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Textual Keys to Understand Socrates' Profession of Ignorance in the *Apology* (21a-23c)[1]

Abstract

In the present paper I analyze some relevant textual keys of Plato's Apology (21a-23c) to show the many strands underlying Socrates' claims of ignorance. I advocate a position that seeks to reevaluate the use of epistemic lexica by considering other evidence, such as cultural and dramatic context, the use of hypothetical clauses, the comparative and the rhetoric of the pair real/apparent. From this approach, I hope to show that there are good reasons to interpret Socrates' claims of ignorance in the light of amiable irony, whereby the use of language and other literary devices create layers of meaning to express the full sense of Socratic wisdom for the audience without resorting to the charge of contradiction or insincerity. Against a position that reduces Socrates' message to the use of epistemic lexica to interpret it either by synonymy, equivocity or low/high cognitive grading, I propose to read Socrates' claims of ignorance, always in comparison to others' claim of wisdom, as a sort of cultural appropriation and revaluation of the traditional title σοφία/σοφός.

Key words: Socrates, wisdom, Apology, ignorance, Plato.

Traditionally, the Narration of the *Apology* (from 21a to 23c) provides the grounds to discuss two major themes, the divine origin of the mission of *elenchus* and Socrates' disavowal of knowledge.[2] Focused on the latter, the scholarly tradition has drawn particular attention to the paradox resulting from Socrates' profession of ignorance. Socrates' statement "he knows

1 The present article is part of my PhD research thesis at UCL (see Silva 2017), and was presented in the Ancient Philosophy research group *Ad Archai* at Universidad of Brasilia in November 2019. The writing and submission of the article was made as part of a larger research project at the Universidad Alberto Hurtado in Chile: Proyecto Conicyt PAI Convocatoria Nacional Subvención a Instalación en la Academia Convocatoria año 2018 PAI77180035.

2 Strycker and Slings (1994, 59), who analyse the formal structure of the *Apology* in rhetorical terms, identify this section as the "Narration". Significantly, the central function of the Narration (διήγησις) according to Aristotle's Rhetoric is to depict moral character (cf. Rh. 1417a16ff.).

he is not σοφός with respect to anything, either big or small" (21b4) has triggered a search for "senses" in which epistemic terminology, ἐπίστασθαι, εἰδέναι and particularly σοφία/σοφός, are used in the *Apology*, namely a "weak sense" and a "strong sense". Among these are, for example, Vlastos (1985), Brickhouse and Smith (1994) and Benson (2000). On the opposite side, defending a "semantic monism" are e.g. Lesher (1987) and Reeve (1989)[3] In the present paper, I propose that there is no need to engage with either of these positions. As Gail Fine has argued (2008), a careful reading of the text shows that there is no explicit contradiction or paradox, but different words designating different cognitive states. On this, I take Fine's position as the starting point. The text offers enough clues to understand the way σοφία and other epistemic terminology are being used and qualified. However, I do not agree with the way she reads a possible contrast between epistemic lexica understood as high-level/low-level degree, the highest of which is *knowledge* defined as justified true belief (by reference to the *Meno*). I question this position by considering further evidence which includes cultural and dramatic context, the use of other lexica, syntax and rhetoric. I first start by highlighting the unique value of σοφία over other epistemic terminology. I then proceed to evaluate the use of irony in Socrates' profession of ignorance claiming that while it is possible to see Socrates as an εἴρων, there is no need to raise the charge of insincerity. Thereafter, I analyze in more detail Socrates' different expressions of ignorance and wisdom, particularly συνειδέναι ἑαυτῷ, οἴεσθαι and γιγνώσκειν. I then consider Socrates' wisdom against others' by assessing the use of hypothetical clauses and the adjective in the comparative degree. I finish with an analysis of the distinction real/apparent, considering the double sense of δοκεῖν and the rhetorical force of the device.

1. A cautionary note on the cultural import of σοφία: the old accusations

The analysis covers the *Apology* (from 21a to 23c), the story of the oracle or "Narration", where Socrates defends himself from the old accusations. It is quite remarkable that the key term in the old accusations against Socrates is the title of σοφός. This aspect of the imputation appears when he first announces the accusations (18b7), before the story of the oracle (20d6-7) and after the story of the oracle (23a2-3). What makes it more remarkable is the absence of terms of blame. "It is striking that the so-called charges of the first accusers are

[3] "In several early dialogues, he defends a principle of 'semantic monism': that whenever we employ a word, there is a single quality designated by that term which, once properly identified, can serve as a distinguishing mark for all the things designated by that term […]. So multiplication of senses of "know" would be thoroughly 'un-Socratic'" (Lesher 1987, 278).

not worded as charges: there is no mention of injustice, no blame, no call for punishment. Their statement, which after all refers to him as a wise man (σοφὸς ἀνήρ), could even be read as praise" (Leibowitz 2010, 40). Why is σοφός at the center of the old accusations? We could certainly think of other characteristics making Socrates a target of popular odium and ridicule. Among these, one can think that Socrates' characteristic ugliness might have made him a more notorious and, of course, a more laughable target. His physical appearance, combined with the way he dressed, i.e. poorly and barefoot, might also have attracted public attention. It is also possible that Socrates was arousing suspicion among people because, being an Athenian, he was acting like a foreigner. Mostly, however, Socrates associated with people that had become enemies of Athens. He was the teacher of Critias, who later became a member of the Thirty Tyrants (404 BCE), a pro-Spartan oligarchy, and the mentor of Alcibiades, who led the failed Sicilian expedition, was charged with the mutilation of the statue of Hermes and allied in conspiracy with Sparta and Persia against Athens. Surprisingly enough, none of these reasons is presented explicitly as a motive against Socrates in Plato's *Apology*. The official charges are formulated on grounds of impiety and corruption, and the old accusations are based, according to Plato, on nothing other than rumors, stereotypes and prejudices. It is relatively safe to assume that when Socrates voices his old accusers, the label σοφός refers to the intellectual type of the *Clouds*. These accusers, one cannot "know or mention their names unless one of them is a writer of comedies" (18c9- d1) and what they say is "that there is a man called Socrates, a wise man, a student of all things in the sky and below the earth [Σωκράτης σοφὸς ἀνήρ, τά τε μετέωρα φροντιστής], who makes the worse argument the stronger (18b7-c1).[4] But what exactly is wrong with being a σοφός or a φροντιστής? As seen in the *Clouds*, the title, when associated with the new-fangled intellectual trend, carries the charge of transgression of the old traditional and moral values.[5] The comic stereotype of Socrates, although is meant to be humorous in the context of comedy, in the context of Plato's *Apology* proves to have some serious implications regarding Socrates' reputation of being a σοφός. Both the fact that the two charges appear almost cited word by word from Aristopha-

[4] Translation of the Greek are from Plato's *Complete Works*, edited by John M. Cooper, and Hutchinson (see Plato, 1997). Adapted translations are always indicated.

[5] Both accusations are more or less implicitly linked with the formal charges of impiety and corruption. Firstly, the investigation of celestial phenomena directly or indirectly leads to the defiance of religious conventions, among which is the acceptance of the gods of the city. Secondly, 'to make the weaker argument stronger' refers to Protagoras' ἀντιλογία whereby two opposite arguments can be claimed about every state of affairs. The assumption (at least in its vicious version) is that the power of rhetorical argumentation is such that can plead an unjust cause and win.

nes' *Clouds*, and its explicit reference (195c3) seem to suggest that for Plato's presentation of Socrates these are indeed sources of serious prejudice.

The historical reasons might be useful in order to establish the mindset of the jury or understand the attitude of the audience, but as far as the *Apology* is concerned, one of the strongest sources of prejudice is the common opinion that Socrates is a typical σοφός. Of course, the prejudice may have been wider and more diverse in formulation, all of which suggests that Plato might have been deliberately selective. I propose that Plato focuses specifically on σοφός because it offers a good way to defend and rescue Socrates' activity. Because σοφία and σοφός have a well-established cultural significance in the fifth century BCE, especially in the context of poetic competition and traditional forms of wisdom, a novel definition would be less effective than the appropriation of a notion invoking the authority of the tradition. The label, here in allusion to the stereotype of the intellectual as depicted in Aristophanes' *Clouds*, is broad in meaning, reference and value, all of which makes it a perfect target for the purpose of redefinition and appropriation. In the *Apology*, Plato seems to find an opportunity to question the criteria whereby the σοφοί are called σοφοί (Socrates himself included), making Socrates' trial a case against the tradition of wisdom. Furthermore, Plato picks up the stereotype of the σοφός to assert Socrates as a sort of σοφός. He tests the knowledge of those with the highest reputation of σοφία to show that they do not know the things that would make them real σοφοί. He dissociates mere reputation of σοφία from real σοφία, against a tradition that uses these labels essentially as titles of authority and reputation.

Beyond the specific meaning and connotations that these labels carry in specific instances, the σοφ- group of words have a strong cultural bearing. To claim the title, the σοφός needs to possess a set of qualities, "wits and personality", according to Lloyd (1987, 103), but, more importantly, as Tell observes, authority, i.e. "the process of acquiring the cultural legitimacy necessary to claim the position of σοφός" (2011, 17). And this cultural legitimacy is mainly acquired by public recognition. This is important as it provides the context to understand σοφός (along with σοφιστής and φιλόσοφος) as a title of reputation – even if it is bad reputation. Claims for the title of σοφός run throughout from the Archaic period to the Second Sophistic and can be attested – among many others – in the elegies of Theognis and Xenophanes, in the prose of Heraclitus, the lyric of Pindar and Bacchylides, in the three tragedians (especially in Sophocles and Euripides), and in the comedy of Aristophanes. Moreover, this is an honorific title central to the Greek culture of competition (ἀγών) from its earliest period: "Rivalry in claims to be wise starts almost as soon as we have any evidence to go on in Greece, and what counted as wisdom was an extraordinarily open-ended and negotiable question. Anyone could set himself up as a philosopher or as sophist, or, come to that, as a doctor" (Lloyd 1987, 103).

It is worth remarking that the focus is on σοφία/σοφός specifically. The scholarly tradition on Socrates tends to consider σοφία as an equivalent for other intellectual categories, such as ἐπιστήμη and τέχνη and then the question seems to be dissolved in the problem of knowledge in general. This assumption is not only problematic in that it is difficult to justify – at least in the case of the *Apology*, but more importantly, in that it conceals the unique value the label σοφία/σοφός has in the literary tradition of the fifth century BCE. On the tendency to equate σοφία and τέχνη, Lesher states: "σοφία however had a long-standing connotation of special skill, expertise, a high degree of competence in a field, and the fact that someone could be σοφός in a particular episteme could hardly prove interchangeability *salva veritate*" (1987, 282). Let the evidence provided by the Greek text be sufficient to establish it as a salient category: the word σοφία and σοφός appear thirty-six times, whereas τέχνη occurs twice (20c1; 22d7), and none of these instances seem to prove that they are interchangeable. The same applies to ἐπιστήμη, which appears only once (19c6) throughout the *Apology*, although cognate forms as the verb ἐπίστασθαι occurs more regularly. Also, in Platonic scholarship it is well-established that σοφία has the cognitive force of ἐπιστήμη. In this regard, it is treated as integral part of the intellectual lexica. Some scholars have observed the competitive strand of σοφία in connection with the significance of this terminology in Plato, but the implications have not been carefully considered. See Benson, for example, who alerts his reader: "I will be following the virtual consensus of Socratic scholarship in treating Socrates' vocabulary – primarily ἐπιστήμη, σοφία, τέχνη – and their cognates as essentially interchangeable" (2000, 10). This is problematic. Not only because the term within Plato's corpus is widely colored and complex, but also because it ignores its cultural weight. Some scholars have raised the question: "Can it be true that the Greek reader in Plato's time understood 'science' in the sense of mathematical knowledge every time he used the term 'wisdom'? Can we imagine that the term had just one meaning in Greek that made it synonymous with 'knowledge'?" (Ibáñez-Puig 2007, 166 n16). This is a good question, and I believe that the answer is no.

2. Socrates' profession of ignorance: irony revised

Since Vlastos' (1987) influential paper on the topic, it has become crucial to distinguish the Greek εἰρωνεία with the Latin *ironia* as understood in its Quintilian sense. The former would imply a malicious intention of deceiving or shamming someone whereas the latter would be a rhetorical device to mean something contrary to what is being said.[6] "Irony involving a figure does not differ from the irony which is a trope, as far as its genus is con-

[6] Vlastos offers examples in comedy, tragedy and the Platonic corpus (1987, 80-84).

cerned, since in both cases we understand something which is the opposite of what is actually said [*in utroque enim contrarium ei quod dicitur intelligendum est*]." (Quint. Inst. 9.2.44.)[7] Since attributing insincerity to Socrates is highly problematic, most critics have favored the core of the Quintilian sense, not without disagreeing on how this irony is ultimately conveyed by language: indeed, to establish what are the linguistic cues to detect irony seems difficult, if not impossible, as it might be something conveyed by non-linguistic signs (as voice tone). The problem of irony in the *Apology* is centered around Socrates' profession of ignorance, according to which the question arises as to whether he is being insincere or ironic when he (allegedly) claims: "the only thing I know is that I do not know". Is he openly deceiving his interlocutor or is he methodologically using irony? Many aspects deserve consideration here. Firstly, a categoric distinction between deception and irony seems artificial. If we consider – as I believe we should – that the dialogues are dramatic works of art, deception might result by the use of language in certain context assessing the inner and outer frame of the text, as Vasiliou puts it (1999, 464). This is not too far from what happens in tragedy. Tragic irony works in interaction with the characters' state of mind in the inner frame and the audience as witness in the outer frame. Consider, for example, Sophocles' *Electra* (1442-65). Electra and her stepfather Aegisthus talk about "the comeback" of Orestes. Aegisthus thinks Orestes is dead and he is ready to see his corpse. Electra works in complicity with her brother Orestes knowing he is alive, and in the name of their dead father Agamemnon, they are about to exact vengeance against Aegisthus and their mother Clytemnestra. The language used by Electra when talking about Orestes is ambiguous enough to avoid the charge of insincerity (since she never actually lies) while Aegisthus is deceived.[8] Irony here is thus the result of all the dramatic elements and is played to be fully conveyed by the audience. Often enough, the ironic effect is beyond people's intention to deceive, and yet deception may result. Consider, for example, when Donald Trump, defending himself from the criticisms aiming at his poor use of language claimed: "I know all the words, I have the best words". The result is ironic and there is no intentional act of deception at play (there is no εἴρων) and yet someone is being deceived, namely Trump himself. Self-deception is, in fact, in most cases what Socratic irony denounces, and this becomes quite clear to any attentive reader. But even if we do not want to

[7] Trans. Harold Edgeworth Butler.

[8] Orestes says to Aegisthus: "Do you not perceive how you have long been addressing the living in terms suited to the dead?" (1478-1479). The irony accounted by the use of ambiguous words allows her to be polite and never lie, which gives her a complete control of the situation. "The scene proceeds loaded with irony that arises mainly from Electra's answers, which reveal the truth and mislead at the same time. The news are so good for Aegisthus that he cannot believe them yet; but while he wants more evidence, Electra finds the opportunity to indulge in dark humour" (Markantonatos 2009, 101).

commit to the charge of insincerity, it would be difficult to deny that Socrates is an εἴρων. This does not need to be negatively charged, especially when considering amiable irony as described by Aristotle (Nich. Eth. 1127b 23-26): "Ironists, who tend to say less than they are, appear more refined in their characters. For they seem not to speak for the sake of gain but as people who avoid bombast. And they especially deny having qualities held in high repute-as, for instance, Socrates used to do."[9] This is the sense that also rescues Cicero: "It [*ironia*] marks a man as free from conceit, and at the same time witty, when discussing wisdom [*sapientia*], to deny it to himself [*hanc sibi ipsum detrahere*] and to attribute it playfully to those who make pretensions to it [*qui eam sibi adrogant*]' (Cic. Brut. 292, 7-12).[10] Even Quintilian recognizes this trait of Socrates: "a man's whole life may be colored with irony, as was the case with Socrates, who was called an ironist because he assumed the role of an ignorant man lost in wonder at the wisdom of others [*agens imperitum et admiratorem aliorum tanquam sapientium*]." (Quint. Inst. 9.2.46). This seems to be precisely what is going on in the *Apology*. Socrates' attitude and activity brings to the scene witty and playful dissimulation, something that while not comparable to open deception, it is not without guile. For most critics, the concern around the charge of insincerity is that the *Apology* stands as the most significant of Plato's works for the purpose of Socrates' self-presentation, what Brancacci (1997b) calls an "intellectual autobiography". Socrates claims he is being sincere at 17b; 20d; 25a. "Unless we are to understand Socrates in the *Apology* as engaging in a comprehensive pattern of deception about his own motives and activities – an interpretation that has no basis in Plato's text – we cannot avoid reading these professions of ignorance as sincere" (Bett 2011, 218). But I believe one can trace a sort of amiable irony in Socrates' profession of ignorance which does not necessarily raise the charge of insincerity or intentional deceit. I argue that, at least in the Narration of the *Apology,* there are certain linguistic cues that explain how Plato manages to make Socrates both sincere and an εἴρων (in the Aristotelian, Ciceronian and Quintilian sense described above). For this, I claim that there is no need to trace two senses in epistemic lexica, as Vlastos supposes "complex irony" to work as characteristic of Socrates' profession of ignorance.

3. The apparent paradox: the possible contrast between epistemic lexica

The paradox in Socrates' profession of ignorance only arises if we assume that he is actually saying "the only thing I know is that I do not know". This, indeed, is not an uncom-

[9] I am using here the new translation of Robert C. Barlett and Susan D. Collins (see Aristotle 2011).
[10] Cited after the translation of G. L. Hendrickson, and H. M. Hubbel (see Cicero 1939).

mon formulation of Socrates' profession of ignorance.[11] But this is never said by Socrates, neither explicitly nor implicitly, as Fine (2008) asserts. Of course, the effort to avoid the sense of paradox (in order to avoid contradiction) should not be exaggerated either. We should remember that Socrates is confronting a riddle: the god's oracle proclaiming his wisdom, a wisdom he does not believe to possess. So at least initially (and implicitly) the first formulation carries a sense of paradox.

To explain the paradox, most critics have centered around the question of epistemic lexica, either assuming synonymy or equivocity among the different terms. Fine (2008) recognizes that both these approaches are unnecessary: the text offers different terms for different cognitive states. Indeed, there are three formulations of Socrates' profession of ignorance conveyed by three key words (representing Socrates' state of mind): συνειδέναι ἑαυτῷ, οἴεσθαι and γιγνώσκειν. To this point, I completely agree with her. However, I disagree with the way she proposes to elucidate the contrast: grading it more or less from a standard of knowledge (as described in the *Meno* 97a ff): "in order to decide whether he is talking about knowledge, we need to decide whether he is talking about a truth-entailing cognitive condition that is appropriately cognitively superior to mere true belief". (2008, 55) Fine believes that Plato uses forms of εἰδέναι, ἐπίστασθαι and σοφία in this way. From a careful analysis of the texts, I do not think this approach is either necessary or accurate.

3.1. συνειδέναι ἑαυτῷ:

Socrates uses the form σύνοιδα ἐμαυτῷ twice in the Narration: when he reacts to the oracle reported by Chaerophon "there is no one more σοφός" (21a6-7) and when he visits the artisans, the last group interviewed after the politician and the poets, in the hope that they would prove to be σοφώτεροι.[12] Let us as center in the first, as it is the most problematic.

Whatever does the god mean? What is his riddle? I am very conscious that I am not wise in much or less; what then does he mean by saying that I am the wisest? [ἐγὼ γὰρ δὴ οὔτε μέγα οὔτε σμικρὸν σύνοιδα ἐμαυτῷ σοφὸς ὤν· τί οὖν ποτε λέγει φάσκων ἐμὲ σοφώτατον εἶναι;] For surely he does not lie; it is not legitimate for him to do so. (Trans. adapted) (21b3-7)

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[11] See e.g. Parke and Wormell 1956 and Tarrant 2006.

[12] "Finally, I went to the craftsmen, for I was conscious of knowing practically nothing, and I knew that I would find that they had knowledge of many fine things [ἐμαυτῷ γὰρ συνῄδη οὐδὲν ἐπισταμένῳ ὡς ἔπος εἰπεῖν, τούτους δέ γ' ἤδη ὅτι εὑρήσοιμι πολλὰ καὶ καλὰ ἐπισταμένους.]. In this I was not mistaken; they knew things I did not know, and to that extent they were wiser than I". (22c9-d4)

I believe that Fine is correct when she asserts that there is no formal contradiction as far the formulation uses two different forms to express knowledge: συνειδέναι and σοφὸς ὤν. Of course, if these forms are interpreted as synonyms, contradiction is unavoidable as Kraut (1984, 272 n44) and Woodruff (1990, 62 n3) suggest. But it does not seem legitimate to presume these are synonyms. Against this view, Fine assumes a low/high degree contrast and establishes that σοφία stands as equivalent to ἐπιστήμη. She avoids synonymy, but at the end, assumes it to explain the cognitive force of σοφία. Both readings forget an important principle invoked by Lyons in his important work *Structural Semantics*: "it is generally agreed that two different units are very seldom, if ever, substitutable in all contexts *salva significatione*." (Lyons 1963, 52). More likely, σοφία here could be simply understood in its pre-oracle use, that is, as expert knowledge linked to rhetoric and natural phenomena. As seen above, the title is at the center of the old accusations, precisely what Socrates is trying to deny. Only after solving the oracle σοφία will acquire its full meaning.

If we want to offer an interpretation that responds more properly to what Socrates means to say, maybe what deserves more analysis is the σύνοιδα ἐμαυτῷ. Woodruff (1990, 62 n3), who takes the συνειδέναι to be as equally strong as the σοφὸς ὤν, brings an example found in the *Phaedrus*, where Socrates reacts to the speech of Lysias read by Phaedrus. Differing from Lysias' ideas on love, he says that he has been inspired by the ideas of other wise men and women. "Now I know well that none of these ideas can have come from me – being aware of my own ignorance. [ὅτι μὲν οὖν παρά γε ἐμαυτοῦ οὐδὲν αὐτῶν ἐννενόηκα, εὖ οἶδα, συνειδὼς ἐμαυτῷ ἀμαθίαν·]" (235c 6-8) (Trans adapted).[13] Although I do think that the passage serves to demonstrate that both these expressions have the similar epistemic force, I do not believe they can both be reduced to mean "know". Socrates, *being aware of his own ignorance*, *knows well* that he is not the source of these ideas. Socrates is assessing his own cognitive state in a first-person reflexive experience, so he has no expression of doubt: he knows it well. There is no contradiction implied. To this extent, the example is comparable to the one in the *Apology*: Socrates is fully conscious of his state of mind, being ignorant or not σοφός. This does not authorize a reading that assumes equivalence between εἰδέναι and συνειδέναι ἑαυτῷ. The form συνειδέναι ἑαυτῷ with the συν- as prefix and the reflexive pronoun in dative makes a unique expression of self-reflection, the preposition indicating concomitance, a sort

[13] The translation has been adapted, but it is worth noticing that the original makes the same mistake than the one Brancacci observes of Vlastos's translation. Alexander Nehamas and Paul Woodruff (1997) translate the σύνοιδα ἐμαυτῷ as "know" and the εὖ οἶδα as "I am well aware". The inconsistency is observed by Fine (2008, 60-1 n23).

of "co-knowing", and the pronoun restricting it to a private relationship with the self (cf. Brancacci 1997a and Cancrini 1970).

To illustrate how little care is given to the unique force of this expression, see Vlastos who translates "For I am not aware of being wise in anything, great or small".[14] As Brancacci observes, he transforms an affirmative proposition in a negative one, conveying the opposite of what Socrates means to say: "Socrate è cosciente con se stesso di non essere sapiente, ed è proprio il possesso di tale sapere privato ed esclusivo che consente di allegare la testimonianza della propria 'coscienza' come elemento atto a mettere in dubbio il significato immediato e apparente del1' oracolo." (1997a, 294). Fine presumes that this can be solved by grading it down from knowledge. "It is not specialized expertise of a given domain; it does not involve a systematic, synoptic grasp of a field; it is too atomistic to count as wisdom, as wisdom as conceived in the *Apology*." (2008, 63). But how is wisdom conceived in the *Apology*? We have the wisdom of expert rhetoricians and the natural philosophers, the human wisdom of Socrates, the wisdom of the craftsmen and the wisdom of god. There is no doubt that the expression should not be assimilated to σοφία, as it has its own cognitive force. But it should not be down-graded assuming σοφία to be "knowledge" either. This is a reflexive, second degree or metacognitive understanding that provides full certainty. It is perhaps the highest expression of Socratic self-knowledge and, indeed, proves to be the highest form of human σοφία in the *Apology*. To assume there is a contrast that obeys to a sort of hierarchy or grading down from knowledge (understood as "justified true belief") is simply wrong. As Brancacci points out, this is closer to the infallible judgement of moral conscience: it is a truth of moral judgment that is certain and yet incommunicable (1997a, 287).

3.2 ὀίεσθαι

The importance of this expression in the analysis of cognitive lexica is shown by its own context. It describes Socrates' first moment of realization about the truth of the oracle, i.e. his own wisdom, after the encounter with the politician.

So I withdrew and thought to myself: "I am wiser than this man"; it is likely that neither of us knows anything worthwhile [οὐδὲν καλὸν κἀγαθὸν εἰδέναι], but he thinks he knows something when he does not, whereas when I do not know, neither do I think I know [ἀλλ' οὗτος μὲν οἴεταί τι εἰδέναι οὐκ εἰδώς, ἐγὼ δέ, ὥσπερ οὖν οὐκ οἶδα, οὐδὲ οἴομαι·]; so I am likely to be wiser than he to this small extent, that I do not think I know what I do not know [ὅτι ἃ μὴ οἶδα οὐδὲ οἴομαι εἰδέναι]." (21d 3-7)

[14] Vlastos 1991, 82.

The evidence resulting from cross-examination is conclusive: neither he nor his interlocutor know anything "worth knowing" (καλὸν κἀγαθὸν; 21d4). This is the first time the object of σοφία is qualified. At the beginning Socrates claimed not to be (much or less) σοφός with respect to anything; now he relativizes his claim by saying he does not know "things worth knowing". I think this translation (Burnet [1924] 1982) for the pair καλὸν κἀγαθὸν is adequate in this context. Although a literal translation "fine and good" (cf. Stokes 1997) fits the nature of the object of σοφία, I believe here Socrates is not referring to anything specific; he is rather invoking the most conventional use of the form καλὸν κἀγαθὸν, meaning 'admirable', 'noble and good', although it anticipates what it will become a standard of moral value. We shall see that the criteria defining real σοφία are established by the value of the object known, and the elements deemed more valuable are morally relevant. Some of these expressions occur when the poet talks about πολλὰ καὶ καλά (22c3) without knowing them, and the craftsman thinks he knows τἆλλα τὰ μέγιστα (22d7) without knowing them. Whether they are expert on their own craft is a matter that seems to fade into the background of a far more significant problem: the fact that they do not know the most important things and yet claim to know them. Thus, the artisan fails to convey real knowledge not inasmuch as he is an artisan – indeed he knows his own craft – but as he is misled by false beliefs concerning other matters. Thereafter, Socrates' mission extends and applies to anyone he considers a σοφός (cf. 23b5-6). The σοφός, beyond his most immediate field of expertise, should display awareness towards his cognitive state if he is ignorant; otherwise, he should prove to know those valuable things. What are those "valuable things" remains relatively open, until he reveals the nature of his philosophical vocation. Socrates puts forward the purpose of the elenchus by addressing a pretend interlocutor:

> Good sir, you are an Athenian, a citizen of the greatest city with the greatest reputation for both sophia and power [εἰς σοφίαν καὶ ἰσχύν]; are you not ashamed of your eagerness to possess as much wealth [πλεῖστα,], reputation [δόξης] and honors [τιμῆς] as possible, while you do not care for nor give thought to wisdom or truth [φρονήσεως δὲ καὶ ἀληθείας], or the best possible state of your soul?" Then if one of you disputes this and says he does care, I shall not let him go at once or leave him, but I shall question him, examine him and test him, and if I do not think he has attained the goodness that he says he has, I shall reproach him because he attaches little importance to the most important things [τὰ πλείστου ἄξια περὶ ἐλαχίστου ποιεῖται] and greater importance to inferior things [τὰ δὲ φαυλότερα περὶ πλείονος]. [...] Be sure that this is what the god orders me to do, and I think there is no greater blessing for the city than my service to the god. (29d7-30a7)

Here Socrates contrasts two different sets of values: one related to money, reputation and honor; the other related to prudence, truth, and the state of the soul. The first set of goods

is deemed less valuable than the second. Indeed, knowledge and virtue, throughout Plato's dialogues, are necessary for a good and happy life, whereas wealth, honor and reputation are only good if guided by knowledge. This is what underlies the distinction between apparent and real. The real σοφός_knows the things that matter most for a good life; the apparent σοφός, while valuing the title, ignores them.

Both the politician and Socrates are ignorant with regard to the same object, but whereas the former believes he knows it, the latter does not. The kind of ignorance the politician displays reveals to Socrates the sense in which he is more σοφός: it is regarding the assessment of his own cognitive state, what he "esteems" or "thinks" (οἴεσθαι) himself to know. "Socrates is wiser than the unnamed politician in that he lacks a false belief that the politician has" (Fine 2008, 68). The sense of οἴεσθαι here is not extraordinary and alien to other uses of literature.[15] Nonetheless, it is important to observe that this is a word that, other than a weak or parenthetical form of judgement, might have a higher philosophical reach in the Platonic corpus. There are at least two passages, apart from the *Apology*, where the cognitive state of οἴεσθαι characterizes and guarantees the possibility of philosophical activity. One of these occurs in the *Symposium*, when Diotima describes the intermediate nature of ἔρως. Eros philosophizes, i.e. desires σοφία, since he is in between the extreme of wisdom and ignorance; while the wise do not need it, the ignorant do not *think* (οἴεσθαι) they need it. "For what's especially difficult about being ignorant [ἀμαθία] is that you are content with yourself, even though you're neither beautiful and good nor intelligent. If you don't think you need anything of course you won't want what you don't think you need [οὔκουν ἐπιθυμεῖ ὁ μὴ οἰόμενος ἐνδεὴς εἶναι οὗ ἂν μὴ οἴηται ἐπιδεῖσθαι]" (204a4-7). Thus, thinking or believing to possess knowledge while not possessing it creates the wrong disposition to the philosophical task of seeking knowledge. See e.g. the *Meno*, when Socrates interviews the slave as a way to prove that a man's soul remembers rather than learns the truth. In the process of Socratic cross-examination, the slave reaches a state of *aporia*. Socrates says to Meno: "You realize, Meno, what point he has reached in his recollection. At first he did not know what the basic line of the eight-foot square was; even now he does not yet know, but then he thought he knew [ἀλλ' οὖν ᾤετό γ' αὐτὴν τότε εἰδέναι], and answered confidently as if he did know, and he did not think himself at a loss, but now he does think himself at a loss, and as he does not know, neither does he think he knows [καὶ ὥσπερ οὐκ οἶδεν, οὐδ' οἴεται εἰδέναι]."[16] (84a3-8)

[15] The primary use designates 'think', 'suppose', 'believe', and the parenthetic use expresses modesty or courtesy: "expressive of modesty or courtesy, to avoid over-great bluntness of assertion" (cf. LSJ sv).
[16] There is also a similar use of the ἡγεῖσθαι ('think', 'believe') in this passage.

3.3 γιγνώσκειν

Here Socrates has finally come to understand the meaning of the oracle as the result of his investigation.

This man among you, mortals, is wisest who, like Socrates, understands that his wisdom is truly worthless [Οὗτος ὑμῶν, ὦ ἄνθρωποι, σοφώτατός ἐστιν, ὅστις ὥσπερ Σωκράτης ἔγνωκεν ὅτι οὐδενὸς ἄξιός ἐστι τῇ ἀληθείᾳ πρὸς σοφίαν.] (Trans. adapted). (23b2-4)

This expression, although describes Socratic ignorance, is hardly an example of a paradoxical or contradictory statement. We are now officially out of the enigmatic riddle zone. This is the discovery of what Socrates takes the god to mean, which is consistent with his own state of belief, i.e. that he does not think that he is σοφός. Attempts to trace a contrast between γιγνώσκειν and other epistemic lexica in the philosophy of Plato is considerable. The problem is two-fold, as it involves the attempt of demarcating and also translating the relevant Greek lexica. Gould (1955), for example, contends the view that uses the distinction "know-that" and "know-how", according to which ἐπιστήμη is identified with the former. In this vein, Bostock argues, "we are given no hint of any restriction on how "knowledge" is to be understood (1991, 37-8) and knowledge here may include (a) knowing that (something-or-other is the case), (b) knowing how (to do something), and (c) knowing an object (e.g. a person, a place, and so on)" (1991, 37). See also Runciman, who warns against assuming "that Plato is clearly aware of a distinction between knowing that, knowing how and knowing by acquaintance" (1962, 13). Chappell (2004, 31) discusses Runciman's view by proposing that Plato may have been aware of the modern distinction, but finds conceptual connections between the two, a connection that the Greek allows. See also Guthrie who warns that knowledge-how is "never entirely divorced from the other two kinds" (1978, 68). More recently, Burnyeat (2011) revendicates Lyons' (1963) structural reading of epistemic terminology to challenge a fixed interpretation of the lexica in terms of know-that, know-how and knowledge by acquaintance.[17] I believe this is the correct approach. Lyons (1963) has offered the most systematic and complete account from structural semantics. One of the results of his study often cited to establish a possible distinction is that "whereas εἰδέναι and ἐπίστασθαι, and

[17] For a more detailed examination of a possible contrast between εἰδέναι and γιγνώσκειν from the Indo-European cf. Silva 2012. Lyons, in his study, observes that the only relevant contrast between εἰδέναι and γιγνώσκειν appears in those contexts in which the dependent object is a personal noun or personal nominal phrase. In these, the occurrences of γιγνώσκειν with personal noun are as regular as those of εἰδέναι with common nouns. "On the other hand, the most characteristic environments of γιγνώσκειν (in which εἰδέναι and ἐπίστασθαι rarely occurred) are those in which the object of the verb was a personal noun." (1963, 179).

εἰδέναι and γιγνώσκειν are frequently and clearly convertible in the text, it is not so clear that γιγνώσκειν and ἐπίστασθαι are ever convertible; and there are passages where they seem to be in contrast" (Lyons 1963, 177). This, of course, does not offer much clues in this context.

Gail Fine (2008) takes γιγνώσκειν to be another instance of low-level cognitive state, whereas σοφία, like ἐπιστήμη indicates high-level knowledge. But a counter-example might easily question this generalization. Having been warned against a fixed reading of Greek lexica through the Platonic corpus, it is worth noticing a passage in the *Theatetus* (possibly the most relevant dialogue on this subject) identifying real σοφία with γνῶσις. Toward the close of the digression that compares the philosopher with the man of law, Socrates asserts that the most god-like thing is the man who becomes as just as his human nature allows him to be. Socrates' view on justice arises against Protagoras' relativism. According to him, what counts as real σοφία and good is to recognize god as the absolute measure of justice: "for it is the realization of this that is genuine σοφία and goodness [ἡ μὲν γὰρ τούτου γνῶσις σοφία καὶ ἀρετὴ ἀληθινή], while the failure to realize it is manifest folly and wickedness [ἡ δὲ ἄγνοια ἀμαθία καὶ κακία ἐναργής·]" (176c4-5). In this context, σοφία is the apprehension of some truth that starts by assuming the gap between human and divine. To be sure, in this context σοφία rescues its prudential component, rendering something closer to 'understanding' or 'wisdom', a meaning which is reinforced by φρόνησις, invoked a few lines above.

4. Socrates' wisdom against others': hypothetical clauses and the use of the comparative

It is the belief that the god cannot be lying that ultimately motivates Socrates' following course of action. He sets out to investigate the meaning of the oracle by cross-examining those who are popularly considered σοφοί. Interestingly, Socrates seems to concede the possibility that there are σοφοί men. "I went to one of those reputed wise, thinking that there, if anywhere [ὡς ἐνταῦθα εἴπερ που], I could refute the oracle and say to it: 'This man is wiser than I, but you said I was'" (21b9-c2). In keeping with the belief that he is not a σοφός, Socrates would think that there are other men more σοφοί. Even if this passage is not interpreted under the veil of irony, there is no need to conclude that Socrates is conceding here that there are other men more σοφοί. He decides to go to visit those who are reputed σοφοί, thinking that "if indeed" (εἴπερ) there was a place to find out who was σοφώτερος, this should be that place. The conditional clause states a hypothetical scenario with no definite implications as to its realization, and so the fulfilment or non-fulfilment of its consequence, i.e. that he will prove the oracle wrong, remains uncertain. "Greek has no especial forms to show that an action was or is fulfilled, however clearly this may be implied in the context. Any form of

conditional sentence in which the apodosis does not express a rule of action may refer to an impossibility" (Smyth 1920, 515 §2292). I believe this is an important linguistic move and fits well with what Vasiliou has identified as "conditional irony". According to him, "[t]he irony lies in the fact that if the antecedent were true, then Socrates would really believe the consequent; however, it is clear to the reader, though not always to the interlocutor, that Socrates believes that the antecedent is false, which therefore suggests that he believes the negation of the consequent." (Vasiliou 1999, 462) But there is no reason to think that Socrates believes that the protasis is true (and therefore the apodosis), although the conditional is true. "The irony arises in so far as we have reason to believe that Socrates does not believe that the (implied or explicit) antecedent is true, and so he does not really believe or endorse the consequent. The conditional itself, however, remains true." (Vasiliou 1999, 463). This is indeed a repeated formula in the section of the old accusations. Regarding the study of natural causes, he confesses: "[...] I do not speak in contempt of such knowledge [τὴν τοιαύτην ἐπιστήμην], if someone is wise in these things [εἴ τις περὶ τῶν τοιούτων σοφός]' (19c5-7). Similarly, about instructing other people he admits: "Yet I think it a fine thing if someone were able to teach people [εἴ τις οἷός τ᾽ εἴη παιδεύειν] as Gorgias of Leontini does, and Prodicus of Ceos, and Hippias of Elis" (19e2-4). And in the same way, when he learns that Evenus of Paros claims to teach virtue, he says: "I thought Evenus a happy man, if he really possesses this art [εἰ ὡς ἀληθῶς ἔχοι ταύτην τὴν τέχνην] and teaches for so moderate a fee" (20b9-c1). Certainly, it is no coincidence that the three assertions are immediately qualified by the hypothetical clause "if". The first is a case of plain conditional, which suggests the possibility is not unlikely. The second and third are cases of remote conditional (εἰ + optative), which suggests the odds are slim. "About the value of cosmologists' science, Socrates will not speak disparagingly, if somebody has a real competence in such a field; but the negative form of his assertion and the proviso with which it is accompanied are clear hints that Socrates has his reasons to be skeptical" (Strycker and Slings 1994, 53-54).

Socrates never endorses that the commonly reputed σοφοί are actual σοφοί, i.e. he never acknowledges that they know these matters, even when there is an explicit recognition of the importance and value of some of these matters. This is also the case here: people claiming knowledge, which Socrates does not possess and does not claim to possess. Significantly, negative assessment is not directed towards the object known, but to false claims of knowledge, i.e. pretense of knowledge. As already discussed, he identifies the politician, his first interlocutor, as "one of those reputed wise" or "who appear to be wise" (τινα τῶν δοκούντων σοφῶν εἶναι; 21b9). The participle of δοκεῖν "renders equally ambiguous in Greek, meaning either "those thinking themselves to be wise" or "those appearing to/thought by others to be wise" or "those appearing to/thought by me to be wise"; the last is perhaps ruled out here,

though it is not impossible in general, by "thought to be wise by many people and by himself'" (Stokes 1997, 117). The only thing he acknowledges is the reputation of σοφία some have; by admitting it, however, he is not endorsing it (i.e. he never admits the politicians deserve such a reputation). Taking apparent σοφία to be the result of the opinion of the majority, i.e. a question of public recognition, allows us to understand the way in which Socrates applies these labels without necessarily raising the charge of insincerity. I will come back to the question of δοκεῖν in the next section.

It seems relevant to evaluate Socrates' degree of σοφία over others not least because two different descriptions are found in the *Apology*. At 21a6, it is said that Chaerephon asks the oracle whether there is anyone more σοφώτερος than Socrates, to which the Pythia answers "there is no one σοφώτερος" (21a7). The oracle's response has two grammatical features worth noticing: (i) it is a negative statement; (ii) it uses the comparative form of the adjective σοφός. This form describing Socrates' σοφία implies that there could be someone at least (but not more) σοφός than Socrates. Surprisingly enough, Socrates restates the answer of the oracle in the following terms: "what then does he [the god] mean by saying that I am the wisest [σοφώτατον]?" (21b5-6). Socrates has turned the oracle into a positive statement using the superlative form of the adjective σοφός (cf. Vigo 2001, 114-7; Strycker and Slings 1994, 76). The description affirms that Socrates is more σοφός than everyone else, which does not follow from the former sentence "there is no one more σοφός than Socrates". Vigo (2001) proposes to interpret the superlative without the article as indicating a very high degree of the attribute, but not the highest. Thus, Socrates might be asserting the high degree of his σοφία as stated by the Pythia, without asserting that he is the most σοφός. However, in the context of the present analysis, this interpretation is not entirely satisfactory. Essential to Socrates' mission is to prove his σοφία in relation to others'. The oracle says that "no one is more σοφός than Socrates", and from here Socrates undertakes the task of testing others' σοφία. Hence, the focus is not so much on the degree of Socrates' σοφία by itself, but as compared to others'. In this regard, I privilege Fine's reading of the superlative. "To say that he is wisest need not imply that he is wise. [...] someone might be the wisest person there is, without being wise; he might just come the closest to being wise" (2008, 81). This solution rescues two important elements: Socrates "sort of σοφία" and others' ignorance.

It is worth remarking that Socrates declares that he is aware of having no knowledge, but he never declares that he is ignorant, an ἀμαθής. We should remember that σοφία in opposition with ἀμαθία in Plato is normally understood in terms of true as opposed to false judgement, not possession and lack of knowledge. We tend to talk about Socrates' profession of ignorance, but the truth is that in the *Apology* he is never described as an ἀμαθής. This is so because his soul is free from false beliefs and self-conceit, the worst form of ignorance. It

therefore would be more accurate to call him a non-expert, but not ignorant. In line with his "profession of ignorance", he has also been described as a "non-thinker", but this is not accurate either.[18] Socrates, indeed, thinks about his cognitive state, "he does not think he knows".

5. The rhetoric of real and apparent

Let us take some of the significant instances when Socrates refers to the other "wise men". Socrates starts off his investigation affirming: "I went to one of those reputed wise [ἦλθον ἐπί τινα τῶν δοκούντων σοφῶν εἶναι]" (21b9). After cross-examining the politician, he concludes: "I thought that he appeared wise to many people and especially to himself, but he was not. [ἔδοξέ μοι οὗτος ὁ ἀνὴρ δοκεῖν μὲν εἶναι σοφὸς ἄλλοις τε πολλοῖς ἀνθρώποις καὶ μάλιστα ἑαυτῷ, εἶναι δ' οὔ·]" (21c5-7). After the experience with the politician and other men who thought themselves wise, Socrates restates the importance of his divine mission: "so I must go to all those who had any reputation for knowledge [δοκοῦντας εἰδέναι] to examine its meaning. [..] I experienced something like this: in my investigation in the service of the god I found that those who had the highest reputation [μάλιστα εὐδοκιμοῦντες] were nearly the most deficient, while those who were thought to be inferior [δοκοῦντες φαυλότεροι] were more knowledgeable" (21e5-22a6).

Significantly enough, the title of σοφός is primarily an honorific title of reputation; to a large extent, what makes someone deserving of the title of σοφός is to be thought (δοκεῖν) σοφός by others. Plato exploits the double aspect of δοκεῖν particularly with regard to others' claims of σοφία. "*Doxa* may mean reputation or glory in the eyes of the world, but also mere opinion as opposed to knowledge" (Blundell 1992, 140). The thought is that a great reputation for σοφία does not entail possession of knowledge. See how the distinction operates in the context of the *Theaeteus*, in the example cited above: "for it is the realization of this that is genuine wisdom and goodness [τούτου γνῶσις σοφία καὶ ἀρετὴ ἀληθινή], while the failure to realize it is manifest folly and wickedness [ἡ δὲ ἄγνοια ἀμαθία καὶ κακία ἐναργής]" (176c4-5). True (ἀληθινή) σοφία is contrasted with δοκοῦσα σοφία: "Everything else that passes for ability and wisdom [ἄλλαι δεινότητές τε δοκοῦσαι καὶ σοφίαι] has a sort of commonness – in those who wield political power a poor cheap show, in the manual workers a matter of mechanical routine" (176c6-d1). This makes us think that it is possible to become a reputed σοφός, without actually having knowledge. In the *Cratylus*, Socrates says to Hermogenes that his brother Callias obtained his reputation for

[18] Lesher notices that the proclamation of such "a modest thinker" – in his words, "a non-thinker" (1987, 283).

σοφία (σοφὸς δοκεῖ εἶναι; 391c1) from learning with the sophists in exchange of money. This suggests that, by associating with the sophists, one may obtain a reputation for σοφία, without necessarily being a σοφός.[19] The reputed σοφοί, considered as such in the eyes of the majority, can be qualified as "merely reputed". The distinction between real and apparent gains significance when considering that σοφία is a flexible category and can be easily appropriated.[20]

As already discussed, Socrates recognizes the politician's and the poet's reputation of σοφία. He also recognizes this σοφία is only apparent, but not real. The Greek word used to express 'apparent' in this respect is δοκεῖν, usually translated by English 'believe', 'think', 'suppose', a weak form of judgement in that it lacks the sufficient evidence or certainty characteristic of full understanding.[21] We may wonder how this becomes a question of *seeming* versus *being* or *appearance* versus *reality*. Strycker and Slings, in one of their notes on the *Apology*, argues with the tradition that interprets δοκεῖν as appearance: "it is well-known that δοκεῖν and δόξα refer to opinion or the conceit of knowledge as contrasted with knowledge or truth, not to appearance as contrasted to reality" (1994, 62). Although Strycker raises an important issue of interpretation, he also seems to overlook the fact that the question of appearance and reality in Plato is rarely treated independently of the question of perception and knowledge.[22] In the context of the *Apology*, however, it is useful to keep in mind the notion of opinion, as it crystallizes two important aspects at play: one epistemological, the other linked to public perception. The epistemic status of *doxa* in Plato is approached differently in different dialogues, but for the present case, what needs to be established is that *doxa*, even if informed by truth, is unreliable.[23] On the other hand, *doxa* expresses public opinion (cf. Blundell 1992, 140). In the *Apology*, the label "apparent" when attached to σοφός/σοφία corresponds to the most traditional and popular account of

[19] Is there such a thing as a merely apparent σοφός? Cf. Phaedrus 275a5-b2; Euthyd. 305c7-d5.

[20] This is the case with sophists in the *Republic* (493a6).

[21] In general, both verbs have a parenthetical function in the first person as a way to express personal opinion or moderate an assertion, e.g. δοκεῖ μοι, 'in my view', 'in my opinion', 'it seems to me' (cf. LSJ, s.v.). The Greek verb φαίνειν is only used once in this sense at 30a1.

[22] The problem of appearance is both phenomenical and judgemental. The question of the nature of reality versus appearance rises on the grounds that perception can lead us to conclude something erroneous; hence, the nature of things perceived is judged to be illusory, whereas an underlying permanent reality guarantees consistent knowledge.

[23] Cf. *Meno* 97b5ff. On the significance of the distinction for the early dialogues, Beversluis asserts: "Socrates does not, of course, *deny* that some of his interlocutors have true moral beliefs, i.e. beliefs, which, *if submitted for elenctic testing*, could survive; but he attaches no epistemic importance to it. It is not enough to believe propositions which happen to be true" (1987, 217).

what σοφία is, which is essentially embodied by poets, sophists, statesmen, physicists, and craftsmen. In this regard, apparent as opposed to real opens the possibility of someone being σοφός without being a reputed σοφός, and, to the same extent, someone being reputed σοφός without being a σοφός. The opposition in these terms is explored with the example of justice in the *Republic* II, where Glaucon hypothesizes the existence of the most unjust man who appears (δοκεῖν) just, and the most just, who appears (δοκεῖν) unjust (361a-b). Significantly, the whole purpose is to determine whether justice is something that is valuable and desirable by itself (and not by virtue of its effects). As discussed in the previous section, honor (within which is public recognition) is not among the ultimate goods as σοφία is. At some level, Socrates is reminding his audience that σοφία is something to be sought because it is at the center of a happy and good life, and not because of the reputation the title traditionally carries. To be sure, Plato does not seem to be questioning the institutional and cultural weight of the long-standing tradition of σοφία; rather, by understanding the high and valuable authority attached to these labels, he means to question whether they are being rightly assigned.

In the context of the *Apology*, the definition of σοφία via real as opposed to apparent is especially significant in the interpretation of the truth of the oracle. Through this distinction, Socrates is allowed to divorce what he proves to be an erroneous and deceptive representation of σοφία and the σοφοί from a true and correct one. As a result, those who appear to be σοφοί to the majority prove to be non-σοφοί after Socrates' examination. The contradiction puts forward the unreliability of appearances. Above all, the pair real/apparent provides Socrates with a criterion to discriminate between the elements of σοφία that are valuable from those that are not. According to Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca in their *The New Rhetoric*, the "appearance-reality" pair – in their view, "the prototype of all conceptual dissociation" (1969, 415) – is so persuasive because it presents the elements defined in terms of "real" as more valuable than those defined in terms of "apparent".[24] As Schiappa observes, "dissociation is a rhetorical strategy whereby an advocate attempts to break up a previously unified idea into two concepts: one which will be positively valued by the target audience and one which will be negatively valued" (1991, 5-6). By dissociating σοφία /σοφός into real and apparent, Socrates is allowed to appropriate the title of σοφός in its more valuable sense while disengaging from its less valuable aspect. To this extent, dis-

[24] "While the original status of what is presented as the starting point of the dissociation is unclear and undetermined, the dissociation into terms I [defined in terms of apparent] and II [defined in terms of real] will attach value to the aspects that correspond to term II and will lower the value of the aspects that are in opposition to it" (Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca 1969, 417).

sociation "is not simply a datum, it is a construction […] It enables those that do not correspond to the rule which reality provides to be termed illusory, erroneous, or apparent (in the deprecatory sense of this word). In relation to term I [defined in terms of apparent], term II [defined in terms of real] is both normative and explanatory" (Perelman and Olbrecht-Tyteca 1968, 416). "Real definitions", in this context, would resolve the tension between the opposing aspects involved in competing claims concerning what is x (cf. Schiappa 2003, 37). For the present analysis, the dissociation of σοφία/σοφός in the context of the *Apology* allows Socrates to solve the paradox initially presented as a riddle by the Delphic oracle "there is no one more σοφός than Socrates". The contradiction between Socrates' claim of ignorance and others' claims of σοφία is overcome by the distinction between apparent and real and the qualification of the object known:

> Real σοφός is "the one who knows the most important things", those who appear to be σοφοί do not know the most important things; thereafter apparent σοφοί are not real σοφοί.

Plato is not reinventing the meaning of σοφία, but rather (axiologically) redefining it within a context where the less valuable aspect is identified with "apparent" and the more valuable aspect with "real". Significantly, for Plato to dissociate "real" from "apparent" σοφία and to persuade that it is only "real" σοφία that is to be accepted, it seems fundamental that σοφία has an identifiable aspect that, because of its apparent nature, is not to be accepted. As Perelman and Olbretech-Tyteca remark: "the purpose of the device may not be to transfer an accepted value over to a new meaning, but rather to enhance the value of a concept by conferring on it a prestige that it lacked in its former use" (1969, 447). In the particular case of Plato's *Apology*, the attempt to redirect the audience's attitude towards σοφία is effective inasmuch as the definition motivates the audience to stop using the laudatory term to refer, for example, to values such as reputation or honor, all of which are deemed of little or no worth. Of course, Plato's strategy is not used for the sheer purpose of persuasion.[25] According to Perelman and Olbrecht-Tyteca (1969, 447), it may be the case that the dissociation is employed either for persuasion or it "may be the result of an inner

[25] In this regard, Socrates in the *Apology* is shown to be, despite his own claims (17b3), a clever speaker. His rhetoric, however, is not empty. It is to persuade, but no only to persuade; it invokes a value-system, which he is ready to recommend because he believes it to be true: "unless indeed they call an accomplished speaker [δεινὸν καλοῦσιν οὗτοι λέγειν] the man who speaks the truth [τὸν τἀληθῆ λέγοντα]" (17b4-5).

conviction which the speaker believes to conform the reality of things and is ready to justify". I tend to believe this is the case here.[26]

6. Conclusion

In the present paper I have attempted to rescue some of the textual keys of the *Apology* (21a-23c) to show the many strands operating in Socrates' claims of ignorance. I have advocated a position that seeks to reevaluate the use of epistemic lexica by considering other evidence, such as cultural and dramatic context, the use of hypothetical clauses, the comparative and the rhetoric of the pair real/apparent. From this approach, I hope I have demonstrated that there is room to interpret Socrates' claims of ignorance in the light of amiable irony, whereby the use of language and other devices create layers of meaning to show the sense of Socratic wisdom for the audience (in this case, represented by the jury in the inner frame and the reader in the outer frame of the text) without supporting either contradiction or insincerity. Against a position that reduces Socrates' meaning to the use of epistemic lexica to interpret it either by synonymy, equivocity or low/high cognitive grading, I proposed to read Socrates' claims of ignorance, always in comparison to others' claim of wisdom, as a sort of cultural appropriation of the traditional title σοφία/σοφός.

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[26] It responds to what Robinson (1950, 165) classifies as "real definition as the adoption and recommendation of ideals". Both the strong moral tone and the promotion of ideals and standards would be shaping these kinds of definitions.

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