

“and their kings must be those who have become the best in both philosophy and war.”

Plato, *Republic* 543a¹

Socrates’ military career has always been something of an enigma.² Plato’s *Apology* indicates that he fought in the battles of Potidaea, Delium, and Amphipolis (28e). But no one has known quite what to make of a Socrates in hoplite armor. There is no comprehensive account of his military career in connection with his moral and political commitments and his conception of the good life. A suitably detailed and contextualized portrait of Socrates’ relation to Athenian hoplite culture may provide insight into the life he chose to live and, thus, into his character. And this may be significant in the case of such an exemplary figure from whom we learn to reflect on life and how to live it.

Socrates’ military service is one of the few items in his biography that is secure. The details of this service are noteworthy for this reason alone. But it must also be the case, given the nature of hoplite warfare, that this was no minor biographical detail. The specific battles in which Socrates fought, and the broader campaigns associated with two of them, were charged with political significance. The expedition to Potidaea probably consumed close to three years of his life. The engagements at Delium and Amphipolis ended in Athenian defeats. The latter conflict, resulting as it did in the deaths of Cleon and Brasidas, the two men most eager for war in Athens and Sparta, helped pave the way for the Peace of Nicias in 421. Moreover, these events occurred

¹ All translations from the Greek are my own.

² I owe a debt of gratitude to several friends and colleagues who have read and commented on this paper more times than they probably care to remember. In particular, I must thank Ginger Osborn, Robert Drews, Kathy Gaca, Anthony Kaldellis, Victor Davis Hanson, and Ronald Polansky.

in the context of an ugly war in the course of which all parties involved conducted themselves more and more in a manner that could only be called—and frequently was called—unjust and dishonorable. Everything we know about Socrates leads us to believe that he reflected deeply upon the relevance of hoplite culture to the pursuit of the good life.

Contemporary scholars often note that Socrates served as a hoplite; yet those who proceed to characterize the man and his relation to his world rarely take further notice of this fact. Alexander Nehamas, for instance, seeks insight into the good life by examining Socrates as a literary figure (Nehamas 2000, 8). The Socrates appearing in literature is often a hoplite; indeed, it is primarily from this literature that we know of his military life.³ Nehamas notes that Plato's Socrates "consistently exemplifies" the view that one should do only what one believes to be right, without wavering (Nehamas 2000, 7). Nevertheless, he never seriously considers what Plato's portrait of Socrates as hoplite might tell us about what he believed to be right and good.⁴

³ It is of course a question how much we can learn about the historical Socrates from the Socrates depicted by writers such as Plato and Xenophon. But it seems to me that we can hardly avoid drawing conclusions about the man from the portrait. For if we press our scruples on this point too far, we must abandon all hope of saying anything significant about even his philosophical commitments. After all, what we know of his moral philosophy, for example, is as dependent upon the literature as are the more mundane facts of his life. Even the less stylized writings of later ancients on whose work we draw for information were themselves based upon the earlier more overtly literary accounts. This situation is perhaps unavoidable given the propensity of Socrates' contemporary followers and admirers to portray him through the medium of Σωκρατικοί λόγοι. Nietzsche's frequent condemnations of Socrates are clearly directed at the historical figure, and are as clearly based upon Plato's literary accounts. Even Vlastos' admirable attempt to justify his inferences from literature to history can only be provisional (Vlastos 1991, 45-106). I intend to take the literary accounts as evidence for historical facts where they are consistent with one another and are not obviously serving purely literary ends.

⁴ Nehamas' case is not unusual. Hope May's *On Socrates* includes a section on the historical Socrates. Yet there is

Those few who *have* reflected on the broader implications of Socrates' relation to Athenian hoplite culture have consistently overlooked the details of his participation in that culture. Nietzsche, for example, has much to say about Socrates and Greek militarism; but almost none of it is based on the facts of Socrates' service. Gregory Vlastos considers the subject in several places; but he grounds his account upon a fundamentally inaccurate characterization of Socrates' military life. More recently, Brickhouse and Smith have distanced Socrates from Athenian military culture. But their account is reminiscent of Vlastos', and suffers from some of the same flaws. I intend to show how these scholars have misconstrued Socrates' military career by comparing what they have to say with what we can establish about Socrates' involvement in Athenian hoplite culture.

We begin with Nietzsche, a critic whose negative view of Socrates has captivated large segments of the academic and intellectual communities. Nietzsche denounces Socrates as the anti-aristocratic, anti-military-man *par excellence*. He claims that "the [Athenian] adherents of the 'good old times'" held Socrates responsible for the dramatic decline of "the old Marathonian stalwart fitness of body and soul" (Nietzsche 2000, 86).⁵ According to Nietzsche's account, Socrates almost single-handedly transformed the Greeks from heroic warriors into moralizing rationalists. Indeed, he was the fullest manifestation of a world-historical break between the mores of traditional aristocratic Greek society and a metaphysically grounded morality that

no consideration of his hoplite service. May mentions Socrates' military career, of course, but only to make a point about his relation to Athenian democracy. The silence that surrounds Socrates' military career may contribute to the surprise, even the shock, that students express upon first hearing the details of Socrates' military service. Familiar with Socrates' name, they imagine him only as a teacher or a spiritual reformer along the lines of the Buddha or Jesus. Thus his role as a hoplite warrior comes as quite a revelation.

⁵ Nietzsche evidently has in mind Aristophanes' *Clouds* 985-989.

would eventually produce a decadent world of plebian anti-heroism. Nietzsche plays up Socrates' low birth and accuses him of harboring *ressentiment* against his betters; he characterizes Socratic dialectic as a knife thrust into the heart of old Athens and her noble traditions. In short, Nietzsche condemns Socrates as "pseudo-Greek, anti-Greek" (Nietzsche 1976, 474).

Ironically, Socrates' most influential admirer reinforces certain aspects of Nietzsche's critical portrait. But when Gregory Vlastos repeatedly emphasizes Socrates' supposed anti-militarism, he does so in a spirit of praise. Vlastos formulates this aspect of his account by exaggerating the implications of Socrates' statement in the *Crito* that one must never do injustice (48b). From this statement he derives and attributes to Socrates a "moral revolution," the centerpiece of which is indeed a very anti-Greek sort of pacifism. Ancient Greek morality was, to quote Vlastos, "grossly discriminatory in conduct toward personal enemies;" it glorified "[h]arming one's enemy to the full extent permitted by public law..." (Vlastos 1991, 179-180).⁶ Socrates, in contrast, was guided by an "undeviatingly beneficent goodness" (Vlastos 1991, 197). He was, says Vlastos, committed to the view that

⁶ Vlastos does not distinguish between personal and state enemies. In his chapter on Socrates' rejection of retaliation he refers to both types of enemies indiscriminately. In Vlastos 1987 he discusses the *talio* exclusively in military terms. This may be less than rigorous; yet the Greeks themselves did not always mind this linguistic distinction. Blundell 1991 informs us that "*polemios* came into regular use for a strictly military enemy, but *echthros*, always the regular word for a personal enemy, remained in use alongside *polemios* for enemies in war, for example in treaties. Conversely *polemios* is sometimes (though less often) used for personal enemies" (39). She notes also that one of the primary senses of *philo* is political. That is, one's *philo*i were one's fellow citizens. From this sense grew the notion of love of country (43-44).

true moral goodness is incapable of doing intentional injury to others, for it is inherently beneficent, radiant in its operation, spontaneously communicating goodness to those who have come into contact with it, always producing benefit instead of injury, so that the idea of a just man injuring anyone, friend or foe, is unthinkable (Vlastos 1991, 196-197).

The core of Socrates' moral revolution lay in the universal applicability of something like the above principle. Socrates supposedly refused to discriminate between friends and enemies: a just man must *never* injure *anyone*. Socrates, writes Vlastos, was "...the first Greek to grasp in full generality [the] simple and absolutely fundamental moral truth..." that "...if someone has done a nasty thing to me this does not give me the slightest moral justification for doing the same nasty thing, or any nasty thing, to him" (Vlastos 1991, 190).⁷

Vlastos frequently frames Socrates' "rejection of retaliation" as a repudiation of certain aspects of contemporary Athenian military culture (see, e.g., Vlastos 1991, 184-185, 191-192, & 197; 1987, 127-133; and 1974, 33-34). This culture was characterized by traditional Greek military practices such as the *lex talionis* and the preemptive strike (Vlastos 1991, 180-186). One of the most notorious representatives of this culture was Cleon, the Athenian demagogue and general. Vlastos illustrates Socrates' revolution by contrasting the two men. Cleon lived and died by the *talio*; Socrates rejected it. Consider, for example, Cleon's condemnation of Mytilene. After the suppression of an oligarchic revolt in Mytilene, Cleon convinced the Athenians to execute the city's adult male citizens and to sell the women and children into slavery. Vlastos imagines a counter-

⁷ Vlastos construes Socrates' injunction to avoid injustice much more broadly than Plato himself did. In the *Laws* Plato wrote that one must not act unjustly specifically in connection with the need to train citizens for war (829a).

factual situation in which Socrates is commanded to communicate the order of execution to the captain of the ship bound for Mytilene. He argues that Socrates would have refused to participate, for two reasons: first, the proposed punishment was unprecedented in its ferocity, nearly genocidal, and barbaric (Vlastos 1974, 33); second, it was indiscriminate inasmuch as it condemned the innocent democrats along with the renegade oligarchs. Vlastos concludes that Socrates, had he been commanded to do so, would have declined even to relay the orders to those charged with carrying out the executions (Vlastos 1974, 33-34).⁸

Vlastos directly connects Socrates' revolution to Cleon's treatment of other rebellious cities. When Scione and Torone revolted, Cleon persuaded the Athenians to crush them, execute or imprison the adult male citizens, and enslave the women and children.⁹ Vlastos draws a thick, dark line between Cleon's treatment of these cities and Socrates' own moral position. Cleon and the Athenians who followed him were motivated by the *talio*. Socrates was not. His "rejection of

⁸ Note that Vlastos portrays Socrates' "revolution" in quite general terms. He writes indiscriminately of "being unjust," "injuring," "doing something nasty to" someone, etc. His project is not to formulate the precise nature of Socrates' moral commitments based upon an examination of the Greek terms involved. Rather, he is investigating the relationship between a generalized version of Socrates' "do nothing unjust" prescription and the practice of warfare. This is not to say that there is no work to be done by way of sorting out the different expressions Socrates employs in the *Crito* in this context. But, as I say, this is not Vlastos' project. Nor is it mine. My argument is that whatever Socrates meant by the words he used to express his moral commitments, those commitments were compatible with Athenian militarism. Therefore, some interpretations of his morality (such as those produced by Nietzsche and Vlastos in particular) must be ruled out.

⁹ Scione's adult males were executed; Torone's were imprisoned. Vlastos uses these examples in 1991, 197 and 1987, 130 & 133.

retaliation” was a “surgical excision of that malignancy in the traditional morality which surfaces in actions like the genocide Athens had all but inflicted on Mytilene and then, as the war dragged on, did inflict on Scione, Torone, and Melos” (Vlastos 1991, 197).

Thomas Brickhouse and Nicholas Smith reaffirm this image by presenting Socrates as a man who repudiated the aggression and violence that were so much a part of his world. Though on many issues they disagree with Vlastos, they share his concern to show that Socrates would never have intentionally acted unjustly toward another man. To this end they argue that if he ever *had* acted unjustly, he would have done so only under the sort of circumstances that would relieve him of all responsibility (Brickhouse and Smith 1994, 151-154; 2000, 212-216). Even so, they are confident that Socrates never had to confront such a problem. In their words, “there is no reason to think that Socrates was ever asked to carry out a legal order to engage in any of the many evils the city of Athens committed. Nor is there any reason to think that Socrates ever actively supported the commission of any of those evils” (Brickhouse and Smith 1994, 154).

Brickhouse and Smith, like Vlastos before them, acknowledge that Socrates declined to oppose the Athenians’ imperial and military aggressiveness. But they resist any intimation of support or complicity. Vlastos reasons that Socrates did not denounce the condemnation of Mytilene and the similar treatment meted out to Scione, Torone, and Melos because it was a public matter, to be decided in the assembly, whereas Socrates’ philosophical effort was a private affair among small numbers of friends or intimates (Vlastos 1987). Brickhouse and Smith follow Vlastos completely here. If Socrates had any moral culpability it was only to the extent that his “political passivity” prevented him from rising in the assembly to dissuade the Athenians from their brutal plans (Brickhouse and Smith 1994, 153-154).

The facts of Socrates' military career do not square with the above interpretations. Hardly a passive observer, Socrates actively supported Athens' imperial war effort. As we shall see, he willingly fought with some of the men and on some of the very campaigns that the standard accounts assure us he would have condemned. Moreover, the extent of his military activity is much wider than anyone has recognized. The relevant evidence demonstrates that Socrates fought in many more battles than the three that are commonly acknowledged. On the Potidaean campaign alone he may have seen action at Therme, Pydna, Beroea, and Strepsa. Before returning to Athens he probably served at Spartolus and "other places" (Thucydides 2.70.4). On the Amphipolitan expedition he served possibly at Mende, definitely (for a time, though perhaps for a very brief time only) at Scione, then at Torone, Gale, Singus, Mecyhera, Thyssus, Cleonae, Acroathos, Olophyxus, Stageira, Bormiscus, Galepsos, and Trailus. There may have been more. As far as I can determine, no one has ever pointed this out. Nor has anyone closely examined the conditions of his service, or his possible motivations. Had this been done, readings such as those offered by Nietzsche and Vlastos would have been seen for what they are: untenable. As far as we can tell from the available evidence, Socrates was not a pleb who destroyed Athenian aristocratic culture out of envy and spite; nor was he the founder of a pacifist revolution. To the contrary, he specifically did *not* associate with members of his own social class. He eagerly cultivated relationships among the Athenian warrior caste, the καλοκαγαθοί.¹⁰ He adopted their manners and traditions. Like them, he respected and lived by the mores of Athenian hoplite culture.¹¹

¹⁰ These associations have led many to ask about Socrates' connection to radical oligarchy. This, I believe, is a red herring. The relevant point is that Socrates shared many of the cultural ideals of the hoplite class, which included

In the summer of 432 the Athenians assisted Corcyra in a naval engagement against Corinth.¹² Expecting the Corinthians to retaliate by inciting rebellion among their colonies, some of which were tributary subjects of their empire, the Athenians mounted a campaign against one of them, Potidaea. They demanded that the Potidaeans tear down a section of their city wall and turn out their Corinthian magistrates (1.56.2). Refusing to submit, the Potidaeans secured a promise of aid from Sparta and revolted. That summer the Athenians dispatched two contingents to put down the rebellion and to pacify the surrounding region. The first group captured Therme and then laid siege to Pydna, where the second group joined them. Together they assaulted Beroea and Strepsa and finally advanced on Potidaea (1.61.2-4).

The battle at Potidaea was brief but fierce. One hundred fifty Athenians were killed, including their general Callias. The Potidaeans and their allies lost approximately three hundred (1.63.3). After the fighting the Potidaeans withdrew into the city, to which the Athenians immediately laid siege. The citizens persevered for two years. By the winter of 430/29 they could resist no longer. Thucydides reports that in the end “the grain

moderate- and even non-oligarchic enemies of the radical democracy.

¹¹ For Socrates' interest in καλοκαγαθία see Plato, *Symposium* 222a; Xenophon, *Memorabilia* 1.1.16, 1.2.2-3, 1.6.13-14, 4.7.1, 4.8.11. For the connection between καλοκαγαθία and war see Plato, *Republic* 376c and *Laches* 192c; Xenophon, *Memorabilia* 2.6.27 and *Oeconomicus* 11.17 & 19. In Book 3 of the *Memorabilia* Socrates exhibits a keen interest in the art of the general and in those Athenians who aspired to the position. Socrates and his followers seem to have displayed an admiration for Sparta's military culture (see Aristophanes, *Birds* 1280-83). Paul Cartledge 1999 has suggested that Socrates may have been “a laconiser of both the pragmatic-political and the political-theoretical kinds” (317).

¹² The following account, unless otherwise indicated, is based upon Thucydides.

had run out; and besides the many other things that had already befallen them concerning the need for food, some even ate each other” (2.70.1). Under the terms of the surrender the surviving Potidaeans were exiled for life.

The Athenians remained in their camp at Potidaea until the summer, at which time they campaigned against several other cities in the Chalcidice. They had reason to believe that Spartolus would be betrayed to them, so they advanced on the city and proceeded to burn the crops. The Olynthians, however, Spartolus’ neighbors to the east, raised a force to help defend the city. Upon arriving in Spartolus they joined ranks with the locals and attacked the Athenians. The Chalcidian cavalry and light-armed troops fought well against the Athenians’ own horse and peltasts; but the Athenian infantry repelled their hoplites. The Chalcidians, therefore, retired behind the walls of Spartolus. Yet it was not long before they received fresh reinforcements, and the combined forces launched another attack. This time, the Chalcidian cavalry and peltasts harassed the Athenians to such a degree that they panicked and fled back to their camp at Potidaea. They lost four hundred thirty men, along with all of their generals. The survivors requested and received permission to collect their dead, after which they headed home for Athens (2.79.1-7).

It was sometime during this Potidaean campaign that Socrates famously rescued Alcibiades in battle.¹³ As Alcibiades recounted the incident in Plato’s *Symposium*, “none

¹³ There appear to be problems with the chronology, based upon the wording (or the inferences typically drawn from the wording) at the beginning of the *Charmides*. In that dialogue Socrates, who has just returned home from the camp at Potidaea, encounters friends who ask him about a battle there in which he had participated shortly before (ὀλίγον...πρίν) he left. If we take this to be *the* battle of Potidaea, which occurred at the very beginning of the campaign, then Socrates’ remarks about encountering youths upon his return who were not yet grown up when he left, and Charmides’ remark that he remembers Socrates from his childhood, are baffling. Yet the text of the dialogue

other than [Socrates] saved me. He refused to abandon me when I was wounded and saved both me and my armor” (*Symp.* 220e). From this we can infer that Socrates fought in or very near the front lines. He was certainly close enough to the action to come to the rescue of a wounded Alcibiades before the enemy could dispatch him. If Alcibiades had been wounded and was in mortal danger, the fighting around him must have been severe.¹⁴ Socrates did not hesitate. He stood in front of his friend and defended him from the enemy (Plutarch *Alcibiades* 7.3).¹⁵ Alcibiades thought Socrates’ actions so heroic as to merit the decoration for bravery (*Symp.* 220e).

does not demand that we interpret it as referring to *the* battle of Potidaea, which occurred in the summer of 432. I suggest that the battle that had just occurred was in fact the battle at Spartolus, which took place near Potidaea (near enough that upon being routed the Athenians retreated to their camp at Potidaea), and that did in fact take place just prior to the Athenians’ departure and return home. Moreover, as we have seen, the Athenians lost over four hundred men in this battle, which makes it much more lethal than the actual battle of Potidaea. This would explain why Chaerephon notes a report that the fighting was “very severe” and that many of their friends had died (153c). Between the actual battle of Potidaea and this battle a contingent of sixteen hundred hoplites arrived at Potidaea. If Socrates was with *this* group, then we can rule out his having fought at Therme, Pydna, Beroea, Strepsa, and, indeed, at *the* battle of Potidaea. If, however, we take seriously his comment in the *Apology* that he stood at his station and faced death at Potidaea, then we must conclude that he was with one of the two contingents that arrived at the beginning of the campaign. In that case, he would have served for the duration. I believe that we *can* take his remark in the *Apology* seriously, since he seems there to be referring to specific (and famous) battles.

¹⁴ For the severity of the fighting over a fallen man and his armor see *Iliad* 17. Homeric combat was not identical to classical hoplite combat, but the comparison is helpful.

¹⁵ Plutarch uses the word ἀμύνω, to “defend” or “fend off from.” This word need not suggest a purely defensive posture. Plutarch employs it often to designate a real fight. See, for example, his *Aristides* (17.7), *Theseus* (11.1), *Cimon* (17.3), and *Nicias* (21.5). Homer, too, often uses it to mean “fight in defense of.” For example, in *Iliad* 13 461 ff. there is a fight over the body and armor of Alkathoōs. Aineias “defends” the body against Idomeneus and

Recall the Nietzschean image of Socrates, which contrasts Socratic rationalism to Athenian militarism. This cannot be right, for Socrates himself fought in the service of empire. When the Corinthians addressed the members of the Peloponnesian League, calling for war to save Potidaea, they twice condemned Athens as a τύραννος πόλις, a tyrant state (1.122.3, 1.124.3). Pericles himself openly declared that the Athenians were fighting for the preservation of a tyranny, and even suggested that its acquisition had been unjust (2.63.2). His decision to attack Potidaea was occasioned not by Potidaean aggression but by strategic considerations regarding a third party, Corinth (1.44.2; Kagan 1969, 273-285). When the Potidaeans resisted, the Athenians beat and starved them into submission. They besieged and/or reduced several other cities as well. There is a record of Socrates on this campaign. We know that during the long siege he stood out among the soldiers as something of an eccentric (*Symp.* 219e-220e). We hear nothing, however, of his standing out as a moral revolutionary suggestively questioning his comrades about the justice of Pericles' military aggression. That Socrates, so far as we know, raised no objections to serving on this campaign suggests that neither militarism nor imperialism violated his conception of the noble and good life.

The next battle for which we have evidence of Socrates' presence occurred six years after the fall of Potidaea. He was with the Athenians at Delium when a large Boeotian army put them to flight after a particularly bloody melee.¹⁶ The Athenian right

Idomeneus' friends "defend" him against Aineias and other Trojans. The result is an all-out fight on both sides. In the Platonic *Alcibiades* (115b) Alcibiades says that many men die trying to rescue their friends and relatives in battle.

¹⁶ Seven thousand Athenian hoplites were present, accompanied by a small cavalry (4.94.1). The Boeotians, led by the Thebans, had in addition to their own seven thousand hoplites, one thousand cavalrymen and ten thousand

wing routed the Boeotian left, crushing the Thespians and surrounding and butchering the troops next to them (4.96.3).¹⁷ On the other side of the field, however, the Thebans prevailed. Their commander, Pagondas, dispatched two cavalry units to the aid of his collapsing left wing. Mistaking these reinforcements for a large army, the Athenians panicked, scattered, and retreated in disarray (4.96.5-6). The Boeotians pursued them and cut down nearly one thousand men before breaking off the chase at nightfall (4.101.2).

In Plato's *Symposium* Alcibiades tells of Socrates' composure during the retreat. While fighting raged all around him, he led a small contingent of hoplites, Laches included, safely out of the slaughter. Alcibiades, from the relative safety of his horse, had occasion to observe Socrates' demeanor, and he later recalled that he had been calm, alert, and had the look of a man who would fight back mightily if challenged (*Symp.* 221a-b). This event might well have inspired Nicias' advice in the *Laches* that young men should practice fighting in armor. Such training, he says, will be most advantageous after the collapse of a phalanx, when a man must attack a retreating enemy or defend himself against pursuers. It will also give him an appearance more terrifying to the enemy (*Laches* 182a).

unarmored soldiers (4.93.3).

¹⁷ If it is true that generals usually fought in the front ranks and on the right wing, then Socrates may have fought in this part of the battle. He was with Laches during the retreat, which suggests that he fought near him in the original battle. Laches was not a general at Delium, though he had held that position in the past. See Hanson 2000, 107-116; Hanson 1995, 489n19. But see Wheeler 1993.

Two years after Delium Socrates joined another expedition north, the details of which are as surprising as they are illuminating.¹⁸ In the summer of 422 he accompanied Cleon on a wide-ranging campaign to restore Athens' imperial possessions in and around the Chalcidice and Thrace. Several cities were in open rebellion and others had fallen to the Spartans under Brasidas. Cleon, determined to punish and reclaim them, successfully proposed a decree calling for the execution of the Scionians (4.122.6). Shortly thereafter the Mendaean revolted (4.123.1-3). Enraged, the Athenians dispatched one thousand hoplites to reduce the cities (4.129.2). They descended on Mende first. When the city gates were thrown open on the second day of the assault, the soldiers pillaged the city and very nearly massacred the citizens (4.130.1-7). From Mende they moved south to Scione, where, after defeating the Scionian and Peloponnesian garrison, they laid siege to the city (4.131.1-2). The following summer Cleon himself sailed north with twelve hundred hoplites. Socrates may very well have been fighting outside Scione with the first contingent. If not, he sailed out of Athens with Cleon. After putting in at Scione to collect reinforcements, Cleon and his men (Socrates now definitely included) sailed to Torone, where they overpowered the garrison and took the survivors captive. They enslaved the women and children, and sent the men to Athens as prisoners (5.3.2-4). After the fall of

¹⁸ The following account is based upon, a) Socrates' assertion in the *Apology* that he stood in the battle lines at Amphipolis; b) Thucydides' account of the expedition that culminated in that battle; and, c) West and Meritt 1925. See also Woodhead 1960. That Socrates fought in the famous battle at Amphipolis in 422 is almost universally agreed to be the case. If this is true, then the account in the text of his service with Cleon, as surprising as it may be, must follow. Less than a handful of scholars have suggested that Socrates must have been referring in the *Apology* to some other battle at Amphipolis. Their case, however, is less than convincing. For a discussion and criticism of this denial see Calder 1961.

Torone, Brasidas abandoned the Sithonian peninsula for a more secure position at Amphipolis. The Athenians took advantage of his absence by capturing several other cities, including Gale, Singus, and Mecyhera. The cities on the Athos peninsula, among them Thyssus, Cleonae, Acroathos, and Olophyxus, may have submitted without significant resistance.

After securing the Chalcidice the Athenians proceeded to Eion. On the way they stormed Stageira¹⁹ and reduced the strategically important Bormiscus.²⁰ From Eion they pushed west, taking Galepsos and the much larger Trailus. Returning to Eion they settled in and awaited an opportunity to move against Brasidas in Amphipolis. Cleon stalled. When finally he led his men out to reconnoiter the surrounding area, he was informed that Brasidas was preparing to attack. Caught off guard, Cleon hastily attempted to organize a retreat. As his troops wheeled around to withdraw, the Peloponnesians sallied out and rushed them from the rear. The stunned Athenians scattered. Many joined ranks on a hill and with spears and swords beat back repeated assaults. Finally, unable to withstand the barrage of missiles the cavalry and the peltasts launched against them, they disbanded and fled into the hills (5.10.7-10). Six hundred Athenians died in the melee (5.11.2), Cleon among them (5.10.9).

Cleon was ruthless; he was brutal to rebellious cities; but Athens needed him. The empire in the north was crumbling; much of Thrace was in open rebellion. The Athenians were livid (4.122.5, 4.123.3). The punishment from which they had spared the citizens of

¹⁹ Stageira survived. One wonders whether Aristotle's grandfather was resident in the city at the time and, if so, how the history of philosophy might have been altered had Stageira fallen.

²⁰ The Athenians might have assaulted these cities *after* encamping at Eion.

Mytilene they imposed upon the defeated Scionians, at Cleon's insistence. They retaliated against Torone almost as severely. Thucydides did not record the sufferings of the many other cities that fell to Cleon's army; but we may be sure that they too felt the bronze edge of the *lex talionis*.²¹ In the end, though it cost him his life, Cleon's northern campaign was extraordinarily successful. Thanks to his efforts, "[t]he coast of Thrace from Aenus to Pallene had been reorganized, much of it reconquered..." (West and Meritt 1925, 69).

Socrates' lengthy service with Cleon does not fit comfortably into the popular image. Vlastos overlooks it when he cites the Athenians' treatment of Scione and Torone as examples of paradigmatically *anti*-Socratic aggression. When Brickhouse and Smith declare that Socrates never actively supported Athens' "evil" acts, they do so expressly in connection with the Athenians' treatment of Scione (Brickhouse and Smith 1994, 153-154). But Socrates may very well have been with the contingent that stormed Scione in the summer of 423. Or he may have sailed with Cleon the following summer. Either way, he served at Scione and he arrived there in full knowledge of the campaign's objectives; he knew that the men were to be executed and the women and children enslaved. Thus the assertion that Socrates never participated in Athens' "evil actions" cannot be correct. If he were under a legal obligation to serve on these campaigns, then Brickhouse and Smith have gone wrong again. If, as I believe, he served willingly and eagerly, their error is compounded.

²¹ The Athenians' conduct at Mende may provide a hint. During the Peloponnesian War "[t]he normal practice when a state was overrun was (1) the seizure of all women and children, (2) the seizure of all slaves, (3) the slaughter or seizure of all defeated military men" (Pritchett 1971, 81).

Fighting with the infantry was not something into which every Athenian citizen was thrust by necessity. A long tradition strictly regulated admission into hoplite ranks according to family wealth. In the archaic period, for example, one had to be a member of the *zeugitai*, one of Solon's four property classes, which required a significant annual agricultural income. Hoplite status may have later been regulated according to the worth of one's total property, but the income requirement would still have been high (Hanson 1995, 296). Socrates would not have qualified for hoplite service under either of these arrangements. Sometime during the Peloponnesian War, however, the requirements seem to have been significantly relaxed. Still, even under these circumstances, not just any man could serve as a hoplite. He had to have the resources to buy the panoply. Most hoplites were farmers, men who owned and turned a profit from their own land.²² Poor men did

²² Hoplite armor was not so expensive that it was limited to only the wealthiest segment of society. Still, it was beyond the means of thousands of citizens, mostly laborers like Socrates, who could serve only on the fleet. In the fifth century the cost of the panoply was approximately one to three hundred drachmas (Hanson 1999, 227). Assuming steady employment, the average laborer could expect to earn around three hundred drachmas a year. Annual expenses for a family of four totaled anywhere from two hundred eighty to over three hundred drachmas (Rosivach 1992, 52 and 64n60). In other words, the annual income of an average laborer would have barely supported a family of four. At some point, too, Socrates had to support another wife and a third son. It seems unlikely, therefore, that he would have had the resources to spend on hoplite equipment. Consider also that Socrates doesn't seem to have worked nearly as much as an average laborer. Indeed, at his trial he doubted whether he could scrape together one hundred drachmas (*Ap.* 38b); he claimed, in fact, to have no money (37c). In Xenophon's *Oeconomicus* Socrates says that his property, including his house, is worth only five minae (2.3), or five hundred drachmas. Hanson notes that the panoply was worth about three months salary of the poorest citizens (Hanson 1995, 296); yet this is a purely abstract point and does not take into account primary living expenses. Hanson's actual contention is that the panoply was affordable for the average farmer (and not confined to the wealthiest landowners),

not join the infantry: they could neither purchase nor maintain the necessary equipment. This is why thousands of Athenian citizens rowed in the fleet or served as light- or un-armed attendants on the phalanx.²³ Socrates was notoriously indigent. Had he lived like the average Athenian laborer, he would have been confined to service on the fleet.²⁴

So how and why did Socrates come to possess the equipment necessary for qualification as a hoplite? It is unlikely that he inherited it from his father, who was poor himself (see, e.g., *Laches* 186c). Moreover, in Sophroniscus' day there may very well have been regulations in place that would have barred him from acquiring hoplite armor (Hanson 1995, 299). Perhaps Socrates saved his money in order to purchase his panoply.²⁵ If so, this would have taken time and determination, which would suggest that he very much wanted to serve as a hoplite. Perhaps he solicited the necessary funds from his wealthy friends. This, too, would evidence a commitment to hoplite service. In sum, whether he saved his money or borrowed it from friends, he was not *required* to buy the panoply; he did not *have* to be a hoplite. However Socrates came by his arms and armor, he voluntarily chose his way of war.

a man worth around two or three thousand drachmas (Hanson 1995, 487n8). He recognizes that, practically speaking, the panoply was "beyond the reach of the poor" (Hanson 1995, 249).

²³ The very rich, men like Xenophon and Alcibiades, generally rode with the cavalry.

²⁴ One might argue from the fact that Socrates served as a hoplite that he was not as poor as the sources make him out to be. Though this is possible, of course, it runs counter to all of the testimony we have regarding his financial situation.

²⁵ Diogenes Laertius relates a tradition that Socrates invested money and profited from the accruing interest (2.20).

Even after he had acquired the panoply, Socrates would not have been subject to a random draft. During the Peloponnesian War men who were eligible to serve as hoplites had their names inscribed on a list, the κατάλογος.²⁶ Call-up for military service was conducted according to a procedure whereby only the number of men required for a campaign was specified. The taxiarchs, under the direction of the generals, recruited the appropriate number from among those who were eligible to serve (Christ 2001, 398-402; Andrewes 1981, 1-2). The generals enjoyed significant latitude in this regard. Though they swore to select men according to a regular rotation, they did not always honor their oath. They regularly sacrificed piety to the success of the campaign, for they knew that an indiscriminate distribution of service could swell the ranks with weaklings, cowards, or men who for any number of reasons were undesirable. There were situations in which a general particularly wanted a specific man (or band of men) to join him, even though he (or they) was not technically eligible (see, e.g., Aristophanes *Peace* 1181-1190). The generals required victory. When assembling a fighting force they sought out those men whom they thought would serve them best (see e.g., Christ 2001, 401-402; Xenophon *Memorabilia* 3.4.5).

At first glance, Socrates would never have been mistaken for the ideal infantryman. He was poor. He was almost forty when he served at Potidaea and in his late forties at Delium and Amphipolis. He attended particularly arduous expeditions, which involved extended periods of deprivation punctuated by episodes of extreme stress. There were many other (and younger) men available for the campaigns against Potidaea and Amphipolis. We must ask ourselves: How did Socrates come to take part in all of this?

²⁶ The following account is based upon Christ 2001 and Andrewes 1981.

Why would the generals recruit an older man for strenuous service when so many others were available? Consider the details of Cleon's Amphipolitan campaign. Socrates was around forty-eight years old at the battle of Amphipolis. In just two years he would have retired from active duty and remained in Athens with the home guard. A total of twenty-two hundred men took part in the campaign. There were at least six thousand hoplites in Athens in the summer of 422, all of whom had served at Delium two years previously and been inactive since then.²⁷ Cleon intended to assault several cities on the way to Amphipolis. The campaign would be protracted and especially dangerous and everyone knew this (Kagan 1974, 318-319). The importance of the mission and the limited number of men make it almost certain that Cleon or his close associates were personally in charge of recruiting.²⁸ So how did Socrates wind up in the ranks? He had a reputation for courage, won at both Potidaea and Delium. The latter battle had occurred just two years prior to the expedition to Amphipolis. Socrates' record of valor and bravery may very well have recommended him, despite his age. Probably Cleon or one of his taxiarchs invited him to serve.

Would Socrates have been obliged to serve if asked? Would he have served without protest under a man whose character and methods he considered ignoble and

²⁷ Seven thousand hoplites served at Delium in 424/3 (4.93.3), and this was the Athenians' full hoplite force (4.90.1). Approximately one thousand died there (4.101.2), leaving approximately six thousand men. One thousand hoplites sailed to Scione the following summer (4.129.1). If Socrates left with this group, he would have been one of only one thousand selected from a pool of six thousand. If he left with Cleon, he would have been one of twelve hundred chosen from a pool of five thousand. When he left for Potidaea he was one of three thousand selected from a pool of over thirty thousand.

²⁸ For recruitment by individual generals see Christ 2001, 400n.9.

unjust? It is surely relevant that a citizen could be excused from service due to poverty (see Christ 2001, 404-405). Many men of the hoplite class, men for whom poverty was not an issue, simply refused to serve altogether. There were laws against this, of course. Even so, while those who ignored the summons of the κατάλογος did not escape the disdain and ridicule of their fellow citizens, they seem only rarely to have been prosecuted.²⁹

On the other side of this coin, it was not uncommon for men to volunteer for military duty.³⁰ And considering the incongruity between the evidence of Socrates' financial situation and the facts of his hoplite service, we should not rule out the possibility that he was himself a volunteer. An infantry soldier could earn one drachma daily; and there was always the prospect of booty, especially if cities were to be sacked and the citizens sold into slavery.³¹ Precisely these conditions applied to Cleon's northern campaign.³²

²⁹ Pisander was known to have avoided combat (Xenophon *Symp.* 2.14; Aristophanes *Birds* 1556 ff.); so was Aristogiton (Plutarch *Phocion* 10). Cleonymus was a hoplite but he tossed away his shield and fled from battle (Aristophanes *Clouds* 353; *Wasps* 20 ff.). Amyntias, too, avoided military service (Aristophanes *Clouds* 692). See also the story of Meton and his son in Plutarch's *Nicias* 13.5-6. Plato (*Republic* 469d) remarks that some men avoided fighting by poking around among the dead before the battle had been concluded. Though such men were in theory vulnerable to a charge of ἀστρατεία, in practice they often incurred no official penalty (Christ 2001).

³⁰ In 447 Tolmides, son of Tolmaeus persuaded approximately one thousand Athenian volunteers to fight with him at Coroneia (Plutarch *Pericles* 18.2). In Aristophanes' *Birds*, Pisthetairos urges a young hoodlum to volunteer for a campaign in Thrace (1364-1369). See Andrewes 1981, 2 and Christ 2001, 399.

³¹ On the distribution and sale of booty and the sale of slaves see Pritchett 1971, 65-84.

³² Similarly, on the way to Potidaea the Athenians attacked at least four other cities. When they exiled the Potidaeans

We should not over-estimate the influence an ἄγραφος νόμος might have exercised on Socrates. Although there may have been cultural pressures on men of a certain class to serve with the hoplites, these pressures would not have operated on families in the laboring class. Socrates grew up in a milieu that celebrated the victory at Salamis and stressed service on the fleet. Moreover, as far as we can tell from his literary depiction, Socrates was the paradigmatic example of a man who is able to transcend the influence of custom; he resisted cultural pressures and lived his life exclusively according to what he believed to be the good. The average Athenian of the hoplite class may very well have been motivated by culturally established ideals of heroism, virtue, service to the polis, etc. But it is hard to believe that such considerations could have pressured Socrates into acting contrary to his deepest commitments. Socrates' service as a hoplite may have been compatible with custom; it was not because of it.

It is worth noting that Socrates' military career overlapped his philosophical career by many years, at least as Plato portrays him. The *Charmides*, which begins with his return from Potidaea, represents Socrates at or near his philosophical maturity. He would have been around forty years old at the time. He is obviously well known as someone deeply concerned with education in the *Laches*, which is set at least six years later, sometime after Delium. Interestingly, much that was distinctive about his philosophical character was associated with his hoplite service. His imperviousness to the elements, his frugality, moderation, and powers of concentration became widely known at

they allowed each citizen to take only one or two items of clothing and a small sum of money. Whatever they left behind presumably became Athenian property.

Potidaea, as did his intimate association with Alcibiades (*Symp.* 220a-b).³³ At Potidaea and again at Delium he earned a reputation for courage. His philosophical reputation must have been well established for some time before the Amphipolitan campaign, for Aristophanes produced his *Clouds* in 423, one year prior to the expedition.³⁴ This is all to say that Socrates was living as a philosopher throughout his military career. Thus it cannot be that his hoplite service was a thoughtless indiscretion that his later intellectual development caused him to reject. Socrates was not a warrior who later became a philosopher; he was both warrior and philosopher simultaneously.

Socrates' notoriety as a philosopher may have had something to do with his service at Potidaea. He shared a tent with Alcibiades during the campaign, which was most likely the young man's first military experience (Plutarch *Alc.* 4.4 and 7.2; Plato *Symp.* 219e). This must have been arranged, or at least approved, by Pericles, Alcibiades' guardian at the time. Socrates was already close to Alcibiades (*Symp.* 219e) and he may have associated with Pericles' circle of intellectuals.³⁵ He did not meet the archaic

³³ Plutarch says that everyone marveled to see Alcibiades living, dining, and exercising with Socrates on campaign (*Alc.* 4.4). Given the influence that Alcibiades had over his peers (as demonstrated, for example, by the effect his refusal to play the flute had on young men of his generation [*Alc.* 2.4-6]), his association with Socrates must have contributed to the spread of the philosopher's reputation.

³⁴ If Socrates left with the first contingent, the play was presented just months before his departure.

³⁵ Plato's *Menexenus* (235e-236d) makes Socrates close to Aspasia, Pericles' mistress. Two other Socratics, Aeschines and Antisthenes, wrote dialogues named after her. He is associated with her also in Xenophon's *Memorabilia* 2.6.36. He converses with Pericles' son in *Memorabilia* 3.5. Diogenes Laertius (2.18) says that he was reported to have been a pupil of both Damon and Anaxagoras, two of Pericles' close associates. Plato, in the *Republic* (400b-c) and *Laches* (180d), associates him with Damon. For Pericles' relation to Damon and Anaxagoras

standard for membership in the hoplite class; nor would he have met the later relaxed qualifications regarding total property worth, if in fact this change was made. It is unlikely that the requirements were relaxed any further than this at the beginning of the war. So, Socrates may have served at the request, or with the special permission, of Pericles himself.

The evidence suggests that Socrates served bravely, sometimes even daringly. He must have fought in the first few ranks during the battle at which Alcibiades was struck and wounded by the enemy. We have already noted Alcibiades' report of his valor in this and other battles. Laches, who fought beside him at Delium, extolled his courage (*Laches* 181b). Socrates himself said that he stood steady in the ranks and faced death (*Ap.* 28e). In addition to all of this, there is one argument from silence that is too telling to ignore. Aristophanes delighted in ridiculing known cowards. But though he produced his *Clouds* after Socrates had been in combat many times, and his intention was to parody and to ridicule, he leveled no such accusation against him.³⁶

There are innumerable opportunities in the dialogues for Socrates to challenge the justice of war, or to raise the possibility of a moral requirement to resist military service, or at least to resist active participation in battle. Plato's dialogues are replete with references to warfare. The *Charmides*, for instance, begins with everyone begging Socrates to describe his activities while on campaign at Potidaea. This would have been an opportune moment for him to invite his interlocutors to consider the morality of a

see Kagan 1991, 21-25.

³⁶ Had Socrates been opposed to war, Aristophanes could hardly have referred to him as one who was mad for Spartan ways (ἐλακωνομόνουν), regardless how meager his diet or shabby his dress. See *Birds* 1281.

“preemptive strike” in which not only combatants but also innocents were killed.³⁷ Yet he does no such thing. Nowhere in the dialogues does Socrates give any indication that he had moral objections to hoplite warfare. To the contrary, in the *Protagoras* he says it is “noble” (καλόν) and “good” (ἀγαθόν) to go to war (359e).³⁸

There is no reason to believe that Socrates changed his opinion about war even at the end of his life. In 401, when Xenophon asked his advice about joining Cyrus’ expedition against Artaxerxes, Socrates’ only scruple was that the Athenians might resent his serving under the man who had lately helped the Spartans defeat them (*Anabasis* 3.1.5). He raised no moral objections to warfare as such. Indeed, when he looked back on his life in his final days he expressed no regrets for his military occupation in the service of empire. He remarked, in fact, that he was confident that he had never been unjust to anyone (Plato *Ap.* 37a; Xenophon *Defense* 3.5.26).

Plato’s Socrates says time and again that in everything we do we must constantly consider how it bears on happiness and the good life (see, e.g., *Ap.* 28b and *Gorgias* 526d-e, 527b). His idea of the good life apparently included life as a hoplite. He may very well have relished the experience of battle. But to be a hoplite was also (we might say,

³⁷ This remark should not be construed as in any way alluding to contemporary issues of politics and war. Rather, it is an allusion to, a) Vlastos’ claim with respect to his hypothetical Mytilene example that Socrates would have resisted because innocents were killed; and, b) his characterization of the “preemptive strike” as an extension of the traditional morality against which Socrates’ “moral revolution” was directed.

³⁸ See also Plato’s *Gorgias* 468b-470b, where Socrates suggests that in some cases it may be good and just to kill people, exile them from their homes, and confiscate their property. At *Phaedrus* 248d he suggests that the life of the military commander is second only to the life of the philosopher. In Xenophon’s *Memorabilia* Socrates includes learning the art of war in a list of occupations that make for a joyous life (2.1.19, 4.5.10).

primarily) a matter of status and culture. Socrates declined to serve in the fleet because he considered it ignoble (*Republic* 396b; *Laws* 707a-c). The καλοκαγαθός, he says in the *Gorgias*, is happy (470e). Socrates associated with the καλοκαγαθοί: he married into their ranks;³⁹ he drank and sang with them at their symposia; he exercised and talked with them in their palaestrae; he visited their homes; he fought beside them on the battlefield. These were not the typical actions of an indigent Athenian. Socrates actively pursued this life for himself; he went out of his way to live it.

In this we see not a revolutionary but a traditionalist.⁴⁰ Socrates *believed in* Athenian hoplite culture, he admired and aspired to live up to the aristocratic ideal of the καλοκαγαθός. This ideal was manifested most gloriously in the Μαραθωνομάχαι, the farmer-warriors who laid low the Persian might at Marathon. When Plato, in the last years of his life, recalled these old hoplites and their ways, he remarked that the land battles they fought had made the Greeks better men (*Laws* 707c). Socrates fought such battles and was such a man. He did not fight at Marathon himself, of course; but he stood proudly in the long line of hoplites that stretched back to those who did. He identified

³⁹ Diogenes Laertius informs us of Aristotle's claim that Socrates married Myrto, the daughter of Aristides the Just (2.26). Aristides was a cousin of Callias (who married Elpinice, Cimon's sister), whose grandson plays host to Protagoras in Plato's dialogue by that name. In Plato's *Gorgias* Socrates singles out Aristides as one of the very few good politicians (526b). Aristides and Socrates came from the same deme, Alopecce. Some connection between the two families is obvious from Plato's *Laches* (180d-181c).

⁴⁰ This is not to claim that Socrates was nothing more than a hoplite. We must not go to one extreme while rejecting the other. Socrates, like Aeschylus before him, and Archilochus before *him*, was a servant of the muses as well as of the god of war.

with these men and accepted that their way—the way of the hoplite—led most nearly to the good life.

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