetically, given the Socratic initiations, more than any reason of piety, Plato achieved a philosophy ignited by that teacher-student relationship could best implant and which Plato could best elucidate.

Socrates, and his trial, is not most vivid in the *Apology* and in related instances, in *Crito* and *Euthypro*.

Aristotle is a third generation who gets to know Socrates only via Plato's detached mentorship for some twenty years. Aristotle is ideologically and chronologically very distant from Socrates, making him a more dispassionate evaluator of the Platonic writings.

Aristophanes is a sui-generis and he is best treated separately.

Socrates made sure that the trip would certainly commence despite the varying internal uniqueness of the components of the quadriga. No matter what. He was well-built and possessed a built-in psychological advantage — a temperate life. The appetites were safely tied in knot, and the irascible passions would break loose if ever, very rarely, and in those rare occasions, the fire and brimstone of his assault on an intellectual euthanasia would volley from the epicenter of his psyche. Expressed with his usual profundity, the shallow-minded would invariably perish — unknowingly.

Indeed Socrates was a very detached personality. Ties were un-knot: family, relatives, friendships, and material possessions. Unbuttoned, loose and open. Free and pedestrian. He was an uncompromising nonconformist.

The Pied Pipers

Socrates unchained. He was the nemesis of the encyclopedic sophists. The sophists were merchants of false pretenses, the crowd-drawer of the merchandised civic excellence, whetting the vulnerable appetites of the gullible to salivate for the low melting point icing of public approbation. They preyed on the rich young men in particular and when the price was right, offered to teach them the mastercraft — the art of verbal persuasion, so they will excel in the motions of the master key — political shrewdness. Plato called them the 'paid hunters of rich young men' while the more scrupulous Xenophon brands them as 'masters of fraud'. The fortune paid for the services of the sophists seemed to be a long term investment at the start. An issue at hand could be proven true or refuted false, either way depending on one's adrenals. With deft hands and startling stagemanship of an epideixeis, the inner city dwellers could not believe that these men were actually provincial imports who were going to rule and dominate the professional league. Robed in purple, the Pied Pipers who were each competing in sales, were apparently succeeding in promoting the show "The Greatest Circus Come to Town". With expertly brewed phenomenalism, relativism and subjectivism, the moneyed, and nothing else, worked out the coup.

Socrates unleashed. Like Rambo, he faced and tackled the pretenders to the seat of wisdom of the Athenian city-state. With his sword of ignorance, he set forth to unmask man of his world of make-believe.

The sophists met their antithesis. Any possible synthesis was an absolute no-way. The protagonists found themselves at irreconcilable poles. The stance taken by both parties were irreversible for their ideologies were completely two different worlds; the false versus the true. It is not surprising therefore that such a chasm would exist too in their attitudes toward money. In this aspect, it was also a case of an infinite difference between being and nonbeing.

For the know-alls, Socrates offered ignorance. The acknowledgement of one's ignorance was a humbling initiation that was strictly indispensable. For the promise of you-will-learn-everything, Socrates offered only one thing: know thyself. For the manhole-rhetorics, Socrates offered the mejiutic purgative. Where ready answers were available off-the-rack, Socrates insisted on elenchic wit over pickled consumerism. The Socratic alternative was anything but instant and bottle-fed. No pain, no gain. And it was no ordinary pain.

It was the typical Socratic labor pains where midwifed delivery was liberation from a caged existence. It meant a liberation from the sophistic drunkenness made worse by fake labels and imitations. And it meant a lifetime struggle because the phantoms of the hangover continued to haunt. The rehabilitation program of the intellectual skeletons required a combination of both-kindness and most of all, consistency till death.

This is the lot of heroes. They have to die in order to be born and live. Quite so often, their kind of death is always atypical and quite typical of martyrs.

But why should the civilized and freedom loving Athens prosecute and convict to death its celebrity at seventy? Was he not the toast of Athens, the center for the civil intellect? Was he not the celebrated salesman of virtue and a very credible merchant of their field of dreams?

Apparently, not anymore.

Dreamers do die and like most soldiers, they are bound to fade away.

Living Dangerously

Socrates was, at seventy, considered a rebel whose cause Athens could do better without. The familiar figure in the streets of Athens was deemed a threat to the free-wheeling lifestyle of the city. Athens and Socrates, their consciences no longer matched, or, were they ever?

Death was simply anticlimactic and the antemortem was what preoccupied his students.

When we say that I.F. Stone's *THE TRIAL OF SOCRATES* comes to fill a void in contemporary Greek literature, we mean it. To combine bedrock scholarship with bestseller marketability is no mean feat.

Stone's opus electrifies the reader with the rare amalgam of a readable journalistic running commentary with an awesome scholar's dig to sift available data and test the veracity of competing truth-claims. In probabilistic tone, he ventures to hypothesize through the "what-undergoes-combustion-is-not-true" approach.

Stone artfully succeeds in arresting the comfortable scholar from what seems to be, an armchair complacency on one hand, or, a dogmatic machismo on the other hand, to the outside world of ordinariness of the pedestrian lanes, where Socrates was, and will always be. The Socratic school did not have walls at all.

Stone, in short, while he succeeds in presenting Socrates habeas corpus, recreates a scanned-like canvass of the Athenian time and space, its cerebral propensities, at almost eyeball to eyeball contact.

The real meat of the book surfaces in Part II after an anatomy of the socratic method and objective.

The majiueutic method is used as an instrument to extract and galvanize the absolute. The arbitrary searches for the permanent. The accidental leads the way to the unchanging.

Socrates manifested early symptoms of intellectual eliticism and snobbery, so it seems. Blame it on the cultural layers of Athens but the blessings of wit and statecraft were not a matter for general patronage. Somehow, these rare gifts began and stopped at the upper crust and the pull of gravity seems inutile to cause an effect which would be partici-

pated in by the general polis and demos. Some men were simply created more equal than others.

"Those who know" becomes the measure, the borderline which divides the ruler from the ruled.

The logic can be pushed to an absurdity but pushing it is already unsocratic. There is no systematic logic affirmed, was there? And is not the majeutic method fraught with double-edged surprises?

The Socratic elenchus possesses a built-in tails-I-win-heads-you-lose generator. In deed and in fact, Socrates was an eternal figure in what seems to be a real life theater of the absurd.

Strangely and thus too excitingly, Socrates churned thru life 'living dangerously'. At one turn, he could be the most unbridled unorthodox, but he could stage being an incorrigible orthodox at the next. He alluded to an internal daimonion which radar-like, warned him to less turbulent seas. Such customary instinct functioned best in his acceptance or avoidance of people. The same calculus warned him consistently regarding political affairs and the sed contras of not entering its arena.

In the view of Socrates, the philosopher is an institution by himself busy with the crystallization of the good life. As a stargazer, he was preoccupied with the preparation for death and regarded his second class counterparts with an interrogative "Who?", "They?". The true philosopher lived the good life, the fake talked about it.

Involvement in political affairs required a techne, reserved for the philosopher king.

Socrates orbited within the paradigms of the political theory while he consciously avoided the grime of the agora and the during-drink entertainment. He insisted that the symposion be conducted according to what it was supposed to be, an intellectual swordplay. Still yet, he insisted that the participants observe a decorum proper to their dignity, especially so, in vino situations. Politics was everything a philosopher worth his salt must shy away from. The company of the fullers, cobblers, farmers, merchants was not to be taken seriously. He was one athenian who admired the political complexion of Sparta and Crete to be more appropriate for his city. It fitted his ideal of a ruling class which was both atomary and exclusive. This perhaps, notwithstanding the grim possi-

bility that considering his social status, he would then fall back into the category of the perioikoi?

But, if Socrates disdained the open society, he could not keep these sentiments to himself. His students knew this for a fact and his thesis convinced them.

Mass media operated through poetry and the theater.

The comic poets were perhaps the most devious species of them all. They could get away with effrontery which really was a packaged kakegoria. They were society's licensed jesters who were tolerated to shoot from the hips. Their bullets were of course honey-flavored but were often fatal. Free meant no limits and the spectrum, in complete abandon "for art's sake". Garbage in, garbage out.

The Clouds of Aristophanes

The Clouds of Aristophanes was perhaps the most lethal. While other cartoonists spared him some sprinkling of compliments vis-a-vis, 'his great powers of endurance', 'his allergy to flattery', or 'the ambivalence of his phrontisterion'; Socrates suffered a barricade in this opus. His educational mission was targetted bulls-eye and the teacher effervesced as the "abstract principle of evil" which preyed on the unsuspecting no different from an ubiquitous malevolent. "The high priest of the finest nonsense" was defrocked of both decencies the decency of his perennial signature cloak and the decency of his name and reputation. He was head coach, team captain and center-guard all rolled and a package of bejewelled dandies, quacks, peddlers of pornos; name the freak and Socrates was the obvious wreck. Here was a man who was a spartan in style and unAthenian in substance. And if the eyes were really the windows of the soul, what a pair of 'swaggering and rolling' soul! And the contagion plagued by this man and his crew on the nomoi, fully aged, truly great, and irrevocably Athenian, was more than a tidal catastrophe.

The props of the spoof were all marshalled for the most expensive but nevertheless the most cruel scene. The 'thinkery' was condemned to the ultimate of all punishments: burn it down! It was a punishment which awarded absolute restitution on the aggrieved and absolute penalty on the criminal, an infinite chasm between one and zero. Athens Public Enemy No. 1 was forced to fish outside the territorial limits: cast your net in the subterranean and at the stratosphere.

If Aristophanes' *Clouds* was a prophetic work so to say, it was due to the fact that the very same charges stalked by the opus were to materialize twenty four years after its composition. Despite the considerable number of years, the characterization of Socrates jigsawed, matched, and the parts became a whole, spelling death in the end.

The Anomaly Live

Whether calculated or coincidental, the bomb that exploded over the head of Socrates was no surprise happening. It was building up and he knew it. Storm clouds were forming for sometime now and threatening signals were already blinking maydays. It blew from a slight drizzle to a moonsoon, from snowflakes to virginal avalanche, from an airgun to an automatic Uzzi. The character assassination which started off as a comedy was about to end in something else. Humor was no longer intended as an intellectual appetizer.

Surely, for such smoke, there has got to be fire. It was a conflagration which was as devilish as the tirades. Some character arsonists were lurking in the dark.

The impact of the intended harm was incalculable. Children were exposed to this most marketable and thereby the most popular Athenian means of communication. It was the radio-equivalent in Athens. The trial of Socrates has already started so to say. Publicity was used in its most hideous and covert form. The doxa was fueled with a barrage of the leaven of discontent. If money and influence move, so to say, what else does one need to destroy?

There was another ingredient that was put to use effectively. Plato's divine germ postulated specific genes for a particular arete. Some men are gifted to sculpt, others to heal, others to teach, and so on. But it is possible too that the genes may turn haywire and skid off its nature's bonding pattern. We have an anomaly that would be posthaste consigned to anonymity. Society should be protected from such goebels.

The Athens of Socrates was not spared from these 'faults'. Athens was no Sparta. Sparta was a straight-jacket, business-is-business, poker-faced society. It was austere in posture and followed the thin lines of the spectral diversities in its healthy, iron-bar pyramid. But if it was known for brawns, and questionably, brains, Sparta was uniquely

suspicious of 'aliens'. An alien meant everything that did not fit into any of the spartan calibrations. We have seen Athens to be a complete antithesis to what Sparta stood for. The fit and the fat, the bellicose and the peaceful, the parasites and the achievers, all these had their space of maximum tolerance in Athens. If the experts in the art of the *techné logon* had their well-heeled crowd of jaded wit; the mob, the culturally disabled, had their freedom parks in the agora of open admission. By a natural process of phase distribution, the pranksters, the hecklers and the genetic troublemakers polarized into the specific gravities of their own kind. The permanence of Athens was sustained by its own fluidity. Strangely, the prototype of civilization seemed oblivious of the reins which human nature ached for in its present state of paradigm lost. By their own lessons of experience, the postnatal blindness was a phenomenon to reckon with. The cause of such dysfunction must be unmasked. Where did the carotenes go?

Passions unchained spells Hiroshima. And the exercise of freedom happens to be the most vulnerable and the easiest to be infected. But curiously however, it is the last to express regrets.

The anomaly which evolved out of a devious agenda was easily the greatest threat, now and for all time. It was a pinless grenade. Complete the triangle with money and influence, and the precipice would become a touch-and-go. Instructors of cajolery were available. If the price was right, one could choose between force or slimy persuasion. Both means were undoubtedly violent with the difference that the former was instant relief and the latter was slow strangulation cum apparent consent. Conspiratorial meetings were convoked under the cloak of the right of association and 'academic' freedom so to say. Suspensions germinated and paranoia mushroomed.

The assumption into power by the oligarchic gang of Thirty was occasioned by a myriad of antecedents both fortunate and unfortunate. We expect Socrates to jubilate. Wasn't oligarchy a form of government of his dreams? Was it not true that some of his ex-friends were exclusive cardholders of this Now-in-power enclave?

Socrates the talkative became a Socrates the reticent. He held his tongue except when he was dialogueing his favorite elements. The Salamis case might have been too much of a trauma of a revelation of the Thirty's true complexion problems. The recurring dematose signaled the imminence of change. The greenhouse effect was taking its toll and

soon, the spectre of a monstrosity of an El Niño caused by the prostitution of freedoms loomed in the horizons.

The persecutors of today will be the persecuted of tomorrow. The seat and the shoes are parmenidean. It is the behind and the feet that Heraclitus constantly changed.

Tactical alliances were conveniently forged. The lost command in Athens and those who fled the city finally saw a blur of a common cause. They were united in their common enemy. What used to be a layered society was now a black box of style and substance. They agreed not to disagree — for the meantime. The operating principle was as bizarre as it was tenuous: The enemy of your friend is your enemy, or, The enemy of your enemy could possibly be your friend. The phalanx generated by the complainants now appealed to be a multisectoral battle on one side, and gave an impact that it was a case of The People of Athens vs. Socrates et al.

The fittest is bound to survive. Some species will conk out of the race. In Socrates' Athens, it was not uncommon to witness a litany of judicial murders. Disenfranchisement of property continued. The rich became richer and the poor were back to their old cards with the big difference that this time, they were poorer than before. The alliance was short-lived as it was expected from the very start. An edifice built on a quicksand of hate and vendetta, the fluffy alliance suffered a simple end of self-destruct. And the Pacmam instinct became more exclusive.

Similar to any kind of false pretence, history strikes back in chariots of fire. Time becomes truth's stamina and nature fights back to seek its rightful place. The personalities who thrived on media met their end by the same media. While it seemed that the poets and the theater producers had their last-say-immunity, Socrates' daimonion remained unperturbed and kept its cool.

The Doxa Justice

And so democracy . . .

A sweeping amnesty is declared. It was meant to force the issue of reconciliation at all cost regardless of status, gains and loses. It was a call to peace so to say, a kind of peace which entailed the condition as you are now, not as you were.

Litigants were entertained according to complaints committed within a certain time frame. But the amnesty's time frame could not heal old wounds or cosmeticize a gaping scar. Guilt by association was not simply imminent. It was omnipresent. It was not enough for one to be stigmatized for not having taken active part in the resistance against the Thirty, one was under suspect for not having fled Athens during the reign of ignominy.

Socrates, it appears, filled the description of the "charges" with a rating of: All Of The Above. Tough luck indeed. He was mum, during the Thirty's reign. Verdict: acquiescence. Silence meant yes. Neither did he flee Athens during its darkest hours. Athens ran through his veins no matter who was up there. Socrates was Athens, and Athens would have been entirely different if Socrates were not an Athenian.

Morbid resentments can be very ingenious. With the will, there will always be a way. No matter what and no matter how.

A powerful man knew the what and the how. His name was Anytus.

He was a man of consequence on account of the latest circumstances. Thanks to the democratic reforms of which he played a major role, he was at the right side of the fence at the right time but seemingly with the wrong scorecard to settle. Tanning animal hides was his bread and wine and it appears that he was doing exceptionally well in his trade. As an entrepreneur however, he had set his ambitions beyond the success of his tannery. Unfortunately for Socrates, the dream of Anytus was not only as simple as the desire to break the monotony of what Socrates called "those who want to buy cheap, but would like to sell dear". Socrates who wore no leather faced a foe who was not only in leather but of leather.

Anytus it seemed, had it all — for the moment, at least. Coming from behind, he was well-ensconced upfront. He had all the cards in his sleeves and the choice cuts were all his. The court trial have not even started and the final verdict appears to be quite predictable. Money and influence spelled an eon of difference between the persecutor and the persecuted. Socrates did not have both. With public opinion and the mass media orchestrated against him, who is against Anytus? Anytus was Goliath and Socrates was not even David.

But what was it really between the two protagonists? The initial embers were fanned out on the issue of the future of the son of Anytus.

It was learning the trade of the father versus the art of learning the *techné logon*. The future against the present.

Socrates in court. There were no lawyers to succour the defendant. That was not the style as yet. The protagonists had to speak for themselves. The services of the lawyers so called, like Lysias or Demosthenes, could be engaged by any of the parties to compose the text which would serve as the basis of what the parties would proclaim to the jury.

For a man who had to make hard decisions in life, this momentous event was for Socrates no different from the past. For a man who was very selective and discerning, whose appeal struck a selected and a screened audience, the jury of 500 chosen by lot or by favor, by force or by a dubious scheme, was too much a gall even to imagine.

There was no bill of particulars regarding the specific charges lodged against him.

But it was a sheer waste of energy to bewail the travesty of justice. Socrates would not mind instructing us again, and again, that justice as defined would never, never be attained in the world of *doxa*. Absolute justice is an ideal and as such, man will have to contend with its relativism, its vulnerability to a media blitz, its spangled *compañerismo*, its tribal protective instincts, and its hidden agenda behind and below, yes, behind and below REALITY.

The judicial murder against philosophy finally reeled off. The barefooted defendant's reading told him about seeing the same pairs of sandals he was familiar with during the days of the oligarchs. He saw however, a new set of faces and that was all into it.

Besides, Socrates the accused was doomed *ab initio* judging from the train of events lined by the new centurions and sensing the intense political climate so formidably breathing on his still broad and sturdy shoulders.

But Socrates was at peace, at peace with himself, at peace with others whether they accepted his kind of peace or not. He was more than willing as a victim. His inner *daimonion* suddenly suffers a brownout, a complete power shutoff. It was no longer delivering instructions and messages. There was absolutely nothing to decode. Socrates interpreted the *daimonion's* silence as a go-signal. The hemlock is waiting. And it should not be made to wait for a long time.

Stone's account lends the impression that Socrates was convinced of his fate. And he seemed to have "hurried up" that encounter with death.

Death for Socrates was no alien. His life was an orchestrated practice for the final countdown, a full-bloodied non-conformist, he seemed to have already severed himself from what could have been a serious ethical stumbling block: the unseen but operating human respect. This seems to be a major leap frog from his self-control though the direction was consistent toward a definition. Life must be defined amidst the trivia and trifles of everydayness. Death-now determined the death-tomorrow. This was the breakthrough in the search for the episteme. When all the veneer and cosmetics of opinion will have been extinguished and extinct, immortality is not far behind. Eternal springs hope.

How did Socrates accomplish his designs during trial?

Indicted But . . .

He was still the firm and the uncompromising man as he was before. He was still the raging lion against the sophists, the unstoppable martial arts expert in the elenchic gift, and oh, so incorrigibly convinced in his mission possible. But Socrates was not one to count the whats and the hows and most especially the ways he knew he could. Not at that time. Not anymore anyway.

There was one fatal "mistake" Socrates committed according to Stone. Socrates waxed sarcastic. He does not only disdain the jury, he mocked them.

People whom the jury had previously convicted bail-free were still in the streets! Useless.

The members of the jury were far from being competent in handling their present jobs. Some of them are seated in that far-from-august body because they have no other occupation to live by. If something was better than nothing, then nothing for this people was well deserved and the present dispensation certainly provided the internal bureaucracy which bred mediocrity by the bundles. Democracy at hand equated the right ethical decisions with number and random

plurality aside from the fringe benefit of a hands-on experience and if at all, learning on the job, for the ambitious who was also callous. Politics seemed like dust which turned into mud with a few drops of water. The philosopher-king who never lost his preoccupation for death was guided in his reign by his death-eschatology. Any other reason spelled not death but a camouflaged disaster. One went to a shoemaker when one needed a new pair, or to a tanner when leather was called for. But certainly, one did not go to a tanner, or to shoemaker, or to a merchant when one needed enlightenment regarding wisdom, justice, virtue and beauty! Hopeless.

The time certainly was not destined for the presentation of a skillful rhetorics based on a well-discerned position paper. Sorry Lysias, so sorry Demosthenes, Socrates had no money. He had the *techné logon* but borrowed time is borrowed, period.

The charges could not be anything more vague than corruption of minors and atheism against the state religion. Since religion was an official act of the state, any affront against religion was considered an affront against the state. Fight one, lose two.

If Socrates was guilty of the misbehavior of his former students, and he had several who were misbehaving differently, how come his accuser could not pinpoint the same alleged overt act on him? Neither the indictment nor the trial process could provide this data. Worse still, the specific laws violated by Socrates were never spelled out whether such laws were promulgated by an explicit declaration, by practice or tradition, or by allusion to a 'higher law'.

The jury votes twice. Guilty or not guilty. He was voted guilty. The second voting meted out the penalty.

The punishment of exile from Athens was negotiable apparently. Deep within the recesses of his immortality, Socrates faced the pain of leaving the Athens to which he knew he did no wrong. No way.

His loyal friends visited him in his solitary cell offering him the money to pay the fine and the plan to escape Athens. No, the jury did not deserve that much money. One mina was all the 500 strong but mentally inept body was worth. An escape was almost the same as an exile. It would be a victory for the inglorious, an approval of the miscarriage of justice and the institutionalization of mediocrity, if not of buffoonery, in

the Athens he loved so much. Socrates could not imagine himself being an accomplice that would facilitate the conferment of such legalized status to such an event perpetuated by people whom he would rather, if he had his way, not confer such a paramount responsibility as to determine the common good and the destiny of human kind. The political will was profoundly warped this way what, with the obsession to please 'the many', and the genius of 'the few' was drowned by the cacophony of the noise produced by the hundreds of fingers all trying to dip into a pie which spoiled easily.

If indeed Socrates was a fatalist, he certainly knew what he wanted and what he did not like to happen in this life. He had been used to a functioning, healthy and independent life. He could not imagine a life opposite to what he was used to lead. Besides, with this new crop of rulers, he definitely would choose death since this will afford him a companionship with perfect personalities in the life beyond.

Apology of Socrates

Perusing Plato's Apology of Socrates revealed a chronicle of reactions, among other emotions, of grief and courage. Plato was an eyewitness of the trial and seeing his idol being roasted, cut, and dissolved was mortally overpowering. It was not the same Plato after his teacher's death.

Deep down, the more sophisticated-minded Plato grasped the bottomline equation, it was a versus situation between convention and progression, between individual uniqueness and the corporate conscience, so called.

The Socrates of Plato prefaced his exordium with an eighty-proof eye opener. False speech found it easy to be palatable and appetizing with the use of French dressing capped with wine named as distinct as *Roi des Rois*. It does not respect limits, it is ingenious. Established facts are made arbitrary and everything depends on which side of the fence you are or from which angle you are sighting. Or, it all depends on the political persuasion of Aristophanes' chorus, the very effective cheering squad which jeered everytime the lie detector's pointer swayed against the heartbeat of innocence. Falsehood will not thrive in the absence of the marshalled crowd, the ontology cannot be plumbed by 'the many'. 'The many' are destined to their illusions and delusions.

What 'the many' held as true for generations especially the prescriptions for moral and political affairs, were, at the most, to be considered opinions. This, despite the fact that the very same opinion had graduated to sit at the pedestal of authority. The process philosophy of Socrates was now considered a direct affront to the duly constituted authority and the very essence of the political life of the city-state.

While Meletus the frontline accuser could not formulate a coherent and substantive charge, Plato accepted the fact that Socrates failed to establish his innocence. One all. Or zero-zero. If Socrates did not belong to 'the few' who could mold the young with the expertise, then Socrates is guilty of the charge. Socrates argued, that granting without conceding, the alleged charge could never be intentional for he knows pretty well that such act will inevitably boomerang. Otherwise, the absence of awareness merits further instruction and not punishment. Socrates was more than convinced that the impiety charge lurked at the vortex of the spewing Meletus who must have enjoyed every minute his celebrity status earned overnight.

The way of life, the kind of man that he was, was put forward by Socrates as the best evidence of his innocence. Like Achilles, the warrior of Homer's *ILIAD*, Socrates spent all his life in the search for what is true. This comparison did not fail to draw the ire of the jury and touched, as it were, the eye of the storm.

The Universal Culprits

Greek poetry in general, and Homer in particular, was not the poetry that we take it for what it is today. Coached in a unique vocabulary and syntax which locked-in its oral and jingle-like transmission, it was an essential vehicle of the greek educational apparatus, the encyclopedia for the whys and wherefores of the *nomos* and *ethos* of the individual's civic and personal life. It was therefore the fount of the universal consciousness of the greek mores and values. It stood for the collective culture, the social pressures which guided the 24-hour behavioral pattern of what it is to be greek.

The staff of authority was propped up by the nod of Zeus. In the *ILIAD*, the plot centered on an offense committed against an official. Authority was equated to that of a hero and the life of the hero was the very crucible of the greek mores, values, and beliefs.

By such comparison of Achilles to his personality, Socrates had tread sacred grounds. His brush with death took place in the very needle of the greek psyche. As the kind of man that the jury was preconditioned to think about him, the analogy broke hell and loose. It was not only irrelevant, it was irreverent.

But really, could not the testimony of life be the best evidence? Is it not the evidence itself? But that was too abstract for the 500 pairs of ears.

Plato's Socrates surfaced with specifics for the sake of the superficial minded.

If he was still around to answer their charges, it was because he had avoided political life. Politics is a fatal game mortals who have forgotten immorality play.

If what he had taught the young of Athens were really incendiary, the jury must now produce them in court and be afforded with a repeat performance at no charge, as it was his practice ever since.

The noble hearted Socrates refused to employ histrionics and cheap dramatics. Xanthippe and the children will not be dragged into shedding their tears and lament for mercy. Socrates ruled out the possibility of using the very same 'mob effect' which he decried so much, to be used in affirming his innocence. If the Socratic justice and nobility did not penetrate the jury's hearts, so be it. To hope for their minds' ascent, was asking for the moon. Guilty then, if guilty.

Plato's Socrates was allowed to offer counterproposals. The first proposal made by Socrates was a free board and lodging for life at the Prytaneum, the headquarters of all the hall of famers of Athens. Wasn't he the one and the best in his category? The second proposal was the payment of damages. His friends knew the key to the jury's brains. It was found in their pockets. If money talked, no problem, it does not think.

The jury reacted with a decision that seemed to save the last drop of its self-respect. Natural Law had not totally given up on the badly boxed-in 500.

The verdict: Death.

But Socrates wanted to have the last word.

His death was going to leave behind more Socrateses. Blood spilled for the sake of truth and justice was never obliterated. The stains were permanent and spread. Blood squeezed out by unjust persecution waters 'the few' to be more resolute, decisive and convinced. Besides, death for Socrates was not like ended, but life changed for the better and the best.

Plato as a court eyewitness and therefore a credible source of what transpired, was spared from witnessing the final copy.

A Matter of Rewinding

Stone comes up with a moving speech Socrates should have delivered instead, capitalizing on the athenian soft spot for a well-crafted rhetorics and we find it more than appropriate to quote in full (p. 212-214).

"Men of Athens, fellow citizens . . . This is not the trial of Socrates, but of ideas, and of Athens.

"You are not persecuting me for anything I did, but for what I have said and taught. You are threatening me with death because you do not like my views and my teaching. This is a prosecution of ideas and that is something new in our city's history. In this sense, Athens is in the dock, not Socrates. Each of you, as my judges, is a defendant.

"Let me be frank. I do not believe in your so-called freedom of speech, but you do. I believe the opinions of ordinary men are only doxa beliefs without substance, pale shadow of reality, not to be taken seriously, and only likely to lead a city astray.

"I think it absurd to encourage the free utterance of unfounded or irrational opinions, to base civic duty on a court of herds, like cabbages. Hence I do not believe in democracy. But you do. This is your test, not mine.

"I believe — and I have often said — that the shoemaker should stick to his last. I do not believe in versatility. I go to a shoemaker for shoes not for ideas. I believe the man who knows should rule, and the

others should, for their own good, follow his prescription, as they do their physician's.

"I do not claim to know but at least I know when I do not know. Such men as I — you may call us philosophers or stargazers as you like — are a civic treasure, not a menace, guides to a better way of life.

"Your freedom of speech is based on the assumption that every man's opinion is of value and that many are better guides than the few. But how can you boast of your free speech if you suppress mine? How can you listen to the shoemaker's or the tanner's views when you debate justice in the assembly, but shut me up when I express mine, though my life has been devoted to the search for truth while you have tended to your private affairs?

"You are proud that Athens has been called the school of Hellas. Its gates have been open to philosophers from all over Greece and even the outer barbarian world. Will you now execute one of your own because suddenly you cannot stand to hear an unpopular opinion? It is not I but you that will be disgraced forever by my condemnation.

"You accuse me of having been the teacher of Critias and Charmides, the leaders of the extreme oligarchs under the Thirty. But you are now acting as they did, they summoned me as you know, and ordered me to cease teaching the *techne logon* — the art of reasoned speech and logical analysis — to those under thirty years of age. You are doing the same thing. You are preparing to sentence me for having taught this *techne* to the youth of Athens during my lifetime.

"You say my ideas have been corrupting the youth, and leading them to question the democracy. Critias feared I might lead them to question the democracy. How, then, do you differ from the dictator you so recently overthrew. You say that I was Critias teacher. You are acting as if you had become his pupils. They feared my ideas. So do you. But at least they did not claim to be lovers of free speech.

"The Thirty were arbitrary, and did as they pleased. You claim to be men who live by law. Are you not acting the same way? Tell me, now, by what law of Athens do you seek to restrict philosophic teaching? Where can I find it among the city's statutes? When was it debated and voted? Who proposed such monstrosity, as you yourselves — in calmer days and in your right minds — would have termed it?

"The test of truly free speech is not whether what is said or taught conforms to any rule or ruler, few or many. Even under the worst dictator, it is not forbidden to agree with him? It is freedom to disagree that is the freedom to disagree. This has been the Athenian rule until now, the pride of our city, the glory on which your orators dwell. Will you turn your backs on it now?

"You say I have show disrespect for the city's gods. Beware that you do not make yourselves guilty of that very offence in condemning me. How can you honor Peitho when persuasion is inhibited, and nonconformist thoughts prosecuted? Are you not disobeying the Zeus Agoraios, the very of debate, when you restrict debate by condemning me?

"Ideas are not as fragile as men. They cannot be made do drink hemlock. My ideas — and my example — will survive me. But the good name of Athens will wear a stain forever, if you violate its traditions by convicting me. The shame will be yours, not mine."

This well-manicured, supposed-to-be-delivered speech by Socrates care of Stone immediately captures in a momentous flashback the irrevocable pain of omission. While it pains to witness truth being trampled or negated, it is more painful when the accused practically refuses to take a wholehearted interest in the defence of one's innocence; or, fails to take cognizance of other ways by which he can address the issues and save one's skin. The speech capsulizes the charges and the defence's stand. Stone's elegant pen and cascading wit succeed in stroking the finer details of the event capturing the vividness of the art which clones reality. The message rings across with a speed that allows the reader to chew the cud and provide the elbow room for the creative imagination to photograph the jury from a stance of stiff-necks into a mob of whining thorubus.

Time to Go

Nothing much could be done now with the death sentence. The convicted was not keen on an appeal or in filing a motion for reconsideration. It would not have mattered anyway to Socrates even if the sentence was an acquittal. The jury's amnesia was ontological and beyond repair. Plato's ananke fathomed the problem as a case of necessity. That was all the space provided by the clearance height that the jury could under-

stand and the draftsman is limited to the internal disposition of the materials he has at hand. If the temper of the jury was ignited by the sarcasm of Socrates, the crowd's frequent Alzheimer reaction was to be expected from a verbal assault which pierced their ago.

A Temporary Restraining Order (TRO) occurred without Socrates appealing for it. It was prohibited to implement the sentence of capital punishment on that particular day of celebration. The show must go on and Socrates was made to wait. Yes, he had to die but his death must not be a killjoy. But Socrates was hardly keen about such delays be it caused by a natural coincidence or by a wily legal maneuvering.

And so after a brief interruption, Socrates was ready. And the hemlock please.

The Socratic prophecy which he addressed the jury that "do not think that you'll ever get away with this" may not have registered its target in the conviction. For a man who had initiated what is oftentimes called the Greek Enlightenment, Socrates walks into our life's center-stage to address us about the timeless definition of man. He may see, but he is blind. He may be knowledgeable but he is not wise. He may be a man approved but he has not arrived. He is changing but he has not changed.

The biography of Socrates is philosophy itself. And the message is cogent as it is pointed: Athens could be any place today but the story of its people cum Socrates is everyman's — today and for all time.

Anytus' fate had it. He was exiled after falling in disfavor with the present dispensation. The demiurge was kind enough to afford him time to languish in the same torment he had caused Socrates et al.

Stone has accomplished in 282 pages more than what he promised he will deliver. He has not only succeeded in resurrecting Socrates in our times. He has called Socrates back to us beyond a mummified form, living and born-again. He has whetted a hunger for his type of ancient classics from those being purveyed to a captive audience. Since the greek terms were inextricable from the very cultural landscape of the times of Socrates, Stone's sizzling analysis of their graphic historicity, his rare hermeneutics of facts and events, **THE TRIAL OF SOCRATES** deserves laurels more than just being a National Bestseller.