Contemporary Socratic scholars are often divided about even the most basic principles of interpretation of Plato's Socratic dialogues. Perhaps these divisions are deepest regarding two issues in particular: first, how are we to understand the relationship between the historical and the Platonic Socrates and, second, how if at all, do the dramatic features of the dialogues bear on the philosophical views Plato wishes to convey. This book consists of six essays by well known scholars of ancient philosophy and a helpful introductory chapter. Although two of the essays assume an essentially neutral stance with respect to interpretive principles, the other four, to one degree or another, come down on the side of distinguishing sharply between the historical Socrates and the early dialogues' character by that name and on the side of seeing the dramatic aspects of the dialogue as keys to Plato's intended meaning.

It is perhaps understandable that commentators have so often succumbed to the temptation to use non-philosophical details to interpret the philosophy of the early dialogues. After all, since it is exceedingly difficult to see how Plato's Socrates could possibly defend some of his pronouncements, one is tempted to think Plato is up to something other than what Socrates is made to say. A star example is Socrates' pronouncement in the Apology that his mission has its origin in the Delphic oracle given to Chaerophon that no one is wiser than Socrates. How Socrates could have thought that a declaration about his wisdom was really a command to aid his fellow Athenians by exhorting them to care about philosophy is the topic of Michael Stokes' contribution. Stokes does a creditable job of showing just how puzzling Socrates' remarks about the origin of his mission really are. Unlike most contemporary commentators, who tend to assume that Plato's version of the speech does not greatly distort important, substantive portions of Socrates' actual speech to the jury, Stokes plants the idea early in his essay that Plato's version of the speech is largely fiction. And if Plato's version tells us more about Platonic artistry than commentators have usually claimed, it was designed, Stokes says, to convince readers of the work of Socrates' innocence of the actual charges he faced and of the great benefits of calling the established values into question. For Stokes, Socrates' mention of the oracle as the source of his mission is simply meant to reinforce the notion that what he does is thoroughly pious. Plato gives us no explanation—and commentators search in vain for one—of why Socrates would be convinced that he has a mission or why he thought it could be traced to an oracle which, so the Apology tells us, said only that no one is wiser than Socrates.

But is the oracle episode really just a Platonic fiction, introduced early
on to give the speech "a dramatic start, and one not requiring too much by way of philosophical argument" (74)? He is no doubt correct that the logic of Socrates' speech does not require that there be an explanation buried in the text of the *Apology*. Socrates needs to convince the jury that his work has been pious, not why he took himself to have a duty to serve the god. But it does not follow from anything Stokes says that Socrates couldn't give reasons for taking the oracle's words to be a divine command. If so, it is important for our understanding of Socrates' text to inquire about what those reasons are. Stokes' Plato apparently thinks that readers will be so taken with Socrates' piety that they will not notice that Socrates has no explanation for engaging in what he says is the most important activity he could ever engage in. It seems more likely that Plato, consummate artist that he was, invites us at every turn to look for the reasons that stir Socrates to do whatever he does. What Socrates says about the origin of his mission is no exception.

Ian Kidd's short but provocative essay is one of the more valuable contributions to this volume. Kidd begins by paying lip service to the theme that dramatic form is essential to the meaning of the early dialogues. But the importance of Kidd's essay lies in what he takes to be the point of Socratic questioning. Using the *Laches* to illustrate his thesis, Kidd argues that the proper method of doing philosophy, which Plato exemplifies in the dialogue form, aims at the discovery of the interlocutor's and the reader's latent knowledge. Kidd agrees with those who think that the early dialogues have, in some sense, constructive results and are not simply intended to reveal an interlocutor's ignorance. Unfortunately, Kidd's essay ends before he tells us why we can be so sure that Plato thinks each of us, and each of the interlocutors, possesses the latent knowledge that will answer to Socrates' questions. Nor does Kidd tell us what the criterion of Socratic knowledge is. Having been stimulated to ask and try to answer Socrates' vexing questions, how can we be sure that the answers we come up with are correct? Here Kidd is of no help.

Spiro Panagiotou's essay focuses on the *Crito* to provide evidence for his general interpretive thesis that the point of an early dialogue is not what it appears on the surface to be. In spite of the fact that Socrates himself advances the position of the personified laws of Athens, according to Panagiotou, Plato does not intend for the reader to see that position either as Socrates' or as the correct position. One reason, of course, is that, on its face, the position of the personified laws, which demands of the citizen unqualified obedience to the commands of the state, conflicts with the implication of Socrates' vow in the *Apology* that he must disobey a command not to philosophize. What Socrates "really" thinks in the *Crito*, according to Panagiotou, is reflected in the two guiding principles, never treat anyone unjustly or badly and always