

After waiting outside for a time, as they were told to do, the doorkeeper informs Phaedo and the other young friends of Socrates that "the Eleven are releasing him (*sc.* from a leg-iron), and pronouncing the sentence that on this day he should end his life." The friends are let into the prison. Socrates has had the leg-iron struck off, and is supine on a couch. Xanthippe, already there when Phaedo and the others enter, is seated, holding his son, a baby in arms. When she sees Socrates' friends, she loses her composure. Crito, a wealthy man, accompanied by a number of attendants, is also there. Socrates bids him have Xanthippe taken home. Socrates sits up. Philosophical discussions commence. Socrates argues for the personal survival of the soul in an afterlife. The discussions are spun out over many hours until late in the afternoon (*Phd.* 61e–115a).

The discussions ended, Crito asks Socrates chiasmatically "What do you instruct them or me to do regarding the children or anything else . . . ?" (τί δὲ τούτοις ἢ ἐμοὶ ἐπιστέλλεις ἢ περὶ τῶν παίδων ἢ περὶ ἄλλου του . . . ;). By requesting instructions for himself regarding the children, Crito indicates that he is willing to be their guardian after Socrates dies. Socrates ignores Crito's request. Socrates tangentially acknowledges the existence of his children, saying "If you (*sc.* Crito and the young friends) attend to yourselves, you will be serving me and mine, and yourselves as well." As the plural verbs of the last words (ὀφείλομεν, ἀπόδοτε, ἀμελήσητε) are grammatically puzzling, I note that Socrates refers to himself here in the singular (ἐμοὶ), and refers to his sons in the plural (τοῖς ἐμοῖς), who are three in number. The main room of the prison is not the appropriate place to provide instructions regarding the sons, as Phaedo and the other young friends present, many of them foreigners, will not be implementing them.

Socrates, accompanied by Crito, now goes off to a side room. The young friends are ordered to stay behind. Phaedo, in the main room with the others, recounts what happened in the side room, by the legerdemain of literary license (*Phd.* 116a7–b5): "and when he had bathed

* Translations of the text are mine unless otherwise indicated. I follow the text of BURNET, J. (1901–06). *Platonis opera*. 5 vols. Oxford.

and his children had been brought to him—for he had two little sons and one big one—and the women of the family had come, he talked with them in Crito's presence, and gave them such directions as he wished; then he told the women to go away, and he came to us¹." Whilst in the side room, Socrates provides the instructions (ἐπιστείλας ἄττα ἐβούλετο), requested earlier by Crito in the main room. Crito stands in front of Socrates (ἐναντίον τοῦ Κρίτωνος), taking note of the specificities of the instructions. Xanthippe is again present, as why would she not be?² Socrates is facing imminent death, he has a family, who appear only in *Phaedo*, and he is the father of three sons. The nurture and education of his sons must be attended to. Crito's request for instructions in that regard in the main room of the prison, and Socrates providing instructions in the side room, establishes the fact that Crito is their prospective guardian.

Socrates returns to the main room and sits down freshly bathed. The servant of the Eleven arrives and stands in front of him. It is not yet nightfall. He has come to announce that the countdown to Socrates' execution has commenced. Apparently those condemned to die were given the privilege of drinking the hemlock at a moment of their choosing in the time before full sunset. He eulogizes Socrates and departs in tears. Socrates calls after him to express his intention to cooperate in the execution procedure: "I salute you likewise, and we will do these things" (καὶ σύ, ἔφη, χαῖρε, καὶ ἡμεῖς ταῦτα ποιήσομεν). I read the antecedents of ποιήσομεν to be Socrates and the servant of the Eleven, as the immediate context suggests. Then, addressing "us" (Καὶ ἅμα πρὸς ἡμᾶς), namely the narrator Phaedo and the other young friends, Socrates eulogizes the attendant. Socrates now addresses Crito: "Crito, let us be persuaded by the situation (πειθώμεθα αὐτῶ) (*sc.* that the time is now), and have someone bring the poison!"

Crito demurs urging Socrates to delay as long as possible, as many under sentence of death indulge in eating, drinking and even having sex up to the last moment. Socrates again bids Crito be persuaded, replacing the urbane and emollient πειθώμεθα with bare injunctives: πείθου καὶ μὴ ἄλλως ποίει. The altered syntax reflects Socrates' sense of urgency, and his

¹ Translation of FOWLER (1914, 395, 397).

² Cf. BURNET (1911, 144): "It is surely impossible to believe with some editors that Xanthippe is not included among the οἰκεῖαι γυναῖκες. The mere fact that the youngest child is brought back seems to show that she is."

impatience with Crito's delaying tactics. Crito is persuaded, and nods to a slave-boy standing nearby to fetch the man to administer the poison. Although he is their prospective guardian, Crito is not acting here on behalf of the children. The exact time of Socrates' death does not affect their welfare one way or another. The servant of the Eleven³, summoned, returns and asks whether Socrates knows what he must do (τί χρῆ ποιεῖν). Socrates says that he does. He asks if a bit of the hemlock may be poured out as a libation to some god. This is not feasible for technical reasons. Socrates prays to the gods that his passage yonder may be one of good fortune. The man hands him the kylix, and Socrates drinks down the hemlock. These twinned acts make up the doing of the things, which Socrates spoke of earlier, at *Phaedo* 116d4. His friends are reduced to tears and, in the case of Apollodorus, who had been weeping continuously, to cry out aloud. Socrates admonishes them for their womanish lack of composure.

Socrates' death by hemlock poison is depicted at length. The covering and uncovering of Socrates' face permits him to utter his last words. He is supine on a couch, as he was when he spoke his first words (*Phd.* 60a7–8), afterwards sitting up. He says "Crito, we owe (*sc.* one) rooster to Asclepius. Discharge (*sc.* the debt) and do not fail to attend to it!" (ὦ Κρίτων, ἕφη, τῷ Ἀσκληπιῷ ὀφείλομεν ἀλεκτρούνα· ἀλλὰ ἀπόδοτε καὶ μὴ ἀμελήσητε).

In the first clause, who are the we of "we owe" other than Socrates? And for whom is the debt owed? In the second clause, why is Socrates' injunction to discharge the debt expressed in the plural? As the first clause was prefaced with the address "O Crito," is Crito the single addressee in the second clause, or are there other addressees?

WILAMOWITZ, NOCK, CLARK, MOST, and CALDER have attempted to answer these

³Cf. BURNET (1911, 116): "It is to be observed that the man who administers the hemlock draught is not the same person as the officer of the Eleven." A remark of the former speaks against BURNET's observation. Earlier, at *Phaedo* 116d2–3, Socrates promised the servant of the Eleven (ὁ τῶν ἕνδεκα ὑπηρέτης) that "we will do these things." Later, the unnamed man, with whom Socrates does these things, seems to be the same person. The man explains why a libation of the hemlock is not feasible: "We grind up only so much (*sc.* hemlock) as we calculate is enough . . ." He expresses himself in the plural because as the servant of the Eleven, he is the director of the prison and manages its staff: the doorkeeper (ὁ θυρωρός [*Phd.* 59e4]), the prison guard (ὁ τοῦ δεσμωτηρίου φύλαξ [*Cri.* 43a5–6]), and unnamed others.

questions. According to MOST (1993), following CLARK (1952), Plato, not in attendance at the prison, is to be the beneficiary of the cure. Thanks to the second sight accorded to the dying, Socrates foresees Plato's future recovery from his current bout of illness. The antecedents of ὀφείλομεν are many: Socrates, Crito, the young friends, and the future audience of the dialogues immortalizing the philosopher that Plato will publish after his recovery. If so, one would expect the text to read "we *will* owe" instead of "we owe." It also seems odd that, according to Most's scenario, Crito and an unknown number of others would be procuring and sacrificing one rooster to Asclepius for the wealthy Plato's cure, rather than the author once recovered discharging the debt himself.

According to CALDER (1999), following NOCK (1950, 49), the beneficiary of the cure is Socrates who "thanks the god of health for a lifetime of good health." The grammatical plurality of "we owe" is in effect a singular, the *pluralis modestiae*. This construction is found in tragedy. However, so far as I know, there are no other instances of it in Plato, nor does CALDER cite any. The endemic morbidity rate of adults in pre-modern cities makes it unlikely that Socrates enjoyed lifelong good health. Socrates refers to his own bouts of illness in order to illustrate the subjectivity of one person's perceptions, reporting how differently wine tastes (sweet or bitter) to Socrates when healthy, and again to Socrates when ailing (Σωκράτη ὑγιαίνοντα καὶ Σωκράτη αὖ ἀσθενοῦντα [*Tht.* 159b3–4]). The remark controverts CALDER's and NOCK's thesis, unless it be read as expressing a thought experiment unrelated to Socrates' lived experience.

According to WILAMOWITZ, the beneficiary of the cure is a member of Socrates' household, either Xanthippe or one of the sons. He writes (1920, 2:58):

Sokrates hat das gesagt, weil es ihm einfiel; weshalb den Asklepios . . . das Gelübde getan war, wissen wir nicht, fragen wir nicht. Xanthippe oder eins der Kinder wird krank gewesen sein, was es war. Es war eine geringfügige Sache für Sokrates, da hatte er es vergessen, als er draußen seine letzten Bestimmungen über diese irdischen Dinge traf.

WILAMOWITZ does not explain how he arrives at the conclusion that the rooster sacrifice to Asclepius is owed for recovery from disease of someone of Socrates' household. (If one provisionally accepts WILAMOWITZ's hypothesis, in view of the fact that Xanthippe's days of bearing Socrates' children are over, it is more likely that one of the sons, who are the future

of the οἶκος, would be the beneficiary of the cure). WILAMOWITZ passes over in silence his reading of the grammatical plural "we owe," namely that Socrates uses the plural because he is speaking as the head of his household, and that "we owe a rooster to Asclepius" indicates that his οἶκος, which is a collectivity, has incurred a debt for the cure of one of its members, a young child himself unable to pay the debt. The first-person plural ὀφείλομεν, read that way, would be an example of the *pluralis patris familiae*, grammatically identical to the *pluralis societatis*. In the second clause of the last words, Socrates bids Crito, again using the *pluralis patris familiae*, speaking to him as head of *his* household—apparently the status required for that of guardian—to act on behalf of Socrates' οἶκος. Crito is to arrange for a communal sacrifice ritual of a rooster⁴, which will be effected by means of the collective instrumentality of his οἶκος as he directs⁵. Socrates employs the same syntax twice in bidding Crito do something, a pair of injunctives, the second injunctive a double negative to emphasize the first. At *Phaedo* 117a3, Crito is enjoined in the singular to act on Socrates' sole behalf by having someone bring the hemlock without delay: πείθου καὶ μὴ ἄλλως ποίει. The exact moment of Socrates' death does not affect the welfare of his children. At *Phaedo* 118a8, in the second clause of the last words, Crito the householder and the guardian of the sons is enjoined with the same syntax, but this time in the plural (ἀλλὰ ἀπόδοτε καὶ μὴ ἀμελήσητε), that he and his household act on behalf of Socrates' οἶκος.

Again according to WILAMOWITZ, the debt is owed for a minor thing, and that is why Socrates forgot to arrange for its payment earlier when he issued the instructions to Crito and the household women. But is paying the debt owed for a son who survived a bout of illness, and did not die, a trifling matter? It is not gossip to note that WILAMOWITZ published these words in 1920, after his son Tycho, a promising philologist, fell in battle at the beginning of the

⁴ Cf. an Attic fifth-century BCE red-figure oinochoe held in the Louvre, imaged at <http://www.louvre.fr/oeuvre-notices/oenochoe-attique-figures-rouges/>, which depicts a communal sacrifice ritual. What appears to be a dressed, trussed fowl on a spit is held over a fire altar by a naked youth. A man pours a libation from a kylix on the altar. Another man leans on a staff observing the sacrifice. All are wreathed.

⁵ Cf. CALDER's scenario for the second clause (1999, 562): "The second person plurals (ἀπόδοτε, μὴ ἀμελήσητε) refer to Crito and the servant who would cut the rooster's throat."

Great War. WILAMOWITZ's personal accommodation to the death of his only son, permitting him to return to his work, may have had something to do with his conviction that it is an insignificant worldly matter to Socrates that a son recovered from disease and did not die. As we do not hear the specificities of Socrates' instructions at *Phaedo* 116b3–4, the instruction to pay the debt in the last words is more likely a repeated than a forgotten one, repeated because its place in the hierarchy of instructions issued earlier was near or at the top.

As WILAMOWITZ recognized, "we owe" in the last words represents Socrates speaking for his οἶκος, which owes a debt for the recovery from disease of one of his sons. For which son is the rooster owed? Xanthippe's presence at *Phaedo* 60a1–3 seems to supply the answer. Socrates' youngest son, a baby in arms, has been brought to the prison. Its mother, seated, is holding it (ἔχουσάν τε τὸ παιδίον αὐτοῦ καὶ παρακαθημένην), presumably so that Socrates, supine on the couch and chained, may see the baby. Had Socrates primarily summoned Xanthippe, the infant would have been left at home with the women of the οἶκος⁶. The other sons were not summoned. The morbidity rate of infants in fourth-century BC Athens would correlate with the endemic rate of infant death before the age of one year in pre-modern cities⁷. It is a near certainty that the baby had recently recovered from disease. The household's debt to Asclepius for its cure has not yet been paid. With his last words, the dying philosopher Socrates, the man of *logos*, speaking for his household, repeats the instruction to pay for the cure of his youngest son, a baby in arms, not yet talking⁸, who had recovered from disease and did not die.

The atomic facts that make up this nested pair of antitheses are woven into the text,

⁶For a modest household such as his, Xanthippe and Crito the prospective guardian of the children would have sufficed to take note of the instructions that Socrates delivers at *Phaedo* 116a7–b5. The οἰκεῖλαι γυναῖκες, who appear at this time (they are also mentioned at *Phaedo* 117d9 as having been sent away), and would have washed Socrates' corpse, had he not bathed, and would have taken care of the baby at home, had Socrates not instructed that it be brought to the prison, seem a necessary invention on Plato's part, for their function of minding children permits the baby's appearance in the prison not be adventitious.

⁷Angel (1975, Table I) estimates infant mortality under one year in Classical Greece (650 BC) as 500 per 1000 births.

⁸For typical development ages for walking and for talking, cf. <https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/002010.htm>

and drawn from everyday life. Everyone knows that infants suffer frequent illnesses, and that children begin to talk after they learn to walk. The death of Socrates is a given. But the rhetorical arrangement of the facts that inform Socrates' instruction regarding his youngest son (dying/speaking versus not yet talking/living) suggests that Socrates' ultimate worldly transaction on behalf of the baby is Plato's invention. Plato represents Socrates' last words as a secular statement, reflecting his concern for his biological family, of personal significance only, in no way a philosophical exhortation to the young friends. The presence of the baby at *Phaedo* 60a in the prison, *before* the young friends enter, and Socrates' corpse at the end of the dialogue, serve as a framing device to the arguments for the survival of the soul after death.

Plato reveals his own opinion of those arguments at *Phaedo* 115d3–6. Crito likes to listen to philosophical discussions (φιλήκοος μὲν ἔγωγε [*Euth.* 304c7]), as he does in *Euthydemus*, and he shows himself perfectly competent to follow their logic as, for example, when Socrates recounts to him the closely argued pursuit with Kleinias of the *telos* of the art of the kingly ruler in that dialogue. When Crito in *Phaedo* hears Socrates assert that "I will depart and go off to certain of the joys of the Blessed Ones" (οἰχήσομαι ἀπιὼν εἰς μακάρων δὴ τινὰς εὐδαιμονίας), Plato puts the opinion in Crito's mind that Socrates is consoling the grieving young friends as well as himself. As Crito does not express that opinion openly out of consideration for the present circumstances, Socrates conveniently reads his mind for the audience's sake: ταῦτά μοι δοκῶ αὐτῷ ἄλλως λέγει, παραμυθούμενος ἅμα μὲν ὑμᾶς, ἅμα δ' ἑμαυτόν. I suggest that Crito's opinion reproduces Plato's opinion. If Crito were not competent to judge that the arguments for the personal survival of the soul after death justifying Socrates' egregious assertion here amount to unverifiable consolations⁹, it would be otiose for Plato to put that opinion in his mind. But Socrates' arguments do in fact console Simmias, Cebes, and the other young friends, who presumably overlook or ignore Plato's

⁹ As the Greek idiom παραμυθούμενός τινα ("overtalking someone") indicates, consolation is a kind of persuasion, unlike collaborative argumentation that permits of verification or disproof. Cf. *Prt.* 348d3–4 where Socrates specifies the right way to pursue a thought: "When one is alone and thinks about something, straightway he goes about seeking a man, until he should come upon him, to whom he might demonstrate (*sc.* the thought) and, with that man, ascertain (*sc.* whether it be true or false)."

opinion of the matter semi-hidden in Crito's mind. And the arguments in *Phaedo*, directly or second-hand, in part or in their entirety, have consoled many down through the ages. The immortality arguments in *Phaedo* constitute the moments of a useful fiction, a noble lie to mitigate the average man's dread of his personal extinction at death¹⁰. In an exercise of literary virtuosity, Plato guardedly indicates that Socrates' argument in *Phaedo* is a γενναῖον ψεῦδος, by siting that thought in an inconspicuous, easily overlooked place, in Crito's mind.

¹⁰Cf. *Rep.* 3.414b8–c2: “What mechanism, said I, would we have other than fictions created of necessity, of which we were just now speaking, fabricating a noble lie to persuade, preferably, the rulers themselves or, failing which, the rest of the city?” (τίς ἂν οὖν ἡμῖν, ἣν δ’ ἐγώ, μηχανὴ γένοιτο τῶν ψευδῶν τῶν ἐν δέοντι γιγνομένων, ὧν δὴ νῦν ἐλέγομεν, γενναῖόν τι ἐν ψευδομένους πείσαι μάλιστα μὲν καὶ αὐτοὺς τοὺς ἄρχοντας, εἰ δὲ μή, τὴν ἄλλην πόλιν;).

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