

CHORUSES OF VIRTUE: NARRATIVE MEDIATION AS ETHICAL  
HABITUATION IN PLATO'S DIALOGUES

by

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Choruses of virtue: narrative mediation as ethical habituation in Plato's dialogues

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## ABSTRACT

In Book VII of the fifth-century BCE Athenian philosopher, Plato's, dialogue the *Laws*, the 'Athenian Stranger' claims that lawmakers are producers of the finest and truest tragedy, which true law alone can produce to perfection. This appears to contradict statements elsewhere in Plato's corpus which suggest that tragedy, especially fifth-century Athenian tragedy, is morally damaging for both its audience and performers. Previous scholarship has attempted to trace the influence of Athenian tragedy on the development of Plato's philosophy and his use of the dialogue form, but few consider the narrative, socio-political, religious, and pedagogical function of the tragic chorus in connection with Plato's dialogues. This thesis, employing narratological concepts such as focalization, metalepsis, and time, examines Plato's use of narrative voice in his dialogues as a pedagogical scaffold and protreptic for the internalization of virtue and pursuit of the philosophical life. Plato's philosophical narrators are revealed to belong to a Socratic circle and are described as being 'initiated' into the mysteries of philosophy in a manner analogous to initiation into Dionysus' cult, achieved through participation and purification through dance in the tragic chorus. Plato's appropriation of the tragic dramatic form therefore runs deeper than has been previously maintained and demonstrates the necessity of ethical habituation through *mimēsis* as a precursor to the achievement of *eudaimonia* or human flourishing.

## LAY SUMMARY

The goal of this thesis is to examine the literary and philosophical influence of the fifth-century Athenian tragic chorus on Plato's use of narrative perspective in several key dialogues. This thesis demonstrates that the narrators of Plato's dialogues are analogous to a tragic dramatic chorus, who both act as a mediator between the audience or reader of the drama and the dramatic action or arguments of the story. Application of narratology, the theory which deals with the principles underlying narrative texts, to Plato's dialogues leads to new insights into Plato's conception of philosophy and his unique literary choices. Furthermore, this analysis contributes to our understanding of Plato's attitudes towards media and its psychological effects on a human being's moral development.

## PREFACE

This thesis, submitted in partial fulfilment of the degree of Master of Arts in Classics at the University of British Columbia (Vancouver), is the original, unpublished, and independent work of the author, Alexa White. All due reference and credit are given in relation to other research and direct quotations.

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## I. INTRODUCTION

In Book VII of Plato's *Laws*, the so-called Athenian Stranger, Spartan Megillus, and Cretan Cleinias discuss the acceptable forms of discourse that will form the basis of the education for the citizens in the hypothetical city-state of Magnesia. When they come to tragedy, the Athenian asks:

What about our 'serious' poets, as they're called, the tragedians? Suppose some of them were to come forward and ask us some such question as this: ὦ ξένοι, may we enter your city-state and country, or not? And may we bring and lead in our work with us? [...] What would be the right reply for us to make to these divine men? This, I think: 'Most excellent foreign men, we ourselves are makers of the finest and best tragedies within our power. At any rate, our entire state has been constructed to be a 'representation' of the finest and noblest life – the very thing we maintain is most truly and genuinely a tragedy. So we are poets like yourselves, composing in the same genres, and your technical competitors and adversaries as artists of the finest drama, which true law alone has the natural powers to 'produce' to perfection (VII.817a1-c1).<sup>1</sup>

Only a few Stephanus pages earlier, the Athenian had remarked:

when I look back now over this discussion of ours [...] it's come to look, to my eyes, just like a *poiēsis* [παντάπασι ποιήσει τινι...] I was overcome by a feeling [πάθος] of immense pleasure [ἡσθηῖναι] at the sight of my 'collected works', so to speak, because, of all the addresses I have ever learned or listened to [...] it's these that have impressed me as being

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<sup>1</sup> All translations of Plato are lightly adapted from John M. Cooper, ed., *Plato Complete Works* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1998), unless otherwise indicated.



the most eminently acceptable and the most entirely appropriate for the ears of the younger generation (VII.811c-d).

These two passages taken together suggest that this Platonic dialogue is a ‘literary’ or ‘poetic’ drama. Scholars have long commented on the formal affinity between the Platonic dialogue and its’ generic cousin, Athenian tragedy.

Closely attendant upon the question of Plato’s relationship to tragedy is the question of Plato’s use of dialogue. Although it may be admitted that the question of Plato’s use of dialogue is tendentious, the stylistic form of Plato’s dialogues is crucial for understanding Plato’s construction of philosophy as both a discipline and way of life. For Plato, to do philosophy was not simply to study certain subjects and employ one’s rationality in pursuit of analytical truth (though this is a part of it). More importantly, to ‘do philosophy’ was to be a philosopher, that is, to make a conscious choice to organize one’s life around a prescribed set of ethical, metaphysical, and epistemological commitments that would shape his<sup>2</sup> cognitive and emotional perspective and guide his every action.<sup>3</sup> Plato evidently believed that the type of media that one consumed played an integral and decisive role in his moral habituation, as can be inferred from Socrates’ analysis of the moral effects of *mimēsis* in *Republic* III, as well as Socrates’ frequent criticisms of the dominant modes of discourse in his contemporary time. The question, then, ‘why dialogue?’, while not new and by no means unexplored, continues to be an important one, and especially important

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<sup>2</sup> I have chosen to use the male pronouns when characterizing Plato’s philosopher because, as scholars like Andrea Nightingale notes, Plato frequently conceives of the philosopher as male given his cultural and historical context; however, it is important to note that Plato acknowledges the potential for female philosophers in his corpus, such as the role of Diotima or Aspasia in the *Symposium* and *Menexenus* respectively, as well as the concept of philosopher queens in book 5 of the *Republic*.

<sup>3</sup> Indeed, this appears not simply to be unique to philosophy, but to ancient virtue ethics more generally; most famously and influentially, see Pierre Hadot and Arnold I. Davidson, *Philosophy as a Way of Life: Spiritual Exercises from Socrates to Foucault* (New York; Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), 147-178; 264-276.

for understanding Plato's conception of what it means to do philosophy, and by extension, what it means to live a flourishing and virtuous life.

Perhaps the principal reason for the Athenian Stranger's claim being so surprising is due to the discussion of mimetic poetry in Plato's earlier dialogue, the *Republic*. Set in the house of the wealthy merchant, Cephalus, in Athens' port of Peiraeus, the *Republic's* central investigation is that of justice, and more specifically, whether justice is intrinsically beneficial or worthwhile. Throughout the course of the conversation, Socrates and the principal interlocutors, Plato's brothers Glaucon and Adeimantus, the trio try to construct an ideal city (given the title 'Kallipolis', the beautiful or fine city), an instantiation of perfect justice, in order to understand what justice *is*, before understanding whether it is intrinsically worthwhile. One feature of the ideal city that Socrates spends time expanding is the question of mimetic, that is imitative, forms of media and the effects these will have on the citizens of Kallipolis. This is important for forming the pedagogical curriculum of Kallipolis, as Socrates argues that as exercise is the training of the body, so too *mousikē* constitute the training of the soul. Socrates specifically argues that *logoi*, speeches, constitute a subset of *mousikē* (II.376e5). In book III, after discussing the content of these *logoi* and *muthoi*, Socrates turns to their 'style' or 'diction', *λέξις* (II.392c5). Socrates makes a distinction between types of stories that are narrated strictly through diegesis, 'reportage', where the narrator 'stays himself' without taking on the persona of a different character, and stories that are strictly mimetic or imitative, that is, represent characters other than the narrator himself. Falling between these distinctions are narratives that are a mixture of the two, that is, employ both diegesis and *mimēsis* (II.392d3-5). The paradigmatic case for stories that are strictly mimetic are comedy and tragedy (that is, Athenian drama), whereas the case of the 'mixed' *lexis* is Homeric epic, and

finally the pure narrative or diegesis is embodied in the dithyramb, a type of choral performance dedicated to Dionysus, and which is thought to be the origin of Athenian drama.

Socrates eventually concludes that, given the principle of specialization that in order for a society to properly flourish each citizen has to specialize in one particular craft or occupation, imitative poetry should not be permitted into Kallipolis, except, perhaps, for the kind which imitates people who are “courageous, self-controlled, pious, and free” (III.395c4). The reasoning for this is that for Socrates “human nature [...] can neither imitate many things well nor do the actions themselves, of which those imitations are likenesses” (III.395b3-4). For Socrates, the ideal city and its proper flourishing is a direct analogy with the proper flourishing of the human soul. Thus, when the different aspects of human motivation within the soul try to meddle with their improper function, particularly when appetites interfere with the natural function of reason, which is to rule, the soul will not be successfully flourishing. Furthermore, “[the leaders of Kallipolis] mustn’t be clever at doing or imitating slavish or shameful actions, lest from enjoying the imitation, they come to enjoy the reality. Or haven’t you noticed that imitations practiced from youth become part of nature and settle into habits of gesture, voice, and thought” (III. 395c5-d2)? The most important aspect of this claim has to do with the intrinsic enjoyment that Plato believes that a performer can take in the imitative act. If the performer enjoys imitating certain things, this is only one step away from enjoying doing those activities in reality. This passage therefore demonstrates how important *mimēsis* is for the moral education of the human soul.

The question that these two passages in Plato’s corpus raise for the reader is precisely what Plato’s intention was in casting his own dialogues as mimetic works. Many of Plato’s dialogues are set in dramatic form much like the script of a tragedy or comedy, so it is surprising firstly that Plato chose to employ this stylistic *lexis* as well as why the Athenian Stranger in the *Laws* argues

that he and the other lawmakers of the ideal Cretan colony are makers of the finest tragedy. I argue that Plato uses the ‘mixed style’ of combining narrative and *mimēsis*, the style that is “pleasant” and “by far the most pleasing to children, their tutors, and the vast majority of people” (III.397d4-5) as a means of habituating his readers, which according to the Athenian Stranger in the *Laws* are the youth, to take pleasure in imitating philosophers and achieves this primarily through his manipulation of narrative perspective in the dialogues. The time that both those who practice philosophy, literally the ‘love of *sophia*, wisdom,’ and read the philosophical dialogues, not only diverts the philosopher from engaging in certain activities which will take away from the care of their soul (mainly of a bodily sort, such as drink, food, and sex) but also prepares them to truly enjoy such a life and therefore harmonize the disparate elements of a human being’s motivations.

This constitutes a form of purification that Plato models after initiation into a mystery cult, and particularly tragic choral initiation. This demonstrates both a continuity and improvement, for Plato, of the pedagogical function of the chorus in Athenian tragedy. In Athenian tragedy, however, the aesthetic pleasure of the performance is mainly located in the spectators, whereas Plato instead focuses on the aesthetic pleasure that the performer takes in philosophical *mimēsis*. For Plato, however, this requires a proper choral leader, one who aims at the betterment of the performer (and by extension the reader of the dialogue) rather than the enjoyment of the spectator, the latter of which Plato thinks is the aim of the democratic tragic poet. Plato finds as his ideal chorus leader Socrates, an individual who has harmonized the elements of his soul through his philosophical mission and activity of philosophical dialectic, the Socratic *elenchus*. Hence Plato’s dialogues are all narrated either by Socrates himself or those who imitate Socrates’ method and can provide a proper attitudinal model for the reader of the dialogue herself. These narrators are

above all, because they have channeled their live into *sophia* rather than other pursuits, not liable to affective change which can pollute or warp human perception of reality.

Martha Nussbaum's 1986 publication *the Fragility of Goodness: Luck and Tragedy in Greek Philosophy* is one influential analysis of Plato's relationship with the genre of tragedy, in which the author asks not merely why Plato didn't write a philosophical treatise in the manner of Aristotle or Kant, but rather why he didn't write a dramatic *tragedy* in the manner of Aeschylus, Sophocles, or Euripides. In her study, Nussbaum famously classifies the Platonic dialogues as 'anti-tragic theatre', in that they retain the form of tragedy while replacing the 'tragic' contents, that is, the *pathos*, with arguments (*logoi*).<sup>4</sup> Nussbaum analyzes Greek tragedy (and subsequently philosophy) as a response to the diametrically opposing roles of *technē*, technical craft or specialization, and *tuchē*, fate or chance, in human life, with the former representing the degree of power or autonomy a human might exercise over her own life, and the latter representing the forces of fate outside of the rational agent's control. She therefore argues that Plato's dialogues represent 'anti-tragic' theatre in that they dispel the perils of *tuchē* by developing a sophisticated notion of moral *technē*, particularly as it relates to detaching oneself from dependencies that are beyond the parameters of human agency. Plato constructs this *technē* primarily, in Nussbaum's view, through "a deep modification of ends [...] that [...] creates new values and new dependencies"<sup>5</sup> that are *not* subject to the whims of *tuchē*. Thus, Plato's dialogues are 'anti-tragic' in that they encourage the rational agent to detach herself, as far as she is able, from the factors in her life that may be taken away and consequently prevent any possibility of 'tragedy' in its traditional sense.

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<sup>4</sup> Martha Craven Nussbaum, *The Fragility of Goodness: Luck and Ethics in Greek Tragedy and Philosophy*, revised edition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 128, 130.

<sup>5</sup> Nussbaum, "Fragility," 119-20.

Nussbaum's view is attractive as it suggests the formal significance for both Plato and the Athenian tragedians that arguments and propositions be mediated through human subjects liable to the whims of fate, and in that both Athenian tragedy and Plato's dialogues "challenge their audience to inhabit [the dramatic world] actively, as a contested place of moral struggle, a place in which virtue might possibly in some cases prevail over the caprices of amoral power, and in which, even if it does not prevail, virtue may still shine through for its own sake."<sup>6</sup> While I agree with Nussbaum that Plato's philosophical and poetic project has to do with a re-evaluation of ends, Nussbaum rhetorically overstates the degree to which Plato's dialogues eliminate tragic elements and poetic language.<sup>7</sup> Nonetheless, Nussbaum points out that even in dialogues that are emotionally or appetitively charged, such as the *Phaedo*, one of their central aims (usually mediated through the mouth of Socrates) is to chastise the interlocutors who inappropriately experience pity and grief, thereby discouraging the reader him or herself to similarly experience those emotions.

The appetitive and emotional 'scenes' present in many dialogues, then, speak to the necessity of moral habituation and the proper training of the non-rational aspects of the psyche. *Mimēsis*, of which Plato's dialogues are examples, is useful not simply for the shaping of the rational aspects of the mind, as Nussbaum's analysis suggests, but also for the emotive or appetitive aspects of the human psyche. Nussbaum paved the way for comparison and engagement of Plato's dialogues with his former *métier*, the tragedians. I aim to build on her interpretation by analyzing not merely the formal and generic similarities between Plato's dialogues and the tragedies, but more broadly the socio-political and religious implications of tragic and

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<sup>6</sup> Nussbaum, "Fragility," xxxvii.

<sup>7</sup> For instance, "[the dialogue's] dry and abstract tone positively discourages the arousal of emotions and feelings" (Nussbaum, "Fragility," 131).

philosophical *mimēsis* as a form of ethical habituation. The Platonic dialogue is not *merely* a “crystalline theatre of the intellect;”<sup>8</sup> on the contrary, by being mediated through characters ‘infected’ by the Bacchic sting of philosophy, namely the love of wisdom (*philosophia*), I argue that the philosophical dialogue enables its readers to similarly be ‘initiated’ into the mysteries of philosophy through the activity of philosophical dialectic and therefore purification, and therefore itself constitutes the crucial Socratic project of the reshaping of moral ends to which Nussbaum rightly gestures. Imitation is crucial to Plato’s ideas about achieving true happiness, and Socrates represents, for Plato, the ideal chorus leader, due to his temperance and commitment to the pursuit of ethical and metaphysical truth. Plato’s dialogues are therefore not merely a protreptic for the pursuit of philosophy but are actually a corrective improvement of an important educative and pedagogical programme of the Athenian *dēmos*, namely, the tragic chorus.

Nussbaum’s analysis relies on the premise that “the tragic *elenchos* does not present itself as part of an ongoing search for *the* correct account of anything. We cannot learn from it without generalizing to some extent.”<sup>9</sup> This analysis is in part founded on her interpretation of Plato’s dialogues as seeking to guide their readers from particular instantiations of abstract concepts such as justice and beauty to the general and overarching forms that constitute true reality. While it is not the work of this analysis to evaluate this claim, Nussbaum’s treatment of the generic commonalities between the Platonic dialogues and Athenian tragedies can be expanded upon to include the impact of the civic, religious, and importantly performative aspects of tragedy on Plato’s philosophical dramas. For instance, Nussbaum’s suggestion that tragedy is not part of an ongoing search for a correct account, and instead only presents the plurality and complexity of

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<sup>8</sup> Nussbaum, “Fragility,” 133.

<sup>9</sup> Nussbaum, “Fragility,” 134.

ends that appear to be an irreducible aspect of human experience, while useful and compelling, does not examine the role that the chorus might play as a potential voice or representation of the body politic of Athens, “a collective character personified by the citizen body [*personnage collectif, incarné par un collège de citoyens*].”<sup>10</sup> More recent analyses of the civic and religious role of tragedy in Athens has pointed to its pedagogical function, as a means of educating its citizens, and particularly young men, on matters of the deliberation central to the successful flourishing of the Athenian democracy.<sup>11</sup> This might be represented most of all in the tragic chorus, constituted of Athenian young men and an integral aspect of their musical and civic education. The tragic chorus has frequently been interpreted as the mediator of the dramatic action and the spectators, and therefore might suggest ways in which Athenian tragedians were putting forth positive claims about how the audience itself ought to evaluate or react to the events happening on stage. Furthermore, recent work on tragedy, particularly Joshua Billings’ *The Philosophical Stage: Drama and Dialectic in Athens*, has demonstrated the full extent to which tragedy was importantly continuous with ‘philosophy’, and, I would argue, constituted an important foundation for Plato’s formation of philosophy.<sup>12</sup>

Other analyses of Plato’s relationship to tragedy similarly do not focus on the central role of the chorus as being a fundamental aspect of tragic experience. Scholars such as Stephen Halliwell and Andrea Nightingale suggest that Plato’s dialogues seek primarily to parody the tragic

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<sup>10</sup> For the highly influential (and deeply controversial) idea that the tragic chorus was an incarnation of the city, see Jean-Pierre Vernant and Pierre Vidal-Naquet, *Mythe Et tragédie En Grèce Ancienne* (Paris: F. Maspero, 1972), 13-14: “There is therefore a polarity in the tragic technique between two elements: the chorus, being collective and anonymous, whose role consists of expressing in its fears, hopes, judgments, the sentiments of the spectators who make up the civic community, and the individual personality, who forms the central action of the drama” (my translation).

<sup>11</sup> See for instance Geoffrey W. Bakewell, “Tragedy as Democratic Education: The Case of Classical Athens,” *Administrative Theory & Praxis* 33, no. 2 (2011): 265-266.

<sup>12</sup> Joshua Billings, *The Philosophical Stage: Drama and Dialectic in Athens* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2021), 1-22.



formula, with the former arguing that Plato problematizes and indeed attempts to subvert the tragic idea of an ill-fated protagonist with little or no agency over his life,<sup>13</sup> and the latter arguing that Plato deliberately set philosophy in opposition to tragedy to demonstrate that the philosophical life is superior.<sup>14</sup> Both scholars argue that Plato parodies characters who would normally be deemed tragic in the Athenian cultural imagination, defined in this context as the dramatic representation of ‘serious’ (*spoudaios*) and therefore, to a certain degree, authoritative characters, by rendering them, upon the test and scrutiny of the Socratic *elenchus*, to be comical and mistaken about what truly counts as tragic (namely, lacking in moral virtue). On the other hand, Socrates’ ultimate execution, which might appear to be tragic in a manner akin to Oedipus’ tragic reversal in Sophokles’ *Oidipous Tyrannos* or Pentheus’ death in Euripides’ *Bacchae*, is revealed to be the opposite through Socrates’ logical and argumentative stance. Thus, Socrates “transcends tragedy,” and the true tragic protagonist is revealed, often, to be the Athenians themselves.<sup>15</sup>

These analyses importantly show that Plato’s own creative and philosophical project was influenced by the dominant modes of discourse with social currency in Athens, and particularly tragedy. But, as Christopher Moore notes, these analyses of Plato’s construction of philosophy as a genre occurring as an entirely novel practice does not show the whole picture: “The view of *philosophia* presented in Plato’s dialogues shows as much continuity as rupture with earlier views [...] he is defending *philosophia*, not defiantly adopting a dubious name for an obscure practice.”<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Stephen Halliwell. “The Life-and-Death Journey of the Soul: Interpreting the Myth of Er,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Plato’s Republic*, ed. G. R. F. Ferrari (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 451.

<sup>14</sup> Andrea Nightingale, *Genres in Dialogue: Plato and the Construct of Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 92.

<sup>15</sup> Jacob Howland, “Plato’s *Apology* as Tragedy,” *Review of Politics* 70 (2008): 520. The idea that Athens is a tragic protagonist is also suggested to be the case in Thucydides’ *History of the Peloponnesian War*; see Simon Goldhill, *The Invention of Prose* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 32.

<sup>16</sup> Christopher Moore, *Calling Philosophers Names: On the Origins of a Discipline* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2020), 222.

In this analysis I seek to build upon these scholarly analyses, and argue that in addition to Plato's intended continuity of *philosophia* with older semantic senses of the term, Plato similarly wanted to make the love of wisdom continuous with the religious and civic functions of Athenian tragedy, particularly through choral activity. Analyzing the narrative and pedagogical continuity between the Athenian tragic chorus and Plato's dialogues sheds light on the Athenian Stranger's seemingly paradoxical claim that the philosophical life is the truest and finest tragedy and has the power to produce true virtue.

In addition, while many of these treatments have suggested that Plato's relationship with tragedy is a merely negative one, in that he is attempting to legitimize philosophy over and above tragedy,<sup>17</sup> fewer pay closer attention to the narrative similarities as well as the religious and political implications communicated in tragic *mimēsis*.<sup>18</sup> I propose that Plato's appropriation of the dramatic form runs deeper than merely parodying tragedy as a means of replacing it with 'philosophy', but that rather Plato characterizes philosophical *mimēsis*, much like tragic choral *mimēsis*, as a form of worship that leads a human being to achieve *eudaimonia* (literally, the having of a good *daimōn* or fate) by taking delight in the active imitation of the divine. It is therefore continuous with the function of Greek tragedy, which was ultimately a civic and religious institution dedicated to the worship and representation of the god of theatre himself, Dionysus.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Granted, parodies can be 'more or less' dialogic, in Bakhtin's sense, where the more dialogic the parody is, the more semantic authority and legitimacy is given to the genre being parodied or subverted. See Nightingale, *Genres in Dialogue*, 7.

<sup>18</sup> In a similar vein, Gavin Ardley interprets Plato as a "tragedian" more so in the *thematic* content of his dialogues rather than its formal or socio-political affinities with the genre of tragedy: "we may begin to understand Plato's metaphysics only when we see it as an element in a greater whole of philosophic endeavour, an endeavour focused on the theme of human tragedy and salvation" (Gavin Ardley, "Plato as Tragedian," *Philosophical Studies (Maynooth, Ireland)* 12 (1963): 8).

<sup>19</sup> Indeed, the ritual occasion of the dramatic festivals is one way to answer the question about the extent to which Athenian drama has something to do with Dionysus: see Simon Goldhill, "The Great Dionysia," in *Nothing to do with Dionysus? Athenian Drama in Its Social Context*, eds Winkler and Zeitlin (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), 128-129.

Plato's philosophical chorality and *mimēsis* differs in that rather than emphasizing the delight and enjoyment that the *spectator* receives from witnessing this philosophical activity, Plato instead shifts the emphasis to the enjoyment that the actor and therefore *performer* (and by extension the philosophical narrator of the dialogue) gains from engaging in philosophical investigation. This therefore enables the proper habituation and internalization of the intrinsic worth of virtue that is a necessary precursor to the achievement of *eudaimonia*.

Application of narrative theory to Plato's dialogues suggests that the philosophical narrators of Plato's dialogues are akin to the tragic chorus in that they mediate the tragic *agones* of the dialogue, either by participating in this active imitation and thus worship of the divine, or else by actively observing Socrates' philosophical *elenchus*.<sup>20</sup> Hence, Plato's claim in the *Laws* that the life of the philosopher is the truest and finest tragedy is not something that Plato says in jest or as a means of integrating popular Athenian social practices.<sup>21</sup> Instead, examining the philosophical *elenchus* as a form of chorality allows one to understand the connections of Dionysus, the god of wine, mania, tragedy, and immortality, with Plato's characterization of the activity of philosophy.

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<sup>20</sup> For the idea that the tragic chorus mediates the opposing views of the *agones*, see Claude Calame, "Choral Polyphony and the Ritual Functions of Tragic Songs," in Gagne and Hopman, eds, *Choral Mediations in Greek Tragedy* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2013), 37.

<sup>21</sup> Several scholars have interpret the Athenian Stranger's claim as a nod to the necessity for a practical legislator to incorporate such a popular mimetic medium into his legislation, hence, "The presence of tragic poets is addressed last, a position that perhaps reflects the anxiety of legislating on an immensely popular cultural form" (Gagne and Marianne Govers Hopman, "Introduction: the Chorus in the Middle," in *Choral Mediations in Greek Tragedy* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2013), 22; see Kenneth Yu's work on Plato's discussion of the Dionysian in *Laws* I and II: "Uncovering the strategy by which Plato dismisses Bacchic dancing without eliminating Dionysus from Magnesia entirely illustrates how Plato delicately negotiates his political fantasies with the historical realities of Greek civic religion" (Kenneth W. Yu, "The Politics of Dance: Eunomia and the Exception of Dionysus in Plato's *Laws*," *Classical Quarterly* 70, no. 2 (2020): 607-8. Cf. Morrow, *Plato's Cretan City*, 308: "A legislator of Plato's time would be defying long-established customs and deep-seated desires if he attempted to prohibit, for example, the phallic processions and orgiastic rites of a Dionysian festival."

I begin with a brief literature review of scholarly views on the influence of tragedy on Plato's dialogues. I then examine several examples in which Plato characterizes philosophers as belonging to a metaphorical chorus, having been 'initiated' by the 'sting' of philosophical frenzy or madness and participation in Socrates' *elenchus*, thus situating the Socratic *elenchus* and way of life against the backdrop of various mystery cults popular in the Classical Greek world, and particularly the Dionysian mysteries. This in turn suggests that philosophical dialectic is itself cast as a form of worship of Plato's unique ideas about divinity. I then utilize narratological and philological analysis to define and understand how Plato and the philosophical characters of his dialogues characterize 'tragedy' in opposition to philosophy. The god of tragedy, Dionysus, who is often portrayed in drama, particularly the *Bacchae*, as an ideal chorus leader, is instead portrayed as inconsistent and in a constant state of becoming and contradiction in Plato's dialogues. Contrastingly, Plato conceives of the gods as temperate, harmonious, and consistent, all qualities humanly embodied in his archetypal philosophical chorus leader, Socrates.

Finally, I offer a reading of the Athenian Stranger's discussion of the pleasures of Dionysus, particularly wine and *symposia*, in Books I and II of the *Laws*, arguing that the Athenian's adoption of proper sympotic practice acts as a meta-narrative and meta-philosophical metaphor for the philosophical dialogue and ethical training itself. This also allows us to recontextualize Plato's use of *mimēsis* in the dialogue as opposed to that of tragic *mimēsis* in the Athenian tragedians and helps clarify Plato's adoption of the mimetic dialogue form, represents people 'doing things' without reportage, and hence allows the reader to 'practice' and internalize the starting points of virtue. As Socrates and Phaedrus argue in the *Phaedrus*, someone cannot learn how to be virtuous from merely reading a book but must *practice* virtue. Hence the philosophical dialogues, and particularly the views that oppose the philosophical ethical and

especially ontological commitments learned through philosophy, offer her reader an attempt to ‘test’ herself against alien *logoi* through a nevertheless sober and sound philosophical chorus – the narrator or macro-focalizer, implicit or explicit, of the dialogue itself.

## II. LITERARY INTERPRETATION OF PLATONIC TRAGIC *MIMĒSIS*

Ruby Blondell’s recent exploration of Platonic ‘drama’ takes a different approach from considering it to merely parody tragedy, and instead examines what it means for a work to be ‘dramatic’ in the first place. *Prima facie*, “the dramatic quality of the dialogues lies in the tension or interrelationship between various views, rather than the clear assertion or dominance of any one view [...] Many writers on Plato take some such assumption for granted, viewing the dialogues as ‘dramatic’ precisely because – and in so far as – they embody conflicts of ideas.”<sup>22</sup> As Blondell notes, however, this criterion does not work particularly well for what might be classified as the ‘late-period’ dialogues, which do not necessarily contain opposing views. Nor do all the Athenian dramatic tragedies include a formal *agōn* or competitive debate.<sup>23</sup> Furthermore, as Blondell notes, this does not seem to be a necessary condition for something to be classified as ‘dramatic’ – for instance, a philosophical treatise may present conflicting ideas or choose not to privilege a single argument or view, but one would still not consider this to be a ‘dramatic’ work.

Instead, Blondell proposes that dramatic texts entail and just are “the suppression of the authorial voice.”<sup>24</sup> Even in the case of the first-person diegetic dialogues, such as the *Republic*, Blondell notes that the “voice [of the narrator] is never Plato’s own. There is [...] always at least *one* dramatic character [...] This privileged character thus dramatizes others.”<sup>25</sup> That there is

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<sup>22</sup> Ruby Blondell, *The Play of Character in Plato’s Dialogues* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 15.

<sup>23</sup> For this definition of drama, see G. Ryle, *Plato’s Progress* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1966), 194.

<sup>24</sup> Blondell, *Play of Character*, 16.

<sup>25</sup> Blondell, *Play of Character*, 17.

sometimes only one dramatic and thereby perspectival privileged character (normally Socrates) led to the idea starting from antiquity that Plato's dialogues, despite being dramatic and dialogic, are nevertheless in some sense dogmatic. While it seems that this is less the case for the strictly mimetic and thus non-diegetic dialogues, recent studies on the application of narrative theory to Plato's dialogues are actually in agreement with this ancient hypothesis, by revealing that in fact even in the non-diegetic dialogues there is a single focus of perception through which the dialogue is mediated to the reader, and thus a single privileged character 'macro-focalizing' the arguments and events.

Application of concepts from narratology to Plato's dialogues has revealed that even Plato's mimetic or directly dramatic dialogues are in fact narratives. Kathryn Morgan has argued that Plato's narrative voice acts as a proreptic device, which manifests in many dialogues when the narrator praises or is depicted as taking delight in the life of philosophy, and in particular, philosophical dialectic – in other words, the Socratic *elenchus*.<sup>26</sup> On the other hand, Margalit Finkelberg's analyses of Plato's dialogues have demonstrated that, even though Plato's dialogues are presented as just that – dialogic, in the Bakhtinian sense of literary dialogism – in fact all of Plato's works are mediated through the macro-focalization of one individual speaker and perspective and are therefore *not* dialogic in the Bakhtinian sense (with the notable exceptions of the *Menexenus*, *Crito*, and *Euthyphro*).<sup>27</sup> Finkelberg's analysis led to what I take to be two important conclusions. Firstly, after Plato's experimentations with first person diegetic dialogues, he wanted to continue to write them in the form of the direct mimetic dialogue rather than the

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<sup>26</sup> Kathryn Morgan, "Plato," in *Narrators, Narrative, and Narratees: Studies in Ancient Greek Narrative*, vol. 1, eds Irene J.F. De Jong, René Nünlist, and Angus Bowie (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 368. That the Socratic *elenchus* is a form of dialectic, particularly the structure of the *ti esti* style of argumentation, see Jakob L. Fink, ed., "Introduction," in *The Development of Dialectic from Plato to Aristotle* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 21.

<sup>27</sup> For an excellent review of Bakhtin's notion of dialogism, see Alastair Renfrew, *Mikhail Bakhtin*, (London: Routledge, 2014), 77-8.

diegetic form (as evidenced by Euclides' remarks in the frame of the *Theaetetus*) while nevertheless ensuring that the events of the dialogue are still mediated through a single, univocal perspective. Secondly, the person who macro-focalizes each dialogue is either Socrates or a member of Socrates' circle. Indeed, this conclusion is implied in an essay by Charles H. Kahn, in which the author states that "each doctrinal formulation [in Plato's dialogues] is a partial, localized perspective on a total scene for which there is no god's-eye point of view."<sup>28</sup> Hence each dialogue is framed and mediated through a local and perspectival vantage point.

Before continuing my analysis, I must first address a preliminary objection. Gregory Vlastos' pioneering literary analyses of Plato's dialogues in the 1980s and 90s argued that the philosophical positions presented in each dialogue must be contextually situated within their respective context, and consequently should not be read alongside what might appear to be an opposing or conflicting view in a different dialogue. This view emerged through literary analysis of Plato's dialogues, through which method Vlastos and his students proposed a certain kind of developmentalist theory of Plato which attempted to isolate the 'early' Socrates from Plato's own intellectual ideas.<sup>29</sup> As such, one might object to my intertextual methodology of comparing Plato's views about tragedy, and indeed philosophy itself, between dialogues that Plato may have written at different stages of his literary and philosophical development, and particularly comparing the views of the so-called 'two Socrates' of Plato's corpus.<sup>30</sup> While it is not the scope

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<sup>28</sup> Charles H. Kahn, "Importance of the Dialogue Form for Plato." In *The Development of Dialectic from Plato to Aristotle*, ed. Jakob L Fink (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 173.

<sup>29</sup> See Gregory Vlastos, "Socrates *contra* Socrates," in *Socrates: Ironist and Moral Philosopher* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

<sup>30</sup> "I have been speaking of 'a' Socrates in Plato. There are two of them. In different segments of Plato's corpus two philosophers bear that name. The individual remains the same. But in different sets of dialogues he pursues philosophies so different that they could not have been depicted as cohabitating the same brain throughout unless it had been the brain of a schizophrenic." Gregory Vlastos, "Socrates *contra* Socrates," in *Socrates: Ironist and Moral Philosopher* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 45-6.

of this analysis to weigh in on this debate, it is enough to point out that such an objection does not largely impact my argument, given that Plato's views of tragedy are remarkably consistent across the entirety of his dialogues, which is examined in detail in section IV. In terms of Plato's desire to mediate his dialogues through a single focus of perception, as Finkelberg has demonstrated, Plato seems to have experimented with bi-focally mediated dialogues in three of his early period dialogues, the *Crito*, *Euthyphro*, and the potentially spurious *Menexenus*. Nonetheless, Finkelberg's analysis shows that except for these three dialogues, it appears as though Plato did eventually settle on writing dialogues that are mediated through a single focus of perception, and after his experimentations with direct diegetic narration in his so-called middle period dialogues, landed on the direct dramatic form, signalled in Euclides' and Terpsion's discussion in the frame narrative of the *Theaetetus*.<sup>31</sup>

In order to understand the conclusions presented above, it is first necessary to define narratology, narrative, and focalization. Narratology is, broadly, "the theory that deals with the general principles underlying narrative texts."<sup>32</sup> The literary theorist Gérard Genette identified a distinction between story (*histoire*), narrative (*récit*), and narration (*narration*), where the 'story' is defined as "*l'ensemble des événements racontés*," the set of reported events or arguments of the text; the 'narrative' constitutes "*le discours, oral ou écrit, qui les raconte*," that is, the speech, oral or written, which they report; and finally the narration, "*l'acte réel ou fictif qui produit ce discours, c'est-à-dire le fait même de raconter*," that is, the act, real or fictive, that produces this speech, that is to say, the fact of story-telling itself.<sup>33</sup> In other words, the narration is the *means* or strategy

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<sup>31</sup> Finkelberg, *The Gatekeeper*, 121-2. For a study on the chronological groupings of Plato's dialogues, see Leonard Brandwood, *The Chronology of Plato's Dialogues* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

<sup>32</sup> Simon Hornblower, ed., "Narratology and Narrative Techniques in Thucydides," In *Greek Historiography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 131.

<sup>33</sup> Gérard Genette, *Nouveau discours du récit* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1983), 10.



by which the events of the story are *related* to the audience of the text. While Plato wrote several diegetic dialogues with an explicit narrator (e.g., Socrates in the *Republic*, which famously begins with Socrates' claim "I went down to the Peiraeus yesterday..."), Finkelberg demonstrates that even Plato's dramatic or 'mimetic' dialogues (hereafter mimetic), which portray a direct conversation between two interlocutors as though it were the script of a dramatic play (e.g., the *Gorgias* or *Laws*), are similarly narratives, or in other words, "[texts] in which a *narrator* recounts a series of events."<sup>34</sup> To support her argument, she cites Plato's classification of *mimēsis* as a form of diegesis ('narrative') in *Republic* III, and the narrative frame of the *Theaetetus*, which explicitly thematizes the existence of a suppressed and implied narrator even in the dialogues represented in mimetic form.<sup>35</sup> Beyond proving that Plato's mimetic dialogues are all narratives, Finkelberg demonstrates that almost all of Plato's mimetic dialogues are mediated through the perspective of a single character (again, excepting the 'early period' *Crito*, *Euthyphro*, and *Menexenus*).<sup>36</sup> Therefore, while Socrates is the *explicit* narrator of the *Republic*, *Lysis*, and *Charmides*, Finkelberg shows that he is similarly the sole narrator of even the non-diegetic, mimetic dialogues, such as the *Sophist*, *Cratylus*, and *Phaedrus*.

Finkelberg's primary method for identifying the narrative perspective of the mimetic dialogues is the identification of focalization as an indicator of narrative authority. Every narrator is also by definition a focalizer, that is, a narrator or a character "through whose 'eyes' the events and persons of a narrative are 'seen.'"<sup>37</sup> The narrator-focalizer comments on the setting, expresses

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<sup>34</sup> Irene J.F. De Jong, *Narratology and Classics: A Practical Guide* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 17; emphasis mine.

<sup>35</sup> For Plato's notion of diegesis through mimesis, see *Republic* III. 392c and Margalit Finkelberg, *The Gatekeeper*, 1-5. For the dramatic frame of the *Theaetetus*, see *Theaetetus*, 143b-c and Margalit Finkelberg, *The Gatekeeper*, 5-9. See also Kathryn Morgan, "Plato," in *Narrators, Narratees, and Narratives in Ancient Greek Literature*, eds René Nünlist, Angus M. Bowie, and Irene de Jong (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 358.

<sup>36</sup> For discussion of Plato's three bi-focally narrated dialogues, see Finkelberg, *The Gatekeeper*, 53-56.

<sup>37</sup> De Jong et. al., "Glossary," in *Narrators, Narratives, and Narratees: Studies in Ancient Greek Narrative*, eds Irene J.F. De Jong, René Nünlist, and Angus Bowie (Leiden: Brill, 2004), xvi.

emotional and perceptive reactions to the story, and mediates what the narratee experiences by directing her attention to an event, character, or other aspect of the story. Focalizers are the characters to whose perspectives the reader has access.<sup>38</sup> It is through these focalizers that the information of the story is filtered. The phenomenon of focalization is thus one of the primary means for revealing the narrator, particularly when the narrator is suppressed or implicit as in Plato's mimetic dialogues.<sup>39</sup>

Finkelberg's secondary, but similarly important, argument for the narrative qualities of Plato's mimetic dialogues has to do with the occurrence in Plato's works of the narratological concept of emplotment or *mise en intrigue*, "the moments where we seize the active work of structuring revealed or dramatized in the text."<sup>40</sup> This is revealed in Plato's dialogues primarily through what Finkelberg dubs as the 'narrator's text', which she defines as the "segments of text containing descriptions of the setting and of the characters' appearance, movements, and emotional responses presented by the explicit or implicit narrator."<sup>41</sup> These tools – characterization, description of setting, and perspectival and emotional mediation by the narrator – are how Plato 'emplots' the arguments presented in his dialogues. These moments are important for Plato, as I will argue, in acting as a pedagogical scaffold for his reader, by flagging the important argumentative transitions of the dialogue. In addition to acting as a pedagogical scaffold, however, I argue that these emplotment methods are like the emplotment methods of the tragic chorus in guiding and informing the reader's understanding of the narrative. As Plato's intellectual career

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<sup>38</sup> Finkelberg, *The Gatekeeper*, 125.

<sup>39</sup> There are precedents for internal narrator-focalizers in ancient Greek literature predating Plato's dialogues. An example of the internal narrator-focalizer is found in the role that Odysseus plays during his narration of his journeys to the Phaeacians. See Deborah Beck, "Odysseus: Narrator, Storyteller, Poet?", *Classical Philology* 100, no. 3 (2005): 215.

<sup>40</sup> Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, trans. Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer (Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 31-51.

<sup>41</sup> Finkelberg, *The Gatekeeper*, 125.

progressed and especially in his later period dialogues, this ‘pedagogical scaffold’, the narrator’s text, slowly gives way, as Finkelberg notes, to a higher concentration of ‘metanarrative comments,’ namely, when an interlocutor “comments on the discussion, thematizing its stages and expresses his attitude to the form it has assumed.”<sup>42</sup> This will become more important when navigating the narrative of Plato’s *Laws*, his final dialogue, which contains less narrator text and many more metanarrative comments concerning the suitability of the Socratic dialogue as an educative and pedagogical tool for the correct ethical habituation of the youth.

Finkelberg’s conclusions reveal that the individuals narrating these dialogues are universally either Socrates or his close associates.<sup>43</sup> This conclusion seems to support Kathryn Morgan’s assertion that the narrative voice in Plato’s dialogues is essentially protreptic. The narrators are philosophical characters, or at the very least, characters who are the followers of Socrates and, more importantly, actively imitate his unique way of life, that of philosophy, and as such encourage and take delight in the activity of philosophy and transmit that desire onto the reader of the dialogue herself. Hence, rather than the narrators of the dialogues being close associates of Socrates acting as a means of affirming the validity and truth of the conversations being reported (since it seems clear that Plato was not striving to actually record true conversations of Socrates, but rather to capture the general methods and character of the ‘gadfly’ of Athens), instead this is thematized so as confirm to the reader that the events and conversations being portrayed in the dialogues, particularly those where there are views contrary to the philosophical way of life such as Thrasymachus’ praise of tyranny in the *Republic*, are being mediated and importantly subjectivized by philosophical characters who have been ‘initiated’ into the mysteries of philosophy. Thus, the dialogue is framed through the perspective of a sound and sober narrator

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<sup>42</sup> Finkelberg, *The Gatekeeper*, 132.

<sup>43</sup> Finkelberg, *The Gatekeeper*, 166.

or metaphorical chorus, who subjectivizes the events as a person someone who is committed to the pursuit of virtue, functioning both as a protreptic for loving and pursuing wisdom, and thereby enabling her to be ‘initiated’ into the mysteries of philosophy. As the Athenian’s discussion of wine and the pleasures of *symposia* will attest, one cannot truly become temperate unless one has had a ‘taste’, so to speak, of the pleasures that would threaten that temperance.

Both philosophy and tragedy therefore enable a cathartic experience for their viewers, namely, to witness events that would not normally be permitted to be spoken or performed in real life.<sup>44</sup> So too, a rational agent will not be able to truly know and internalize that virtue and philosophy are worthwhile pursuits until he has also witnessed the opposite kind of life, a life in pursuit of vice and tyranny. Philosophical dialogue, then, is a safe test of a person’s character, just as the *orthon symposion* is a safe venue through which to test a person’s character. Nevertheless, the ‘subjective’ view of events that we receive through the eyes and macro-focalization of the philosophical narrator corresponds to what is ontologically true, on Plato’s rational argumentation and metaphysical beliefs. Socrates (and by extension his *daimōnion*, linked importantly to his philosophical elenctic method), is for Plato the true and proper chorus leader.

### III. PHILOSOPHY AS MYSTERY CULT AND CHORAL *MIMĒSIS*

#### III.1 Choral Mediation and Initiation

In order to situate Plato’s philosophical chorality, it is necessary to review the scholarly theories on the origins and relationship between the ritual and dramatic aspects of Greek tragedy. As Barbara Kowalzig argues, “drama and ritual are related through a continuity of choral ritual

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<sup>44</sup> See Charles Segal, “Euripides’ *Bacchae*: The Language of the Self and the Language of the Mysteries,” in *Interpreting Greek Tragedy: Myth, Poetry, Text* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986), 295. I return to this point in Section V below.

forms in a changing social context; it is the resulting dynamic that shapes the form, content, and (to some degree ritual) character of ancient drama.”<sup>45</sup> One influential interpretation of the relationship between the ritual and dramatic aspects of Dionysian festival posits tragedy’s origin in mystery cults and choral initiation. Proponents of this view, such as Richard Seaford, argue that the Dionysian mysteries are described in Euripides’ *Bacchae* as an aitiology of the origin of tragedy itself.<sup>46</sup> The basis for this analysis is rooted primarily in the chorus of Maenads in Euripides’ *Bacchae* and the chorus of initiates in Aristophanes’ *Frogs*, as well as the relationship between the dithyramb and tragedy. As Kowalzig notes,

Dionysus’ chorus – the dithyramb – played an important part in mystery cult by virtue of the particular nature of the dithyrambic dance, just as Apollo’s *choros* – the paean – responded to certain aspects of Apollo’s persona. Choral dance may well be what relates the god to the mystic side of his cult and, perhaps also more widely, to his worship [...] what the choral ubiquity [in the *Bacchae*] suggests is that ‘initiation’ into Dionysiac rites is experienced through the *choros*: the entry into Dionysiac cult is when you start dancing yourself.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Barbara Kowalzig, “And Now All the World Shall Dance! Dionysus’ *Choroi* Between Drama and Ritual,” in *the Origins of Theatre in Ancient Greece and Beyond*, eds Eric Csapo and Margaret C. Miller (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 222. See also Oddone Longo, “The Theatre of the *Polis*,” in *Nothing to do with Dionysus? Athenian Drama in Its Social Context*, eds Winkler and Zeitlin (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), 16: “The original matrix for tragedy (and for comedy) is to be sought in choral action. But this carries us back to a stage in which there was as yet no clear separation into two groups – the community of actors (the chorus) and the community of spectators (the public). In the earliest performances there was no split or distinction between the stage area and the auditorium.”

<sup>46</sup> Kowalzig, “All the World Shall Dance,” 225; see also Richard Seaford, “Dionysiac Drama and the Dionysiac Mysteries,” *Classical Quarterly* 31, no. 2 (1981): 252-275.

<sup>47</sup> Kowalzig, “All the World Shall Dance,” 228-229. Cf. Anton Bierl, “Maenadism as Self-referential Choraliness in Euripides’ *Bacchae*,” in *Choral Mediations in Greek Tragedy*, eds Renaud Gagné and Marianne Govers Hopman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 215: “To introduce someone into the Dionysian cult is conceived as an initiation into Bacchic mysteries (21-2, 40) that coincide with dramatic choral dance in the realm of theatre.”

I follow this interpretation of the *Bacchae* and argue that Plato appropriated this idea in his construction of philosophy as a way of life, thus demonstrating that Plato's connections with tragedy run deeper than has been previously maintained.<sup>48</sup> As I will demonstrate next, Plato similarly links choral experience, analogized to the Socratic *elenchus* or philosophical dialectic, to a form of initiation into a mystery religion, particularly that of Dionysus, in his dialogues.

There are reasons to analyze the tragic chorus as the primary narrator-focalizer(s) of the dramatic action. First and foremost is the notion that the chorus mediates the dramatic action, not only from the mere physical fact that the chorus occupied the orchestral area between the *skēnē*, the stage of dramatic action, and the seating area of the audience, but also in that they react and perceive the events happening on stage and are thus potential models for how the extradiegetic audience should also react. In fact, the chorus members occupy a unique position in that they are both intradiegetic (a narrator or narrative situation within the narrated world) as regards the narrated world of the drama, and extradiegetic (a narrator or narrative situation outside of the narrated world) as regards their role as performers in a festival to Dionysus.<sup>49</sup> They are therefore capable of interacting with both the 'aristocratic' heroic protagonists on stage and the *hic et nunc* of the Athenian democratic audience.<sup>50</sup> This is analogous to the role that the narrators of Plato's dialogues play (excepting the literal physical/spatial separation), namely, in mediating the

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<sup>48</sup> What I do not aim to do in this analysis is to take a side on whether this is indeed reflective of the actual historical processes that may have constituted the relationship between the ritual occasion and dramatic context of tragedy in Athens. Indeed, one scholar cautions against attributing the origins of Athenian theatre and tragedy to Dionysian ritual. See Scott Scullion "Nothing to Do with Dionysus": Tragedy Misconceived as Ritual," *The Classical Quarterly* 52, no. 1 (2002): 135-6. This potential objection, however, regardless of its merits or whether it indeed poses a serious challenge to the popular interpretation of the connection between Dionysian ritual and the origins of drama, does not pose a serious threat to my argument. For it seems clear that at least some Athenian playwrights suggested or portrayed this as being the case within their own works, for instance in Euripides' *Bacchae* and Aristophanes' *Frogs*. Plato could therefore have been influenced by these characterizations of the origin of tragedy in his own poetic career regardless of its factual historicity.

<sup>49</sup> For these definitions of intra- and extra-diegetic, see Finkelberg, *the Gatekeeper*, 16.

<sup>50</sup> Calame, "Choral Polyphony," 37.

arguments of the ‘heroic’ (often aristocratic) protagonists through their unique perspectival vantage point and reacting to it in various ways, in turn modeling how the extradiegetic reader herself might (or perhaps should) respond. Thus, they are both intradiegetic as regards the narrated story as well as extradiegetic in mediating it to the (external as regards the narrative) reader of the dialogue herself. They are the reader’s first perspectival entry into the dramatic action.

On another narratological level, many tragic plays appear to contain a ‘choral plot’. Hopman argues that this is a frequent narrative strategy of Aeschylean tragedy, particularly the *Persians*, the *Suppliants* and the *Eumenides*. In each of these plays, “the chorus’ desire [...] triggers and organizes the action of the actors.”<sup>51</sup> On the other hand, Finkelberg notes that one of Plato’s fundamental strategies in narrativizing his dialogues is achieved through representing the philosophical narrator organizing and enacting important changes in the plot, often motivated by his desire to see the conversations followed through to their logical or narrative conclusion. Thus, when the titular interlocutor of the *Gorgias* does not want to speak with Socrates anymore, for instance, the narrator of that dialogue, Chaerophon, interjects to request that they continue the conversation.<sup>52</sup> This successfully leads them to continue their investigation rather than ending it prematurely. The plot or arguments of the dialogue are therefore furthered on account of the desire of the philosophical narrator to keep the *elenchus* going in a manner akin to Aeschylean choral emplotment. Finally, as has been mentioned and explored above, both choral activity and Socrates’ *elenchus* is depicted as a form of initiation into a cult, particularly as demonstrated in Euripides’

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<sup>51</sup> Marianne Govers Hopman, “Chorus, Conflict, and Closure in Aeschylus’ *Persians*,” in *Choral Mediations in Greek Tragedy* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2013), 68. Interestingly, this seems to be less common in Euripidean tragedy, which may in fact correspond to Aristotle’s complaint in the *Poetics* that Euripides was not an ideal tragic playwright insofar as he delegated the chorus to a more ornamental and less plot-involved aspect of the tragedy.

<sup>52</sup> For the *Gorgias* as a case study of Plato’s use of narrative text to further the plot of the dialogue, see Finkelberg, *The Gatekeeper*, 138-142.

*Bacchae*, demonstrating that there existed in the Athenian imagination a cultural connection between the tragic chorus, the dithyramb, and mystery cults concurrent with Socrates' own philosophical activities.

There are, however, several important differences between the philosophical narrator as a metaphorical chorus and actual choral activity in tragedy. The most obvious difference between these two amounts to the performative context: tragic choruses occur most famously within the context of a festival to Dionysus in Athens, namely the City Dionysia, whereas the philosophical narrator could partake in the Socratic *elenchus* anywhere, whether that is outside the city walls, in the bustling Athenian agora, in the gymnasium, or in an aristocratic private household. Similarly, the readers of the dialogues find themselves in a different context than the audience of a tragedy; the reading of the dialogues could occur, again, anywhere, and is therefore less connected to a public communal civic performance. One could for instance read or listen to a Platonic dialogue in the comfort of his own home, as do Terpsion and Euclides in the *Theaetetus*.

Furthermore, the fact that Plato's dialogues were perhaps intended to be read or listened to in a less organized festival and civic context, at least more so than the tragedies, suggests that the reader could read it according to her own leisure and at her own pace, and could go back to moments of interpretive difficulty that might not be afforded the audience of a tragedy. As a member of the audience in a tragic festival, there is no 'rewind' button or opportunity to ask the performers to go back several verses and perform it again. That Plato's dialogues differ from tragedy in this manner seems largely consistent with Plato's differentiation of philosophy from other primarily oral/aural forms of discourse, namely that those who practice philosophy can do so at their leisure time, where the possession of *scholia* is an integral characteristic of the



philosopher.<sup>53</sup> Plato's dialogues are therefore what he might take to be an improvement on the educative potential of tragedy, in that the reader could go back to a certain part of the dialogue if he had difficulty understanding and so take a more active part in his own learning.

Another difference between the metaphorical philosophical chorus and the tragic chorus in tragedy has to do with the nature of the narrator or narrators. First and foremost, the philosophical narrator does not sing and dance in the literal sense that the tragic *choreutēs* does. It should be noted, however, that *choreia* had a much wider semantic range for the ancient Greeks than it does for modern Western individuals. *Choreia* could include for the Greeks not only the more modern Western understanding of dance, but also a "military drill [...] or an academic procession, or a group of priests and acolytes celebrating the mass."<sup>54</sup> It should be noted, however, that any form of *choreia* was also usually accompanied by music (though this need not be the case). *Mousikē*, too, had a broader semantic range, and indeed Socrates in the *Phaedo* calls philosophy the *megistē mousikē* (*Phaedo*, 61a). Perhaps more distinctively, then, as Nussbaum points out in her analysis, the philosophical dialogue is cast in prose rather than verse, and, on her reading, therefore communicates with the rational rather than the emotional or appetitive aspects of the psyche. Nussbaum argues that Plato cast his dialogues in prose due to his beliefs about the deceptive quality of poetic verse, which is pleasant to listen to and therefore can deceive by 'drugging' or lulling the audience into a perceptual state in which they are unable to rationally and autonomously engage with the ideas being presented.<sup>55</sup> Instead of singing and dancing in the more literal sense, they engage in rational discussion and inquiry, or else observe rational discussion and inquiry, which

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<sup>53</sup> See Kathryn Morgan, "Plato," in *Time in Ancient Greek Literature: Studies in Ancient Greek Narrative, Volume 2*, eds Irene J. F de Jong and René Nünlist (Boston: Brill, 2007), 345: "Philosophic discourse is characterized by leisure and by measured progression through the topic at hand. Unlike the orator, the philosopher need not speak under the constraints of the water clock. His only responsibility is to the integrity of the argument."

<sup>54</sup> Glenn Morrow, *Plato's Cretan City* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1960), 305.

<sup>55</sup> Nussbaum, *Fragility*, 130.

habituates and encourages the reader to cultivate a deep love for *sophia*, that is, encourages her to become a true philosopher.

The final, and I take to be most important, difference between the philosophical chorus and the tragic chorus is that the tragic chorus represents a plurality of individuals, not only literally in that the chorus is comprised of a group of people, but also ideologically, in that each *choreutēs* could represent a different type of person. Thus, in Hopman's narratological reading of the choral odes in Aeschylus' *Persians* it is revealed that the chorus "[does] not reflect the perspective and ideas of a single entity, albeit a collective one. Rather, they combine a plurality of perspectives and voices, weaving the Elders' with others' views into plural, polyphonic, and multi-focalized songs."<sup>56</sup> Similarly,

the [choral] odes focus on a wide variety of objects, considering them from various degrees of proximity or distance, and activating the viewpoint or ideology of different character groups to whom the *choreutai* may or may not belong. As a result, seemingly incompatible ways of thinking, perceiving, or reacting, are united under the voice of a single performative entity.<sup>57</sup>

This also constitutes, on Hopman's reading, the ritual aspect of the chorus, namely that the chorus achieves "solidarity without consensus."<sup>58</sup> James Fernandez argued that the aim of ritual is the achievement of 'solidarity without consensus'. That is, the aim of ritual is the achievement of common understanding, even amidst notional disagreement or difference.<sup>59</sup> On the other hand and distinct from tragedy, Plato's philosophical narrator attempts to achieve both solidarity *and*

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<sup>56</sup> Hopman, "Chorus, Conflict, and Closure," 65.

<sup>57</sup> Hopman, "Chorus, Conflict, and Closure," 67.

<sup>58</sup> Hopman, "Chorus, Conflict, and Closure," 75.

<sup>59</sup> James W. Fernandez, "Symbolic Consensus in a Fang Reformatory Cult," *American Anthropologist* 67, no. 4 (1965): 904.

consensus between the ideologically conflict parties, with the ‘consensus’ often being achieved either as the mutual acknowledgement of *aporia* between the interlocutors in the earlier dialogues or by arriving at the consensus that virtue is worthwhile for its own sake in the middle- and late-period dialogues. Socrates tries to get the interlocutor’s various beliefs and opinions to internally inhere and agree with one another, such that their motivations and beliefs may be harmonized and reach such an internal consensus.

The ‘chorus’, in this case the narrator, of the philosophical dialogue is always a single person who is a member of Socrates’ philosophical circle. The aim of the Socratic *elenchus* is to eliminate internal and incompatible ways of thinking or perceiving in order to achieve a state of inner harmony and consistency between the various motivations of the soul.<sup>60</sup> This is one of the most important ways that the philosophical ‘chorus’ is importantly distinct from tragic chorality, and in fact supports Nussbaum’s conclusion that tragedy illuminated the irreducible and complex ends valued by human agents, while on the other hand the Socratic *elenchus* sought to eliminate these and replace them with the single end of *sophia* (and particularly the love of wisdom, *philosophia*) in order to ‘bind together’ the human soul into a consistent and unified whole. Wholeness and internal consistency seem to be above all characteristic of Plato’s concept of divinity, particularly the Platonic forms, and thus by engaging in the philosophical *elenchus* one imitates and thereby worships the divine. On the other hand, the worship of Dionysus as presented by the tragedians is instead rooted in particular ends that are often conflictual. To take one example, the conflict of Sophocles’ *Antigone* has to do with the conflicting and plural values or priorities one ought to place on one’s obedience to civic laws, romantic entanglements, religious beliefs, and

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<sup>60</sup> And not, as one scholar has importantly demonstrated, to logically *disprove* the proposed definitions or arguments: see Robert B. Talisse, “Misunderstanding Socrates,” *Arion: A Journal of Humanities and the Classics, Third Series* 9, no. 3 (Winter 2002): 5.

family. Thus, Plato's philosophical choruses aim to represent and thus worship a very different conception of the divine than that of the tragedian's, which is examined in greater detail in section IV. Nonetheless, Dionysus and the 'true Bacchants' play an important role in Plato's formulation of philosophy.

### III.2 Philosophical Initiation

There are suggestions that those who practice philosophy are in some sense 'possessed' by a philosophic frenzy or mania and belong to an exclusive group of people throughout Plato's corpus. Each of these examples seem to tie the philosophical character to the divine, particularly a realm connected to that of Dionysus. In the *Phaedo*, for instance, Socrates claims that there are very few true *Bacchoi* that exist, in a passage worth quoting at length:

In truth, moderation and courage and justice are a purging away [κάθαρσίς] of all such things, and wisdom itself is a kind of cleansing or purification [καθαρμός]. It is likely that those who established the mystic rites [τὰς τελετὰς] for us were not inferior persons [φαῦλοί] but were speaking in riddles [αἰνίττεσθαι] long ago when they said that whoever arrives in the underworld uninitiated and unsanctified [ἀμύητος καὶ ἀτέλεστος] will wallow in the mire, whereas he who arrives there purified and initiated [ὁ δὲ κεκαθαρμένος τε καὶ τετελεσμένος] will dwell with the gods. There are indeed, as those concerned with the mysteries say, many who carry the thyrsus but the Bacchants [βάκχοι] are few. These latter are, in my opinion, no other than those who have practiced philosophy in the right way [οἱ πεφιλοσοφηκότες ὀρθῶς]. I have in my life left nothing undone in order to be counted among these as far as possible, as I have been eager to be in every way. Whether my eagerness was right and we accomplished anything shall, I think, know for certain in a short time, god willing, on arriving yonder. This is my defense [ἀπολοῦμαι], Simmias

and Cebes, that I am likely to be right to leave you and my masters here without resentment or complaint, believing that there, as here, I shall find good masters and good friends. If my defense is more convincing to you than to the Athenian jury, it will be well (*Phaedo*, 69c-69e).<sup>61</sup>

This passage is remarkable for several reasons, not least of which is Socrates' claim that the 'true' *Bacchoi* are *orthos*, 'correct', philosophers, as well as Socrates' use of the language of *katharsis* and initiation. Scholars have noted that Plato describes 'seeing', that is, being able to comprehend with the metaphorical mind's eye, the Platonic forms, the highest and perhaps only things that have a claim to truly 'be', with the language of mystery cults and initiation.<sup>62</sup> It is further suggested from Plato's dialogues that being able to comprehend these forms in life would enable one to have a happy afterlife, and furthermore that those who imitate the internal consistency and harmonious of the forms become 'like god', and thus become immortal, just as initiation into these various mystery cults came with the promise of obtaining a better afterlife.<sup>63</sup>

Furthermore, Socrates uses the language of *ainisso* when describing the riddling language of the Pythian priestess' oracle at Delphi in the *Apology*, a word which is likewise used of the

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<sup>61</sup> τὸ δ' ἀληθὲς τῶ ὄντι ἢ κάθαρσις τις τῶν τοιούτων πάντων καὶ ἡ σωφροσύνη καὶ ἡ δικαιοσύνη καὶ ἀνδρεία, καὶ αὐτὴ ἡ φρόνησις μὴ καθαρισμός τις ἢ. καὶ κινδυνεύουσι καὶ οἱ τὰς τελετὰς ἡμῖν οὗτοι καταστήσαντες οὐ φαῦλοί τινες εἶναι, ἀλλὰ τῶ ὄντι πάλαί αἰνίττεσθαι ὅτι ὃς ἂν ἀμύητος καὶ ἀτέλεστος εἰς Ἄϊδου ἀφίκηται ἐν βορβόρῳ κείσεται, ὁ δὲ κεκαθαρισμένος τε καὶ τετελεσμένος ἐκεῖσε ἀφικόμενος μετὰ θεῶν οἰκήσει. εἰσὶν γὰρ δὴ, ὡς φασὶν οἱ περὶ τὰς τελετὰς, 'ναρθηκοφόροι' μὲν πολλοί, βάκχοι δὲ τε παῦροι.' οὗτοι δ' εἰσὶν κατὰ τὴν ἐμὴν δόξαν οὐκ ἄλλοι ἢ οἱ πεφιλοσοφηκότες ὀρθῶς. ὣν δὴ καὶ ἐγὼ κατὰ γὰρ τὸ δυνατόν οὐδὲν ἀπέλιπον ἐν τῶ βίῳ ἀλλὰ παντὶ τρόπῳ προθυμήθην γενέσθαι: εἰ δ' ὀρθῶς προθυμήθην καὶ τι ἠνύσαμεν, ἐκεῖσε ἐλθόντες τὸ σαφὲς εἰσόμεθα, ἂν θεὸς ἐθέλη, ὀλίγον ὕστερον, ὡς ἐμοὶ δοκεῖ. ταῦτ' οὖν ἐγώ, ἔφη, ὦ Σιμμία τε καὶ Κέβης, ἀπολογοῦμαι, ὡς εἰκότως ὑμᾶς τε ἀπολείπων καὶ τοὺς ἐνθάδε δεσπότης οὐ χαλεπῶς φέρω οὐδ' ἀγανακτῶ, ἠγούμενος κάκει οὐδὲν ἦττον ἢ ἐνθάδε δεσπότης τε ἀγαθοῖς ἐντεύξεσθαι καὶ εταίρους: τοῖς δὲ πολλοῖς ἀπιστίαν παρέχει: εἴ τι οὖν ὑμῖν πιθανώτερός εἰμι ἐν τῇ ἀπολογίᾳ ἢ τοῖς Ἀθηναίων δικασταῖς, εὖ ἂν ἔχοι.

<sup>62</sup> See Andrea Nightingale, *Philosophy and Religion in Plato's Dialogues* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 19-23. For a detailed account of Plato's use of the language of mystery cults and initiation, see also Bianca M. Dinkelaar, "Plato and the Language of Mysteries: Orphic/Pythagorean and Eleusinian Motifs and Register in Ten Dialogues," *Mnemosyne* 73, no. 1 (2020): 36-62.

<sup>63</sup> For instance, *Phaedrus* 248e-249c.

language of mystery cults. Given that the dramatic setting of the *Apology* is the end of Socrates' life, the fact that Socrates' divine mission as described in the *Apology* is an attempt to understand the riddle of the oracle is aligned with the initiation and rites of a mystery cult in the *Phaedo* (*Apology*, 21b4). Similarly, Socrates' deliberate use of the word *phauloi* to describe those who laid down the mysteries recalls the many times that Socrates himself and other philosophers are said to be *phaulos* or comical, which is thought to be opposite to the characters depicted in tragedy, as well as the clever (*deinos*) and wise (*sophos*) sophists, Socrates' intellectual opponents in verbal combat.<sup>64</sup> Plato therefore likens philosophy, particularly Socrates' method and the activity of the *elenchus*, to a form of initiation into a mystery cult, particularly one devoted to Dionysus.

The reference to the Bacchantes in the *Phaedo* is similarly present in Plato's middle-period dialogue, the *Phaedrus*, when Socrates enumerates the various forms of divine mania that the gods grant to humankind. Mania is closely associated with Dionysus and his maenads, frenzied women who were enthused by the god and compelled by this frenzy to leave the domestic sphere, the socially ordained *topos* of the typical Athenian aristocratic Greek woman, and engage in various orgiastic rites in the woods in honour of the god. In the *Phaedrus*, Socrates describes the fourth type of mania being specifically connected to Bacchic frenzy: "a third type of possession by the Muses is mania, which grasps the tender and pure soul, waking it up and inspiring in it a Bacchic frenzy [ἐκβακχέουσα] for songs [ὠδὰς] and for other production [ποίησιν], ordering the myriad works of the ancients and instructing [παιδεύει] those of the following generations" (245a, lightly modified). The Greek verb ἐκβακχέω has Bacchus as its root, meaning 'to excite to Bacchic frenzy'. Euripides' uses this term in his *Troïades*, however, interestingly, not of Bacchus or

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<sup>64</sup> See Nancy Worman, *Abusive Mouths in Classical Athens* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 153: "Plato often uses these terms (i.e., *phaulos*, *katagelastos/geloios*) to frame Socrates' interactions with sophists (actual or envisioned), which points to a purposeful appropriation of comic discourse around the depiction of professional speakers and their notorious critic."

Dionysus inciting people with frenzy but rather *Apollo*: “Had not Apollo turned your wits to maenadic revelry, you would not for nothing have sent my chiefs with such ominous predictions forth on their way (407-410, trans. E. P. Coleridge).<sup>65</sup> In the history of scholarship on the relationship between Apollo and Dionysus in tragedy, Nietzsche argued that they represented two sides of aesthetic experience and were engendered in equal measure in Greek tragedy, namely the Dionysian and the Apolline: “an enormous opposition [...] between the Apolline art of the image-maker or sculptor [...] and the imageless art of music, which is that of Dionysos.”<sup>66</sup> Indeed, Dionysus actually shared Apollo’s panhellenic sanctuary at Delphi, suggesting already in antiquity a close relationship between the two, and one Attic vase painting depicts Dionysus on one side of the pot and Apollo on the other, suggesting their opposing but importantly connected spheres.<sup>67</sup> As we will see later, Socrates interprets his own divine mission as being given to him by Apollo, already connecting his unique practice of philosophy to Athenian civic religion.

All these references in Plato’s philosophy may have been inspired by the so-called Dionysian mysteries. The prevailing opinion seems to be that the Dionysian mysteries emerged as an echo or imitation of the Eleusinian mysteries, based upon the latter’s popularity and success.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> εἰ μή σ’ Ἀπόλλων ἐξεβάκχευεν φρένας, οὗ τᾶν ἀμισθὶ τοὺς ἐμοὺς στρατηλάτας τοιαῖσδε φήμαις ἐξέπεμπες ἄν χθονός.

<sup>66</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy and Other Writings*, trans. Ronald Speirs (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 14.

<sup>67</sup> For instance, the Amsterdam krater. See Milette Gaifman, “Theologies of Statues in Classical Greek Art,” in *Theologies of Ancient Greek Religion*, eds Esther Eidinow, Julia Kindt, and Robin Osborne (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 265-7: “The Amsterdam krater also reflects upon the complex relationship between Apollo and Dionysus at Delphi. Although not identical, the two gods resemble each other in appearance, dress and attitude; they share size, long curls and exposed torso. Both have a mantle and a distinctive crown and both tilt their head to the side. While Dionysus is in the company of at least two followers, Apollo has at least one female companion, probably Artemis. The Apolline and the Dionysiac are presented as two comparable counterparts at Delphi. On the krater, the Apolline and the Dionysiac belong to the same space, yet they cannot be seen together because of their positions on the pot’s surface. Consequently, the gods’ spheres emerge as two facets of the same holy site. Both realms are filled with music, although the sounds are not the same; one is fused with the beats of a tambourine, and the other with the strums of a divine lyre.”

<sup>68</sup> Sara Iles Johnston, “The Myth of Dionysus,” in *Ritual Texts of the Afterlife*, eds Fritz Graf and Sarah Iles Johnston (London: Routledge, 2013), 73: “the Eleusinian Mysteries were already thriving at the time that our myth and cult were developing; they undoubtedly served as an inspiration and perhaps even as a specific model for our bricoleur.”

Indeed, evidence has linked the Orphic mysteries to the Dionysian mysteries, with one ‘Orphic’ gold tablet explicitly stating the *Bacchoi* as being part of the initiated. An ‘Orphic’ (Bacchic?) gold tablet found lying on the chest of a skeleton in the cyst-grave of a women dating to around 400 BCE explicitly mentions Bacchic initiates: “And they will declare you to the Subterranean [ὕποχθόνιος] King, and they will assign you to drink from the Lake of Memory. And you, too, having drunk, will go along the sacred road on which other famous initiates [μύσται] and *Bacchoi* [Βάχχοι] travel (1 *Hipponian*, 13-16, trans. Johnston, modified).” Here there is a striking commonality in the language that both Socrates in the *Phaedo* and the author of the tablet use to describe the Bacchic initiates. The underlying association between both Plato’s eschatology and that of the Dionysian mysteries was the belief that the initiated would enjoy a happy afterlife, as opposed to the rather bleaker picture of the underworld offered through the epics of Homer. This initiation granted the initiate access to knowledge of how to navigate the underworld. Similarly, Plato’s description of the underworld (especially the myth of Er in *Republic X*) articulates the necessity of practicing philosophy in life so that one will know what to do when their soul reaches the afterlife, suggesting the influence of mystery cults on the development of his philosophy.

The language of philosophical frenzy or being a part of a philosophical circle is similarly present in the especially Dionysian Platonic dialogue, the *Symposium*, in which Alkibiades, dressed in the guise of a satyr, or indeed Dionysus himself,<sup>69</sup> claims to the rest of the symposiasts that

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<sup>69</sup> See Kenneth Dover, ed., *Cambridge Greek and Latin Classics: Plato. Symposium* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 160; see also Frisbee Sheffield, *Plato’s Symposium, the Ethics of Desire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 184: “Alcibiades arrives crowned with ivy and violets, drunk and supported by a train of flute girls. He appears as the very embodiment of the Dionysiac forces which, although appropriate to the traditional symposium, have been excluded from this evening’s entertainment [...] Alcibiades is appropriately embodied as Dionysus because he is to reintroduce those elements of mortal life denigrated as ‘mortal trash’ by the distinctively other-worldly philosophical *eros* depicted by Socrates.”



you know what people say about being bitten – that you’ll only talk about it with your fellow victims: only they will understand the pain and forgive you for all the things it made you do. Well, something rather painful and indeed even perhaps the most painful has bitten me in my most sensitive part – I mean my heart, or my soul, or whatever you want to call it, which has been struck and bitten by the *logoi* in philosophy, whose grip on young and eager souls is much more vicious than a viper’s and makes them do the most amazing things. Now, all you people here, Phaedrus, Agathon, Eryximachus, Pausanias, Aristodemus, Aristophanes – I need not mention Socrates himself – and all the rest, have all shared in the madness, the Bacchic frenzy of philosophy [πάντες γὰρ κεκοινωνήκατε τῆς φιλοσόφου μανίας τε καὶ βακχείας]. And that’s why you will hear the rest of my story; you will understand and forgive both what I did then and what I say now. As for the house slaves and for anyone else who is not an initiate [βέβηλός], my story’s not for you: block your ears (218a-c, lightly modified)!<sup>70</sup>

Here again we see the ‘mania’ of philosophy, as well as the reference to Bacchus, being constitutive of philosophical experience, and indeed one that is particularly able to impact young souls. In addition, the language that Alkibiades here is that of initiation – only those who have similarly been ‘bitten’ by philosophy can hear his *muthos*, because only they will be able to understand it. Alkibiades uses the word βέβηλός to refer to the uninitiated. According to LSJ, the word βέβηλός is used in a Sophoclean fragment as an equivalent to ἀμύητος (Soph., *Fr.* 154, 570).

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<sup>70</sup> φασὶ γὰρ πού τινα τοῦτο παθόντα οὐκ ἐθέλειν λέγειν οἷον ἦν πλὴν τοῖς δεδηγμένοις, ὡς μόνοις γνωσομένοις τε καὶ συγγνωσομένοις εἰ πᾶν ἐτόλμα δρᾶν τε καὶ λέγειν ὑπὸ τῆς οὐδύνης. ἐγὼ οὖν δεδηγμένος τε ὑπὸ ἀλγεινοτέρου καὶ τὸ ἀλγεινότατον ὧν ἂν τις δηχθεῖη—τὴν καρδίαν γὰρ ἢ ψυχὴν ἢ ὅτι δεῖ αὐτὸ ὀνομάσαι πληγεῖς τε καὶ δηχθεῖς ὑπὸ τῶν ἐν φιλοσοφίᾳ λόγων, οἳ ἔχονται ἐχίδνης ἀγριώτερον, νέου ψυχῆς μὴ ἀφυοῦς ὅταν λάβωνται, καὶ ποιοῦσι δρᾶν τε καὶ λέγειν ὅτιοῦν—καὶ ὁρῶν αὖ Φαίδρους, Ἀγάθωνας, Ἐρυξιμάχους, Πausανίας, Ἀριστοδήμους τε καὶ Ἀριστοφάνους: Σωκράτη δὲ αὐτὸν τί δεῖ λέγειν, καὶ ὅσοι ἄλλοι; πάντες γὰρ κεκοινωνήκατε τῆς φιλοσόφου μανίας τε καὶ βακχείας—διὸ πάντες ἀκούσεσθε: συγγνώσεσθε γὰρ τοῖς τε τότε πραχθεῖσι καὶ τοῖς νῦν λεγομένοις. οἱ δὲ οἰκέται, καὶ εἴ τις ἄλλος ἐστὶν βέβηλός τε καὶ ἄγροικος, πύλας πάνυ μεγάλας τοῖς ὤσιν ἐπίθεσθε...

Alkibiades telling those who are not initiated to ‘close up their ears’ and not listen to his *muthos* may also be a reference to Alkibiades’ historical accusations of staging a mock initiation of the Eleusinian mysteries to uninitiated individuals.<sup>71</sup> As such, Alkibiades describes Socrates’ company and *logoi* in terms of initiation into a mystery cult.<sup>72</sup> Given that Alkibiades was a part of Socrates’ philosophical circle, Plato seems to be suggesting that the Athenians saw Socrates and his followers as engaging in secret mystic rites that were subversive to the overall civic community.

Perhaps more importantly, Alkibiades is here suggesting that philosophy, and in fact not merely philosophy but the *logoi* ‘in philosophy’ (τῶν ἐν φιλοσοφίᾳ λόγων), cause people to do and say things they otherwise wouldn’t. Alkibiades’ even goes as far to suggest that Socrates’ *logoi* are themselves divine, but nonetheless disguise themselves as instead being γέλοιος, comical or humorous, much like how the Silenus statues are vulgar and comical on the outside but hold images of gods inside them (*Symposium* 215b1-d1; 221d10-e222a10).<sup>73</sup> This demonstrates that Plato was attempting to subvert the cultural representation of philosophy from its comical associations and instead align it with a serious and important way of life, more specifically a divine way of life, and thus align it more closely to the subject matter of tragedy.

Finally, there is an intriguing reference in Plato’s *Republic* which has been argued by Pierre Destrée to reveal Socrates’ circle of initiates to all equally partake in a shared or common

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<sup>71</sup> For an excellent account of Alkibiades’ religious impiety, particularly his profaning of the mysteries and the Herms, see Nancy Evans, *Civic Rites: Democracy and Religion in Ancient Athens* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010), 146-69.

<sup>72</sup> Sheffield, *Plato’s Symposium*, 191: “Alcibiades goes on to reveal the details of his attempted seduction of Socrates as if he were revealing the highest mysteries.” See also Fernando Santoro, “Dionysian Plato in the Symposium,” in *Psychology and Ontology in Plato* (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2019), 15: “There are at least three characters in the *Symposium* who serve as voices of Dionysus: Aristophanes, Diotima, and Alcibiades. From them, we recognize the three stages of an Orphic initiation: firstly, the symbolic interpretation; secondly, the contemplative asceticism; and finally, the epoptic revelation. Plato built the symposium scene not only as a convivial party but also as a teletical, initiatory rite.”

<sup>73</sup> Indeed, Alkibiades begins his speech by likening Socrates to the statues of Marsyas who look ugly on the outside but are revealed to have gods inside them and ends it by realizing that Socrates’ *logoi* are exactly the same, an artful example of one of Plato’s favourite literary strategies, namely ring-composition.

*daimōnion*, the sign or divine voice related to the Delphic Apollo that comes to Socrates to warn him against doing certain things, and particularly against taking on certain disciples. As Destrée notes, scholars often take Socrates' *daimōnion* to be uniquely confined to his own experience alone on account of a puzzling passage in *Republic* VI: "Then there remains, Adeimantus, only a very small group who consort with philosophy in a way that's worthy of her [...] my own case [τὸ δ' ἡμέτερον] is hardly worth mentioning – my daimōnic sign – because it has happened to no one before me, or to only a very few" (VI.496a8-c2).<sup>74</sup> Socrates strikingly uses the first-person plural possessive pronoun ἡμέτερον when describing his *daimōnion*. Socrates' use of the first person plural possessive pronoun has been interpreted as a plural form with a singular meaning. Destrée disproves this claim by arguing that this only happens in Greek with verbs, not pronouns, and by pointing to the fact that just a few lines earlier Socrates "used the same word as an adjective to refer to 'our friend Theages' (VI.496b7), as every translator takes it, where the plural cannot but include Socrates and Adeimantus [...] and perhaps the Socratic circle as well. Therefore it would be particularly strange that at 496c2-3 Plato uses the plural of the very same word to refer to Socrates alone."<sup>75</sup> Thus, as Destrée concludes, the way that this passage has often been translated by scholars is flawed; it should not be Socrates' own individual case alone, but should rather be translated as 'our' case, that is, the case for those who have been 'initiated' into the group of people who "consort with philosophy in a way that's worthy of her [κατ' ἀξίαν ὀμιλούντων φιλοσοφία]" (VI.496a10). Indeed, Socrates claims that those who do engage in philosophy know "how sweet and blessed a possession it is" [ὡς ἡδὺν καὶ μακάριον τὸ κτήμα] in contrast to the "mania of the many" (VI.496c). Socrates concludes that under unideal political conditions the best-case scenario

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<sup>74</sup> τὸ δ' ἡμέτερον οὐκ ἄξιον λέγειν, τὸ δαιμόνιον σημεῖον: ἢ γὰρ πού τινι ἄλλῳ ἢ οὐδενὶ τῶν ἐμπροσθεν γέγονεν.

<sup>75</sup> Pierre Destrée, "The "Daimōnion" and the Philosophical Mission — should the Divine Sign Remain Unique to Socrates?" *Apeiron* 38, no. 2 (2005): 65-66.

that the true philosopher can do to achieve happiness is to practice justice and stay out of political life.

What is interesting about Socrates' reference to his *daimōnion* is that it is, in both Xenophon and Plato, often described as a deity that tells Socrates whether he should associate with certain young men; in a word, whether he ought to become their informal teacher or mentor. It is tempting to think of this voice as Socrates' justification for taking on an apprentice or initiate into the philosophical circle. That Socrates was imparting a form of teaching or education that was linked to his philosophical mission may further help to explain Socrates' charges both of impiety and corrupting the youth, according to Destrée. As he aptly notes in the *Euthyphro*, Socrates' *daimōnion* alone does not seem to be the *direct* cause of his charges, but rather the fact that it was encouraging him to pass on his teachings, particularly to the youth, hence Euthyphro's somewhat cryptic claim that the "Athenians are not much concerned if they think someone is clever, so long as he does not teach his own knowledge [σοφίας]. But if they think that he is making other people clever like himself, they get angry" (*Euthyphro*, 3c6-d1). It was not the worship of a unique deity that was morally objectionable. Socrates' *daimōnion* was perceived as subversive because of the form of worship his *daimōnion* demanded, namely, the philosophical mission of cross-examining those who believed they knew something of value; that is to say, to practice and spend one's time doing 'philosophy' and having conversations about how best to live one's life. Socrates frequently references how demanding a task this is in the *Apology* and how it has even led to his impoverishment and inability to participate in the Athenian governmental system. This sentiment would be seen as a seriously damaging moral to impart on aristocratic youth in 5<sup>th</sup> century democratic Athens, precisely because Socrates was encouraging them to leave political life and

spend time doing philosophy instead, which naturally led to Socrates' charges and eventual execution.

The above references suggest that philosophy has close connections and affinities to the realm of Dionysus and especially the mystery cults associated with him. Dionysus in turn is the primordial and archetypal leader of choruses and as such is the god of drama and especially tragedy. These connections, I argue, suggest that Plato's relationship with tragedy runs deeper than a mere parody or attempt to differentiate philosophy from other dominant forms of discourse, but has a deeper ontological, religious, and political dimension. Plato wanted to retain the tragic and direct dialogue form as a means of ethical habituation. The reader of the dialogue is thus able to 'practice' how to be virtuous through mimesis, by engaging in the test of encountering alien *logoi*, or arguments and beliefs that are contrary to Plato's notion of philosophical truth. Nonetheless, the philosophical dialogue, as Finkelberg has shown, is always mediated through a philosophical character, either Socrates or someone who imitates Socrates, which allows for the reader to still practice virtue in the way that is important for Plato's idea of moral and ethical habituation through *mimēsis*. Plato is therefore the poet that Socrates is looking for in the *Republic*, "a more austere and less pleasure-giving poet and storyteller, one who would imitate the speech of a decent person and who would tell his stories in accordance with the patterns we laid down when we first undertook the education of [the] guardians" (*Republic* III.398a10-b3, lightly modified).

Nevertheless, Plato is still a dramatist, and his dialogues are importantly influenced and continuous with the ritual and performative function of the tragic chorus, the primary mediator of the tragic action that offered a model for how to respond to conflict. The important difference between Plato's narrators and the tragic narrators, however, lies in the dialogue form being able to be read and consulted at one's own leisure and pace, and acting as a better pedagogical tool than

the tragic performances, and also in that the Socratic *elenchus* or form of ‘chorality’ seeks to unify the different ends and motivations of the soul and funnel it solely towards the love of wisdom (*sophia*), in turn mirroring the unified and consistent Platonic ideas of divinity and the forms. On the other hand, the plurality of the tragic choral voice demonstrates the irreducibility of human ends, leading to tragic conflict and is representative of a flawed vision of the gods as changeable and inconsistent, on Plato’s view.

The institution and place that above all else was known for facilitating this kind of testing was, indeed, the symposium. Angus Bowie argues in particular that “the symposium functions [...] as an institution where values, political and moral, public and private, were tested.”<sup>76</sup> Thus, I argue that the *Laws* passage about the use of *symposia* under the sober and good leader (i.e., the philosophical narrator of the dialogue) allows for just such a test of character. The aim is that the reader of Plato’s dialogues eventually be deemed worthy of being initiated into the mysteries of philosophy – the knowledge and understanding and internalization of the forms – in a way that is quite like the rise in popularity of mystery cults such as the Eleusinian and Orphic mysteries. Thus, Plato’s dialogues are cast as tragedies, which are the domain of Dionysus, as a means of initiation into the life of virtue and *eudaimonia*. It is only in this way that one can truly become virtuous, through ‘practicing’ or testing oneself. This further explains the Athenian’s claim that the lawmakers are the finest writers of tragedies, and that the *Laws* (and indeed most of Plato’s dialogues themselves) are the finest works that a young person can read.

#### IV. THE CHARACTERIZATION OF TRAGEDY

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<sup>76</sup> Angus Bowie, “Thinking with Drinking: Wine and the Symposium in Aristophanes,” *Journal of Hellenic Studies* 117: (1997): 1-2. See also Fiona Hobden, *The Symposium in Ancient Greek Society and Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 6.

What is ‘tragedy’, on Plato’s view? Unlike Aristotle, who offers a formal definition of tragedy, we are not given that luxury in any one of Plato’s dialogues.<sup>77</sup> Thus, to understand what the Athenian means when he says that the *Laws* itself is the ‘finest and truest tragedy’, and that the lawmaker is himself a writer of tragedies, it is necessary to review the different contexts and characterizations of tragedy in Plato’s corpus. As Wiles aptly notes,

[Plato] describes tragedy as it formally and traditionally was, a contest of choruses on the occasion of a sacrifice to Dionysus, held in the precinct of the god. Plato, unlike Aristotle, grew up in Athens and experienced fifth-century drama. He conceives tragedy as an event rather than a text. He would have danced publicly in choruses [...] and would have appreciated the skill and stamina of his peers who danced the chorus [...] Such experiences, far removed from the experience of reading texts, would have shaped his perception of Athenian tragedy as in the first instance a choral mode.<sup>78</sup>

I would add to Wiles’ evaluation that tragedy as a distinctively choral mode similarly influenced Plato’s construction of the philosophical dialogue. The mediating role of the chorus is occupied analogously in Plato by the mediating role of the philosophical narrator but is distinct from choral mediation in that the philosophical narrator can play a more active role in his own learning from the dramatic ‘action’ or, in this case, argumentation, and in that the philosophical narrator aims to unify disparate beliefs rather than magnify them. My analysis of the characterization of tragedy will act as a complement to the way in which Plato characterizes philosophy and the philosophical

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<sup>77</sup> “Tragedy is, then, a representation of an action that is heroic and complete and of a certain magnitude—by means of language enriched with all kinds of ornament, each used separately in the different parts of the play: it represents men in action and does not use reportage, and through pity and fear it effects relief to these and similar emotions. ἔστιν οὖν τραγωδία μίμησις πράξεως σπουδαίας [25] καὶ τελείας μέγεθος ἐχούσης, ἠδυσμένῳ λόγῳ χωρὶς ἐκάστῳ τῶν εἰδῶν ἐν τοῖς μορίοις, δρώντων καὶ οὐ δι’ ἀπαγγελίας, δι’ ἐλέου καὶ φόβου περαίνουσα τὴν τῶν τοιούτων παθημάτων κάθαρσιν. λέγω δὲ ἠδυσμένον μὲν λόγον τὸν ἔχοντα ῥυθμὸν καὶ ἁρμονίαν [καὶ μέλος], τὸ δὲ χωρὶς τοῦ [30] εἶδει τὸ διὰ μέτρων ἔνια μόνον περαίνεσθαι καὶ πάλιν ἕτερα διὰ μέλους. (Aristotle, *Poetics*, 1449b, *Perseus* translation).

<sup>78</sup> David Wiles, *Tragedy in Athens: Performance Space and Theatrical Meaning* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 87-8.

life on the other hand, particularly as embodied in the unique narrative perspective of his philosophical narrators and their view of the events occurring in the dialogue.

The study and comparison of the different dramatic and argumentative contexts in which tragedy is mentioned in Plato's corpus reveals that Plato conceptualized tragedy as a performative and poetic medium that is produced both for the sake of and by individuals who suffer various affections (*pathea*), is especially 'democratic', and is in some manner connected to religious practice and belief, usually through the relationship that the poet holds with the gods or characterization of gods in his work. These three facets of tragedy are in fact inseparably linked, namely, its democratic, ritual/religious, and affective qualities. Nevertheless, tragedy and the tragedians are sometimes ironically, sometimes less ironically, granted a degree of cultural and political currency and authority, complicating the overall image of tragedy as conceived by Plato as an inherently damaging ethical medium. This will be important in differentiating tragedy from philosophy, which is above all characterized by an individual who has learned to be temperate in that he has managed to successfully bind together the disparate elements of his own soul such that his actions and words operate in a seamless harmony.

#### **IV.1 The *Apology* – Socrates' and Dionysus' Tragic Reversals**

##### IV.1.i The Narrators: Socrates and The Athenian Jurors

If we are to take the *Apology* as belonging to the earliest period of Plato's poetic production, as a sketch and representation of Socrates' trial before the Athenian *dikasts* before he was executed on charges of impiety and corrupting the youth, then this is the first time in the corpus that the actual word *tragōidia* occurs. Some have argued that the *Apology* of Socrates is not truly a dialogue.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> See, for instance, Vittorio Hösle, *The Philosophical Dialogue: A Poetics and a Hermeneutics* (2006), 18.



Rather, it is a representation of Socrates' defense speech, a quasi-historical recording of how Socrates defended himself against charges of impiety and corrupting the youth. Application of the narratological concept of focalization is indeed difficult when it comes to such speeches, so much so that Finkelberg does not include the *Apology* in the list of dialogues she analyzes and narratively categorizes in her study. Similarly, Irene J.F. De Jong argues that oratory is a non-narrative genre but can have narrative elements – “the oratorical ‘I’ becomes a primary narrator at the moment he turns to the mythical or historical part of the [...] narration, just as his addressees become primary narratees.”<sup>80</sup>

I would argue, however, that the *Apology* should be seen as a narrative along with the remainder of Plato's corpus, and, perhaps counter-intuitively, a narrative that is experienced primarily through the eyes of the Athenian jury. As such, the macro-focalization of the dialogue comes not from Socrates' perspective, but rather from the perspective of the Athenian jury focalizing him. In narratological terms, the primary narrator of the *Apology* is an intradiegetic (story-internal) implicit narrator-observer – the democratic Athenian jury – in a manner like the role of Chaerophon in the *Gorgias*, Laches in the *Laches*, Protarchus in the *Philebus*, and Eudicus in the *Hippias Minor*, all of whom are implicit narrator focalizers who are not Socrates and are the observers rather than truly active participants in the dramatic ‘action’ or arguments.<sup>81</sup>

Now, this of course does not exclude the fact that Socrates also focalizes within the *Apology*, but his role is that of an internal secondary narrator-focalizer, akin to Odysseus' internal secondary narration to the Phaeacians in the *Odyssey*. In that case in particular, Odysseus is not the macro-focalizer or narrator of the narrative – it is the Muses. Similarly, in Plato's *Apology* the macro-focalization and single point of perception that mediates the speech as a whole is not that

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<sup>80</sup> De Jong, “Narratology in Classics,” 33.

<sup>81</sup> Finkelberg, *The Gatekeeper*, 63-70.

of Socrates, but the Athenian jurors. It is perhaps intuitive that they would be the implicit narrator-focalizers, for this is how Plato himself would have experienced and related the speech to others, namely as an observer and member of the Athenian jury. Indeed, the *Apology* is Plato's only work in which he is present as a (albeit non-speaking) character in the work, signalled to the reader when Socrates points out his presence in the audience (*Apology* 34a). In a sense Plato is therefore a member of this group of Athenians as one of the focalizers of the dialogue.

There is some evidence that suggests that Plato wrote the *Apology* as a narrative told from the point of view of the Athenian jury. Firstly, the address of Socrates' first line is, famously, "how *you* [ὅμεις], Athenian men, have been affected [πεπόνθατε] by my accusers, I do not know" (17a). This emphatic and punctuated use of the personal pronoun ὅμεις, as well as the fact that the Athenians are being affected or suffering something (πεπόνθατε), suggests from the outset that the narrative is being cast in the perceptual and emotive experience of the Athenian jurors. The focus of the first line is not on how *Socrates* has been affected by being put on trial, but rather how the jury feels about it, suggesting that, from the outset, Plato did not intend him to be the primary focalizer. Instead, it seems fairer to say that Socrates is the focalizee, that is, the one being focalized. A few lines later, Socrates declares that "you [ὅμεις, noting again the emphatic personal pronoun] will hear [ἀκούσεσθε] from me the whole truth, not, by Zeus, Athenian men, in embroidered words [...] but you will hear [ἀκούσεσθε] things spoken at random and expressed in the first words that come to mind, for I put my trust in the justice of what I say, and let none of you think [προσδοκησάτω] at all otherwise" (17b-c, lightly adapted). In narratology, one of the indicators of focalization is revealed by examining usages of perceptual language and identifying which character(s) are described as perceiving the events of the story. Other examples of this kind of narrative focalization are used by Plato, particularly in the *Philebus*, where Protarchus' role as

the implicit narrator of the dialogue is repeatedly revealed through “expressions of cognition and perception.”<sup>82</sup> Indeed, Protarchus in the *Philebus* is one such example of the kind of narrator the Athenian jurors are in the *Apology*, namely, an implicit intradiegetic narrator-observer. Thus, the language of προσδοκάω and ἀκούω, both cognitive and perceptual verbs, introduces from the start that it is the Athenians through whose ‘eyes’ Socrates’ speech is ultimately mediated to the external narratee, the reader herself. Often, narratorial remarks in Plato’s dialogues function as a kind of pedagogical scaffold for the reader. Thus, Protarchus’ perplexity at the rather dense and difficult philosophical arguments in that dialogue mirrors the potential confusion of the jury (and reader) of Socrates’ defense speech, allowing for Socrates to make certain concessions and clarifications and thus helping his addressee come to understand the argument.

Other evidence that the Athenians are focalizing the trial is through Socrates’ repeated requests that the jurors “do not make an uproar” (θορυβεῖν) nor to be surprised or amazed (θαυμάζειν) by the things he is saying, again suggesting that the jurors are implicitly dramatized as responding to and mediating what Socrates says (e.g., 17d). These lines should be understood as the narrator’s text, in other words the emplotment or *mise en intrigue* of the dialogue. This aligns with Plato’s narrative strategy of manipulating perspective and focalization in his dialogues as a means of mediating how the reader of the dialogue herself might or should be reacting. Whenever Socrates makes one of these second person addresses, particularly his exhortations not to make an uproar, they always occur either when Socrates’ explains and employs his preferred method of defending himself, or at crucial junctions in Socrates’ arguments. The former instances occur at 17d and 27b, first, when Socrates explains that he is going to use the language he is “accustomed to use in the agora” (17d) rather than conventional forensic language, and then again when he is

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<sup>82</sup> Finkelberg, *The Gatekeeper*, 69.

about to begin his cross-examination of Meletus and he requests specifically that the jurors not make a disturbance but instead compel Meletus to answer Socrates' line of questioning. In the former case, Socrates uses this phrase *mē thorubein* twice in quick succession, first just before he calls upon the god at Delphi (καί μοι, ὦ ἄνδρες Ἀθηναῖοι, μὴ θορυβήσητε, μηδ' ἐὰν δόξω τι ὑμῖν μέγα λέγειν) as a witness to the claim that he was proclaimed the wisest of all the Athenians (20e), and secondly, in the middle of his description of his friend Chaerophon visiting the sanctuary to receive the oracle (καὶ δὴ ποτε καὶ εἰς Δελφοῦς ἐλθὼν ἐτόλμησε τοῦτο μαντεύσασθαι—καί, ὅπερ λέγω, μὴ θορυβεῖτε, ὦ ἄνδρες—ἤρετο γὰρ δὴ εἴ τις ἐμοῦ εἶη σοφώτερος) (21a). Finally, and most importantly, Socrates tells the jurors not to make a disturbance at 30c: “do not create a disturbance, gentlemen, but abide by my request not to cry out at what I say but to listen, for I think it will be to your advantage to listen, and I am about to say other things at which you will perhaps cry out. By no means do this” (30c).<sup>83</sup> This occurs right before Socrates makes the famous claim that a good man cannot be harmed by a worse one, even if he is put to death, as Socrates is about to be. The narrator text of the *Apology*, then, manifests itself in Socrates' repeated requests that the Athenians jurors not make a disturbance in order to draw the reader's attention to, firstly, Socrates' *method* of examination, and secondly, to the *ethical conclusions* that such method reveals to him. Thus, Plato manipulates narrative perspective in a very conscious manner in order to make even Socrates' defense speech appear as a narrative. This functions to mediate how the imagined audience or reader of the dialogue itself might herself respond and guides her on how she ought (or ought not) to respond, therefore habituating her to become accustomed to Socrates' initially *atopos*, strange or out of place, appearance as a philosopher.

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<sup>83</sup> Μὴ θορυβεῖτε, ὦ ἄνδρες Ἀθηναῖοι, ἀλλ' ἐμμείνατέ μοι οἷς ἐδεήθην ὑμῶν, μὴ θορυβεῖν ἐφ' οἷς ἂν λέγω ἀλλ' ἀκούειν· καὶ γὰρ, ὡς ἐγὼ οἶμαι, ὀνήσεσθε ἀκούοντες.

In this sense, the jurors are not only jurymen, but akin to a tragic chorus, who are dramatized as reflecting and reacting to the events happening on the ‘stage’. Plato’s narrative perspective is therefore importantly influenced by the choral perspective offered to us in tragedy. What is particularly interesting about this, however, is that at the end of the *Apology* Socrates switches from addressing the entirety of the Athenian jurors and shifts his attention instead to those who voted against his execution, one of whom was Plato himself (39e; 38b6-7, “Plato here [Πλάτων δὲ ὅδε] Athenian men, and Crito and Critoboulos and Apollodorus urge me to pay the penalty of thirty mina...”). The use of the demonstrative pronoun ὅδε emphatically intensifies Plato’s proximity to Socrates, as well as some of his most famous philosophical associates. This seems to suggest that Plato intended the text as a whole to be directed and addressed to those who were able to see the truth of Socrates’ words that he was not committing injustices but rather aiding in the education of the *dēmos* to always strive for virtue through constant examination and love of wisdom, and that the extradiegetic reader should do the same.

#### IV.1.ii *Tragōidia* in the *Apology*

The mention of *tragōidia* occurs in Socrates’ defense, notably, during his *narratio* to the Athenians, his description of his *ponoi*, ‘labours’, namely, the assignment that he interprets to have been given to him by the god at Delphi, Apollo, through the Pythian priestess. His mission, as he interprets the oracle, is to examine the Pythia’s statement that Socrates ‘is the wisest among all human beings.’ His method of examining this proposition was to cross-examine members of Athenian society who were thought to have a degree of epistemic and social authority and currency in order to demonstrate that one of them is indeed more *sophos* than him: “I must give you an account of my journeyings as if they were labors I had undertaken [ὥσπερ πόνους τινὰς πονοῦντος], to prove the oracle [ἡ μαντεία] irrefutable [ἀνέλεγκτος]” (22a). This language of

course recalls the labours of Herakles, situating Socrates' practice within the mythic and religious landscape of the Athenian popular imagination. Socrates therefore interprets the philosophical *elenchus* as itself a form of religious worship insofar as his activities confirm the authority and truthfulness of the dictates of Apollo.

After testing the politicians and concluding that he is wiser than them insofar as he at least knows that he does not know anything, Socrates describes his cross-examination of the poets, and specifically singles out the poets of tragedy and the dithyramb (although he does also include a more generalizing 'others,' *alla*) (22a). That he specifically calls upon the tragedians and the writers of dithyrambs seems significant given that there were many types of poetry popular in Athens at the time, such as elegiac, and not least of which was Homeric epic, perhaps considered to be the most important cultural text in the shaping of Greek *paideia* and culture. Socrates explains that he "took up [the tragedian's] poems, which seemed [to him] to be most of all the productions upon which they have spent their time (πεπραγματεῦσθαι) in order to ask them what their poetry meant, so that [he] could learn something from them" (22b-c, my translation). Unfortunately for Socrates (indeed he even says that it brings him shame to admit it to the Athenian jurors), all the people present, i.e., the jurors themselves, would be more capable of interpreting the poetry of the tragedians than the tragedians themselves were.

This is a remarkable claim, and I suggest is related to Plato's designation of tragedy as the most democratic poetic form in the *Laws*, namely as the poetic form that eventually led to the rise of Athenian democracy, when tragedies began to be produced not with an eye to how the best or more qualified person would enjoy it, but rather how any person, regardless of his or her worth, would enjoy it (*Laws*, III.700e). As the Athenian Stranger describes in the *Laws*, when the makers of tragedies started to write their poetry with the sole aim of pleasing a general (and thus

democratic) audience, people began to believe that they were epistemic authorities on artistic *technē* or craft. This belief, however, violates Socrates' disavowal of knowledge, and in turn, his interpretation of the oracle that the greatest evil for a mortal is to believe that one knows when in fact he does not, and that to believe that one knows is the greatest mortal error and most detested by the gods as an act of hubris. Thus, Socrates' form of worship of the god, Apollo, is for Plato ultimately the most pious form of worship in that it affirms the ultimate wisdom and authority of the gods rather than the works of the Athenian tragedians, which instill mortals with the hubristic belief that they are wise when they are in fact not, in turn leading them to believe that their wisdom is worth something greater than the gods'.

In the context of the *Laws* passage, the Athenian suggests that the tragic poets aim to please the majority regardless of those individual's unique personality or character, and so as a result try to appease everyone in a manner reminiscent of the Athenian democracy itself, which often made decisions based on what the majority of the population, regardless of his skill or understanding, thought was most pleasant or advantageous. Thus, it seems not at all coincidental that Socrates similarly believes that the democratic jury before him in the *Apology* would have a better understanding of what the tragedies mean than the poets themselves do, since it seems that tragedy in this later and 'democratic' form seems to have been catered only to the whims and desires of those listening to it rather than for their moral betterment. This firmly situates the 'genre' of tragedy not only in the religious but also in the political realm, and indeed, obliquely, as a form of democratic rhetoric or discourse.

Socrates furthermore concludes that the tragedians "do not create their poems by means of wisdom (σοφία) but rather by some nature [φύσει τινί] and being enthused (ἐνθουσιάζοντες) just like the theomantics and the oracle makers" (22d10-c2, my translation), and that they therefore

compose their poetry under the influence of a *pathos* or affection. This is striking, particularly the poets being identified as soothsayers or oracles, since Socrates will himself deliver an oracle later in his defense and, as some have argued, likens himself to a prophet, particularly Tiresias.<sup>84</sup> Socrates argues specifically that, given his proximity to death, he can give a prophecy and will predict what will happen to the Athenians after they have executed him. That the poets are “enthused” is also characteristic of tragedian’s association with Dionysus, and the fact that Athenian tragedy festivals and competitions were themselves a form of worship for the god. This passage suggests that Socrates’ *daimōnion* and own *enthusiasmos* as well as his ability to deliver oracles is a deliberate echo or mirror of the way that poets write tragedies, but that he is apparently possessed by a different kind of divinity, namely his *daimōnion*, whose worship manifested in a dialectical method of cross-examination and testing in order to achieve an internal harmony and unity within the potentially conflicting motivations of the soul.

To synthesize the points made here about the poets, and particularly the tragic poets and composers of dithyrambs, the latter of which is importantly connected to the development of tragedy as having apparently originated as an aspect of Dionysian worship, Socrates describes tragedy in the *Apology* as being characterized less by a formal genre and more by the nature of those who create it, who write beautiful things and are possessed by a god but nonetheless cannot explain their poetics, and thus do not survive Socrates’ own elenctic religious practice. It is tempting to conclude from the *Apology* that Socrates considers his own personal philosophy and divine mission to be a synthesized and improved form of each of the groups of people with a degree of cultural authority whom he cross-examines in this *narratio*. Namely, he takes from the

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<sup>84</sup> Patricia Fagan has argued that at the end of Socrates’ speech he likens himself to the blind seer Tiresias; see Patricia Fagan, “Plato’s Oedipus: Myth and Philosophy in the *Apology*,” in *Re-examining Socrates in the Apology*, eds Patricia Fagan and John Russon (Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 2009), 93-94.



politicians the betterment of, mainly, his fellow citizens; he takes from the craftsman the idea that knowledge of the craft or *technē* is essential when claiming to be able to improve something; and finally, he combines this with the ritual authority, divinity, and pleasure that is derived from the tragedians' works. Socrates himself becomes a kind of oracular vessel for his own *daimōnion* and his own idiosyncratic religious practice, with the ritual and delight taken in the activity of tragedy held in honour of Dionysus being replaced with the ritual and delight taken in the activity of the *elenchus* itself. The *Apology* is therefore, as John Sellars argues, a meta-philosophical text about the innate delight and characterization of the life of philosophy itself as well as a justification for its innate superiority and primacy over other intellectual pursuits. Similarly, Joshua Billings has argued that Euripides' *Bacchae* is also a meta-tragic or meta-poetic meditation on the primacy of Dionysian ritual and worship and tragedy over and above other intellectual and civic commitments.<sup>85</sup>

It is difficult not to notice certain generic and thematic overlaps between Euripides' the *Bacchae* and Socrates' situation in the *Apology*. An obvious linguistic commonality that strikes the reader between Dionysus' opening monologue in the *Bacchae* and Socrates' beginning of his own defense is Dionysus' assertion that he is returning to Greece to defend (ἀπολογήσασθαί) his mother, Semele, who has been dishonoured by her sisters who accused her of lying about having borne the child Zeus (that is, Dionysus himself):

For this city must understand, even if they do not want to,

That they are uninitiated [ἀτέλεστον] in my Bacchic rites [τῶν ἐμῶν βακχευμάτων].

And [I must] defend [ἀπολογήσασθαί] my mother, Semele

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<sup>85</sup> John Sellars, "Plato's *Apology of Socrates*: A Meta-Philosophical Text," *Philosophy and Literature* 38, no. 2 (October 2014): 433-445; Joshua Billings, *The Philosophical Stage*, 204.

Appearing as a *daimōn* to mortals whom Zeus himself begot (30-45, my trans).<sup>86</sup>

In trying to find other intertextual bases for the depiction of Socrates in the *Apology*, scholars have pointed to the forensic speeches of Lysias rather than tragedy and have tried to determine the ways in which Socrates resists and inverts traditional forensic practices in the Athenian judicial court.<sup>87</sup> In this section, I take a different approach, and instead attempt to investigate the ways in which Plato may have modelled Socrates' speech on tragedy, using as a *comparandum* Euripides' *Bacchae* and dramatic discourse more broadly.<sup>88</sup> Important thematic parallels and inversions of tragedy emerge through comparison of the respective missions of Dionysus and Socrates, and I will argue that Plato models Socrates' defense speech not only after the Athenian forensic speeches but more importantly after the general model of Athenian tragedy, and specifically the importance of tragedy (and philosophy) as a choral performance dedicated to god. This is Plato's attempt to situate Socrates' practice of philosophy within the cultural discourse and religious landscape of Athens, with important inversions, demonstrating Socrates' practice of philosophy as divine. The difference between the two is that Socrates replaces Dionysus (or Bromios) as the ideal choral leader (*chorēgos*) (cf. *Bacchae*, 141), someone who has harmonized the conflicting opinions and motivations in his own soul as a result of his philosophical activity, particularly the *elenchus*. This

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<sup>86</sup> δεῖ γὰρ πόλιν τήνδ' ἐκμαθεῖν, κεί μὴ θέλει, ἀτέλεστον οὔσαν τῶν ἐμῶν βακχευμάτων, Σεμέλης τε μητρὸς ἀπολογήσασθαι μ' ὑπὲρ φανέντα θνητοῖς δαίμον' ὄν τικτεῖ Δί.

<sup>87</sup> For instance, see Douglas D. Feaver and John E. Hare, "The *Apology* as an Inverted Parody of Rhetoric," *Arethusa* 14.2 (1981): 205–16.

<sup>88</sup> Indeed, it seems as though dramatic and political discourse were closely intertwined. On the relationship between dramatic and political discourse, see Josiah Ober and Barry Strauss, "Drama, Political Rhetoric, and the Discourse of Athenian Democracy," in *Nothing to Do with Dionysus? Athenian Drama in Its Social Context*, eds Winkler and Zeitlin (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), 238: "Political rhetoric and drama can be seen, and analyzed, as closely related forms of public speech. Like legal trials and Assembly speeches, Athenian theatrical performances and dramatic texts were closely bound up in the mediation of conflicting social values." Cf. Glenn Morrow, *Plato's Cretan City* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1960), 312: "If music has the power that Plato thinks it has (and the evidence as to its effect upon the Greeks is altogether in accord with Plato's estimate), the dithyrambic and dramatic performances at Athens were in fact an education institution of great importance."

therefore encourages his followers to similarly imitate him and therefore become habituated to pursue virtue and ultimately achieve *eudaimonia*.

I am not the first to suggest that it is possible to read Plato's *Apology* through the rhetorical and thematic *topoi* of tragedy. Jacob Howland also notes that "the *Apology* uses certain thematic and formal elements of tragedy – including systematic ambiguity, tragic error, dramatic reversal and recognition, and the figure of a hero who is also a scapegoat or *pharmakos* – in order to expose the paradoxical combination of persuasion and compulsion at the heart of political life and of philosophical passion and aggression in the soul of the philosopher."<sup>89</sup> Howland, argues, however, that the most fitting intertextual basis of the *Apology* and a specific Athenian tragedy is Sophocles' *Oidipous Tyrannos*, and in particular that Plato models Socrates after the eponymous protagonist.<sup>90</sup> I argue, however, that the *Apology*, as an aforementioned meta-philosophical meditation and text, should also be read alongside Euripides' *Bacchae*, which, as Billings and others have shown, is an innately meta-theatrical meditation on the superiority of tragedy and the worship of Dionysus over the arguably more 'Apolline' civic or secular institutions of the *polis*, and demonstrates the ability of tragic discourse to assimilate both archaizing and novel social institutions.

The situations of Dionysus in Euripides' *Bacchae* and Socrates in the *Apology* are importantly mirrored in a variety of ways. As seen above, both Dionysus and Socrates explain to their audience explicitly that they must make a defense (*ἀπολογέομαι*), the former on behalf of his mother, Semele, and by extension his own divinity, and the latter on behalf of his accusations of impiety and corrupting the youth. This is not, however, the only parallel between Dionysus and Socrates. Both are presented as 'foreigners' in their respective contexts, namely Thebes/Greece

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<sup>89</sup> Jacob Howland, "Plato's *Apology* as Tragedy," *The Review of Politics* 70 (2008): 520.

<sup>90</sup> Cf. Patricia Fagan, "Plato's Oedipus: Myth and Philosophy in the *Apology*," in *Re-examining Socrates in the Apology*, eds Patricia Fagan and John Russon (Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 2009), 89.

and the *dikastērion*. Both are faced with an opponent who would reject their unique form of worship or activity in the *polis* as an illegitimate civic institution, namely Pentheus and Meletus respectively. This unique worship or activity is being imitated by anxiety-provoking members of the populace (i.e., the Theban women and the Athenian youth, respectively). Finally, both end their respective texts with a kind of divine punishment on those who wrongly denied their activities and their wisdom. Socrates prophesies to the Athenians that they will be plagued by the next generation of Socratics, who, upon taking up Socrates' unique philosophical activity, will be much harsher than he was in practicing it, and that the Athenians will have harmed themselves by killing him more than they harmed Socrates himself. Dionysus' revenge, on the other hand, occurs when the Theban women, and most importantly Pentheus' own mother, Agave, become Maenads and, in their Bacchic frenzy, kill her son, Pentheus, in a violent *sparagmos*.

Dionysus' opening monologue is, as some scholars have argued, an aitiology of Dionysus' worship in Greece. In a similar vein, one might argue that Socrates' *narratio* in the *Apology* constitutes an aitiology of his idiosyncratic religious practice in Athens and its' spread to the Athenian youth. In Euripides' *Bacchae*, Dionysus proclaims that it is the first time he has come to Greece:

I came to this Greek city for the first time,

having already set those other lands to dance [χορεύσας] and established my mysteries there,

so that I might be a deity manifest among men (20-25, trans. Buckley, slightly modified).<sup>91</sup>

Here, Dionysus proclaims that he is first arriving in Greece, in the city of Thebes. Similarly, Plato makes pains to show that this is the first time that Socrates has ever come up to court: “now this is

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<sup>91</sup> ἐς τήνδε πρῶτον ἦλθον Ἑλλήνων πόλιν, τότε ἔ χορεύσας καὶ καταστήσας ἐμὰς τελετάς, ἵν' εἶην ἐμφανῆς δαίμων βροτοῖς.

the first time I have come to the *dikastērion*” (17d1-2, my translation). In the context of Socrates’ defense, Thebes is replaced by the lawcourts, the *dikastērion*. Also parallel to Dionysus, Socrates at the beginning of his speech explains the other places that people have heard him philosophize, that is, engage in his *elenchus*, namely, in the agora at the money-making tables, and in other places (*allothi*). Dionysus also offers a catalogue of all the other places he has visited before coming to Greece (*Bacchae*, 14-21). The self-othering of Socrates continues when he characterizes himself as a *xenos* to the lawcourts and beseeches the Athenian jurors to allow him to speak in the *tropos* in which he is accustomed to speaking, since he claims he does not know their ‘language’, that is, their style of forensic rhetoric. This has often been analyzed as a reference to the rhetorical strategy of many of Lysias’ orations and defense speeches, namely the strategy of downplaying the rhetorical efficacy of the orator. Nonetheless, the fact that Socrates is deliberately labeling himself as a *xenos*, a foreigner, seems not to be common amongst Lysian defense speeches, and supports Andrea Nightingale’s hypothesis that “Plato’s philosopher is distinguished precisely by his willingness to remain outside of [the Athenian social] economy.”<sup>92</sup> Dionysus in the *Bacchae* similarly presents himself as a foreigner by transforming into mortal disguise and appearing as a Lydian *epōidos*, an enchanter (234).

In addition to the self-othering of Dionysus and Socrates, both are also accused of introducing a newfangled form of worship into the *polis* (setting the people of Thebes and Athens ‘dancing’ and ‘philosophizing’, respectively), since Socrates is accused of contriving new gods. Both Dionysus and Socrates are accused of introducing this unique worship to a socially marginal but civically crucial part of Athenian society, namely, the Theban women and the (primarily aristocratic) Athenian youth. Socrates explains in his defense that after he had embarked on his

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<sup>92</sup> Nightingale, *Genres in Dialogue*, 59.

divine fulfilment and duty to the god at Delphi, he became widely detested, not least of which because the older generation of Athenians thought he was corrupting the youth by causing them to imitate his philosophical methodology: “Because of these conversations [i.e., his *elenchoi*] the youth began following me all on their own accord [αὐτόματοι], especially those who had leisure time [σχολή], who are of the wealthiest [citizens]; for, while listening to my examinations [ἐξεταζομένων] of people, they take delight [χαίρουσιν], and they often imitate [μιμοῦνται] me themselves when they attempt to examine others” (23c, my translation). Socrates’ divine activities are his cross-examinations of the Athenian people, and the youth are doing the same by imitating him, and furthermore take delight in doing so (*chairousin*). The root of the verb that Socrates uses for imitation, *mimountai*, is *mimēsis*, which is fundamentally at the core of any dramatic act, whether that be in Plato’s dialogues or Athenian tragedy.

The youth’s imitation of Socrates is comparable to the way in which the women of Thebes in the *Bacchae* imitate Dionysian frenzy. There are additional associations of the women of Thebes leaving their traditional pursuits, namely the life of domesticity, and being displaced, going off to engage in Bacchic rites in the wild and untamed mountains: “Forthwith the whole land shall dance [χορεύσει], when Bromios leads [ἄγη] the worshipful bands to the mountain, to the mountain, where there rests the throng of women, driven by Dionysus in madness from their looms and shuttles” (Euripides, *Bacchae*, 114-119).<sup>93</sup> Furthermore, Euripides uses similar language as Socrates when describing the inherent delight that Dionysus takes in his dances and festivals: “the maddened satyrs obtained it from the Goddess Mother and added it to the dances of the second-year festivals in which Dionysus delights [παρὰ δὲ μαινόμενοι Σάτυροι ματέρος ἐξανύσαντο θεᾶς, ἐς δὲ χορεύματα συνῆψαν τριετηρίδων, αἷς χαίρει Διόνυσος]” (130-134, trans. T.A. Buckley). The

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<sup>93</sup> αὐτίκα γὰρ πᾶσα χορεύσει- Βρόμιος ὅστις ἄγη θιάσουσ-- εἰς ὄρος εἰς ὄρος, ἔνθα μένει θηλυγενῆς ὄχλος ἀφ’ ἰστῶν παρὰ κερκίδων τ’ οἰστρηθεὶς Διονύσῳ.

chorus similarly expresses how “blessed the man who, happy in knowing the gods’ rites, makes his life pure and joins his soul to the worshipful band, performing bacchic rites upon the mountains, with cleansings the gods approve” (72-82, trans. David Kovacs). These ‘bacchic’ rites just are the choral performance and Bacchic dance, an imitation of the god himself, which constitutes one’s initiation into his mysteries.

In like manner, what is perhaps not as explicit in the *Apology*, but can be gleaned from slight excavation of the text aided by intertextuality with other Platonic dialogues, is that Socrates is depicted as leading the youth away from what is traditionally thought to be, at least in Athenian society, their suitable or expected life path, namely, the path of politics, and initiating them into the life of philosophy through exhorting them to examine and care for their soul rather than external goods. The highest life for an Athenian citizen was thought to be that of a politician, not a philosopher; however, as we learn from Alkibiades’ encomium to Socrates in the *Symposium*, Socrates, like the lure of the siren call in the *Odyssey*, tempts Alkibiades to leave the life of the politician and instead pursue the life of philosophy (*Symposium*, 216a). Right before this statement, Alkibiades refers to the Corybants: “the moment [Socrates] starts to speak, I am beside myself: my heart starts leaping in my chest, the tears come streaming down my face, even the frenzied Corybants seem sane compared to me” (*Symposium*, 215e). The Corybants were worshipers of Cybele, who worshipped the goddess through music and were associated with Dionysus’ cult in the *Bacchae* (*Bacchae*, 125). Thus, by likening himself to a Corybant, Alkibiades suggests that Socrates’ *logoi*, which set Alkibiades ‘philosophizing’, that is, giving close attention to his “personal shortcomings that cry out for the closest attention” (*Symposium*, 216a), are a specific kind of tragic choral initiation.

The idea that the Athenian citizens expected a young man to eventually give up philosophizing at a certain age and enter political life is also suggested in the *Gorgias*, when Callicles says that it is right and proper for a child to philosophize as it is a sign of ‘noble breeding’, but that after a certain point he was expected to give it up for the life of politics (*Gorgias*, 485a-d). Similarly, Thrasymachus in *Republic* I mocks Socrates for acting like a child, asking him whether he still has a wetnurse (I.343a2), which suggests that engaging in philosophy or cross-examination is suitable only for children and that Socrates has not transitioned into full adulthood as a result of his commitment to philosophy. Even within the confines of the *Apology*, however, the hint that Socrates is leading the youth away from the *politikos bios* is suggested by his insistence that one should never care not for external goods such as honour or money, both of which were considered to be the fruits of the political life, but instead care only for one’s soul and its’ proper maintenance, which most of all characterizes the activity of philosophy, and can be achieved through Socratic cross-examination and dialectic.

The language of the youth taking delight in Socrates’ conversations takes on a ritual and tragic valence. The chorus of Maenads, who belong to both the extradiegetic performative and ritual context of the dramatic performance as Athenian actors on stage and the intradiegetic world of the play itself as a chorus of Dionysus, are depicted as taking delight in the god’s revels. So too, Socrates describes the youth taking delight in the activity of Socrates’ *elenchus* and as a result imitating him in their actions, much like chorus of Bacchantes imitating their archetypal choral leader. Thus, *Socrates* is likened to an archetypal chorus leader, Dionysus. It is also worth noting that Apollo, the giver of Socrates’ divine mission and in a way his divine ‘patron’, is similarly an archetypal choral leader, namely of the divine chorus of the Muses. The *elenchus* is therefore an object of delight (*charis*); furthermore, because the youth take specific delight in this *elenchus*,



they go on to then imitate the *elenchus* by practicing it on others. The *elenchus* is thus cast as a form of worship, just as choral performance during the festival of Dionysus, and something that is intrinsically pleasant.

The *elenchus* is therefore pleasurable and delightful and helps to reorient the desires and pleasure that Socrates' metaphorical chorus towards the love of wisdom and truth, rather than to the love of external goods. What is interesting about Socrates and Plato's portrayal of the philosophical 'chorus', however, as opposed to the Maenads in Euripides' *Bacchae*, is that the aesthetic delight is embodied not in the delight of the *god*, who is spectating his chorus (quite literally in the context of the Athenian tragic festival in the sanctuary of Dionysus, since the statue of Dionysus was positioned such that it was 'spectating' the dramatic festival). In Euripides' play it is therefore the god, Dionysus, and the spectator, who takes delight in the Maenad's and satyr's choral dances. On the other hand, in the *Apology*, Socrates focuses on the *charis* that the *youth* and participants take in Socratic conversation, and how the delight of watching Socrates perform the *elenchus* leads the youth to want to imitate him. Thus, Socrates and Plato's form of chorality is importantly centered on the enjoyment of the performers, not the spectators.

The reason for this characterization in Plato therefore has to do with the renegotiation of fundamental ends. The tragic chorus in Athens was composed of Athenian youths and was therefore a foundational aspect of their moral and civic training. Taking proper delight in the right sorts of things is precisely what Plato takes true *paideia* to be, and as such, making the enjoyment of philosophy analogous to the enjoyment of tragic *mimēsis* constitutes a potential means of 'bootstrapping' ethical training and diverting the youth's desires towards the good, reorienting the soul towards the universal and divine forms. Socrates' metaphorical philosophical 'chorus' take delight in philosophy itself, and therefore can fully internalize and understand that virtue is

intrinsically worthy of choice; as M.F. Burnyeat writes, “There is such a thing as learning to enjoy something [...] and it is not sharply distinct from learning that the thing in question is enjoyable [...] The growth of enjoyment goes hand in hand with the internalization of knowledge.”<sup>94</sup> On my reading, then, the Socratic *elenchus* and the delight that the youth take in this philosophical *mimēsis* is therefore itself an aspect of moral habituation, in turn suggesting that the dialogues themselves act as a protreptic for loving wisdom.

Of course, what is notable about parallels between Dionysus and Socrates is that in many of the ways in which they are parallel they are also the inverse of the other. While Dionysus punishes Pentheus for his impiety, it is Socrates in his trial who is accused of being impious, and of course rather than Meletus being killed in the end as Pentheus is, it is rather Socrates who is executed and Meletus who goes off to keep on living. This suggests Plato’s attempt to situate Socrates’ philosophical activity in the dominant discourse and form of entertainment, and indeed religious/ritual activity, prominent during his time, namely, tragedy. Indeed, Socrates suggests that although he is going off to die, he is more than anyone else going to be importantly alive, mainly in the context of his discussion of the cross-examinations and discussions that he will have with other poets and great heroes who have already passed on to the afterlife. On the other hand, it is actually the Athenians who he prophesies will fall back into their ‘slumber’, no longer having their god-assigned gadfly to sting them back awake (*Apology*, 31a3-b5).

Sleep was associated with death in ancient Greek culture. Hesiod claims in the *Theogony* that Thanatos, death, is the brother [κασίγνητον] of Hypnos, sleep (756): “there the children of black Nyx hold their dwelling, Sleep and Death, terrible gods” (758-9, my translation).<sup>95</sup> Socrates

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<sup>94</sup> M.F. Burnyeat, “Aristotle on Learning to Be Good,” in *Essays on Aristotle's Ethics*, ed. Amélie Rorty (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), 76.

<sup>95</sup> ἔνθα δὲ Νυκτὸς παῖδες ἐρεμνῆς οἰκί’ ἔχουσιν, Ὕπνος καὶ Θάνατος, δεινοὶ θεοί...

also associates sleep and death in the *Apology*, in that death is either a “lack of perception, like some sort of sleep where the sleeping person does not see any dreams” (*Apology*, 40d1-e3, my translation) or merely a relocation to a different place, where the soul lives on. As such, by the end of the *Apology*, the thoughtful reader is left to ask herself whether it is truly Socrates who will die as a result of his execution, or the Athenians themselves, who will go back to their ‘dreamless sleep’.

Socrates therefore suggests that the Athenians, while in a literal sense are alive, are nevertheless not living a distinctively human life – “ὁ δὲ ἀνεξέταστος βίος οὐ βιωτὸς ἀνθρώπων,” quite literally, the unexamined life is not a *human* life, he reminds us (38a3-6). Socrates’ elenctic activities are presented inversely as the very paradigm of a distinctly human (and immortal) life. Thus, the *Apology* exhorts one to completely re-evaluate the pathetic conclusions and thus the ends of all human action inherent in Greek tragedy while nevertheless using the themes and tropes of tragedy as a vehicle to understand the true nature of suffering. But this analysis reveals something more. Socrates is not only calling for a fundamental revaluation of ends. He is calling for a reversal and correction of Athens’ foundational political and ethical pedagogical medium: the chorus. Socrates’ method calls for a fundamental shift both in the type of choral activity in which one engages and the type of divinity to which those choruses are dedicated and aims to shift the delight of the spectator (and therefore the god himself), but instead focusses on the delight and joy that the actors and performers take in this imitation, initiating a shift in the traditional aesthetic experience of Athenian tragedy. I now turn to the other dialogues of Plato’s corpus that mention tragedy and show how the narrators there act as a philosophical chorus, mediators of the *agones* and *logoi* or arguments, in a way that habituates the reader to take delight in Plato’s true conception of divinity.

## IV.2: The *Theaetetus* – The (Good) *Anthropos* is the Measure of All Things

### IV.2.i. The Narrators: Terpsion, Euclides, and Socrates

Another important characterization of *tragōidia* in Plato's corpus occurs at *Theaetetus* 152e. Here, Socrates and the titular interlocutor are testing Theaetetus' proposed definition (attributed to the sophist Protagoras) that knowledge is perception, and the paradoxes associated with assigning qualities to things that are constantly becoming. This passage is significant in that it is a passage in which Socrates differentiates the way that poets, sophists, and natural philosophers (aside from the notable exception of Parmenides) argue and relate to one another as opposed to the way that those with the philosophical character and method argue and debate.

The dramatic frame and narrators of the *Theaetetus* are complex and have been the subject of much scholarly attention. Gérard Genette, in his pioneering work on narratology, argues that the *Theaetetus* is '*pseudo-diégétique*' in that it conceals the narrative or diegetic markers by representing one of the frame narrators, namely Euclides, the internal writer/composer of the main body of the dialogue, have an enslaved person read aloud to his narratee, Terpsion, a written report of the conversation between Socrates and Theaetetus, explaining that he took out the diegetic markers and thereby gave his narration the appearance of a drama while in fact being diegetic (*Theaetetus*, 143c).<sup>96</sup> As Finkelberg notes, "there are three narrators here – Socrates, Socrates' narratee Euclides, and Euclides' narratee Terpsion [...] The first level-narrator, Terpsion, is implicit because, as in the other mixed dialogues, the *Theaetetus*' frame story is cast in dramatic form."<sup>97</sup> That Terpsion is the first-level implicit narrator is attested by the identification of Plato's

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<sup>96</sup> Gérard Genette, *Figures III* (Paris: Édition du Seuil, 1972), 245-246: "Ces formes de narration où le relais métadiégétique, mentionné ou non, se trouve immédiatement évincé au profit du narrateur premier, ce qui fait en quelque sorte l'économie d'un (ou parfois plusieurs) niveau narratif, nous les appellerons métadiégétique réduit (sous-entendu : au diégétique), ou pseudo-diégétique."

<sup>97</sup> Finkelberg, *The Gatekeeper*, 97.

zooming-in technique, which Plato often uses at the beginnings of his dramatic dialogues, whereby an interlocutor asks another character about certain events and individuals, thus filtering the information to the reader. In this case, Terpsion asks Euclides where he has been and what he has seen, to which Euclides replies that he has just seen Theaetetus returning to Athens from campaign in Corinth on the brink of death (ζῶντι καὶ μάλα μόλις, “living but just barely,” 142ab1, my translation). The implication is that Terpsion is the first set of ‘eyes’ through which the reader of the dialogue herself views the story.

On the second diegetic level, Terpsion becomes the narratee and Euclides the secondary narrator, since Euclides wrote down the conversation between Theaetetus and Socrates that Socrates told him about and proceeds to have an enslaved person read it aloud to him and Terpsion. Finally, on the third level (the level that is the main body of the dialogue, i.e., Socrates’ and Theaetetus’ conversation proper), Euclides becomes the narratee and Socrates the narrator of his conversation with Theaetetus. It is thus plausible to argue that Euclides is a meta-poetic stand-in for the writer of the whole dialogue, namely Plato himself. That is, when Plato writes his dramatic dialogues, the implication is that he, too, conceives of it as diegetic but merely takes out the indicators of first person diegesis to give it the appearance of a drama. Thus, each of the dialogues, even the dramatic ones, are sustained through an implied first-person narrator.

How does the frame of the *Theaetetus* and the narrative devices employed there relate to Plato’s rhetorical strategies and/or philosophical commitments? Having a frame narrative as well as a complex transmission of *logoi* between speakers suggests a kind of oral history and culture surrounding Socrates and his philosophical circle in an almost rhapsodic fashion. But perhaps more importantly, the opening narration of the *Theaetetus* provides a tragic frame for the third diegetic level and the main body of the dialogue – Theaetetus is about to die. Both Terpsion and Euclides

mourn the inevitable loss of such a promising and bright young man (καλόν τε καὶ ἀγαθόν, ὃ Τερψίων, ἐπεὶ τοι καὶ νῦν ἤκουόν τινων μάλα ἐγκωμιαζόντων αὐτὸν περὶ τὴν μάχην, 142b), and, as I will argue, in order to alleviate the *pathos* of his looming death, turn to *Sokratikoi logoi*, and listen to Euclides' slave recount the philosophical conversation between Theaetetus and Socrates. Euclides explains that after accompanying Theaetetus he remembered Socrates' "mantic gift [μαντικῶς], and especially the things he said about him [Theaetetus]. For [...] [Socrates] came upon him when he was a youth a small time before his death and after spending time and conversing with him [διαλεχθεὶς] fully admired his disposition" (142c, my translation).<sup>98</sup> Here Euclides mentions Socrates' mantic art or sign, *mantikōs*. Socrates could divine that Theaetetus was going to become an excellent man if he ever came to full maturity, even when he was just a *meirakion*, a young man, just from merely conversing with him, that is, engaging him in dialectic (*dialengtheis*). This once again connects Socrates' philosophical project and activities to its divine origin, namely his mantic and daemonic art, and suggests that through his conversations he can make divine predictions about the quality of a person's nature (*phusis*).

This quite literal dramatic performance of Socrates' and Theaetetus' discussion, Terpsion and Euclides' enjoyment and spectatorship of philosophy and particularly Socrates' dialectical *elenchus*, has the twofold effect of immortalizing Theaetetus through oral and recorded memory, as well as shifting the two internal characters (and by extension the reader of the dialogue herself) out of a state of sadness or grief (*pathos*) by instead drawing their attention to Theaetetus' love of wisdom (evidence of his being a true philosopher, which appellation Socrates gives him in the course of their conversation at 155d). Rather than being overcome by a grievous *pathos* spurred

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<sup>98</sup> καὶ δῆτα προπέμψας αὐτόν, ἀπιὼν πάλιν ἀνεμνήσθη καὶ ἐθαύμασα Σωκράτους ὡς μαντικῶς ἄλλα τε δὴ εἶπε καὶ περὶ τούτου. δοκεῖ γάρ μοι ὀλίγον πρὸ τοῦ θανάτου ἐντυχεῖν αὐτῷ μειρακίῳ ὄντι, καὶ συγγενόμενός τε καὶ διαλεχθεὶς πάνυ ἀγασθῆναι αὐτοῦ τὴν φύσιν.

by the knowledge that he is about to die, they instead turn to Socrates' conversation with Theaetetus and by extension the activity of philosophy to take solace. It has been argued that the chorus in tragedy plays a similar function. As Edith Hall argues, Greek tragedy was fundamentally concerned with how to handle suffering, and particularly the suffering surrounding death. One way that one should respond to such suffering is offered to the Athenians through the reactions of the chorus, acting as mediators to the civic audience. As such, it is not only "Greek tragedies [...] that explore the relationship between the living and the dead; portray moral bafflement at the workings of the universe; enquire philosophically into the causes, effects, and nature of suffering; and yet provide considerable aesthetic pleasure – that is, entertainment," but also, Plato's dialogues.<sup>99</sup>

Furthermore, in the vein of immortalizing Theaetetus, it is important and interesting to note that the *Theaetetus* does not end with a return to the frame or first diegetic level of narration, that is, to the conversation and performative context of Euclides' and Terpsion's listening to the slave recount the dialogue, but instead remains within the reported world of Euclides' text. This gives the impression that Theaetetus lives on, leaving the possibility for other writers or poets to continue to imagine and write about his conversations with Socrates. This is achieved by Plato's artful use of time, an important category of narratology, which examines the temporal ordering of the "events caused or experienced by characters."<sup>100</sup> For it seems deliberate and important that Theaetetus is not actually dead at the exact moment of time in the frame conversation between Euclides and Terpsion but is rather on the brink of death. Plato could have written it such that Theaetetus was already dead by the time the two interlocutors read aloud the dialogue. Similarly, if Plato *had* concluded the dialogue with a return to the first diegetic level (for instance, if Plato had had

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<sup>99</sup> Edith Hall, *Greek Tragedy: Suffering Under the Sun* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 11.

<sup>100</sup> Irene J.F. de Jong, "Narratology and Classics," 73. For the narratological concept of time and ancient Greek narratives, see Irene J.F. de Jong, "Introduction: Narratological Theory on Time," in *Time in Ancient Greek Literature: Studies in Ancient Greek Narrative*, Volume 2, eds de Jong, Irene J. F and René Nünlist, (Boston: Brill, 2007), 1-14.

Euclides or Terpsion conclude “And that was the end of Socrates’ and Theaetetus’ conversation”, rather than having it be Socrates who concludes the dialogue from within the narrated world), then consequently, given how long it would take to read aloud and listen to this dialogue, Theaetetus would be dead in the ‘real-time’ of the frame narrative (recall again the very specific language of Theaetetus being alive *mala molis*, just barely).

On a thematic level as well, the final topic of discussion that Socrates and Theaetetus pursue is Socrates’ maieutic practice, that is, his practice of giving birth to the ideas of young men, just as Artemis assists women in giving literal birth. Thus, thematically the dialogue begins with the idea of Theaetetus being on the brink of death but ends with the theme of the birth of his ideas, his *logoi* (210c-d). Offspring of *logoi*, moreover, are described in Diotima’s speech in the *Symposium* as the only truly immortal reproductions to which a human being can give ‘birth’ (*Symposium* 209a1-e10). The dramatic frame of the *Theaetetus* therefore has the effect of being protreptic, namely turning the audience’s attention away from the *pathos* and sadness of Theaetetus’ eminent death towards the activity of philosophy, in much the same way that the chorus functions in tragedy. In doing so, Terpsion and Euclides ease the grief of Theaetetus’ death by allowing him to literarily live on in *logoi*.

#### IV2.ii *Tragōidia* in the *Theaetetus*

When Socrates first mentions *tragōidia*, it occurs in the context of Theaetetus’ first proposed definition of knowledge, namely that knowledge is perception, interpreted from Protagoras’ claim that human beings are the measure of all things. To test this argument, Socrates asks Theaetetus whether the same wind always appears to have the same effect on the same individuals, or if instead one person will think it cold and another hot. Theaetetus agrees with the latter proposition, and both agree that everything that is perceived is in a state of becoming, and



that one immediately entangles himself in a paradox if he ascribes a definite ontological quality to something's essential qualities. Thus, these perceptions are dependent on the state or disposition of the *person perceiving them*, not the actual object itself.

Socrates then argues that this leads the sophists, Presocratic philosophers (again, excepting Parmenides), and the dramatic poets to take the argumentative line that motion and change is the principle of all things, while rest and stillness is the principle of destruction or non-being. At this point Socrates argues that the poet Epicharmis holds this thesis in comedy, whereas in the realm of *tragedy* Homer expresses this, before quoting *Iliad* 14.241-2: "Give me Love, give me Longing now, the powers you use to overwhelm all gods and mortal men! I am off to the ends of the fruitful, teeming earth to visit Ocean, fountainhead of the gods, and Mother Tethys who nourished me in her halls and reared me well" (trans. Robert Fagles). The classification of Homer as a tragedian is itself curious, but echoes Socrates' statement in the *Republic* that Homer is 'the leader of the tragedians' and the first tragedian, as well as Aristotle's statement in the *Poetics* that Homer's poetry has in common with the tragedians that they both write about *spoudaios* characters.

This quote from the 'tragedian', i.e., Homer, is explicitly related to the tragedian's view of cosmology, the gods themselves, and thus their metaphysical and ontological commitments. Socrates represents the tragedians as a whole as having weight and authority in a religious context, and for subscribing to a markedly liquid ontology. Not only that, but the context of Socrates' quote amounts to Hera's request from Aphrodite to use love and longing to 'overwhelm' her target. Here, tragedy is not understood necessarily by its formal characteristics, i.e., by its dramatic and performative context, but rather on its metaphysical and ontological commitments, as well as the types of characters it represents. This philosophy is that motion is the principle of all things and

things are always becoming, and never truly ‘are’. This means, in turn, that *the gods* and divine beings are always changing and in a state of becoming rather than occupying a state of true being.

This is important in the context of the overall argument of the *Theaetetus*, for it recalls Socrates’ concern with Protagoras’ statement that humans are the measure of all things. Such a statement suggests that that perception is variant on the affective disposition of the agent. Since mortals are always in a constant state of becoming on this reasoning, this leads to differing and conflicting perceptual experience. Moreover, Socrates attributes the same interpretive or philosophical commitment, namely the principle of motion and change being the only ‘true’ reality, to all those who are called “*sophoi*”, recalling the language of the *Apology* and Socrates’ cross examination of those professions and ways of life or individuals who are thought to have a claim to *sophia* and thus to possess a form of social prominence, power, or capital. Socrates concludes that these *sophoi* all agree that motion is the nourisher of all things, and he even attests his own arguments to try to demonstrate that rest is bad for both the soul and the body, whereas motion and exercise is good, and returns ultimately to the conclusion stated at the beginning, namely that ‘whiteness’ does not exist outside of the eye of the perceiver:

black or white or any other color will turn out to have come into being through the impact of the eye upon the appropriate motion; and what we naturally call a particular color is neither that which impinged nor that which is impinged upon, but something which has come into being between the two, and which is private to the individual percipient.—Or would you be prepared to insist that every color appears to a dog, or to any other animal, the same as it appears to you (153c-154a)?<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> και ἡμῖν οὕτω μέλαν τε καὶ λευκὸν καὶ ὅτιοῦν ἄλλο χρῶμα ἐκ τῆς προσβολῆς τῶν ὀμμάτων πρὸς τὴν προσήκουσαν φορὰν φανεῖται γεγενημένον, καὶ ὃ δὴ ἕκαστον εἶναι φαμεν χρῶμα οὔτε τὸ προσβάλλον οὔτε τὸ προσβαλλόμενον ἔσται, ἀλλὰ μεταξύ τι ἐκάστῳ ἴδιον γεγονός· ἢ σὺ δισχυρίσαιο ἂν ὡς οἶον σοὶ φαίνεται ἕκαστον χρῶμα, τοιοῦτον καὶ κυνὶ καὶ ὄτφοῦν ζῳῳ;

This passage again speaks to the concern that these purveyors of wisdom believe that ‘truth’ and true reality is dependent on the type of person perceiving and, returning to Protagoras’ statement regarding human beings being the measure of all things, that each of these perceptions are equally true. It is also important to note, I think, that Protagoras’ position that human beings are the measure of all things does not anticipate Cartesian idealism, namely, that all knowledge exists only in the mind or experience of the viewer. Instead, I am in agreement with M.F. Burnyeat and Evan Keeling that, at least as the position is characterized in the *Theaetetus*, “the Protagorean claim is in the first place that the appearances, all of them, accurately reflect or correspond to an external world. They constitute knowledge for this reason and not because we have infallible access to them.”<sup>102</sup> This is also important, I think, when trying to understand Plato’s ontology in addition to what he takes to be problematic about the views and narrative perspective of the tragedians. The narrators of the tragedians are characterized most of all as being liable to suffering various affections and being in a constant state of flux rather than stability, which leads them to believe that their perceptions reflect true external reality. This tragic and sophistic view concerning the changeability and lack of stability of the external world therefore recursively shapes their own personality and soul in a mutually reinforcing relationship.

Socrates presses the matter even further than the mere difference between two different people perceiving the same phenomenon, and suggests that even a single perceiver may have contradictory perceptions:

On the other hand, if you suppose them to belong to what is measuring or touching, this again could never become different simply because something else had come into its

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<sup>102</sup> Evan Keeling, “Pathos in the *Theaetetus*,” in *Psychology and Ontology in Plato*, eds Luca Pitteloud and Evan Keeling (Springer: 2019), 59. See also M. F. Burnyeat, “Idealism and Greek Philosophy: What Descartes Saw and Berkeley Missed,” *The Philosophical Review* 91, no. 1 (1982): 3-40.

neighborhood, or because something had happened to the first thing – nothing having happened to itself (154b).<sup>103</sup>

This suggests that the state of the perceiver him or herself is constantly changing when she is affected by various phenomena, so that even to the *same person* the same wind will at one time be cold and at another time warm, leading one to be unable to ascribe a true quality to anything. Both the perceiver and the perceived are in a constant state of change and flux on the metaphysical view of the tragedians. Socrates uses the further example of comparing sets of dice to one another as an example of the ways in which people like Protagoras manage to ensnare people into internal contradictions, which Theaetetus himself acknowledges. Socrates replies, “That’s a good answer, my friend, by Hera it is; you are inspired. But, I think, if you answer ‘Yes’, it will be like that episode in Euripides – the tongue will be safe from refutation but the mind will not [ή μὲν γὰρ γλῶττα ἀνέλεγκτος ἡμῖν ἔσται, ἡ δὲ φρήν οὐκ ἀνέλεγκτος]” (154d, lightly modified).<sup>104</sup> This is a paraphrase of Euripides’ *Hippolytus* 612: ή γλῶσσ’ ὁμώμοχ’, ή δὲ φρήν ἀνώμοτος, “my tongue has sworn, but my mind is unsworn.” The reference is significant, not merely as a rhetorical response to Theaetetus’ perplexity at the issue at hand, but furthermore because on a meta-textual level it confirms Socrates’ interpretation that the tragedians encourage people to imitate characters who are constantly changing their beliefs, and this in turn informs how the authors are themselves inconsistent and liable to affective changes. This internal inconsistency is therefore implicitly presented as paradigmatic of the tragedians themselves, in addition to the characters of their own tragedies, setting up a recursive relationship between their mimetic creations and their ethical beliefs.

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<sup>103</sup> εἰ δὲ αὐτὸ παραμετρούμενον ἢ ἐφαπτόμενον ἕκαστον ἦν τούτων, οὐκ ἂν αὐτὸ ἄλλου προσελθόντος ἢ τι παθόντος αὐτὸ μηδὲν παθὼν ἄλλο ἂν ἐγένετο

<sup>104</sup> εὖ γε νῆ τὴν Ἥραν, ὦ φίλε, καὶ θείως. ἀτάρ, ὡς ἔοικεν, ἐὰν ἀποκρίνη ὅτι ἔστιν, Εὐριπίδειόν τι συμβήσεται: ἡ μὲν γὰρ γλῶττα ἀνέλεγκτος ἡμῖν ἔσται, ἡ δὲ φρήν οὐκ ἀνέλεγκτος.

Socrates then proposes, in his ironical fashion, that since he and Theaetetus are ordinary people who are not *sophoi* or *deinoi*, they will try instead to ‘examine truly themselves’ rather than try to refute one another, which is an important contrast between the characterization of the genre and way of life of philosophy in opposition to the other forms of discourse popular in Classical Athens:

Now if you and I were professional savants [δεινοὶ καὶ σοφοὶ], who had already analyzed all the contents of our minds, we should now spend our superfluous time trying each other out; we should start a regular Sophist’ set-to, with a great clashing of argument on argument. But, as it is, we are only plain men; and so our first aim will be to look at our thoughts themselves in relation to themselves, and see what they are – whether, in our opinion, they agree with one another or are entirely at variance (154d-154e).<sup>105</sup>

Instead of trying to argue for a plurality and complexity of ends and conflicting experiences, the philosopher aims to harmonize both himself and his views with his interlocutors. The other important contrast between philosophy (implicitly) and these forms of discourse is that Socrates and Theaetetus have *scholē*, leisure time – “ὅτε δ’ οὕτως ἔχει, ἄλλο τι ἢ ἡρέμα, ὡς πάνυ πολλὴν σχολὴν ἄγοντες” (154e). This is reminiscent to Socrates’ discussion in the *Apology* of how the lack of time allowed by the water clock in the Athenian court system does not enable the jury to come to a position of true knowledge. In a similar way, as discussed above, tragedies occurred within a limited timeframe, unlike Socratic *logoi* and *elenchoi*. Therefore, the Socratic *elenchus* and philosophical dialectic is something that can be practiced at one’s leisure, rather than the debates that the choruses of tragedy witness and mediate. Theaetetus’ and Socrates’ *scholē* and

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<sup>105</sup> οὐκοῦν εἰ μὲν δεινοὶ καὶ σοφοὶ ἐγώ τε καὶ σὺ ἡμεν, πάντα τὰ τῶν φρενῶν ἐξητακότες, ἤδη ἂν τὸ λοιπὸν ἐκ περιουσίας ἀλλήλων ἀποπειρώμενοι, συνελθόντες σοφιστικῶς εἰς μάχην τοιαύτην, ἀλλήλων τοὺς λόγους τοῖς λόγοις ἐκρούομεν: νῦν δὲ ἅτε ἰδιῶται πρῶτον βουλευσόμεθα θεάσασθαι ἀνὰ πρὸς ἀνὰ τί ποτ’ ἐστὶν ἃ διανοούμεθα, πότερον ἡμῖν ἀλλήλοις συμφωνεῖ ἢ οὐδ’ ὅπωςτιοῦν...

time to carefully and wholly discuss the matters at hand in order to come to a unified and harmonious position at the end is also a characteristic they share with Terpsion and Euclides on the first diegetic levels of the dialogue, namely the dramatic frame conversation. Terpsion and Euclides, too, have the leisure to enjoy and listen to philosophical conversation, thus creating a structural parallel between the frame and reported conversations.

That Theaetetus wants to continue this discussion in the manner in which Socrates proposed, namely, to truly examine themselves rather than try to disprove one another, is suggested to be emblematic of the character of the philosopher by Socrates' admission that

Theodorus appears to be a good guesser concerning your nature, my friend. For this is very much the state of the philosopher, namely wonder [μάλα γὰρ φιλοσόφου τοῦτο τὸ πάθος, τὸ θαυμάζειν]. There is no other beginning of philosophy than this, and it seems that the man who said that Iris is the offspring of Thaumus made a good genealogy. But do you already understand why these sorts of things are so according to the doctrines which we attributed to Protagoras, or do you not yet (155d, my translation)?<sup>106</sup>

This shows that Theaetetus and Socrates do not consider themselves *sophoi*, but *philosophoi*, those who *love* wisdom. This leads in turn to a curious discussion of those who are supposedly 'uninitiated':

Look around at the crowd and see that none of the uninitiated [ἀμυήτων] are listening in.

These are the people who suppose that nothing exists other than that which they can grasp

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<sup>106</sup> Θεόδωρος γὰρ, ὃ φίλε, φαίνεται οὐ κακῶς τοπάζειν περὶ τῆς φύσεώς σου. μάλα γὰρ φιλοσόφου τοῦτο τὸ πάθος, τὸ θαυμάζειν: οὐ γὰρ ἄλλη ἀρχὴ φιλοσοφίας ἢ αὕτη, καὶ ἔοικεν ὁ τὴν Ἴριν Θαύμαντος ἔκγονον φήσας οὐ κακῶς γενεαλογεῖν. ἀλλὰ πότερον μανθάνεις ἤδη δι' ὃ ταῦτα τοιαῦτ' ἐστὶν ἐξ ὧν τὸν Πρωταγόραν φημὲν λέγειν, ἢ οὐπω;

tightly with their hands, and who don't accept deeds and beginnings and everything that is invisible as belonging to the class of being (155e, my translation).<sup>107</sup>

The language of the uninitiated brings Socrates' and Theaetetus' discussion into a religious and cultic dimension, situating philosophy in its own kind of religious and ritual practice whose secrets and mysteries are only revealed to those who are part of an exclusive group. Furthermore, the uninitiated are described by Socrates as being 'μάλ' εὔ ἄμουσοι', uncultured, but literally without the Muses (156a). Indeed, Socrates' statement about none of the uninitiated listening is perhaps an oblique instance of metalepsis, or 'frame-breaking', in that Socrates is perhaps hinting at the fact that he and Theaetetus' conversation is actually being listened to on the first and second diegetic levels by Terpsion and Euclides, who, because of their intimate relationship with Socrates and love of *sophia*, have been initiated into the mysteries of philosophy. I would argue that Socrates claims that he can reveal the mysteries of these wise men because none of the uninitiated in *philosophy* are listening in. The implication is that because the people around, Theaetetus and Theodorus (and on a meta-poetic level, Terpsion and Euclides, the ones 'listening' to the dialogue on the first diegetic level) are already 'initiated' into the mysteries of philosophy and are therefore permitted to listen to these alien and problematic doctrines. On the other hand, those who have not already been initiated into philosophy might be persuaded of the charm and pleasantness of the doctrine without realizing its fundamental flaws (namely that it posits that only things which can be grasped through bodily perception truly exists).

Socrates goes on to ask Theaetetus whether the doctrine that the passive and active are constantly mixing, and that there are two types of motion which are always in intercourse or interchange between one another, is *pleasant* (ἡδέα) to him (ταῦτα δὴ, ὦ Θεαίτητε, ἄρ' ἡδέα δοκεῖ

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<sup>107</sup> ἄθρει δὴ περισκοπῶν μή τις τῶν ἀμυήτων ἐπακούη. εἰσὶν δὲ οὗτοι οἱ οὐδὲν ἄλλο οἰόμενοι εἶναι ἢ οὗ ἂν δύνωνται ἀπρὶς τοῖν χεροῖν λαβέσθαι, πράξεις δὲ καὶ γενέσεις καὶ πᾶν τὸ ἀόρατον οὐκ ἀποδεχόμενοι ὡς ἐν οὐσίας μέρει...

σοι εἶναι, 157c). Theaetetus then replies that he is unsure whether Socrates is being serious or not. Socrates replies with a characteristic reminder that

I don't know anything about this kind of thing myself, and I don't claim any of it as my own. I am barren of theories; my business is to attend you in your labor. So I chant [ἐπάδω] incantations over you and offer you little tidbits from each of the wise until I succeed in assisting you to lead with you [συνεξαγάγω] your own belief forth into the light (157c-d, lightly modified).<sup>108</sup>

By asking Theaetetus whether this doctrine is pleasant to him, Socrates is trying to test his moral character. As Socrates' discussion of *mimēsis* in the *Republic* demonstrated, people cannot resist imitating people whose characters are similar to theirs because it is *pleasant* (ἡδύς). The connection between pleasure and learning is intimately connected for Plato. If one takes pleasure in imitating the gods and characters of the tragedians, he will become like them. On the other hand, Socrates' *elenchus* shows that these doctrines, upon philosophical reflection and critical examination, are not true, thus shattering the illusion. Pleasure is thereby redirected towards cross-examination and wonder. This again suggests the value of philosophy and harmonizes with the presentation of philosophy as the 'true' form of tragedy in the *Apology* as well as in the *Laws* in that philosophizing can incorporate other ideas and intellectual modes and genres in a way that is safe. This is due in part because the characters in the dialogue and the reader herself are in the company of those who are initiated, that is, initiated in the ontological and by extension ethical values prescribed by philosophy. This is akin to the narrators of the dialogue themselves, universally either Socrates or a member of Socrates' close and intimate philosophical circle.

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<sup>108</sup> οὐ μνημονεύεις, ὦ φίλε, ὅτι ἐγὼ μὲν οὐτ' οἶδα οὔτε ποιῶμαι τῶν τοιούτων οὐδὲν ἐμόν, ἀλλ' εἰμι αὐτῶν ἄγονος, σὲ δὲ μαιεύομαι καὶ τούτου ἔνεκα ἐπάδω τε καὶ παρατίθημι ἐκάστων τῶν σοφῶν ἀπογεύσασθαι, ἕως ἂν εἰς φῶς τὸ σὸν δόγμα συνεξαγάγω...



Once Theaetetus has finally admitted that the theory seems reasonable and pleasing to him, this is the time at which Socrates points out to Theaetetus what he sees to be its flaws: “we had better not pass over any point where our theory is still incomplete. What we have not yet discussed is the question of dreams, and of insanity and other disease; also what is called mishearing or misseeing or other cases of misperceiving” (157e). Socrates introduces the objections of those who are sick, feverish, or dreaming, the standard examples that Aristotle will later take up as instances where the state of the person will determine whether the thing being perceived is close to reality or not: “here it is far from being true that all things which appear to the individual also are. On the contrary, no one of the things which appear to him really is” (158a). This is of course the final *tour de force* in which Socrates and Theaetetus discard the assumption that knowledge is perception.

It is now necessary to tie this entire discussion back to Plato’s characterization of tragedy, and the other forms of discourse with cultural currency generally. What we have seen about the characterization of tragedy is that the philosophical doctrine that the tragedians ascribe to, namely that everything is constantly affecting and being affected such that nothing truly is, is directly tied to the way they portray their characters, as Socrates’ quotation from Euripides’ *Hippolytus* demonstrates. The characters themselves are constantly being affected by external *pathea* and as a result it becomes impossible to ascribe truth to any one phenomenon. Imitating these characters, in turn, is something that is presented as something that has the potential to be pleasant, ἡδύς. Socrates’ counter to this pleasantness is achieved through the familiar Socratic example of someone who is sick or asleep and demonstrates that the fact that things appear to be constantly changing is not the fault of an external reality being relativistic, but is rather the fault of the person perceiving them allowing themselves to be subject to various corrupting affective and pathetic states. As a result, this pleasure is fundamentally perverse or untrue. For the sick person is not in

the proper state to experience true pleasure. The example of the person who is affected by various afflictions proves for Socrates and Theaetetus that perceptions are deceiving but *only* to the person who is themselves in a defective state.

This metaphysical and mimetic characterization of the tragedians is compounded by Socrates' contrast between the way that the *'sophoi* and *'deinoi*' interact with one another versus how the philosophical personality interacts with one another. As Socrates argues, the tragedians and sophists merely want to engage in verbal combat with one another in order to 'win', whereas the philosophers want to truly examine themselves and in doing so find out what state a person ought to be in to gain true knowledge of reality. In addition, they want their views to harmonize with one another rather than merely verbally spar and create more divisiveness in their souls. Furthermore, Socrates' claims of being an *epōidos* or enchanter who is giving Theaetetus a taste of different metaphysical doctrines, and particularly his claim that some of these doctrines are pleasant, shows the value of philosophy in enabling one to test out these potential claims in a manner consistent with the way that symposium is described in Plato's *Laws*, and demonstrates an intertextual allusion to Euripides' portrayal of Dionysus as an *epōidos* in the *Bacchae*. The Dionysian activities of consumption of wine as well as the activity of *mimēsis* of various alien or potentially affective *logoi* are necessary for an interlocutor to experience in that they allow him to 'practice' virtue and resist vice. The value of Plato's philosophical dialogues, and the philosophical life in general, is that there is always a philosophical 'chorus leader' in charge, who is himself not liable to affective change as in tragic choruses. Socrates being likened to a kind of chorus leader is suggested by his use of the verb *συνεξαγάγω*, jointly helping Theaetetus 'lead' his ideas out, just as a choral leader is depicted leading his chorus.<sup>109</sup> Theaetetus is being tested to see whether

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<sup>109</sup> The Greek verb *ἄγω* and its cognates and compounds are often used to denote leading choruses; see Charles Gladhill, "Mousikē and Sophistry in Plato's *Protagoras*," *Illinois Classical Studies* 39 (2014): 26-7.

he finds these untrue doctrines to be pleasant, and the ability to resist internalizing such doctrines, whether or not they are pleasant, constitutes the cleansing and purifying process of the Socratic *elenchus* which constitutes initiation into the knowledge of true being.

### IV.3 The *Phaedrus* – The Living Body of Poetic Works

#### IV.3.i The Narrator: Socrates as Implicit Narrator-Hero

While Socrates is the implicit narrator-hero of the third diegetic level in the *Theaetetus*, in the *Phaedrus* he is bumped up to the primary implicit narrator-focalizer for the entirety of the dialogue. A middle-period dialogue, the *Phaedrus* is primarily Socrates'. We 'see' the conversations and events of the dialogue through Socrates' privileged perspective. As Finkelberg notes, "Socrates' visualization of the pastoral landscape by the Ilissus River unambiguously indicates who should be seen as the implicit narrator of the *Phaedrus*."<sup>110</sup> But importantly, Socrates focalizes not only the physical setting and landscape of the dialogue, using the language of vision, touch, and smell, but similarly the principal and eponymous interlocutor of the dialogue, Phaedrus. Socrates relates Phaedrus' excitement and even describes to Phaedrus, apparently accurately enough for the interlocutor not to contradict him, that Phaedrus, "running into a man who is sick with passion for hearing speeches, seeing him – just seeing [ἰδὼν μὲν, ἰδῶν] him [Socrates] – was filled with pleasure [ἤσθη]: he had found a partner for his frenzied dance [συγκορυβαντιῶντα], and he urged him to lead the way [καὶ προάγειν ἐκέλευε] to share his revel. But when that lover of speeches [τοῦ τῶν λόγων ἐραστοῦ] asked him to recite it, he played coy and pretended that he did not want to" (228b-c, lightly adapted). Here, we get Socrates narrating Phaedrus' hypothetical focalization and feeling of pleasure [ἤσθη, from the verb ἥδομαι, the root of which is ἡδύς] at the

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<sup>110</sup> Finkelberg, *The Gatekeeper*, 61.

moment when he caught sight of Socrates, the latter of whom is “sick with passion for listening to speeches” (τῷ νοσοῦντι περὶ λόγων ἀκοήν), and an *erastēs* of *logoi*. Therefore, even Phaedrus’ perspective is mediated through Socrates’ own (admittedly rather psychologically discerning and accurate) imagination. This is reminiscent of Socrates’ near-omniscient ability to report the emotions and feelings of other interlocutors such as Thrasymachus in the *Republic*, where he is the explicit narrator-hero. Socrates also plays the role of implicit narrator-hero in two other dialogues, namely the *Cratylus* and the *Meno*.<sup>111</sup>

Further, Socrates’ marked focalization is identified by Plato’s zooming-in technique, when he asks Phaedrus where he has just come from, to which Phaedrus replies that he was just spending time with the speechwriter Lysias. Socrates then asks him “what was your *diatribē*? Or isn’t it obvious that Lysias feasted [εἰστία] you on *logoi*?” (227b, my translation).<sup>112</sup> The verb εἰστιάω is philosophically charged in the context of this dialogue, as Socrates will use similar language of receiving one at a hearth or feasting and dining when he describes the rotation of the heavenly bodies and the gods looking down upon the ‘spectacle of being’, that is, the Platonic forms themselves (247e).<sup>113</sup> These are the only two times that Plato uses this verb in the dialogue, which are importantly connected. Phaedrus is thus characterized as someone who delights [ἡσθη] in *logoi* or speeches, which suggests in and of itself an erotic connotation. This eroticism is not directed

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<sup>111</sup> The Athenian Stranger is the other implicit narrator-hero in Plato’s corpus, who mediates in its entirety Plato’s final dialogue, the *Laws*.

<sup>112</sup> τίς οὖν δὴ ἦν ἡ διατριβή; ἢ δῆλον ὅτι τῶν λόγων ὑμᾶς Λυσίας εἰστία;

<sup>113</sup> “And in the circuit [the intellect] looks down upon justice itself, down upon moderation itself, down upon knowledge itself (not the generation which is present on earth, nor the [knowledge] that, I suppose, is different in different circumstances, which we are accustomed to call ‘real’ here), but real knowledge that is in the circumstance of what really exists. But in like manner, after contemplating and having a visionary feast [ἐστιαθεῖσα] on the beings that truly exist, sinking once more into the interior of the heavens, it comes back home” (my translation). ἐν δὲ τῇ περιόδῳ καθορᾷ μὲν αὐτὴν δικαιοσύνην, καθορᾷ δὲ σωφροσύνην, καθορᾷ δὲ ἐπιστήμην, οὐχ ἢ γένησις πρόσεστιν, οὐδ’ ἢ ἐστὶν που ἕτερα ἐν ἑτέρῳ οὔσα ἧμεῖς νῦν ὄντων καλοῦμεν, ἀλλὰ τὴν ἐν τῷ ὄντι ὄντως ἐπιστήμην οὔσαν· καὶ ἄλλα ὡσαύτως τὰ ὄντα ὄντως θεασαμένη καὶ ἐστιαθεῖσα, δῶσα πάλιν εἰς τὸ εἶσω τοῦ οὐρανοῦ, οἴκαδε ἦλθεν.

towards individuals, however, but the *logoi* themselves. As in the *Theaetetus*, Phaedrus says that he will recite Lysias' speech to Socrates if he has the *scholē* for it (227b8), again suggestive of the distinctive way that the philosopher spends his time.

This is not to say that Phaedrus does not do some secondary focalizing. Most notably, Phaedrus points out to Socrates that he, Phaedrus, is not wearing shoes (229a); however, this is an instance of secondary rather than primary focalization, and importantly mirrors Socrates' own disposition and habits. Phaedrus's secondary focalization is therefore an imitation of Socrates not wearing shoes, a trait that Alkibiades ascribes to Socrates in his encomium in the *Symposium* (220b3-8). Alkibiades' description offers a portrait of Socrates', and therefore the true philosopher's, ability to remain unchanged by physical affection and thus serves as a testament to his *sophrosunē*. Phaedrus also imitates Socrates by appropriating the dialectical method of division characteristic of the philosopher, by giving "a careful summary [διάνοιαν] of the whole, listing all the ways he said the lover differs [διαφέρειν] from the non-lover, starting from the first" (228d, lightly adapted),<sup>114</sup> rather than merely 'learning it thoroughly' [ἐκμανθάνω].

Phaedrus is also clearly 'infected' by the divinely inspired 'sting' of philosophy since Socrates describes him as making him a companion in his 'korybantic' dance. Phaedrus' assurance that he did not merely "learn the speech by heart" [ἐξεπιστάμενος τὸν λόγον] as Socrates suggests, but instead sought to list out all of Lysias' distinctions [διαφέρειν], is strikingly reminiscent of the method of philosophical dialectic. On the other hand, Phaedrus' love for the listening to and analyzing speeches is given a religious dimension, for a Corybant was a priest of Cybele, a Phrygian goddess associated with Dionysus and who was the patron deity of a mystery cult akin

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<sup>114</sup> τὴν μέντοι διάνοιαν σχεδὸν ἀπάντων, οἷς ἔφη διαφέρειν τὰ τοῦ ἐρῶντος ἢ τὰ τοῦ μὴ, ἐν κεφαλαίοις ἕκαστον ἐφεξῆς δίδειμι, ἀρξάμενος ἀπὸ τοῦ πρώτου.

to the Orphic and Eleusinian mysteries.<sup>115</sup> Indeed, it may be precisely because Phaedrus is focalized as a philosophical character, who is in some sense an initiate (or hoping to become an initiate) into the mysteries of philosophy that he is permitted by the author, Plato, to do some secondary focalizing himself. Contrast this with the *Republic*, where the audience never sees (or hears) Thrasymachus, an emphatically anti-philosophical person, focalizing any events through his own perspective. All of this suggests that the philosophical dialectic and listening to speeches (*logoi*) is associated with a variety of divine frenzy. Socrates' focalization of Phaedrus, and Phaedrus' secondary focalization through Socrates, emphasizes the delight and divine inspiration that one derives from philosophy, and particularly the examination of *logoi* through the Socratic method. Narrator focalization therefore acts as a protreptic for philosophy.

Furthermore, Socrates suggests that Phaedrus is looking for a leader [*προάγειν ἐκέλευε*] to join in his frenzied corybantic dance and finds that leader in Socrates himself. As was mentioned in the *Theaetetus* analysis, the verb *ἄγω* and its compounds have close affinities to chorality and chorus leading. As Charles Gladhill points out,

Within a choral context [...] the semantic range of *ἄγειν* is extended to include “to lead” and “to manage” the *choros* [...] This semantic extension of *ἄγειν* corresponds not only to *χοράγος*, but to the dancing “herd,” *ἀγέλη*, and the educational system of the *ἀγωγή* in Sparta. This use of *ἄγειν* also recalls *σύναγειν*, which described Orpheus conducting his *choros* in the *Bacchae* [560–64].<sup>116</sup>

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<sup>115</sup> See Giulia Sfameni Gasparro, *Soteriology and Mystic Aspects in the Cult of Cybele and Attis* (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 10-11.

<sup>116</sup> Charles Gladhill, “*Mousikē* and Sophistry:” 26-7.

Plato uses the verb ἄγειν in the *Protagoras* to refer to the eponymous interlocutor's 'chorus' of followers, and, as Gladhill argues, intentionally does so in order to showcase Protagoras' (and by extension the sophists' in general) subversion of the more traditional forms of chorality and choral teaching that were conducted in a public democratic context, namely the dramatic festivals.<sup>117</sup> Protagoras' 'subversive *khoreia*' is therefore in Plato's eyes a perversion of the traditional chorus, being taught in the private domestic sphere rather than a distinctively civic context. What is more, Protagoras teaches the aristocratic youth for a steep fee, causing the money of the wealthier citizens to end up in the pockets of these often-foreign itinerant teachers rather than being redistributed back into the civic body, as did the money of the aristocratic citizen sponsors of the dramatic festivals.

Furthermore, there are other Platonic dialogues aside from the *Protagoras* in which sophists are described as leading or having a chorus, such as the *Euthydemus*: "When [Euthydemus] said this, the followers of Dionysodorus and Euthydemus broke into applause and laughter, just like a chorus at a sign from their teacher [ὡσπερ ὑπὸ διδασκάλου χορὸς ἀποσημῆναντος]" (276b9-c1, modified).<sup>118</sup> The major difference between these two choral leaders, however, is firstly their metaphysical stances (Protagoras believing that 'humankind is the measure of all things' and Euthydemus that one should not care for wisdom or learning) and secondly in that they are unwilling to engage in a mutual conversation with their students. Protagoras only makes grand speeches in his eponymous dialogue and crumbles under the pressure of Socrates' examination. Euthydemus and Dionysodorus, on the other hand, both sophistic teachers of eristic, are described as leading their own chorus, but do not let Cleinias, the μειράκιον who is supposed

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<sup>117</sup> Gladhill, "Mousikē and Sophistry," 34.

<sup>118</sup> Ταῦτ' οὖν εἰπόντος αὐτοῦ, ὡσπερ ὑπὸ διδασκάλου χορὸς ἀποσημῆναντος, ἅμα ἀνεθορύβησαν τε καὶ ἐγέλασαν οἱ ἐπόμενοι ἐκεῖνοι μετὰ τοῦ Διονυσιοδώρου τε καὶ Εὐθυδήμου.

to be learning from them, to “properly recover his breath [ἀναπνεῦσαι καλῶς τε καὶ εὖ]” (276c2, modified) before Dionysodorus interjects and starts speaking again. Thus, the interlocutor is not actually given the opportunity to reply, in stark contrast to Socrates’ elenctic method which depends on the mutual engagement of both interlocutors. Socrates, therefore, is thus presented as a choral leader who does not accept pay to speak with him, and will speak with anyone in public or private, regardless of their wealth or political status, much more akin to the traditional tragic chorus leader. Nonetheless, his choral leading is wedded to a different concept of divinity and ontology than that of the tragedians. Given the semantic connotations of these terms, this passage from the *Phaedrus* likens Socrates to a choral leader of a frenzied choral bacchant or Corybant, thus demonstrating philosophy’s continuity and divergence with drama, and particularly tragedy.

#### IV.3.ii *Tragōidia* in the *Phaedrus*

Socrates and Phaedrus mention tragedy when they are trying to determine the nature of rhetoric, and how rhetoric can be used properly. Specifically, rhetoric is contrasted with that of dialectic. In the *Phaedrus*, there is a much more optimistic attitude towards rhetoric than there is in the *Gorgias*, where rhetoric, and specifically the type of oratory that the sophist Gorgias claims to teach, is demonstrated to be a knack (*empeiria*) rather than a craft (*technē*). The difference between these two views, however, may be explained by the differing interlocutors that Socrates is dealing with in each dialogue; in the former, Socrates is speaking with the young logophile, Phaedrus, who adores *logoi* (perhaps to an excessive extent) but is nevertheless of a philosophical character, whereas in the *Gorgias* the interlocutor Socrates must face is the sophistic and unphilosophical Callicles, who is depicted as disparaging the philosophical life. Moreover, the interactions between Phaedrus and Socrates are cast in an erotic context, while in the *Gorgias* the encounter between Callicles and Socrates is much more agonistic, and in a sophistic context,



solidifying the fact that true philosophers are imbued with philosophical *erōs* rather than agonistic intent.

Before examining Socrates' and Phaedrus' discussion of tragedy, it is necessary to examine Socrates' image and likeness of the soul in his speech praising the merit of the lover over the non-lover, as a speech in response to Lysias'. In this speech, Socrates famously likens the soul to a charioteer driving a winged chariot with two horses. While the souls of the gods have two perfectly behaved horses, human souls have a mixture of 'noble' and 'base' horses, the former of which is easier and the latter of which is more difficult to control. The task of the charioteer is to keep both in control, and if he cannot, the chariot sheds its wings and as a result falls into a mortal body (246a5-c10). This is because, as Socrates explains, the wings are nourished by associating with the souls of the gods and witnessing the 'spectacle of being' in the place beyond heaven but are unable to reach this place if the horses disturb the driving of the charioteer and pull him back down to earth. Socrates then likens the revolution of the heavenly spheres and the circuit of the souls revolving around the cosmos to a divine choral procession: "Now Zeus, the great commander in heaven, drives his winged chariot first in the procession [...] Following him is an army of gods and spirits arranged in eleven sections" (246e9-247a2). There are therefore twelve people in Zeus' 'chorus' (247a10), corresponding to the twelve Olympian gods and to the typically twelve-person tragic chorus.<sup>119</sup> They all follow in Zeus' chorus ("jealousy stands outside of the divine chorus [φθόνος γὰρ ἔξω θείου χοροῦ ἴσταται]", my translation, 247a) and then go to feast at the banquet [ἔστιαθεῖσα] (247e), which recalls the language that Socrates used to describe the 'banquet' of *logoi* on which Lysias feasted Phaedrus. The 'feast' that the souls are afforded when they reach the place beyond heaven is described in rich detail by Socrates, and is worth quoting in full:

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<sup>119</sup> Though sometimes fifteen. See Morrow, *Plato's Cretan City*, 311.

substance, really existing without colour and without shape and not being able to be grasped by touch, visible to the pilot of the soul alone, namely the mind, and which is a species of true knowledge, inhabits this place. Accordingly, the intellect of god, just as much as it is nourished by mind and undefiled knowledge, so too by as much [the intellect] of every soul that would have a care to receive what is fitting, looking at that which exists for an interval of time, would be content, and contemplating true reality is nourished and experiences comfort, until the circular revolution is rotated around to the same place. And in the circuit [the intellect] looks down upon justice itself [ἀπὲρ δικαιοσύνην], down upon moderation itself, down upon knowledge itself, and it has no genesis, nor is it the [knowledge] that, I suppose, is different in different circumstances, which we are accustomed to call ‘real’ as the case stands [νῦν], but real knowledge that *is* in the circumstance of what *really* exists (276c7-e1, my translation).

These Platonic forms (identified as such by Plato’s signature use of the demonstrative intensifier αὐτός to modify these abstract moral concepts) are not subject to change and are therefore reliable sources of knowledge.<sup>120</sup> These forms of knowledge are contrasted with the objects of knowledge that are gained through mortal perception, namely the things that are ‘different in different circumstances’ which mortals are accustomed to call ‘real’ in Socrates’ and Phaedrus’ present circumstances (νῦν), namely, embodied human experience. This is one type of ‘visionary feast’ that a soul can achieve, and the implication is that the human soul can only experience the ‘spectacle of being’ if they have mastered their passions and appetites, analogized as the two horses

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<sup>120</sup> Compare this to Socrates’ and Theaetetus’ discussion of the doctrine that knowledge is perception in the eponymous dialogue, examined above. The true objects of being, Plato’s unchanging and perfect ‘forms’, are sharply distinct from the ‘becoming’ that is the product of perception, which was revealed to be incapable of being a true object of knowledge. Socrates’ and Theaetetus’ investigation discredited for them the sophistic and supposedly tragic doctrine that everything is in a state of constant flux, and that instead, in order for there to be a species of true knowledge, there must exist something that is stable and unchanging undergirding reality and all phenomenological experience.

that represent the non-rational motivations of the soul, namely the lover of honor and the one who loves bodily pleasure (253d4-254a6). Thus, for Plato, true reality does not change and cannot be experienced through mortal sensation but can only be grasped through thought, and *only* grasped by thought when it is not corrupted by the affections and changes of the body. This means that, in order to grasp these metaphysical and true objects of knowledge and reality, one must have purified and cleansed himself of his bodily affections and desires and channel those desires instead towards the love of wisdom and dialectical conversation.

Paul Woodruff argues that the ‘spectacle of being’ that the souls who can control their horses are able to witness is modelled as an inverse of the traditional Athenian theatre, particularly the one in the sanctuary of Dionysus. While in the traditional Athenian theatre the ‘best seats’ would be at the very centre, close to the central hearth and the stage, in Plato’s image, Woodruff notes that the best seats for the spectacle of being would be located at the top and indeed outside of such a spatial organization.<sup>121</sup> His analysis supports my argument in that the chorus that would have been viewed on the traditional Athenian stage is replaced in Socrates’ myth by the divine chorus of the gods circling around the true objects of being, the unchanging forms. The idea that Plato conceives of the souls as being part of a chorus is evidenced by Socrates claim that “everyone

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<sup>121</sup> Paul Woodruff, “Plato’s Inverted Theatre: Displacing the Wisdom of the Poets,” In *Philosophy as Drama: Plato’s Thinking through Dialogue*, eds Hallvard Fossheim, Vigdis Songe-Møller and Knut Ågotnes (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2019), 95-6: “Classical poetry was created to be performed, and tragic poetry was composed for performance in the Theatre of Dionysus, which had a well-known shape: a central hearth in the centre of a circle, from which rose tier on tier of seats, leading at the top to a rim of the highest seats. From the circle radiated pathways with steps. Since the action was mainly in the circle (with perhaps some action on a stage behind it), the best seats were at the bottom, and we can easily imagine the rush of an audience racing on entering the space to take the seats with the best view of the spectacle. This race Plato will invert in an image that can be visualized at least partly on the model of an ancient theatre. The language Plato uses allows (but does not require) this visualization, and the larger context is suggestive of the *ponos* and *agon* of theatre. Plato’s heaven is indeed a place where the most important and difficult work is watching, but with the mind’s eye – taking in the timeless truths of the reality that lies beyond heaven [...] The space will look much like an Athenian theatre, in having aisles and a high rim, though its circle completely surrounds the audience. Those inside have no access to external reality except by ascending to the topmost tier and looking out. In effect, the meaning and use of this space has been turned upside down. The spectacle will be outside the theatre, to be seen only by those who look outside the theatre altogether. In this new kind of theatre, there will be a new sort of thing to watch, and a new way to be a watcher.”

spends his life honoring the god in whose chorus he was a choral dancer [χορευτής] and emulates that god in every way he can, so long as he lives undefiled and in his first life down here” (252d1-3, lightly modified). By dancing in the chorus of the gods, then, the embodied human soul imitates divinity, and can prepare itself in life for its separation from the body and return to the place ‘above heaven’.

Those souls who do not, on the other hand, get to see this spectacle of being as a result of their horses being uncontrolled by the charioteer (a metaphor for the inability for the reasoning part of the human soul, the charioteer, to control the non-rational motivations of the soul associated with the bodily and material realm),

all yearning to follow the god upward, but being unable to, are carried around below the surface [of the heavens], trampling upon and shoving one another, the one striving to get in front of the other. Therefore, at the end [of the procession] there is confusion and conflict and sweat, where due to the vice of the charioteers many [souls] are defiled, and many have much of their wings broken. And all the [souls], despite their great toil leave the ‘spectacle of being’ uninitiated [ἀτελεῖς], and because they went away, they are nourished by the food of opinion” (248a-b, my translation).

The inability to gaze upon true reality leads to people being nourished on spectacles of *doxa* or opinion rather than true being. This seems to be a veiled reference to the kind of feast that the speechwriter Lysias was affording his own students, Phaedrus included. In Socrates’ myth, however, any soul that became embodied into a human must have had at least a glimpse of truth, “since a human being must understand speech in terms of general forms, proceeding to bring many perceptions together into a reasoned unity. That process is the recollection of the things our soul

saw when it was traveling with god” (249b10-c4).<sup>122</sup> The souls at the end of the train, however, have less memory of true reality, and as a result subscribe to the belief that the only true reality are those things experienced in the mortal condition. The philosophical soul who managed to get a glimpse of the forms but still landed in a mortal body is nonetheless able in life to “[grow] wings, since its memory always keep it as close as possible to those realities by being close to which the gods are divine” and are as a result “possessed by god” (249c1-d2) and “always at the highest, most perfect level of initiation” (249c9). In contrast, those souls at the end of the line who do not get a glimpse of the forms are described as not being ‘initiated’ [ἀτελεῖς], once again referencing Socrates’ and Phaedrus’ opening discussion about the frenzied Corybants and the importance of the activity of philosophy enabling one to become initiated into the mysteries of philosophical truth.

Turning now to the discussion of *tragōidia* by Phaedrus and Socrates, the essential conclusion of their investigation into the usefulness of rhetoric is that it is only useful if the person employing it has also understood dialectic, defined as the ability to see “together things that are scattered about everywhere and [collect] them into one kind” and being able to “cut up each kind according to its species along its natural joints” (265d3-e3), as though a speech were a living body. It is in this context that Socrates brings up tragedy and the tragedians. Socrates has just recapitulated all the rhetorical tools and strategies that sophists use in their speeches (notable sophists here being Thrasymachus, Protagoras, Evenus, Prodicus, Hippias, Gorgias, and even Polus, Gorgias’ pupil as represented in the eponymous dialogue) and notes that simply knowing these strategies is not equivalent to knowing how (or why) to employ rhetoric. Phaedrus notes that all of these strategies are especially useful in front of a crowd (and therefore in a distinctly

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<sup>122</sup> δεῖ γὰρ ἄνθρωπον συνιέναι κατ’ εἶδος λεγόμενον, ἐκ πολλῶν ἰὸν αἰσθήσεων εἰς ἓν λογισμῷ συναιρούμενον...

performative context) and Socrates retaliates with an argument by analogy: if someone were to say that they knew how to make someone vomit, or become warmer or colder, but didn't know what would be the effect or why one ought to do it in a given context, this would not make that person a doctor. As Phaedrus notes, again in marked imitation of Socrates' style of reasoning, the person would need to know not merely the strategies or techniques of doctoring, but more importantly "to whom he should apply such treatments, when, and to what extent" (268b). Following upon this analogy, Socrates extends the argument to include the tragedians:

suppose someone approached Sophocles and Euripides and claimed to know how to compose the longest passages on trivial topics and the briefest ones on topics of great importance, that he could make them pitiful if he wanted, or again, by contrast, terrifying and menacing, and so on. Suppose further that he believed that by teaching this he was imparting the knowledge of composing tragedies—

to which Phaedrus retorts that "I am sure they too would laugh at anyone who thought a tragedy was anything other than the proper arrangement of these things: They have to fit with one another and with the whole work" (268c-d). Thus, as Socrates reminds us, "Sophocles would also tell the man who was showing off to them that he knew the preliminaries of tragedy, but not the art (*technē*) of tragedy itself" (269a). Interestingly, tragedy is here in fact conceived of as a *technē*. Writing tragedy here has the potential to be legitimately considered a skill. It is worth noting, however, that it is Phaedrus who claims that tragedy is "nothing other than the fitting arrangement of these [speeches] with one another and the composition in its whole" (268d).<sup>123</sup> This is perhaps the closest that we get to an actual definition of tragedy in any one of Plato's dialogues. Phaedrus is here acting like the dialectician by understanding that tragedy is an arrangement of parts in the

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<sup>123</sup> τραγωδίαν ἄλλο τι εἶναι ἢ τὴν τούτων σύστασιν πρέπουσαν ἀλλήλοις τε καὶ τῷ ὅλῳ συνισταμένην...

proper or fitting manner, just like the doctor properly arranges and orders the different parts of the body. Analogously, it is argued, the philosopher is himself a ‘doctor of the soul’, who looks towards the proper arrangement and harmony of the different motivations of the soul in order for it to achieve its excellence. Socrates’ discussion of “seeing together things that are scattered about everywhere and collecting them into one kind” indeed recalls the language he uses in his myth about the souls who become humans because they are able to collect various perceptions (*aesthesis*) into one form (*eidos*). Socrates, “a lover of these divisions and collections”, is therefore an ideal leader in preparing the soul of his interlocutor, Phaedrus, to conduct this method of division in order to come as close as possible to the divine.

Socrates’ critique of rhetoric is that the rhetorician claims to make somebody virtuous (particularly the sophist) when he himself knows nothing of virtue because his soul has not gotten a glimpse of the forms which are unchanging and stable realities. The problem, then, is not actually with the principles and strategies used by rhetoric itself, but rather the ends to which these are directed – ends that are not understood properly by the teacher or leader. This claim addresses the problem of Socratic intellectualism. As Phaedrus notes, one cannot become a doctor just from reading books, or by coming across a few potions (*pharmaka*, 268c). This is an even more plausible reading given Socrates’ next instruction to Phaedrus, namely that such a person would not be harsh with people who do not know the *technē*, but rather tell them they do not yet understand harmony, but merely the *principles* of harmony. It is necessary to know both the principles of harmony (just as it is necessary to know the principles of virtue) but this alone is not enough to truly know what harmony is, according to Socrates: “if you have a natural ability for rhetoric, you will become a famous rhetorician, provided you supplement your ability with knowledge and practice. To the extent that you lack any one of them, to that extent you will be less than perfect” (269d).

Furthermore, Socrates says that it is incorrect that people “teach these preliminaries and imagine their pupils have received a full course in rhetoric, thinking the task of using each of them persuasively and putting them together into a whole speech is a minor matter, to be worked out by the pupils from their own resources” (269c). The proper choral leader, namely Socrates, helps and encourages his interlocutor to engage in the form of division and collection distinctive to human life which prepares them to be able to identify the forms of true being. Rhetoric and tragedy, on the other hand, have the potential to not take on the proper composition and arrangement – the arrangement of the soul, that is. As Socrates just indicated, each discourse is like a living human, and if the discourse is in disarray that suggests that the soul of the thing producing that discourse is also in disarray. The implication is that the sophist (and the imperfect tragedian, it seems), is likely to mangle the ‘body’ of their speeches or poetic productions, which would in turn mangle the soul of their listeners. On the other hand, Socrates’ elenctic method is aimed at the putting together and unifying of the interlocutor’s soul, in an imitation of the unchanging and divine forms that are never ‘different in different circumstances’.

#### **IV.4 The *Gorgias* – Philosophy as Craft and Tragedy as Knack**

##### IV.4.i The Narrator: Chaerophon as Implicit Narrator Observer

While in the *Phaedrus* tragedy and indeed rhetoric seem to be an acceptable form of discourse so long as one has mastered the art of dialectic, that is, so long as one is a philosopher, the verdict on tragedy and rhetoric in the *Gorgias*, though again cast in similar terms, is not so optimistic. As has already been suggested, this need not entail a foundational shift in Plato’s views about tragedy and rhetoric but may instead be the influence of the principal interlocutor, the anti-philosophical



Callicles. As the Phaedrus suggests and as scholars such as Pierre Destrée has argued,<sup>124</sup> Socrates' elenctic method is moulded to the needs of the interlocutor, not the other way around, and in the case of Callicles, there appears to be little hope that he will ever acquire the 'starting points of virtue' which are necessary to begin one's philosophical journey and 'initiation'. The starting point of virtue, indeed, is merely the will and desire to believe that virtue is something one ought to try to achieve and is therefore related more so to one's appetitive or thumetic temperament than to their rational element. The problem with the sophists who teach their students virtue without themselves having the starting points of virtue is that their students' rational souls are trained first, turning them into sophists who believe that the 'worse argument can appear the better', when in fact a proper training in one's appetites and emotional character – that is, a training that looks to the *whole* soul and all of its potentially disparate motivations – would reveal that this could never be true.

Callicles contrasts most (second only to his contrast with Socrates) with the implicit narrator-observer of the dialogue itself, Socrates' close companion Chaerophon. Finkelberg identifies several good reasons for believing that the dialogue is macro-focalized through the perspective of Chaerophon. Firstly, and principally, "the entire dialogue is explicitly set as Chaerophon's remedy [...] for the presentation he and Socrates have missed [447b1-3]."<sup>125</sup> When Socrates and Chaerophon have entered Callicles' house, and they find out that Gorgias has just given an *epideixis* to a large audience including the interlocutors Callicles and Polus, Chaerophon engages Polus in an imitation of Socrates' *elenchus*, since Gorgias is too tired to do so himself. Although after this brief imitation of Socratic philosophizing Chaerophon withdraws in large part

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<sup>124</sup> Pierre Destrée, "Spectacles from Hades. On Plato's Myths and Allegories in the Republic," in *Plato and Myth*, eds Catherine Collobert, Pierre Destrée, and Francisco J. Gonzalez (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 109-124.

<sup>125</sup> Finkelberg, *The Gatekeeper*, 67.

into the background of the dialogue, Plato reminds us of the important role that he plays as the implicit narrator-focalizer at several important argumentative and narrative junctions in the dialogue. Firstly, when Gorgias decides he wants to end his conversation with Socrates, Chaerophon “acknowledges the presence of the audience and registers their reaction” (458c3-7),<sup>126</sup> compelling the conversation to continue at the behest of the audience’s desire to hear it followed through to its end. Chaerophon’s narrative presence is felt again at the second structural argumentative turn of the dialogue, namely when Callicles interjects at the conclusion of Socrates’ and Polus’ *elenchus* that it is better to suffer injustice than to commit it and incredulously asks Chaerophon whether Socrates is speaking earnestly or joking (481b6).<sup>127</sup> That Callicles addresses *Chaerophon* specifically might seem to be a random choice. Narrative analysis demonstrates, however, that given Chaerophon’s role as the macro-focalizer of the dialogue, this address makes perfect sense, since the dialogue is being mediated through Chaerophon’s eyes.<sup>128</sup> His presence is therefore felt at the most important argumentative and plot transitions of the dialogue, even when he is not explicitly engaging in the dialectical action.

In the *Gorgias*, we see again, as in the *Phaedrus*, that Socrates’ companion can’t help but imitate him. Chaerophon’s cross-examination of Polus utilizes remarkably Socratic themes and techniques, namely the argument by analogy in his employment of the analogy of crafts (448b-c).<sup>129</sup> On the other hand, Callicles appears to be a carbon copy of Gorgias’ style of augmentation,

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<sup>126</sup> Ibid.

<sup>127</sup> Finkelberg, *The Gatekeeper*, 68.

<sup>128</sup> Indeed, the presence of Chaerophon has been seen as somewhat of an oddity: “It is hard to see why Chaerephon is included in the dialogue (as he is in the *Charmides*) and made to ask Gorgias the opening sequence of questions (447d6–48c3) unless it is to present him as the personality for which he had come to stand.” Christopher Moore, “Chaerephon, Telephus, and Diagnosis in the *Gorgias*,” *Arethusa* 45, no. 2 (2012): 199.

<sup>129</sup> It is also tempting to extrapolate that Chaerophon kept them “loitering in the agora” (447a), the typical haunt of Socrates and the metaphorical *skene* where Socrates often describes himself engaging in his *elenchoi*, because he himself was either delighting in Socrates’ cross-examinations or even engaging in some of his own. Indeed, the open-air, public, and in fact remarkably democratic area of the agora is held in deep contrast to the aristocratic and private

who has been staying in his house and of whom he is a pupil, demonstrating the differing effects that one's instructor or mentor can have on a person's personality and beliefs, and further solidifying the role of *mimēsis* in learning and the shaping of one's life path. Chaerophon's focalization is therefore markedly philosophical, and indeed when he is registering the audience's reaction after Gorgias claims that he does not wish to continue his conversation with Socrates, Chaerophon protests, pointing out that the crowd is making a *thorubos* in yearning to hear the rest of their conversation, and that "as for myself, I hope I'll never be so busy [ἀσχολία] that I'd forego discussions such as this, conducted in the way this one is, because I find it more practical [προὔργιαίτερόν] to do something else [ἄλλο πράττειν]" (458c). This reveals Chaerophon's philosophical character, especially in contrast to the rhetorical, tyrannical, and 'tragic' character of Callicles, firstly by showing that Chaerophon values *scholia*, which is stipulated as a criterion of the philosopher in the *Theaetetus* and elsewhere, and directly counteracts Callicles' idea that one should pursue something more practical than philosophy at a certain age. Thus, Chaerophon's focalization is protreptic and shows that he is mediating the conversations.

Similarly, Socrates uses the language of feasting or engaging in a festival to refer to the consumption of *logoi* or speeches in this dialogue, just as he does in the *Phaedrus* ("did we 'arrive when the feast [ἔορτῆς] was over'?" Socrates asks Callicles at the opening of the dialogue), and Chaerophon promises that he will cure or heal, *ιάσομαι*, Socrates and thus 'make up for' (the way that John M. Cooper translates the verb) causing Socrates to miss the speech. Olympiodorus, a Neoplatonist philosopher, indicates that this is an allusion to one of Euripides' lost plays, the *Telephus*. Many modern commentators have dismissed Olympiodorus' suggestion as a far-fetched

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home of Callicles and Gorgias. See Moore, "Chaerophon," 200: "We have good reason to think Socrates and Chaerephon had been engaged in Socratic-style listening and talking even though Gorgias does not state this explicitly."

interpretation, but I, in agreement with Christopher Moore, argue that it is, firstly, a plausible reading, and furthermore that such an allusion is significant to the subject of the *Gorgias* and indeed on the difference between philosophy and tragedy more broadly. Andrea Nightingale has conducted an extensive analysis of the sustained parody and allusion to Euripides' similarly lost *Antiope* in the conversation between Callicles and Socrates, however, less attention has been given to the relationship between the mythic subject matter of the *Telephus* and the arguments of the *Gorgias*.<sup>130</sup> As Christopher Moore argues, there are "systematic parallels between the Telephus story and some aspects of the *Gorgias*'s plot and Socrates' life; these parallels emphasize some of the *Gorgias*'s key observations, in particular the importance of seeking out discussions about how to live well."<sup>131</sup> While the dramatic plays featuring *Telephus* are unfortunately not extant, the mythological details of Telephus are known from other sources (such as Apollodorus). Telephus was a king of Mysia who was fatally wounded by Achilles' spear in a battle preceding the Trojan War. After consulting the Delphic oracle of Apollo, he was cryptically told that "ὁ τρώσας ἰάσεται, the assailant will cure [you]" (Apollodorus, E.3.20). Thus, Achilles, and the weapon that would have killed him also saves him. This allusion makes sense in the case for Chaerophon's situation, in that he both caused Socrates to miss the speech and will also, on account of his friendship with Gorgias, allow him to see it again.

But I think there is more to this allusion than meets the eye. I would add to Moore's analysis that, read in light of Socrates' discussion in the *Phaedo* about the ability of philosophizing and engaging in dialectic arguments being a purification from vice, as well as Socrates' discussion within the *Gorgias* itself about how Callicles presents an unparalleled *basanos* to Socrates,

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<sup>130</sup> Dodds, however, notes that this is an allusion in Dodds, *Plato. Gorgias. A Revised Text with Introduction and Commentary* (Oxford: Clarendon Press), 189-90. The story of Telephus was apparently a vastly popular subject for the Greek tragedians, however, and featured not just in a lost play of Euripides, but also of Aeschylus and Sophocles.

<sup>131</sup> Moore, "Chaerephon," 196.

Chaerophon's claim that he will 'cure' or 'treat' their missing of the discussion relates to the idea that philosophy and the activity of philosophizing via the Socratic *elenchus*, that is, engaging with discussions about the good and testing one's hypotheses against the views of others, constitutes itself this process of curing one of vice. Thus, engaging in the Socratic *elenchus* enables the philosopher to become cleansed and purified, thereby paving the way for the true Bacchic initiations described by Socrates in the *Phaedo*. Indeed, if Olympiodorus is correct in identifying this as an allusion to the Telephus story, then the *Gorgias* shares an intertextual affinity with the *Phaedo*, namely when Socrates is describing in that dialogue the nature of the underworld and claims that "the journey is not as Aeschylus' *Telephus* describes it. He says that only one single path leads to Hades, but I think it is neither one nor simple, for then there would be no need of guides; one could not make any mistake if there were but one path" (*Phaedo* 107e10-108a1). Socrates goes on to say that

the well-ordered and wise soul [κοσμία τε καὶ φρόνιμος ψυχή] follows the guide and is not without familiarity with its surroundings [οὐκ ἀγνοεῖ τὰ παρόντα], but the soul that is passionately attached to the body, as I said before, hovers around it and the visible world for a long time, struggling and suffering much until it is led away by force and with difficulty by its appointed spirit [δαίμονος]. When the impure [ἀκάθαρτον] soul which has performed some impure deed joins the others after having been involved in unjust killings or committed other crimes which are akin to these and are actions of souls of this kind, everybody shuns it and turns away, unwilling to be its fellow traveller or its guide... (*Phaedo* 108a5-c1).

The *kosmia* and *phronimos* soul is contrasted with the *akatharton* soul, which is impure on account of not practicing philosophy and instead being attached to the appetites and affections of the body.

The implication is that by practicing philosophy one becomes purified and therefore can successfully navigate the underworld, whereas choosing a non-philosophical life leads one to be shunned and lost. This provides context for the *Gorgias*, and particularly Callicles, who is so appetitive that he wishes he could continually fill up his desires until they get as large as possible and never practice moderation or virtue, therefore remaining uninitiated.

#### IV.4.ii *Tragōidia* in the *Gorgias*

The word *tragōidia* occurs in the *Gorgias* after Callicles has interrupted the investigation of Socrates and Polus. Here we have Callicles' famous interjection: "Tell me, Chaerephon, is Socrates in earnest [σπουδάζει] about this or is he joking [παίζει]" (481b)?<sup>132</sup> As has been suggested, this statement and seemingly 'random' address to Chaerophon, who has been more or less out of the conversation since close to the beginning of the dialogue, has been taken as evidence for Margalit Finkelberg that Chaerophon is presented as the macro-narrator focalizer of the entirety of the *Gorgias*. Indeed, this statement from Callicles and his address to Chaerophon to ask about Socrates' seriousness is a part of Plato's narrative and rhetorical strategy of shifting the reader's attention to examine the arguments being made. Additionally, Chaerophon's response that he thinks Socrates is in fact being serious, and that Callicles ought to ask Socrates himself, once again shows Chaerophon's passion and devotion to engaging in Socratic dialectic about topics of importance such as virtue and how to live well.

Callicles' use of the words σπουδάζει and παίζει rings certain bells in the readers' head that remind one of Aristotle's characterizations of tragedy as representing *spoudaios* characters. Indeed, as Andrea Nightingale has demonstrated, the entire interaction between Callicles and

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<sup>132</sup> εἰπέ μοι, ὦ Χαιρεφῶν, σπουδάζει ταῦτα Σωκράτης ἢ παίζει;

Socrates is presented by Plato as a kind of parody and inversion of Euripides' play the *Antiope* and is one of the only sustained and explicit 'parodies' of tragedy in Plato's corpus.<sup>133</sup> Given Socrates' proclivity to seem to combine the tragic and the comic, this statement suggests that Socrates is now leaving a conversation between a philosophically inclined (or at the very least, a character not explicitly in rejection of the philosophical character and life) to have a sustained debate with a proponent of a different generic camp, namely, Callicles.

Another indicator from the beginning that Plato is here staging a debate between the genres of philosophy and other forms of intellectual discourse, and especially drama, is Socrates' likening of his own situation to Callicles, namely that they are both lovers of two distinct but seemingly related objects; Socrates the lover of the son of Cleinias, Alkibiades, and philosophy on the one hand, and Callicles being the lover of Demos the son of Pylilampes as well as the Athenian *dēmos* itself (481d). This assertion is also grounded in Socrates' claim that human beings do *not* have wholly different phenomenological experiences, but instead are united in that they share certain universal experiences. At the very least, he argues, Socrates and Callicles are united in having the same experience (νῦν τυγχάνομεν ταῦτόν τι πεπονθότες, 481d). This protects against the kind of relativistic stance that tragedy often asserts in its interpretation and its target audience. There *is* a significant difference between the situations of Socrates and Callicles, however, and that comes from how each relates to the objects of their affections. Callicles cannot contradict Demos or the *dēmos*:

You are not able to refute [them], and so keep shifting back and forth [οὐ δυναμένου ἀντιλέγειν, ἀλλ' ἄνω καὶ κάτω μεταβαλλομένου]. If you say anything in the Assembly and the Athenian *dēmos* denies it, you shift your ground and say what it wants to hear. Other

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<sup>133</sup> Andrea Nightingale, *Genres in Dialogue*, 89.

things like this happen to you when you're with that good-looking young man, the son of Pylilampes (481e, lightly adapted).<sup>134</sup>

The language of *metaballein* is also used in Socrates' and Adeimantus' discussion of the tragedians in the *Republic*, when Socrates affirms that the gods do not change themselves in anyway, for it would be illogical for them to change to a worse form, nor to change into something better, for both would logically contradict their state of perfection.

As we can see, there is a connection here with the way that Socrates characterizes the work of the tragedians and the tragedians themselves – they are constantly shifting themselves in order to please their audience, when in fact the relationship should be inverted; namely, the audience should be shifting to match the truth and stable reality of the chorus leader, as is what happens in Socrates' philosophical *elenchus*. The *elenchus* is therefore an inverted of tragedy, where the leader of the *elenchus* is the one who is unchanging as a result of his cross-examination and harmonizing of the different propositions within his soul (the *logoi*) and the interlocutor in turn to imitates this and so becomes closer to truth or his *daimōn*. Callicles, on the other hand, is depicted as constantly shifting his opinion to gratify his audience, leading him to contradictions, with the result being that his 'internal' chorus lacks consistency. The claim that the tragic choruses were often subject to internal contradiction and inconsistency, and shifted their position based on their equally inconsistent leader, can be supported by narratological analyses of choruses in various tragedies where an actor on stage, at the end of the drama, becomes the chorus leader.<sup>135</sup>

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<sup>134</sup> ἔν τε τῇ ἐκκλησίᾳ, ἐάν τι σοῦ λέγοντος ὁ δῆμος ὁ Ἀθηναίων μὴ φῆ οὕτως ἔχειν, μεταβαλλόμενος λέγεις ἃ ἐκεῖνος βούλεται, καὶ πρὸς τὸν Πυριλάμπους νεανίαν τὸν καλὸν τοῦτον τοιαῦτα ἕτερα πέπονθας. τοῖς γὰρ τῶν παιδικῶν βουλευμασὶν τε καὶ λόγοις οὐχ οἷός τ' εἶ ἐναντιοῦσθαι, ὥστε, εἴ τις σου λέγοντος ἐκάστοτε ἅ διὰ τούτους λέγεις θαυμάζοι ὡς ἄτοπᾶ ἐστίν, ἴσως εἰποῖς ἂν αὐτῷ, εἰ βούλοιο τάλιθ' ἔλεγειν, ὅτι εἰ μὴ τις παύσει τὰ σὰ παιδικὰ τούτων τῶν λόγων, οὐδὲ σὺ παύσει ποτὲ ταῦτα λέγων.

<sup>135</sup> Most notably the role that Xerxes plays in leading the tragic chorus off stage at the end of Aeschylus' *Persians*; see Hopman, "Chorus, Conflict, and Closure," 73-74.



The changeability and variability of the tragic chorus is therefore inverted from the metaphorical philosophical chorus in Socrates' assertion that "as for that son of Cleinias, what he says differs from one time to the next, but what philosophy says always stays the same, and she's saying things that now astound you, although you were present when they were said" (482a-b). That the discussion is being framed by Socrates as setting up an opposition between philosophy and other literary forms of discourse, and most particularly tragedy and rhetoric as forms of persuasion or 'knacks', is also confirmed when Socrates tells Callicles to

either refute [Philosophy] and show that doing what's unjust without paying what is due for it is *not* the ultimate of all bad things, as I just now was saying it is, or else, if you leave this unrefuted, then by the Dog, the god of the Egyptians, Callicles will not agree with you, Callicles, but will be dissonant with you all your life long. And yet for my part, my good man, I think it's better to have my lyre or a chorus that I might lead out of tune and dissonant, and have the vast majority of men disagree with me and contradict me, than to be out of harmony with myself, to contradict myself, though I'm only one person (482b2-c2).

This internal contradiction is juxtaposed to the external contradiction of an out of tune chorus, the fundamental performative component of tragedy for Plato. The implication here seems to be that choruses are often out of tune. On the other hand, Socrates' *elenchus*, and particularly engaging with discourses and conversations about truth and how one ought to live one's life, is aimed towards unifying and harmonizing the internal contradictions within one's own psyche, modeled after the consistent disposition of *Philosophia* herself.

The *Gorgias* passage is also crucial because it shares an intertextual affinity with what the Athenian Stranger says about *symposia* in the *Laws*. Gorgias uses the example of Amphion and

Zethus in Euripides' lost play to compare his situation to Socrates and himself, with Socrates being a man who foolishly lives life in the pursuit and activity of philosophy, while Callicles has moved on to the affairs of the city, namely politics. He argues that this is not a life well-suited to a grown man, and that only young children should be allowed to philosophize (485a5-d3). This reminds one temptingly of the chorus of Dionysus in Plato's *Laws*, who Cleinias and Megillus believe would look quite ridiculous by dancing in a chorus at their stage of life. However, as the Athenian mentions, they will not actually be literally dancing at all. Instead, they will be conversing and philosophizing at a symposium. As such, in the *Laws* we see that it is in fact the eldest citizens who are the ones leading philosophical conversations, which coheres with Socrates' discussion in the *Republic* concerning which time of life is appropriate for dialectical pursuits, namely, only after one has had sufficient training of the lower aspects of his soul, *epithumia* and *thumos*.

This is not the only intertextual connection between these two texts, however. Socrates replies to Callicles' remarks by replying that

If I actually had a soul made of gold, Callicles, don't you think I'd be pleased to find one of those stones on which they test [βασανίζουσιν] gold? And if this stone to which I intended to take my soul were the best stone and it agreed that my soul had been well cared for, don't you think I could know well at that point that I'm in good shape and need no further test [βασάνου]?<sup>136</sup>

He argues that of all things Callicles is such a stone: "I believe that by running into you, I've run into just such a piece of luck [...] I know well that if you concur with what my soul believes, then that is the very truth" (487a). Socrates then goes on a rather lengthy tirade praising and flattering

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<sup>136</sup> εἰ χρυσὴν ἔχων ἐτύγγανον τὴν ψυχὴν, ὦ Καλλίκλεις, οὐκ ἂν οἶμι με ἄσμενον εὐρεῖν τούτων τινὰ τῶν λίθων ἧ βασανίζουσιν τὸν χρυσόν, τὴν ἀρίστην, πρὸς ἣντινα ἔμελλον προσαγαγὼν αὐτήν, εἴ μοι ὁμολογήσειεν ἐκείνη καλῶς τεθεραπεῦσθαι τὴν ψυχὴν, εὖ εἴσεσθαι ὅτι ἰκανῶς ἔχω καὶ οὐδέν με δεῖ ἄλλης βασάνου;

Callicles for his lack of shame when it comes to truly supporting what seems to be such a socially taboo proposition as he had just espoused earlier, and how the other interlocutors were too ashamed to admit to really believing in it.

This whole episode seems like a rather odd remark to make in response to Callicles' oration, however, it makes sense when considering Chaerophon's allusion to the *Telephus* at the beginning of the dialogue, the discussion in the *Phaedo* about the role of the Socratic *elenchus* in achieving ritual purification, and the conversation of *symposia* in the *Laws*. By enabling Socrates to have a discussion with Gorgias and Callicles in turn, Chaerophon really is curing (*iasomai*) Socrates in that it gives Socrates (and by extension the reader of the dialogue) the ability to test himself against immoralist views such as Callicles', enabling him to progress towards truth and test his own convictions and commitment to virtue. In the latter connection, the Athenian Stranger argues that drinking wine is a kind of touchstone or test (*basanos*) that both enables the drinker to test their ability to remain virtuous, as well as enables the observer to find out whether the drinker himself can withstand in his temperance. Here, Callicles, and particularly his forms of discourse, is just one such *pharmakon* or type of affective 'wine' on which Socrates may be able to test himself, albeit rather than testing his *sophrosunē* he will be testing his commitment to the pursuit of the life of virtue. Of course, Socrates' soul is so harmonious already that he can hold his ground with respect to his beliefs, just because he is devoted to and in love with *Philosophia* and has harmonized his motivations and beliefs.

Socrates here explicitly uses the language of the *basanos* which is similarly used in the *Laws* to speak of wine, where it is called a "*basanos* of someone's soul [ἡττημένης τινὸς ψυχῆς βάσανον λαμβάνειν]" (*Laws* I.650a3). Wine is therefore here analogous to alien discourses and *logoi* such as Callicles' (and indeed *all* other individuals one converses with) uses, and in the

context of the *Laws* the only way that such a *basanos* should be allowed is if there is a sober leader overlooking the festivities. This sober leader is Socrates' (or perhaps his *daimonion*), and the philosopher himself – the person who can give interlocutors a 'taste' of the different doctrines and beliefs and allows them to come to a reasoned account as to why they are false. This is precisely what is problematic with what the Athenian Stranger sees as the downfall of tragedy – that it is no longer based on making the citizens good, but rather is only designed to please them as much as possible, regardless of whether this will make them good and truly excellent or not.

The concept of shame is another important element both in the context of the debate in the *Gorgias* and for its intertextual affinity with the Athenian's discussion of wine and the *basanos* in the *Laws*. Firstly, Callicles notes that "when Gorgias was asked by you whether he would teach anyone who came to him wanting to learn oratory but without expertise in what's just, Gorgias was ashamed [...] And because Gorgias agrees on this point, he said, he was forced to contradict himself, just the thing you like [...] As a result of this admission he was bound and gagged by you in the discussion, too ashamed to say what he thought" (482c8-e2). Callicles' implication is that people are often too ashamed to truly admit to their beliefs, and that Socrates' method of questioning prevents people from saying what they believe by making them feel shame. As such, in order to get one to fully admit to their internalized beliefs, it is necessary to give them something that would make them less ashamed to say their opinion. In the *Laws*, we see the Athenian claiming that this is precisely the function that wine has, in making a person utterly lacking in shame and leading to the overconfidence to say and do whatever they want (I.649a), which as a result allows one to witness their true beliefs and character.

Callicles in the *Gorgias*, on the other hand, as Socrates mentions, is utterly unashamed to subscribe to the belief that it is better to commit injustice than to suffer it. As a result of this lack

of shame, Socrates conceives of Callicles as a *basanos*, much like the *basanos* of wine – “I run into many people who aren’t able to test me because they’re not wise like you [...] They’ve come to such a depth of shame that, because they are ashamed, each of them dares to contradict himself, face to face with many people, and on topics of the greatest importance” (487a5-b5). Since Callicles is unashamed to say what he truly thinks, this enables Socrates to truly put his own convictions and beliefs ‘to the test’: “If there’s any point in our discussions on which you agree with me, then that point will have been adequately put to the test [βεβασανισμένον] by you and me, and it will not be necessary to put it to any further test [βάσανον], for you’d never have conceded the point through lack of wisdom or excess of shame” (487d1-e3). If Callicles is revealed to agree with Socrates’ reasoning, it will constitute definitive proof that Socrates’ commitment to virtue is true, since Socrates will have successfully refuted that Callicles *himself* believes that to practice injustice is better than justice. In other words, if Callicles ends up having his position revealed to be the same as Socrates’, it won’t be because he was ashamed and therefore disingenuously agreed with Socrates (which would bring doubt to the actual truth of Socrates’ claim) but instead because he truly was misguided in his own convictions. It will therefore be truly revealed that his soul does not ‘agree with itself’. Therefore, Callicles’ arguments against Socrates are necessary for demonstrating the truth of Socrates’ own claim, just as the Athenian Stranger argues that it is necessary to consume wine in order to truly internalize virtue and practice moderation. This also connects again to Chaerophon’s allusion to the Telephus story in that Callicles’ immoralist arguments, which might be thought to destroy or kill one’s commitment to philosophy and virtue, is in fact through Socrates’ elenctic practice a *cure* and therefore allows for purification by showing that the philosophical position alone is consistent and true.

After Socrates disproves Callicles' assertion that the 'superior' should get a greater share than the 'inferior' by showing him that his concept of superior is mistaken, Socrates explains that a true ruler is a master of himself and self-controlled, to which Callicles replies that instead "the man who'll live correctly ought to allow his appetites to get as large as possible and not restrain them" (491e5-6). Socrates then says, "The way you pursue your argument, speaking frankly as you do, certainly does you credit, Callicles. For you are now saying clearly what others are thinking but are unwilling to say" (492d1-3). This, again, allows Socrates to genuinely disprove this claim, and allows those around who might be thinking this is true but who are unwilling to admit it to witness for themselves that it is not the correct doctrine to hold. Thus, there is a meta-narrative remark here, in that Plato's dialogues allow their readers to examine other alternative ways of life and have them disproved by Socrates, the ideal chorus leader, without having to 'become', that is actually imitate, those immoral ways of life themselves, lest through imitating them they feel delight and thus mistake imitation for reality (as Socrates claims can often happen in the *Republic*). Just like theatrical *mimēsis* allows people to explore their subconscious desires on stage, the dialogue also does this, however, the imitation is protected by being controlled and mediated by a person with a philosophical character. The philosophical discourse therefore *cures* and is a craft akin to doctoring, rather than a knack that aims to merely please and gratify the subconscious desires of its audience.

This allows the reader to cure their soul and become 'purified'. On the other hand, when *tragōidia* occurs in their discussion, Socrates asks, "is the project, the intent of tragic composition merely the gratification of spectators, as you think, or does it also strive valiantly not to say anything that is corrupt, though it may be pleasant and gratifying to them, and to utter in both speech and song anything that might be unpleasant but beneficial, whether the spectators enjoy it

or not” (502b)? When Callicles agrees, Socrates goes on to demonstrate that if one were to take away the verse and spectacle of tragedy and leave just the speech, this would resemble oratory, which seeks to flatter its audience by pleasing it in order to ‘win’ rather than try to genuinely improve its audience. Socrates shows, however, that this is not the aim of law, and that on the contrary the good man will be a practitioner of a craft (*technē*) which is always for the sake of improving its object (503d10-e5). Thus, to simply please a body rather than attempt to cure it does not result in *true* pleasure or excellence. Analogously, philosophy is superior to the current practice of tragedy in that it just is the examination and questioning of what is best for the human soul. Socrates therefore shows that what is truly profitable is not simply to be pleased but to be genuinely improved.

## **IV.6 The *Republic* – Transformative Tragedy**

### IV.6.i The Narrator: Socrates as Explicit Narrator-Hero

The *Republic* is one of the three Platonic dialogues that is directly diegetic, and in each of these dialogues Socrates is the soul narrator, reporting the events in the first person. The *Republic* famously begins with Socrates’ claim “I went down to the Peiraeus yesterday,” (I.327a1, my translation) and as such, Socrates takes on the narrative role that Odysseus played in narrating his adventures to the Phaeacians in Homer’s *Odyssey*.

Socrates’ role as the narrator is not only revealed by his use of the first-person and his exclusive focalization of the characters, but similarly in his use of metalepsis. Metalepsis or ‘frame breaking’ occurs when a narrator or character in a story draws attention to the act of narration, thus ‘breaking the fourth wall’ between the reader and the story and intruding on the extradiegetic world

outside the text itself. There is one remarkable use of metalepsis in the *Republic*, namely when Socrates says that “Thrasymachus agreed on all these points, not as smoothly as I tell now, but reluctantly and with great effort... [ὁ δὲ Θρασύμαχος ὡμολόγησε μὲν πάντα ταῦτα, οὐχ ὡς ἐγὼ νῦν ῥαδίως λέγω, ἀλλ’ ἐλκόμενος καὶ μόγις...]” (I.350c, trans. Finkelberg). Regardless of whether we translate *radiōs* as ‘smoothly’ or ‘readily’ does not change the fact that Socrates is drawing attention to the fact that he is narrating events that happened to him some time ago, and that Plato is therefore “fully aware of the distance between ‘the narrating self’ and the ‘narrated self.’”<sup>137</sup> As Finkelberg notes, this draws even closer parallels between Socrates and Odysseus as narrators, the latter of which similarly recognizes the distinction when reflecting back upon his actions on the cyclopes’ island (Od. 9.228-29). Socrates is therefore editorializing the dialogue, just as Euclides did in the *Theaetetus*, which is significant in that it shows Socrates’ power over communicating how he chose to frame and portray the events and reminds the reader that this episode is being importantly mediated through his perspective. He is therefore framing the arguments through the perspective of a sober and philosophical chorus leader.

#### IV.6.ii *Tragōidia* in the *Republic*

We see a similar thread of the essential changeability and liability to affective change that is embodied in tragedy in Socrates’ discussion of whether various forms of *mimēsis* will be admitted into the ideal city he is constructing with Glaucon and Adeimantus, namely Kallipolis. Intriguingly, the discussion and first mention of tragedy in the *Republic* occurs right before Socrates says what might be thought to be an inversion of the Athenian’s claim in the *Laws*: “You and I, Adeimantus, aren’t poets, but we *are* founders of a city [οἰκισταὶ πόλεως]. And it’s

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<sup>137</sup> Finkelberg, *The Gatekeeper*, 37.



appropriate for the founders to know the types [τύπους] on which poets must base their stories [μυθολογεῖν] and from which they mustn't deviate. But I suppose we don't need to compose their poems for them [οὐ μὴν αὐτοῖς γε ποιητέον μύθους]" (II.379a, lightly modified). This seems to be the opposite of what the Athenian says in the *Laws*, namely that they are *themselves* writers of tragedies, which closely inheres with the claim that the *Laws* is itself the finest and truest tragedy. It is for this reason that I believe that the Athenian Stranger is not merely speaking in jest when he says this in the *Laws* but is drawing an intertextual connection between the *Laws* and the *Republic*.

After Glaucon has asked what the *tupoi* of the *muthoi* must be, Socrates replies, “whether in epic, lyric, or tragedy, a god must always be represented as he is” (II.379a).<sup>138</sup> This is the first mention of *tragōidia* in the *Republic*, and it occurs in the context of the proper representation of the gods. Here it should be noted that tragedy is mentioned not on its own but in conjunction with lyric and epic, however, Socrates’ targeted attacks and criticisms of specific quotations reveal that his true antagonists are Homer and the Athenian tragedians. Socrates then goes on to elaborate the nature of the gods: namely that they are “really good” and therefore “must be described as such” (II.379b). Here, *agathos* becomes conflated with that which both is not harmful (*blaberos*), and, as a logical consequence of it not being harmful, cannot therefore produce or cause harm of any kind (the verb here being *poiein*). The idea that something that is not harmful cannot do harm can also be understood in the context of the poet’s work. One who is not himself harmful will in turn not produce harmful stories or characters, in a poetic sense. Thus, the poets are seen to themselves have the potential and power to harm people with their poetic works.

It is at this point that Socrates quotes extensively from Homer, particularly the claim of Achilles when he tells Priam that Zeus has two urns, one filled with goods and the other with evils,

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<sup>138</sup> τοιοῖδε πού τινες, ἦν δ’ ἐγώ: οἷος τυγχάνει ὁ θεὸς ὢν, ἀεὶ δὴπου ἀποδοτέον, ἐάντε τις αὐτὸν ἐν ἔπεσιν ποιῇ ἐάντε ἐν μέλεσιν ἐάντε ἐν τραγῳδίᾳ.

and indiscriminately distributes these to mortals (*Iliad* 24.527-32). This story violates Socrates' logical arguments and the established *tupoi of muthoi*, for, as he and Adeimantus agreed, anything that is good and therefore not harmful cannot be the cause of evil. Here, Socrates reasons that inversely anything that is good is beneficial. As Socrates argues, the gods therefore cannot be the causes of *all* things, and as such they will have to find some other cause of evil and badness. He also quotes Aeschylus, and while we have lost this tragedy, it appears to be a reference to the situation of Pandarus, which is elaborated at *Iliad* 4.73-126. In the story, the Trojan Pandarus is tricked by Athena and urged to shoot an arrow at the Achaean Menelaus, thereby preventing the peaceful reconciliation between the Trojan and Achaean forces.

This story would violate Socrates' logical statements about the gods being incapable of deception due to their perfection. On a deeper level, however, this also recalls the problem that Socrates and Theaetetus raise about the '*sophoi*' who are constantly in verbal combat rather than hoping to reconcile their initially opposing views. This is where tragic and philosophical *muthoi* differ: the former seeks to affirm and encourage difference and opposition, whereas the latter seeks reconciliation and friendship. Similarly, Socrates likely chose to quote the Pandarus episode in Aeschylus as morally damaging in order to suggest that Athena, an immortal goddess, would never convince a mortal to continue a war between opposing parties, but would instead encourage peaceful reconciliation. The reason why Socrates says these stories must be fought against (*diamachein*) is because they are not advantageous or symphonic (ὡς οὔτε ὅσα ἂν λεγόμενα εἰ λέγοιτο, οὔτε σύμφορα ἡμῖν οὔτε σύμφωνα αὐτὰ αὐτοῖς; II.380c). The respective gods of the tragic and philosophical 'genres' therefore differ, the former being inconsistent and unharmonious and the latter consistent and harmonious, which corresponds in turn to the way that each portray dramatic characters. As Socrates claims in Book X of the *Republic*, which examines more fully

the relationship between representation and the object of reality it imitates, “Between ourselves – for you won’t denounce me to the tragic poets or any of the other imitative ones – all such poetry is likely to distort the thought of anyone who hears it, unless he has the knowledge of what it is really like, as a drug [φάρμακον] to counteract it (*Republic* X.595b).”<sup>139</sup> This once again points to the contrast between the philosopher and the tragedian, the former of which has been ‘initiated’ by having had a glimpse of true reality, that is, the forms themselves (as described in the cave analogy in the *Republic* and the ‘spectacle of being’ in the *Phaedrus*), whereas the tragedians have a flawed and conflicting view of the gods and reality as constantly in flux and always becoming. This leads them to certain changes and affections, while the internally harmonizing project of the philosophers leads one to not experience ‘tragedy’ in the traditionally understood sense.

This argument is closely followed by Socrates’ next characterization of the *tupoi* of *muthoi*: namely, that the gods are not sorcerers, nor do they change their form by appearing in different shapes. They are not liable to alteration or change, for “the most courageous and most rational soul is least disturbed or altered by any outside affection” (II.381a). Furthermore, they do not tell falsehoods. Here, too, Socrates explicitly cites Homer and the tragedians, thereby singling them out, as portraying the gods transforming themselves, quoting from *Odyssey* 17.485-86, as well as a quote that is also from a lost play of Aeschylus which portrayed Hera as a priestess collecting alms (*Republic*, II.381d).<sup>140</sup> The idea that the gods are not liable to affectation or any kind of change again recalls the *Theaetetus* discussion that anything that is always changing will never have a proper view of true reality. Furthermore, the philosopher, whose aim is to harmonize her

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<sup>139</sup> ὡς μὲν πρὸς ὑμᾶς εἰρῆσθαι—οὐ γὰρ μου κατερεῖτε πρὸς τοὺς τῆς τραγωδίας ποιητὰς καὶ τοὺς ἄλλους ἅπαντας τοὺς μιμητικούς—λάβη ἔοικεν εἶναι πάντα τὰ τοιαῦτα τῆς τῶν ἀκούοντων διανοίας, ὅσοι μὴ ἔχουσι φάρμακον τὸ εἰδέναι αὐτὰ ὅσα τυγχάνει ὄντα.

<sup>140</sup> [μηδεὶς ἄρα, ἦν δ’ ἐγώ, ὃ ἄριστε, λεγέτω ἡμῖν τῶν ποιητῶν, ὡς— “... θεοὶ ξείνοισιν ἐοικότες ἀλλοδαποῖσι, “παντοῖοι τελέθοντες, ἐπιστροφῶσι πόληας;” Πρωτέως καὶ Θέτιδος καταψευδέσθω μηδεὶς, μηδ’ ἐν τραγωδίαις μηδ’ ἐν τοῖς ἄλλοις ποιήμασιν εἰσαγέτω Ἥραν ἡλλοιωμένην, ὡς ἰέρειαν ἀγείρουσαν—“Ἰνάχου Ἀργείου ποταμοῦ παισὶν βιοδώροις]

soul with the aim of an internal consistency, is not liable to such affective change and thereby perceives reality in its true state. Recall, for instance, Socrates' remarkable temperance in the *Symposium*, both in his ability to walk on ice without shoes, as well as his ability to heroically withstand the potential psychological and physiological effects of alcohol. In another passage in the *Republic* that suggests that only the philosopher can grasp true reality, Socrates insists that one should not study the soul when it is maimed and corrupted by matter, but rather, one "has to look somewhere else in order to discover its true nature," namely, "to its philosophy, or love of wisdom. We must realize what it grasps and longs to have intercourse with, because it is akin to the divine and immortal and what always is, and we must realize what it would become if it followed this longing with its whole being" (*Republic*, X.611d-612a). Thus philosophy, the love of wisdom, and the redirecting of one's love and pursuits to *sophia* rather than to earthly and material goods, is what will ultimately enable one to be properly reunited and assimilated with divinity and immortality, and to see both what the soul itself is as well as reality.

All of this points to the conclusion that Socrates characterizes the tragedian's god and their metaphorical choral leaders as being liable to change and affection, while on the other hand the philosopher's 'chorality' aims at internal consistency, in a manner that imitates Plato's forms and vision of the divine. Plato's use of narrative voice is therefore protreptic and habituates the reader of the dialogue to similarly divert her desires and pleasure for earthly goods, which weigh down the soul and cause it to lose sight of metaphysical truth, and instead redirect the soul towards the love of conversations – the '*logoi* in philosophy', to quote Alkibiades.

## V. THE CHARACTERIZATION OF PHILOSOPHY – THE *ORTHON SYMPOSION* AS A *BASANOS* OF CHARACTER AND METAPHOR FOR PHILOSOPHICAL DIALOGUE

Having elaborated Plato's characterization of tragedy in opposition to philosophy, we are now in a position to examine the Athenian Stranger's discussion of wine, *symposia*, and Dionysus in the *Laws*. A considerable portion of Plato's final philosophical dialogue is dedicated to exploring the potential political functions of *symposia* in the flourishing of a healthy society. The discussion follows from the initial question posed by the Athenian Stranger, namely whether legislators ought to legislate for the sake of war or on the other hand for the sake of friendship and peace. In countering the view that laws should be enacted with a view to success in warfare, the Athenian suggests that a virtuous individual and community needs to be trained not only to be courageous in the face of pain, but similarly to be able to properly endure and respond to *pleasure*. Only focusing on the training of citizens with a view to their ability to endure pain therefore only aims at a small portion rather than the whole of virtue, which leads the trio into a discussion of the extent to which pleasures, particularly the pleasures associated with *symposia* and wine, ought to be permitted within a political constitution.<sup>141</sup>

The preliminary investigation of the *Laws* has been the subject of considerable scholarly attention. Indeed, the digression seems markedly important given that the Athenian Stranger flags at the beginning of the inquiry that the question of the use and moral suitability of having *symposia* in a society is “not a small *epitēdeuma*” (which can mean a ‘way of living’, as evidenced from its semantic use at *Phaedrus* 233d and *Laws* 793d), nor does it belong to a “*phaulos nomothetēs*” to ‘diagnose’ it (637d). As has been seen, the word *phaulos* is philosophically loaded in Plato's works

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<sup>141</sup> “If our citizens grow up without any experience of the keenest pleasures, and if they are not trained to stand firm when they encounter them, and to refuse to be pushed into any disgraceful action, their fondness for pleasure will bring them to the same bad end as those who capitulate to fear. Their slavery will be of a different kind, but it will be more humiliating: they will become the slaves of those who are able to stand firm against the onslaughts of pleasure and who are past-masters in the art of temptation – utter scoundrels, sometimes [...] when men investigate legislation, they investigate almost exclusively pleasures and pains as they affect society and the character of the individual. Pleasure and pain, you see, flow like two springs released by nature. If a man draws the right amount from the right one at the right time, he lives a happy life; but if he draws unintelligently at the wrong time, his life will be rather difficult. State and individual and every living being are on the same footing here” (I.635c-636e).

and is often used in the context of various interlocutors describing and belittling Socrates' vocation, the activity and *tropos* of philosophy, and as such indicates the importance of the discussion for the conclusions of the dialogue itself.<sup>142</sup> I believe that greater attention to the philosophical and cultural implications of this discussion on the topic of proper legislation is necessary for a nuanced understanding of the *Laws* itself, and indeed Plato's characterization of philosophy more broadly.

In this section, I advance a new reading of the Athenian's discussion of wine in the *Laws* as a metaphor for the psychological effects of *logoi*, and that the '*ortha symposia*' that the Athenian proposes as an *epitēdeuma*, a custom or way of life, and which is defined as a symposium headed by a sober and temperate leader, is a metaphor for Plato's vision of philosophy itself, namely conversational dialectic, which allows its participants to encounter 'alien' *logoi* and thus test themselves against internalizing arguments which might lead one to vice. Philosophical dialectic is therefore an exercise in self-control and allows the interlocutors to practice virtue, which is why it is often described by Plato using the language of initiation and purification. The *Laws*, itself a highly meta-philosophical meditation on the appropriate use and importance of philosophy as a means of ethical habituation, represents Plato's final concerted effort to elevate the status of philosophy in Athenian civic life, thus distancing it from its previously negative associations with the sophists and tragedians as self-proclaimed '*sophoi*'. Philosophy offers an alternative method for one to safely encounter certain characters and doctrines and therefore 'test' these various ways of life, just as *symposia* allow for a safe environment through which to experience the ecstatic effects of Dionysian ritual.

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<sup>142</sup> Nancy Worman, *Abusive Mouths*, 153.

There have been several scholars who have tried to interpret what Plato says about *symposia* and the pleasures of the god of wine, Dionysus, in the context of the *Laws*. As Oswyn Murray notes,

in a fundamental sense [Plato's] whole conception of desire and pleasure is based on the distinctive pleasures of the *symposion*; for him pleasure is always concrete and concerned with the basic human appetites satisfied in the *symposion*. For Plato there is indeed no other form of pleasure than that to be found within the rituals of the Greek *symposion*: to him pleasure is always conceived of as related to the consumption of wine and food, poetry, and sex.<sup>143</sup>

Many of Plato's arguments for pursuing virtue and the philosophical life are rooted in the idea that that the philosophical life is ultimately the most pleasant. What I am more interested in when it comes to Plato's treatment of *symposia* in the *Laws*, however, is less the physical pleasures one derives from food, drink, and sex, but rather the pleasures derived from *logoi* and *muthoi* – that is, poetry, which, as Murray notes, was among Solon's sympotic triad: "These are the works that are dear to me, those of the Cyprian goddess, those of Dionysus, and those of the Muses, who bring joyousness to men" (fr.26).

It is therefore the joy in the Muses that most interests me here, and how Plato could see the *orthon symposion* as representing an institution whereby one might test their temperance or *sophrosunē* not merely in the physical pleasures, but indeed in the poetic pleasures as well. "[M]uch of [Plato's] meaning is contained within context and metaphor; all his sentences carry an implicit charge of meaning, and the metaphor and imagery of the language of pleasure used by Plato are concerned solely with the pleasures of the *symposion*: the relationship between physical

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<sup>143</sup> Oswyn Murray, "The Chorus of Dionysus: Alcohol and Old Age in the *Laws*," in Anastasia-Erasmia Peponi ed., *Performance and Culture in Plato's Laws* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 109-10.

experience, desire, and sensation of pleasure are imagined as if the only place for experiencing them is within a sympotic context.”<sup>144</sup> As Murray points out, “wine reveals the true character of the man”, quoting Alcaeus 330; similarly Theognis’ sympotic poetry suggests that a symposium is an ideal venue to observe one’s fellow symposiasts in order to understand their true character, and that a little bit of wine in moderation is not an evil but rather good.<sup>145</sup> Further, wine causes forgetfulness when not consumed properly: “memory has a wider ambivalence in the *symposion*: on the one hand, remembering songs is good, and the memory of great deeds is a suitable subject for sympotic song; on the other, what is said in the *symposion* should be forgotten at the door.”<sup>146</sup> So too, *logoi*, long speeches and poetry in particular, can cause forgetfulness according to Socrates’ myth of Thoth and Thamus in the *Phaedrus* (275c10-276b1). While I agree with Murray about the importance of memory for the performative aspects of the symposium, I disagree with his notion that symposiasts ought to forget everything that was said and done at the symposium once it has concluded. A poem of Theognis suggests that what is learned at a symposium will and should continue to inform one’s knowledge of the other symposiasts out of doors (θύρηφι), too.<sup>147</sup>

The Athenian Stranger’s arguments about the value of *symposia* are fundamentally rooted in this inherited literary and poetic tradition. In fact, the Athenian Stranger says as a kind of programmatic statement in the *Laws* that the poetry of Theognis, whose poetry praises ‘complete virtue’, is more admirable and necessary for the lawmaker than the poetry of Tyrtaeus, which focuses only on a part of virtue (*Laws* I.630c). The fundamental thesis of the *Laws* is that human

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<sup>144</sup> Murray, “The Chorus of Dionysus,” 110.

<sup>145</sup> “Drinking wine [οἶνόν τοι πίνειν] in large quantities is indeed bad [κακόν], but if one drinks it wisely [ἐπισταμένως], wine is not bad, but good [ἀγαθός]” (Theognis, 211-12, my translation).

<sup>146</sup> Murray, “The Chorus of Dionysus,” 113.

<sup>147</sup> “Among one’s fellow diners [ἐν μὲν συσσίτουσιν] let a man have his wits about him; let him escape everyone’s notice so that it seems as if he were not there, and let him contribute jokes, but when he’s outside [θύρηφι] let him be firm [καρτερός], having learnt [γινώσκων] the temperament [ὄργην] that each man has” (Theognis, 309-12, Loeb translation, lightly modified).



beings are not perfect creatures. As a result, they cannot be wholly persuaded to pursue virtue through reason and argument alone but require moral habituation and aesthetic training in order to achieve *eudaimonia* or flourishing.<sup>148</sup> I argue that this aesthetic training and moral habituation can in fact be found in Plato's dialogues themselves.

The main aim of Murray's essay is an attempt to find a potential historical precedent for the 'chorus of old men' that the Athenian Stranger recommends, to the chagrin and skepticism of his two non-Athenian interlocutors.<sup>149</sup> In an ideal society, as the Athenian Stranger argues, there should be three choral groups, divided based on age, the oldest of which are men over thirty, and are known as the chorus of Dionysus, who, because they are "too decrepit to sing [...] are confined to telling *mythoi* of an appropriately improving nature [...] Later we learn that those over sixty are the 'officers of Dionysus' whose task it is to regulate the rowdiness of the drinking (671d-e; cf.812b-c)."<sup>150</sup> Thus, Plato is here analogizing sympotic customs and performances to chorality, which is remarkable. Murray reminds us, however, that "the choral odes of Pindar and Bacchylides are full of sympotic language and imagery, which suggest a close relationship between choral performance and the *symposion*."<sup>151</sup> I would argue that, rather than the chorus of Dionysus merely telling *muthoi* of an improving nature, they are in fact philosophizing, just as Socrates philosophizes with his interlocutors. Thus, chorality and philosophy are analogized here, however, the choral leaders of the philosophizing are older men who have already been habituated in the art of virtue and thus are able to monitor and guide the youth to similarly practice and internalize the starting-points of virtue.

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<sup>148</sup> Cf. *Laws* I.636a: "Well, my friends, I should think the real difficulty is to make political systems the same in deed and in argument without any dispute [ἔοικεν δῆτα, ὃ ζένοι, χαλεπὸν εἶναι τὸ περὶ τὰς πολιτείας ἀναμφισβητήτως ὁμοίως ἔργῳ καὶ λόγῳ γίγνεσθαι]," lightly modified.

<sup>149</sup> Cf. Glenn Morrow, *Plato's Cretan City: A Historical Interpretation of the Laws* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1960), 313-318.

<sup>150</sup> Murray, "The Chorus of Dionysus," 114.

<sup>151</sup> Murray, "The Chorus of Dionysus," 115.

The discussion of the use of *symposia* emerges from a discussion of self-control (*sophrosunē*) and particularly how one can make their citizens become temperate. Megillus believes that the Spartan law code (which is conveniently, as he says, the same as the Cretan law code) of denying all forms of sympotic pleasure is superior (ὅμως δ' ἔμοιγε ὀρθῶς δοκεῖ τὸ τὰς ἡδονὰς φεύγειν διακελεύεσθαι τὸν γε ἐν Λακεδαιμόνι νομοθέτην, περὶ δὲ τῶν ἐν Κνωσῶ νόμων ὅδε, I.636e), and goes on to disparage Athens by relating an anecdote in which he “saw men in that condition on wagons in your country, and at Tarentum, among our colonials, [...and] saw the entire city drunk at the festival of Dionysus” (I.637b).<sup>152</sup> He argues that the Spartans would never permit such festivals of Dionysus.

Tarentum is significant for Plato. We learn from the *Letter VII* that Plato apparently spent some time himself in Tarentum with the tyrant who ruled there, Dionysius, and attempted to train him in philosophy. What is significant about the reference in the *Laws* is that Dionysius apparently eventually failed to internalize and properly practice philosophy (*Letter VII*, 344d1-345c3). The reference to Tarentum may not seem significant at first glance, however, it would make sense if this particular narrative detail was included so that Plato could draw his reader’s attention to the fact that not only festivals of Dionysus are being rejected, or at least not properly practiced, amongst the Mediterranean world, but more importantly, philosophy itself. This demonstrates a close connection not only between the ritual occasion and worship of Dionysus with philosophy, but also suggests that their discussion about sympotic and Dionysian practices may not be merely confined to a literal meaning but points beyond to the value and necessity of *philosophy* in attempting to construct an ideal state (cf. *Letter VII*, 326a-b).

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<sup>152</sup> οὐδ' ἂν Διονύσια πρόφασιν ἔχοντ' αὐτὸν λύσαιτο, ὥσπερ ἐν ἀμάξαις εἶδόν ποτε παρ' ὑμῖν ἐγώ, καὶ ἐν Τάραντι δὲ παρὰ τοῖς ἡμετέροις ἀποίκιοις πᾶσαν ἐθεασάμην τὴν πόλιν περὶ τὰ Διονύσια μεθύουσαν: παρ' ἡμῖν δ' οὐκ ἔστ' οὐδὲν τοιοῦτον.

The general philosophical argument that the Athenian puts forth in favour of drinking parties can be simplified in a few premises. The Athenian starts by disproving the claim that the actual custom (referred to above as an *epitēdeuma*) of the symposium is innately wrong simply because they are not conducted properly in various city-states. His reasoning is Socratic and familiar: the value of any kind of activity, whether that of ship-navigating or warfare, is ultimately determined by the skill of the leader, whose specialized knowledge leads to either success or failure. A bad leader of an army, the Athenian suggests, does not suggest that military activity in and of itself is a useless endeavour. Analogously, *symposia* are not useless simply because there is no adequate authority with a certain amount of self-control and knowledge of drinking to control the revelers (I.640d-e).<sup>153</sup>

In addition, the Athenian disproves that just because somebody possesses the science (*ἐπιστήμη*) of a given discipline does not make that person a true practitioner of the craft; he uses the example of a captain who “possesses only the science of navigation” but nevertheless “suffers from seasickness”, and further asks whether a commander of an army is “capable of taking command just by virtue of military skill, in spite of being a coward” (I.639b). The Athenian then transfers this idea over to social gatherings: “Take any social gathering you like, which functions naturally under a leader and serves a useful purpose under his guidance: what are we to think of the observer who praises or censures it although he has never seen it gathered together and running properly under its leader, but always with bad leaders or none at all? Given that kind of observer and that kind of gathering, do we reckon that his blame of praise will have any value?” to which

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<sup>153</sup> “Consequently, an attack on such gatherings in cities where they are conducted impeccably might not in itself amount to unjustified criticism, provided the critic were attacking the institution itself. But if he abuses the institution [*ἐπιτήδευμά*] simply because he sees every possible mistake being made in running it, he clearly does not realise, first, that this is a case of mismanagement, and secondly that any and every practice will appear in the same light if it is carried on without a sober leader to control it” (I.640d-e).

Megillus replies, “how could it, when he has never seen or joined any of these gatherings run in the proper way?” (I.639c-d). The discussion recalls the language of Alkibiades in the *Symposium* when he announces that only people who have been infected with philosophical mania are able to understand what he is about to say. As such, this might be understood, particularly in the context of an Athenian debating with a Spartan and Cretan, to be that conversation and higher education – what Plato wants to be the role of philosophy in society – does have a proper use under the right conditions and with the right *archon* or leader.<sup>154</sup> Similarly, as the discussion of tragic and philosophical chorality suggested, in any form of discourse there needs to be a proper leader who is not himself a drinker or, in other words, able to be changed by external affections or become influenced by other people’s doctrines or ‘enchantments’, including the potential immoral effects that unvirtuous *logoi* or arguments might have on the person’s soul (for instance, Thrasymachus’ or Callicles’ arguments).

The Athenian continues that “when men become merry with drink, don’t they need someone put in charge of them who is sober and discreet rather than the opposite? If the man in charge of the revelers were himself a drinker, or young and indiscreet, he ought to thank his lucky stars if he managed to avoid starting some serious trouble” (I.640d).<sup>155</sup> This leads us back to the different contexts in which Socrates characterizes *tragōidia* across Plato’s corpus. The tragedians and sophists, who are often lumped into the same interpretive category in Plato’s dialogues, are both liable to affection and change, which in turn makes them bad leaders, and causes them to have inconsistent views. On the other hand, the true philosopher is consistent due to the activity of the *elenchus* enabling him to harmonize the disparate aspects of his soul. It is therefore not surprising

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<sup>154</sup> Cf. Morrow, *Plato’s Cretan City*, 315.

<sup>155</sup> οὐκοῦν νήφοντά τε καὶ σοφὸν ἄρχοντα μεθύοντων δεῖ καθιστάναί, καὶ μὴ τοῦναντίον; μεθύοντων γὰρ μεθύων καὶ νέος ἄρχων μὴ σοφός, εἰ μὴ κακὸν ἀπεργάσαιτό τι μέγα, πολλῆι χρεῶν ἂν ἀγαθῆι τύχῃ.

that the Athenian says that talking and drinking parties can be useful and reminds his non-Athenian interlocutors that “you’ll find every Greek takes it for granted that my city likes talking and does a great deal of it [φιλόλογός τέ ἐστι καὶ πολύλογος], whereas Sparta is a city of few words and Crete cultivates intellect rather than the tongue” (I.642a). The Athenian is trying to show that Athens’ love for *logoi* is well known in Greece, however, the Athenian also maintains that there are some sorts of talking that does not qualify as true *paideia*, which is concerned only about “education from childhood in virtue, a training which produces a keen desire to become a perfect citizen who knows how to rule and be ruled as justice demands” (II.643e-644a). This is, of course, true philosophy, which is here analogized as the *orthon symposion*.

Once this argument has been established and accepted by Cleinias, the next step is to prove that the symposium can be good (ἀγαθὸν) given proper (ὀρθὸν) management. The Athenian replies that the benefit of such institutions would be that it allows for a proper education of the citizen body. This leads the Athenian to embark on a philosophical digression on the nature of *paideia* and the human soul and is famously where the Athenian proposes that the human soul is a marionette or a puppet (a *thauma*) of the gods, where the differing motivations of the human psyche are represented by varying threads corresponding to the rational, thumetic, and appetitive psychological desires. After this digression the Athenian curiously poses the question as to what would happen if one were to introduce drink to the puppet: “what effect is had on something when it is associated with something else [τοῦτο δὲ ὅλως κοινωνῆσαν τούτῳ ποῖόν τι συμπίπτει γίγνεσθαι...] does drinking wine make pleasures and pains, anger and love, more intense? [...] What about sensations, memory, opinions, and thought? Do these too become more intense? Or rather, don’t they entirely desert a man if he fills himself with drink” (I.645d-e)? The Athenian then notes that someone who drinks reverts to a state like when he was a child, and that his self-

control would be at its lowest. Cleinias is perplexed at the ‘*atopos*’ and ‘*thaumastos*’ claim that one would ever willingly put oneself in such a *phaulos* state, again using the vocabulary often applied to those engaging in philosophy, but nevertheless still has the desire, *prothumos*, to continue the conversation.

The Athenian introduces an analogy, arguing that exercise, while it temporarily enfeebles the body, nevertheless makes it stronger in the long term; analogously, enfeebling one’s psyche by drinking enables one to become more temperate by giving one the occasion to ‘practice’ self-control:

A man has to fight and conquer his feelings of cowardice before he can achieve perfect courage; if he has no experience and training in that kind of struggle, he will never more than half realize his potentialities for virtue. Isn’t the same true of self-control? Will he ever achieve a perfect mastery here without having fought and conquered, with all the skills of speech and action both in work and play, the crowd of pleasures and desire that stimulate him to act shamelessly and unjustly? Can he afford *not* to have the experience of all these struggles (I.647c-d)?<sup>156</sup>

This discussion reveals that in Plato’s *Laws* there is an important implicit association between philosophy, *symposia*, and Dionysus. As Charles Segal’s analysis of the function of tragedy suggests, “the space of the dramatic representation [...] becomes a privileged place in which, thanks to the rhetorical transformations and symbolic displacements effected by the poet’s language, we can evade the censor and view things that we do not normally allow ourselves to see,

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<sup>156</sup> τί οὖν; φόβου φάρμακον ἔσθ’ ὅστις θεὸς ἔδωκεν ἀνθρώποις, ὥστε ὀπόσω πλέον ἂν ἐθέλη τις πίνειν αὐτοῦ, τοσοῦτω μᾶλλον αὐτὸν νομίζειν καθ’ ἐκάστην πόσιν δυστυχή γίγνεσθαι, καὶ φοβεῖσθαι τὰ παρόντα καὶ τὰ μέλλοντα αὐτῷ πάντα, καὶ τελευτῶντα εἰς πᾶν δέος ἰέναι τὸν ἀνδρειότατον ἀνθρώπων, ἐκκοιμηθέντα δὲ καὶ τοῦ πώματος ἀπαλλαγέντα πάλιν ἐκάστοτε τὸν αὐτὸν γίγνεσθαι.

hear things that we do not normally allow to be spoken.”<sup>157</sup> In a similar vein, sympotic experience appears to occupy a distinctly heterotopic space, both physically in the form of the *andrōn* (at least for Plato and his readers) as well as mentally in terms of its relationship with Dionysus, that is, the imbibement of wine (that is, the god himself). Wine enables one to have the courage to do things they wouldn’t normally do, just as drama allows one to watch something they wouldn’t normally want or might be ashamed to watch. Similarly, Plato’s vision of philosophy seems to allow for the occupation of such a space, where one can ‘test’ out arguments and various ways of life through the process of the Socratic *elenchus*, with all of its set and determined vocabulary and methodologies. Where the distinction between these two is drawn is that, at least for Plato, tragedy “externalizes and concretizes, visually and verbally, what remains dim, suppressed, and unformed in the unconscious,”<sup>158</sup> whereas philosophy and the Socratic *elenchus* serves to reveal the unnoticed inconsistencies in *conscious* thought, namely, the holding of various premises that are not logically consistent with one another.

These actually appears not so different, as it turns out. According to Segal, Euripides’ *Bacchae*, “As an enactment of Dionysus’ power and a reflection upon that power, [...] reveals first the hypnotic power of the poet, as the mouthpiece of the god, to enfold us in his web of illusion and then the power of conscious knowledge to break the spell and return us to reality, but with a freshly experienced reintegration of conscious and unconscious.”<sup>159</sup> Similarly, Socratic *logoi*, likened by Alkibiades to songs, enchantments, and odes, and the Socratic *elenchus*, allow the interlocutor to recognize the inconsistencies within his own beliefs and bring this in to conscious realization such that his psychic makeup can thereafter consistently and harmoniously ‘sing’

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<sup>157</sup> Segal, “Euripides’ *Bacchae*, 295.

<sup>158</sup> Segal, “Euripides’ *Bacchae*,” 296.

<sup>159</sup> *Ibid.*

together, much like an ideally unified chorus. The major difference, then, is that while on Plato's view tragedy seems to rend the psyche between its conscious and unconscious self, the Socratic *elenchus* attempts to unite both in harmony. This appears quite opposite to the role that Dionysus plays in the climax of the *Bacchae*: "the *theoria*, or sacred procession, in which Dionysus leads the maddened Pentheus out of the palace and the city to his doom on Mount Cithaeron [...] is both a mystic initiation that marks the revelation of Dionysus' full power as a god and simultaneously a revelation of the conflicts and contradictions within Pentheus which the god releases with a force that overwhelms Pentheus' ego and leaves him both physically and psychologically torn asunder."<sup>160</sup>

Just like wine, which the Athenian argues makes people overconfident and lacking in shame, Socrates' brand of irony, namely his praising of his interlocutors with various epithets such as *thaumasie* and *agathe*, can be read as having a similar function, envisioned as a kind of song or enchantment which makes the interlocutor comforted enough to communicate the views that might otherwise be considered shameful. This is similar to how "the force of necessity will appear as [Dionysus'] power not only to unloose the literal bonds of Pentheus' prison but to release the hidden desires of Pentheus' unconscious."<sup>161</sup> One might think for instance of Glaucon's *dianoia* in the *Republic*, where the promising young aristocrat relates, in vivid detail, the story of a Lydian shepherd, an ancestor of the tyrant Gyges, finding a ring with the power to make him invisible, and then proceeding to indulge in morally profane acts. Here it is tempting to think that Glaucon, an individual with the power to enter political life and/or become a tyrant, is voicing his own

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<sup>160</sup> Segal, "Euripides' *Bacchae*," 305.

<sup>161</sup> Segal, 306.



subconscious desire to be able to ‘do whatever he wants’.<sup>162</sup> Socrates’ philosophizing, however, demonstrates that in doing whatever one wants, one will only achieve a state of inner disharmony, and that instead one should mind one’s own business, which is indeed the principal definition of justice in that dialogue. Thus, Socrates’ as a true ‘chorus leader’ leads to the harmonization of the conflicting desires of Glaucon; on one hand, Glaucon wants to believe that virtue is worth pursuing for its own sake, which is what partly motivates him and Adeimantus to ask Socrates to take up Thrasymachus’ challenge in the first place. On the other hand, however, it is suggested that for Glaucon there is still lingering doubt that such a life will be truly the most pleasant. At the end of the dialogue, we do not learn whether Glaucon has been convinced by Socrates’ arguments; instead, we as the readers are asked to join in on Socrates’ mission, namely, in continuing to have discussion about how best to live one’s life in the hopes of in the end harmonizing our rational and non-rational desires.

I have hoped to show in this section that the Athenian’s discussion of wine and the *orthon symposion* is a metaphor for philosophy itself. The test of one’s *sophrosunē* and virtue through imbibing wine is seen as analogous to testing one’s commitment and beliefs in virtue through engaging in the Socratic *elenchus*, that is, engaging with views that oppose the pursuit of virtue. As the Athenian states, this is a necessary social institution as it allows individuals to practice and thus internalize the starting-points of virtue, something that is missing from the teachings of the sophists who do not allow their students to actively engage in their own learning but merely pour

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<sup>162</sup> See Emily Greenwood, “Seeing Citizens: Rereading Gyges’s Ring of Invisibility,” *Social Research* 83, no. 4 (2016): 837: “In the context of the dialogue, [Glaucon’s] premise does important interpretative work in requiring Socrates to provide an argument for the desirability of justice over injustice without reference to considerations of punishment, reputation, and other external ends. But it also characterizes Glaucon as a particular kind of elite Athenian whose values and ambitions are out of step with Socrates’ philosophical project. The trajectory of Gyges’s ancestor once he steals the ring is a swift ascent to power—to the throne of Lydia itself. With the proviso that the kingdom and society in question—mythical/historical Lydia—is far removed from the Athenian setting of the dialogue, Glaucon endorses the fruits of the ancestor’s misdemeanors—who would not want these benefits, he asks?”

their doctrines into their souls as though pouring wine into an empty vessel. On the other hand, sympotic practice is importantly analogized to choral activity, and to worship of the god Dionysus. This form of choral activity is distinct from tragic and sophistic chorality, however, because there is always a sound and temperate leader of these discussions, unlike the tragic choral leader who is liable to affective change and constantly changing himself just to please his spectator. Thus, we can better understand the Athenian's claim that their unique and 'perfect' form of tragedy is able to produce virtue to perfection. That is, the philosophical dialogue allows one to practice being virtuous through encounters with alien discourse, albeit through the sound perspective of the philosophical leader or narrator.

## VI. CONCLUSION

Application of narratological concepts such as focalization, metanarrative comments, time, and metalepsis reveals that Plato's relationship with tragedy runs much deeper than (merely) a renegotiation of ends, as Nussbaum's analysis concludes, nor merely a parody of tragedy. Plato borrows many of the narrative strategies used by the Athenian tragedians, particularly Aeschylus' tragedies centered around choral plots, but inverts the activity of philosophical chorality by linking his idea of chorality to a different concept of divinity and therefore metaphysical reality, the unchanging, internally consistent, and harmonious principles of being, the Platonic forms. The activity of philosophy is depicted as something innately delightful, thereby enabling the reader to internalize the starting-points of virtue, namely the conviction that virtue is something intrinsically worthwhile *qua* intrinsically and truly pleasurable.

On the other hand, the Athenian Stranger's discussion of *symposia* in the *Laws* points to what Plato takes to be the absolute necessity of philosophy as a social institution in civic life, in that it produces truly virtuous citizens, who have not been merely told through an outside force to

passively follow various dictates and laws or customs, but who have actually been given the opportunity to encounter for themselves ‘alien discourses’ and other ways of life, and thus come to their own autonomous conclusion that the life in pursuit of virtue is innately superior. The philosophical narrator of Plato’s dialogues acts as a pedagogic scaffold for the reader, who mediates the dramatic ‘action.’ These philosophical narrators are themselves initiated into the mystery cult of philosophy, again demonstrating both a continuity in Plato’s thought between dramatic ritual as a form of worship of the god Dionysus, as well as generic rupture, in that Plato’s notions of divinity are drastically re-evaluated. Philosophy ultimately enables one to achieve happiness both in life and in death.

I began by demonstrating that Plato’s characterization of philosophy is often cast in the language of mystery cults, particularly the Bacchic or Dionysian mysteries. These religious practices and experiences are differentiated from Plato’s activity of philosophy and idea of divinity in that Socrates’ philosophical mystery cult constitutes a more personal and active worship of the divine than that of the tragedians, one that requires knowledge, belief, and the constant practice of purification. I then demonstrated that Socrates’ *elenchus* is depicted as a form of chorality, particularly in the *Apology*, and that the Socratic *elenchus* differs from tragic chorality in that it firstly presupposes the criterion of *scholia*, that is, the time to go over and review claims being presented rather than being under certain time constraints as in both the Athenian tragedies and the Athenian lawcourts, as well as by being mediated by virtuous and philosophical narrators. This was demonstrated by philological and narratological analysis of the dialogues in which Plato explicitly engages with discussions of *tragōidia*. Finally, I offered a new reading of the Athenian Stranger’s discussion of wine and *symposia* in the *Laws* as a metaphor for the powers of philosophy to produce true virtue in its citizens. This analysis has demonstrated both the important continuity

and difference between Plato's dialogues and their tragic counterparts in ways not previously acknowledged in scholarship. This reading of the Athenian's discussion of *symposia* and chorality in the *Laws* furthermore has the advantage over historicizing accounts in that it does not rely on dubious evidence for actual historical practices but is instead confined to Plato's internal construction and project of philosophy itself.

I hope that this analysis has shown that an interdisciplinary combination of narratological, historical, philological, philosophical, and intertextual analyses of Plato's dialogues yields important insights into his ontological and political beliefs and demonstrates that Plato's literary and philosophical practice are inextricably linked. While this analysis has been confined to Plato's relationship with tragedy specifically, areas of further development would be to examine not merely the role of *tragic* mimetic drama on Plato's dialogues, but also mime, comedy, and satyr-play.

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