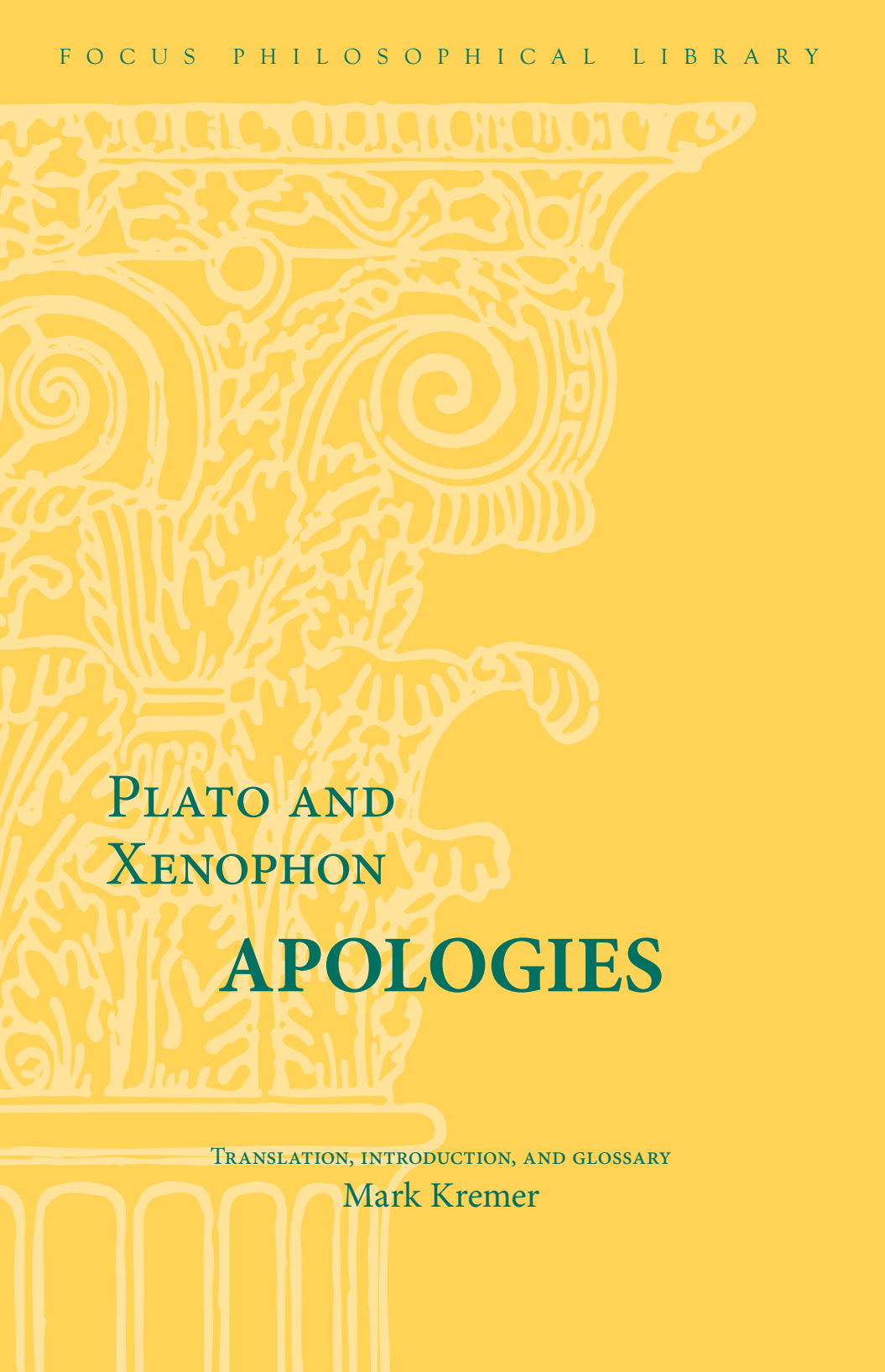


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PLATO AND
XENOPHON

APOLOGIES

TRANSLATION, INTRODUCTION, AND GLOSSARY

Mark Kremer

PLATO and XENOPHON
APOLOGIES

Translated, with
Interpretive Essay and Notes

Mark Kremer

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Preface

Socrates was accused of impiety and of corrupting the youth. Since ancient Athenian democracy had no separation of church from state, these religious accusations were also legal charges. He was eventually tried, convicted, imprisoned, and executed though both Plato and Xenophon make clear that the charges were not brought forward in the spirit of true piety, and that Socrates was a man of real virtue and beneficence. To this day, his trial and execution remain a mark upon the democracy that put him to death.

It is on account of Plato's *Apology* that Socrates is *the* example of persecuted philosophy. He stands face to face with the city and defends himself against its slanders and threats, not only by justifying his existence to them, but by calling into question its authority over him. He would have certainly avoided the hemlock were he born into our modern democracy, but that is not to say that he would be free to live his life of questioning. It is not even to say that the modern state is more tolerant of philosophy than ancient democracy. Athens was not as hostile to Socrates as one might first suppose, nor are we as open to him as we want to believe. Had Socrates wished, he could have easily avoided his guilty sentence and his execution. Plato makes this clear in a number of ways and Xenophon states it outright. Furthermore, the vehemence with which Socrates is today condemned by our educational overseers surpasses the hatred for him in the Athenian democracy. If we would not kill him, it is only because we have invented other ways in which to silence his questions.

Socrates is today condemned for being the founder of Western rationalism. The ancient democracy condemned him for not being a believer in the gods of the city while our "postmodern" or late democracy condemns him for being a believer in "truth", which is said to be relative.

In its democratic expression, relativism assumes progress towards ever-greater democracy is good and necessary. While this belief is not considered religious, because it seems to have no god, one could, nonetheless, argue that it partakes of the religious and does have a god. While democratic relativism recognizes no revealed or traditional god, it believes in a world-historical god

of progress that promises to deliver mankind from all hierarchy, restraint, and the strife accompanying them.

Democratic relativism is, then, not an insight or awareness but an idea used to further a certain understanding of democratic freedom and equality. This relativism is contradictory since it affirms the goodness of democracy, as well as its freedoms and equalities.

Democratic relativism attempts to avoid an account of democratic beliefs by asserting that such beliefs cannot be justified in principle, and, therefore, that one ought not even expect an account. This kind of unaccountable faith is for Socrates, really a form of obscurantism and conventionalism. The denial in principle that democratic opinion has any foundation suggests that the belief in democracy is founded on nothing more than the arbitrary agreement and authority of its adherents, who are protected from the need for argument by the popular acceptance of democracy. Democratic relativism is, therefore, a form of democratic conformity. Democratic relativism is *agnoew* or lacking in awareness, because it does not comprehend its own contradictions.

To the extent that humanity requires thoughtfulness about beliefs and a willingness to defend them, democratic relativism has weakened humanity instead of strengthening it. What pretends to be the greatest openness is really the greatest prejudice or complete unwillingness to listen and to defend. This intolerance masquerading as openness has the same essential character as the ancient religious beliefs of Athens with one important difference: ancient orthodoxy was not nihilistic but actually believed in a world that supported its faith, and in this way is actually more human than the dogma of our progressives. Democratic relativism is, therefore, not only contradictory but its self-protective denial of, and persecution of, the pursuit of knowledge constitutes a form of democratic tyranny.

True openness requires that we embrace Socrates who was the gadfly to the democracy in which he lived, forcing his fellows to justify their lives and teaching them that the unexamined life is not worth living. Whether the prejudice in question was 'progressive' or 'traditional' was of no consequence to him. He brought humanizing doubts to bear upon cherished beliefs.

In addition to being ignorant of its own conventional character, democratic progressives deride past thinkers by exaggerating their dependency on their times. Plato and Xenophon were not unthinking slaves to the prejudices of their class, gender, or the Greek polis, but were self-conscious founders of new traditions, and, as such, broke with their time.

Plato's Socrates was intended to be the pattern of nature, and his example was meant to be the foundation for the Academy. The *Apology*, in

particular, is the work most responsible for establishing the possibility and ideal of the university—a place where the philosopher can get his free meal and have some recognition of his claim to be a great benefactor and to be more worthy of admiration than national heroes.

It is customary to translate Plato's *Apology* with all or some of the *Euthyphro*, *Crito*, and *Phaedo*, because these dialogues, taken together, make up what are called the last days of Socrates. The *Euthyphro* takes place before his trial, the *Apology* at his trial, the *Crito* at his imprisonment awaiting execution, and the *Phaedo* at his death. Although these dialogues are dramatically related, I have chosen not to translate them together, but instead to translate Plato's *Apology of Socrates* with Xenophon's. By studying them together one gains a clearer understanding of the different intentions of Plato and of Xenophon, and therewith a deeper understanding of the nature of philosophy.

When I translated Plato's *Cleitophon*, I said that there was no great need for a new translation, and that my main intention was to provoke and defend thought. The same holds with respect to this work. Mine are not the first translations aspiring towards literalness, and I have benefited from many, including Reeves' book¹, which contains translations of both *Apologies*. The Wests², however, have been most helpful because they have been most literal. I differ from them, not only by including Xenophon's *Apology*, but by trying to overcome the jarring awkwardness that often accompanies literalness. I have also sought a tone that is true to the nature of the drama. An Athenian trial ought not to sound either pedantic or familiar and personal, not even when it is Socrates' trial. The *Apology* is the only public speech given by Socrates. It is, of course, less a defense of the public than a defense of himself and of the life of philosophy. The speech is, therefore, by its very nature insolent in so far as he chooses to judge the public rather than to excuse himself before it. Plato's Socrates even ridicules and humiliates his accuser Meletus in a manner that Socrates knows has and will make himself hated.

Plato is trying to capture what he thinks philosophy's relation should be to the people. When Socrates periodically raises the ire of the jury, the Wests, following Liddell and Scott, translate his admonitions as "Please do not make a disturbance." This is overly polite and more in accord with the manners of the schoolroom than either Athenian politics or Socratic speech. Jowett, whose translation aims to be familiar rather than literal, translates it as "[do] not interrupt me," which is far too personal. Socrates is inciting

1 C.D.C. Reeve, *The Trials of Socrates: Six Classic Texts* (Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 2002).

2 Thomas G. West and Grace Starry West, *Four Texts on Socrates* (Cornell University Press, 1984).

the anger of the crowd and they are clamoring against him. In fact, he is consciously provoking them and falls just short of calling them a mob. His refrains of this verb are moments where we get to measure the reaction of the crowd to what he says and how he responds to them. He does not attempt to assuage their anger but continues to provoke them, and certainly does not flatter their passions in order to win favor with them. The crowd is incensed by what appears to them as insolence and they have no articulate reaction other than noisy outrage.

Socrates, however, is far more than a provocateur. It is easy to shock and insult, but he does so in the name of philosophy. Consequently, he has been called a martyr on behalf of philosophy. Whether it is sufficient to think of him as a martyr any more than as a provocateur is doubtful. The nature of philosophy or of the free mind is somewhere between shameless agitation and high-minded martyrdom. The discovery of this meaning is the most important reason to return to the two *Apologies*.

Plato's *Apology of Socrates*³

SOCRATES: In what way you, Athenian men, have been moved by my accusers, I do not know. As for myself, even I almost forgot myself on account of them, so persuasively did they speak. And yet, in a way, they said nothing true. I wondered, most of all, at one of the many falsehoods which they told—the one in which they said that you need to be on guard lest you should be deceived by me, as I am a clever speaker. That they are not ashamed that they will be immediately refuted by me in deed, when I appear in no way to be a clever speaker, seemed to me to be most shameful of them, unless of course they call the one who speaks the truth a clever speaker. For if this is what they are saying, then I would agree that I am an orator, though not of their sort. As I say, therefore, they have said little or nothing true, but from me you will hear the whole truth. By Zeus, Athenian men, neither speeches beautified like theirs with phrases and words, nor contrived, but rather you will hear what is spoken in words as they happen at random, since I trust the things I say to be just. And let none of you expect otherwise. For surely, it is not fitting, men, for someone of my age to come before you like a youth making up speeches. And above everything, Athenian men, I beg and implore this of you. If you hear me defend myself with the very speeches I am accustomed to speak both in the marketplace at the counters, where many of you have heard me, and elsewhere, neither be amazed nor clamor⁴ because of this. For it

3 The word for apology is *apologia* and can be used to mean legal defense, but is used by both Plato and Xenophon to mean something deeper, as in the accounting or justification for one's very existence, which can be justified by nature as opposed to law or *nomos*. The defense speech to the jury is almost equivalent to defending oneself in assembly or before the city as a whole. There is no judge and instruction in law, and one can bring in personal matters such as the suffering of one's family. Socrates' defense speech is really a defense to the city and not just to a judge, jury, and law in our sense.

4 The verb to clamor is *thorubein*. It is an insult that characterizes the indignation of the jury as noisy and pointless. Since we do not hear the jury speak, their decision appears in the light of Socrates' characterization of them.

holds thus: for the first time, before a court of justice I come, at the age of seventy. Therefore, I am simply foreign to the ways of speaking here. If I happened to be a foreigner, you would surely sympathize with me if I spoke in the dialect and way in which I was raised, likewise I also
18a beg it of you now, and it is just as it appears to me. Disregard my way of speaking, for perhaps it is worse, perhaps better, but rather consider this alone and apply your mind to it: whether or not the things I say are just. For this is the virtue⁵ of a judge, that of an orator, to speak the truth.

First, then, I am right to defend myself, Athenian men, against the first false accusations and my first accusers, and then next against the later
b accusations and the later accusers. To you, many have accused me from long ago and already for many years, yet they say nothing true. Of them, I am more afraid than of Anytus⁶ and those among him, though they too are dangerous. But those are more dangerous, men, the one's laying hold of many of you since childhood, who persuaded you and accused me of nothing true: that there is a Socrates, a wise man, a ponderer on the things above, and one who has investigated all the things under the earth and makes the weaker speech stronger.⁷

c Those ones, Athenian men, who have spread this report are my dangerous accusers, since the ones who listen think that those who investigate these things do not believe in the gods. Furthermore, these accusers are many and have accused me for a long time and, moreover, said these things to you in those years in which you are most trusting, some of you being children and some youths, and they accused me

5 The word for virtue is *aretē* and it means excellence. The excellence of a thing need not be moral. The word for truth is *alētheia*. Socrates emphasizes the intellect by distinguishing virtue and truth from passion and prejudice.

6 Anytus was a tanner, who became wealthy and eventually held a leading political position in the democracy. In Xenophon's *Apology*, Socrates suggests that Anytus' hatred was the real animus for the trial. Socrates blames Anytus for ruining his own son, who had a noble soul requiring a noble activity and object, but who was ruined by sensual passions because his father provided for him coarse and plebian duties. Socrates suggests that participation in politics is for coarse souls.

7 The accusation of being a wise man is related to both the formal charges and to Aristophanes' play the *Clouds*, where Socrates is shown studying natural science and teaching rhetoric. The study of natural science threatens the belief in the gods by giving natural explanations to heavenly movements and occurrences. By looking beneath the earth, Socrates threatens the beliefs in Hades in addition to the cosmic gods. The accusation of making the weaker speech the stronger suggests that he disrupts the divine order by assisting injustice to triumph over justice through the art of rhetoric.

Modern students can now appreciate the wisdom of the world's greatest thinkers. Through clear, faithful translations, renowned scholars have made classical philosophical texts accessible.

Plato and Xenophon: Apologies compares two key dialogues on the trial of Socrates, including the hard-to-find Xenophon's *Apology*. Socrates was accused of impiety and corrupting the youth of ancient Athens and was tried, convicted, imprisoned, and executed. Both Plato and Xenophon make clear that the charges were not brought forward in the spirit of true piety, and that Socrates was a man of real virtue and beneficence. To this day, his trial and execution remain a mark upon the democracy that put him to death.

These dialogues underscore the limitations of democratic relativism and emphasize the nature of philosophy or the free mind. Plato's *Apology of Socrates* is both poetry and an act of reformation – justifying the life of philosophy, challenging the authority of the pagan gods and heroes, and introducing Socrates as a heroic and even divine figure. In contrast, Xenophon's Socrates is not dialectical and otherworldly, but makes a different appeal for philosophy. From Xenophon emerges the heroic tradition of Plutarch with its reflections on the virtues and vices of great historical men.

This is an outstanding text in every respect. The translations are scrupulously literal but readily accessible. The interpretive essay will prove very helpful to students; as for the scholars, no one could deny that everything Kremer has to say is genuinely thought-provoking. This text should be of interest to all scholars and teachers of classical political philosophy, the history of political philosophy, ancient Athenian democracy, and the teachings of Plato and Xenophon – and the challenges they pose to current “post-modern” philosophy.

– Michael Palmer, University of Maine

Mark Kremer (Ph.D., University of Chicago) is Assistant Professor of Political Science at Kennesaw State University, with a research focus on political philosophy and political literature. He formerly taught at Boston University, and recently edited and contributed to *Plato's Cleitophon: On Socrates and the Modern Mind*.

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