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Abstract

Plato's readers struggle to reconcile his combination of conceptual argument and mimetic fiction. In this dissertation, I suggest we can understand this discomfiting combination if we understand the dialogues as "the mimesis of people in speech." Because speech is both referential and performative, speech is a hybrid of thought and action. In order to represent speech in both its rational and transformational aspects, Plato uses both argument and mimesis.

Importantly, I argue, Platonic dialogue differs not only from the logical structure of expository argument but from dramatic mimesis, or, the mimesis of "people in action." In composing the dialogues to mimic conversation, Plato represents human life in its ordinary temporal aspect, recasts what counts as significant action, and brings new aspects of human identity into view. Plato is therefore a literary innovator whose achievements have still not been measured.

In Chapter One, I explain the "genre confusion" at the heart of Platonic dialogue. Because argument and fiction differ—incompatibly—in how their authors speak, how their texts mean, and how their readers treat them, we seem presented with a *choice*: We can read the dialogues as truth-seeking "arguments" (philosophy) or as meaning-making "fictions" (literature).

In Chapters Two and Three, I suggest we "build up" a genre description of Plato's dialogues rather than impose a "top down" method of reading them. To this end, I use the tools of literary criticism to investigate the dialogues' form and effects. Using Aristotle's *Poetics* as a foil and Plato's *Euthyphro* as an exemplar, I contrast Platonic dialogue with

tragedy and other forms. In Chapter Two, I demonstrate how Plato alternately assembles setting, characters and incident into a plot or plot-*like* structure—one which challenges narrative as a mode of explanation and prompts us to philosophical wonder rather than aesthetic katharsis. In Chapter 3, I show how, in imitating Socratic conversation, Plato reveals speech to be the fundamental site of human identity—and philosophy to be both a truth-directed and self-reforming process.

Ultimately, I argue, the dialogues don't require us to *choose* between reading them as philosophy and reading them as literature, but require us to *switch* modes of perception, toggling back and forth between theoretical reasoning and imaginative understanding. The dialogues both present arguments— products of reason which stand aloof of time, person and place—and represent argu*ing*—the temporal, characterological and socially-embedded process of reasoning. Moreover, the dialogues not only mimic but instigate the philosopher's necessary oscillation between the eternal and temporal, intelligible and particular, world of forms and world of flux.

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Table of Contents

Introduction.. 7

Chapter 1: Genre Problems.. 25
1.1 The Euthyphro Problem.. 25
1.2 Argument and its Opposite.. 28
1.3 Genre Matters.. 35
1.4 Two Problems of Plato's Poetics.. 38
1.5 Looking Ahead.. 49

Chapter 2: Plot.. 52
2.1 Action.. 55
2.2 Unity.. 62
2.3 Closure.. 73
2.4 Conclusions.. 81

Chapter 3: Speech.. 101
3.1 The Mimesis of Speech.. 109
i. Object: conversation.. 111
ii. Mode: direct speech.. 122
iii. Medium: prose.. 127
3.2 People in Speech.. 139
i. *Ethos* and *Dianoia*.. 141
ii. *Prohairesis*: Big and Small... 146
iii. The Elenchus.. 150
iv. Speech as Thought, Speech as Action.............................. 155
3.3 The Speaking Being.. 158

Conclusion.. 160

Bibliography.. 181

Introduction

This dissertation is about the Platonic dialogues as a kind of writing, and, therefore, about Plato as a writer.

Most scholars interested in Plato are interested in him as a philosopher. They ask questions like, “did Plato believe in the unity of the virtues?” or “what exactly are the Forms?” These questions are ultimately about Plato’s beliefs, e.g. what he held to be true about the immortality of the soul or a citizen’s duty to the state. These scholars read the dialogues to discover those beliefs and evaluate the reasons he set forth to defend them.[1]

My lens is focused differently. I am interested in questions like, “how does the *Euthyphro* represent time?” and “why does Plato write without narratorial commentary?” These questions are ultimately not about Plato’s beliefs, but about Plato’s poetics.

This is not to say I leave questions about Plato’s *thought* to the philosophers. Composition, after all, gives thinking its shape and expression and compositions as complex as Platonic dialogues—assembling dialogue, action, character, setting, image, myth, allusion and argument—are monumental feats of mind. Indeed, it’s a central claim of this dissertation that Plato did his thinking through art as well as reasoning.[2]

It’s far from controversial these days to claim attention to Plato’s artistry. But too often, this claim amounts to a bromide— that “Plato is a literary genius” is obviously true

[1] David Schur puts it, “Plato’s thought is the goal and Plato’s writings are usually considered the best available means to that goal.” David Schur, *Plato’s Wayward Path: Literary Form and the* Republic (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2014), 24.
[2] I have been helped in my thinking about artistic thinking by a recent book by the poet and scholar Reginald Gibbons titled *How Poems Think*.

but no help at all. Nor does it advance us much to acknowledge that, in Platonic dialogue, "form and content are inseparable." [3] Indeed, Plato's scholars tend to appeal to the form/content dichotomy to sort his "literary elements" from his philosophical arguments, as when François Renaud and Harold Tarrant refer to Plato's "dramatic form" and "doctrinal content."[4] But doesn't Platonic dialogue include "content"—like scene-setting, story-telling, and character interaction—that can't possibly be "doctrinal"? As Alexander Nehamas points out, the non-dialectical conversations that scholars so often describe as "introductory" to the arguments in fact account for as much as one-fifth to one-half of the length of dialogues including the *Laches*, *Charmides*, *Protaogorus*, *Lysis*, *Hippias Major* and *Euthyphro*: "Even to call [these conversations] 'introductions' is to make a controversial choice as to the main purpose of each dialogue." [5] It isn't "form" and "content" that need to be reconciled in Platonic dialogue but Plato's aesthetic and conceptual modes of thought.

Nor do I make common cause with those scholars who take Plato's "literariness" to be an instrument for the concealment or uptake of his philosophical doctrines—i.e. to either partition or widen their appeal.[6] To claim art is a way of thinking is to stand against

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[3] An assertion attributed to Schleiermacher and currently in favor. As Lloyd Gerson points out, "The inseparability or interdependence of drama and argument in the dialogues" has become a commonplace in Platonic studies, but "everything turns of course on how we construe 'inseparability' and 'interdependence.'" Lloyd Gerson, "*Elenchos,* Protreptic, and Platonic Philosophizing," in *Does Socrates Have a Method: Rethinking the* Elenchus *in Plato's Dialogues and Beyond*, ed. Gary Alan Scott (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2002), 227. For more on Schleiermacher's effect on Platonic interpretation, see Schur e.g. To philosophers, "argumentation [is] the significant content of the communicative text" and the recursions peripheral asides. Schur, *Plato's Wayward Path,* xi-xii.
[4] François Renaud and Harold Tarrant, *The Platonic* Alcibiades I*: The Dialogue and its Ancient Reception* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 10.
[5] Alexander Nehamas, *The Art of Living: Socratic Reflections from Plato to Foucault* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 34 n38.
[6] I am thinking of those (e.g. Joshua Landy) who contend Plato used artistic means to block the wrong kind of reader as well as those who argue what amounts to the reverse, that Plato's art is a lure or rhetorical device.

those who treat it as a rhetorical tactic. To twist David Schur's phrase, I mean to show forth a Plato "more arty, less artful."[7] To do so will entail that I treat Platonic dialogue as literature, not merely as expository writing in disguise.

To treat Platonic dialogue *as* literature does not mean I insist Platonic dialogue "is" literature— to the exclusion of it "being" philosophy. In fact, I will argue that Plato's dialogues deny us aesthetic closure and katharsis in order to prompt us *to philosophize*. But that doesn't mean the dialogues are not works of art. (Religious art is intended to send the mind upward; is the Sistine Chapel, then, merely an instrument to that end?) And, of course, to study closure and katharis—to understand the form of Platonic dialogue and its effects—requires the tools of literary analysis.

True, those who read Plato's dialogues as literature often read them divergently—even oppositely—to those who read Plato's dialogues as philosophy. While the philosopher treats the dialogues as truth-seeking "arguments," the literary contextualist[8] treats them as meaning-making "fictions." Ultimately, I argue, this schism reveals the inadequacy of either's disciplinary procedures to fully appreciate Plato's art. It's as if, confronted by the duck-rabbit illusion, one tribe sees the duck and the other sees the rabbit and neither allows for the other's mode of seeing. Thus neither recognizes that Plato's art gives rise to *both* ways of seeing in order to trouble our reliance on *either*.

For an excellent critique of the view that "Plato is making effective use of literary language in order to pursue a didactic philosophical agenda" see Schur, *Plato's Wayward Path*, 7.

[7] Schur describes those who take the dialogues' literary form as "a device or instrument in the service of philosophy" as marking them "more artful and less arty." Ibid., 33.

[8] Literary contextualists are those readers whose "holistic approach contends that Plato's stylistic choices form a context for each proposition he makes in the dialogues, and that this style is therefore essential" to determining what he means. Ibid., 12.

For it is exactly switching points of view that Plato's dialogues so wonderfully effect. Take the naïve reader picking up the *Euthyphro* for the first time. Immediately, she's plunged into a work that must be *imagined*: Two men are in a particular place, in a particular situation, in a specific moment of its unfolding. Like all characters, these men are "only partially specified," but she begins to infer each man's character from his manner of speech.[9] Meanwhile, the narrative world accrues new detail and specificity while, at the same time, these details attract questions—both local ("Is this man right to prosecute his father? What does Socrates think?") and global ("what's the meaning of this confluence of persons, themes, and circumstances?")—that organize her reading. Then: *switch*! The fictional universe falls away, and she's plunged into an argument that must be *conceptualized*: The dialogue's discourse—while still temporally ordered, and uttered—inclines toward the formal logic of a geometric proof. The particularity of the dialogue's circumstances recedes to the background, utterance attains the impersonality of propositional content, and her cognition keys to the "dialectical system of structuring argument" rather than the "narrative system of structuring story."[10] Instead of "following the plot," inferring antecedents and projecting outcomes, she "follows the argument," scrutinizing antecedents and calculating entailments.[11]

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[9] Martin Price, *Forms of Life: Character and Moral Imagination in the Novel* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983), 56.

[10] Nicholas J. Lowe, *The Classical Plot and the Invention of Western Narrative* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 96.

[11] David Concepción makes it explicit in his popular tract, "How to Read Philosophy" that the latter excludes the former: "When you read philosophy you should look for arguments, reasons, and conclusions, not facts, plot or character development." David Concepción, "Reading Philosophy with Background Knowledge and Metacognition," *Teaching Philosophy* 27, no. 4 (December 2004): 359.

The motivating purpose of my dissertation is to account for this experience. (Hence it is oriented to the *poetics*, rather than the hermeneutics, of Plato's dialogues). As Jacob Klein points out, Plato's dialogues invoke both our capacity for imagination (*ekrasia)* and our capacity for reasoning (*dianoia*).[12] But, I would argue further, they do so in such a way that one capacity seems to challenge the other. The work of *imagining* calls on our worldly sense experience.[13] Mimesis re-presents "the experience of the outer world." [14] In the act of theoretical *reasoning,* on the other hand, we turn away from what is particular and time-bound to contemplate what is universal and timeless. Philosophy serves a reality behind the veil of "the outer world." As in the duck-rabbit illusion, each "vision" of the world disrupts and disputes the other. Or, to put it another way, each way of "seeing" bedims the other. Literature's way of seeing produces blind spots. The *theoria* of philosophy is too dazzling.[15]

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[12] Jacob Klein, *A Commentary on Plato's* Meno (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1965), 19.
[13] Mimetic pleasure, Aristotle reminds us, is the pleasure of "exercising the understanding" *in the act of recognition*, i.e. the application of prior knowledge: "men enjoy looking at images because what happens is that, as they contemplate them, they apply their understanding and reasoning to each element (identifying this as an image of such-and-such man, for instance)." Thus "if it happens that one has no previous familiarity with the sight, then the object will not give pleasure *qua* mimetic object." (Ch 4)
[14] Lowe, *Classical Plot*, 20.
[15] Among the original meanings of *theoria*, still active in Plato, is a religious pilgrimage, culminating in the viewing of sacred objects. *Theoria*, then, is "a sacralized mode of spectating." Andrea Nightingale, *Spectacles of Truth in Classical Greek Philosophy:* Theoria *in Its Cultural Context* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 97 In conceiving of philosophy and literature as two ways of "seeing," I owe an intellectual debt to Martha Nussbaum's reading of the *Symposium*": "We see two kinds of value, two kinds of knowledge; and we see that we must choose. One sort of understanding blocks out the other. The pure light of the eternal form eclipses, or is eclipsed by, the flickering lightning of the opened and unstably moving body." But she stops at reading these as "two mutually exclusive varieties of vision": "Those two—philosophy and literature—cannot live together or know each other's truths…." (198-99) Yes, philosophy and literature offer mutually exclusive visions of the world, just as no one can see the duck and the rabbit simultaneously, but we can *switch* points of view. Martha Nussbaum, "The speech of Alcibiades: A reading of the *Symposium*" in *The fragility of goodness: Luck and ethics in Greek tragedy and philosophy* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 165-195.

This insight—that theoretical knowledge dims our perception of particulars and vice versa—animates many of Plato's great images of philosophical life, most famously the Allegory of the Cave.[16] Each time the philosopher looks at a source of light (first the fire, then the sun), he is blinded. Returning to the Cave, he finds his eyes "filled with darkness." (516e) In the *Republic*, Socrates takes the philosopher's loss of sight lightly, a small sacrifice to a higher truth. But in the *Theaetetus*, he registers the loss. In a moment of teasing intimacy—which is, at the same time, a stunning admission—Socrates says: "It really is true that the philosopher fails to see his next-door neighbor; he not only doesn't notice what he is doing; he scarcely knows whether he is a man or some other kind of creature. The question he asks is, What is Man?" (174b)[17]

But Plato is that rare, rare writer who *sees* us in both capacities: as "human being," an object of abstract knowledge, and as "next-door neighbors," particular subjects. If Plato's answer to "What is Man?" can be found in his theory of the soul,[18] it can also be found in his deft characterizations of the *Symposium*'s Alcibiades, the *Euthyphro*'s Euthyphro, the *Republic*'s Cephalus and Thrasymachus. Plato never lost sight of his "next-door neighbors."

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[16] Besides the Cave, and the story of Thales falling into the well, which proceeds the quotation I mention next, there is the Symposium's "ladder of love" by which the lover relinquishes his "small-minded" love of a singular, beautiful body as he approaches the Form of beauty.

[17] Translations of Plato are from Cooper unless otherwise noted. John Cooper, ed., *Plato: Complete Works* (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company, 1997).

[18] Some might say Plato's answer to "What is Man?" is "featherless biped," the taxonomic description offered by the Athenian Stranger in the *Statesman*. But, as Will Cochran deftly argues, Plato uses the inadequacy of the definition to point to the problems of the Stranger's "value neutral" dialectic. Still, the story of Diogenes Laertes plucking a chicken to announce "Here is Plato's man" has given the story legs. As a send-up of the worst tendencies of rationalism, it's worth keeping in the canon of Platonic apocrypha. William Cochran, "Plato's Philosophical Prologue: The Case of Plato's *Statesman*" (paper presented at the 18th annual independent meeting of the Ancient Philosophy Society, Atlanta, GA, April 26-29, 2018).

While the dialogues train the "sight-loving eye" to see beyond the veil, I contend, they also educate the "philosophical eye" to see without a squint.

There are strange ironies in Plato bearing the mantle of Platonism.[19] Philosophically, Plato seems to advance a theory of Forms which denigrates the sensible world of time-bound particulars. Artistically, he invents the "'realistic' historical dialogue, a work of imagination designed to give the impression of actual events."[20] Plato is an idealist but not an allegorist: instead of making his narrative world more abstract and symbolic of the eternal realm, he makes it more particular and naturalistic than perhaps any literary artist before him. Like the comedians, Plato represents contemporary persons and prosaic situations—but without comedy's hyperbole or fantastical elements. Like the tragedians, Plato hews close to psychological realism—but applies it to the temper and spectrum of emotions (embarrassment, annoyance, impatience, exasperation, resentment) you'd expect from a Jane Austen novel rather than a Greek tragedy. Even among the *Sokratikoi logoi*, Plato's use of local settings and historic time grounds his dialogues in greater specificity than those of his peers.[21] Indeed, seen from a certain point of view, Plato's dialogues—representations of contemporary people in everyday situations "designed to give the impression of actual events"—are masterpieces of realism.

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[19] I leave it to the philosophers to determine whether Plato *was* a Platonist!
[20] Charles H. Kahn, *Plato and the Socratic Dialogue: The Philosophical Use of a Literary Form* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 35.
[21] The *Sokratikoi logoi,* also known as "Socratic conversations" or "Socratic dialogues," are a genre of literary prose works developed at the turn of the fourth century BC. I will say more about them in Chapter 3.

Yet the rise of literary realism has been attributed to the death of philosophical Platonism. In his influential work, *The Rise of the Novel*, Ian Watt argues that only when modern philosophy escapes the hold of "Platonic form," does particularity begin to flourish. Realism, as a mode of representation, had to defeat the "strong classical preference for the general and universal," particularly pronounced in neo-Platonic thought.[22] Watt's account of the rise of the novel has been complicated over time—especially by those who extend the genre's genealogy to the ancient world, championing the prose narratives of Chariton and Heliodorus as inaugurating the novel's "continuous history of about two thousand years."[23] But only a few lonely voices, most importantly that of the 20th century literary critic and philosopher of language Mikhail Bakhtin, have argued for the *artistic* contributions of Plato to the development of Western literature —indeed, Bakhtin credits Socratic dialogue[24] as "one of the starting points for that line of development in European artistic prose and the novel that leads to the work of Dostoevsky."[25]

Which brings me to my second purpose. The reputation of Plato the philosopher has obscured the contributions of Plato the writer. The weight of Western civilization primes and guides us to read Platonic dialogue as philosophy; on the other hand, we have not yet begun reading Platonic dialogue as literature. Plato's literary readers sometimes take a scolding tone to Plato's philosophers, as if those who read Plato's dialogues to understand

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[22] Ian Watt, *The Rise of the Novel: Studies in Defoe, Richardson and Fielding* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 16.
[23] Margaret Anne Doody, *The True Story of the Novel* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1996), 1.
[24] Meaning in this case, the genre of *Sokratikoi logoi* rather than what Plato's scholars refer to as his "Socratic dialogues."
[25] Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics,* ed. trans. Caryl Emerson (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 112. Meaning in this case, the genre of *Sokratikoi logoi* rather than what Plato's scholars refer to as his "Socratic dialogues."

their arguments are doing it wrong. (But hasn't this way of reading Plato—call it the history of philosophy—changed the world?) If I have a reforming zeal, it's aimed at the history of literature.

Plato's place in the pantheon of literary innovators is far from assured. While other disciplines make Plato in their own image, poetics perhaps still resents Plato's ultimate loyalty in the "ancient quarrel."[26] If Plato defined philosophy in part by banishing poetry from his city, poetics has returned the insult by excluding Plato from its histories. [27]

I mean to assert Plato's legacy as an author who made significant innovations in literary art, discovering means of representing human life not previously attempted. To this end, I use tragedy (and, to a lesser extent, epic) as a foil. Tragedy and epic are certainly not the only genres of literature Platonic dialogue could be usefully compared to— nor do I address the many "intertextual encounters" by which Plato cannibalizes or ventriloquizes these genres.[28] But tragedy and epic, particularly as they are theorized in Aristotle's *Poetics*, shape a paradigm of Western narrative ("the classical plot") still dominant today: "Ensouled" by plot, these art forms (tragedy and epic, but also the ballad, realist novel,

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[26] As an example of making Plato in your own image, the political theorist Danielle Allen answers the question "Why did Plato write?" with "to effect political change." Danielle Allen, *Why Plato Wrote,* Blackwell Bristol Lectures on Greece, Rome and the Classical Tradition (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 4.

[27] Convinced Plato's interest in art is "limited to its propaganda value," for example, Steven Moore is unwilling to admit his entrance into "our republic of fiction": "So we'll leave him to the philosophers" he concludes. Steven Moore, *The Novel: An Alternative History: Beginnings to 1600* (New York: Continuum, 2010), 78.

[28] See Andrea Nightingale's marvelous *Genres of Dialogue: Plato and the Construct of Philosophy*, which argues that Plato marks the boundaries of philosophy as an intellectual activity by "scripting intertexual encounters with traditional genres of poetry and rhetoric" including funeral oration, eulogy, tragedy and Old comedy. Andrea Nightingale, *Genres in Dialogue: Plato and the Construct of Philosophy* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 193. Bakhtin, himself a classicist, suggested street carnival as a predecessor of the *Sokratikoi logoi*, and Leslie Leslie Kurke (*Aesopic Conversations*) has recently argued for the dialogues' affinity with Aesopian fable.

classical ballet, Hollywood film, etc) are animated—and patterned— by the aspect of human life oriented to the pursuit and fulfillment of aims. In representing "people in action," the classical plot is structured by a tightly interlocking chain of events, features conflicts between man and his world, and represents human character as most potent in the moment of *decision*. By contrast, Platonic dialogue a) represents human life in its "ordinary" temporal aspect, b) recasts what counts as significant action, and c) brings new aspects of human identity into view:

(a) In a tightly plotted work of art, events happen on account of one another not merely after one another: "the internal connection of the plot is logical rather than chronological."[29] Life's temporal unfolding is subordinated to the structure of unified action. Plato's dialogues, on the other hand, effect the tempo of ordinary life, in which each hour follows from and leads to another, each day passes from and to another. While classical plot is tightly closed, and organized with respect to its end, Plato's dialogues are provisional and extensible. In other words, by resisting the aesthetic principles of "unity" and "closure," Plato re-imagines our life in time and shows forth the ongoing, unfinished condition of human action.

(b) Both Plato and the tragedians represent speech. But while some scholars use this fact to stress Plato's continuity with drama, I take it as a major point of departure. Tragic dialogue is the means by which "people in action" pursue—through speech—goals external to the conversation (e.g. Oedipus investigates the circumstances of his birth). Speech is the handmaiden of action, not the action itself. Plato, on the other hand, creates dramas of speech that reveal conversation—philosophical conversation—as a human activity equal in

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[29] Paul Ricouer, *Time and Narrative* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 40.

moral seriousness to any other deed. Speech can expose, and threaten, its heroes as much as any other adventure.

(c) Indeed, in representing the Socratic elenchus, Plato exposes regions of the human psyche foreign to the dramatic stage. Whereas, in tragedy, the hero is competent to express her *dianoia* (thought) and *ethos* (character), Plato revises the relationship between self and speech by showing us to be unreliable narrators of our own beliefs and motives. The "conflict" Socratic dialogue dramatizes is not the agon *between* men but between man and himself. Indeed, Plato's dialogues show that self-division is a permanent condition, not a temporary wound, and recommends philosophy, for those who can endure it, as the endless conversation of "the soul with itself."

My project, then, unites two purposes under one banner: the quest for "genre knowledge." On one hand, genre tells us the *kind* of text we are reading (literature or philosophy? limerick or sonnet?) and provides instructions for how to read it. Without the guidelines of genre, it's surprisingly difficult to construe any given utterance.[30] A student of mine wrote an angry denunciation of an assigned article entitled "High Integrity, Moral Decency Cost Idiot Man Millions." The 'article,' of course, was from *The Onion*, a satirical newspaper. He had not identified it as satire. My student understood every statement in the article. But he did not understand the article. He had fundamentally misjudged the kind of thing it was.

[30] Or any given detail. In romance, blonds denote innocence and moral earnestness. (I owe this point to Price, *Forms of Life*, 24). On the other hand, hat color, not hair color, matters in the Western. Meanwhile, other genres (the realist novels or postmodern Western, say) may "send up" these conventions by ironizing them: Take, for example, the wretched Rosamond's "pure blondness" in *Middlemarch*. Conventions that establish meaning in one genre become stereotypes to puncture in another.

In her paper entitled "What do we think we are doing?" philosopher Constance Meinwald eschews the idea that there is a "correct" way to read Plato, proposing "how we proceed in our interpretative activity depends largely on what we take the *purpose* of that activity to be." [31] But prior to our attempt to interpret a text, whatever our purpose, we must determine what kind of text it is. This is why the question—is Platonic dialogue philosophy or literature?—however partisan or misleading, remains an apt articulation of the challenge we face when we seek to interpret a Platonic dialogue: Have we judged correctly what kind of text it is?

At the same time, genre isn't just a "rule book" for how to read. It's also a global tool of communication that can "teach people to see aspects of reality in a new way." [32] Literary genre determines what aspects of human identity come to the fore, what counts as a significant event, and what principles order the cosmos. Not all aspects of human experience survive transplantation between genres. Odysseus's rhetorical delicacy, deceit, and self-preservation— classic comic virtues—are not virtues in *Philoctetes*. In tragedy, a hero equipped for survival is suspect. Genre structures the norms and values that control our total response to a work of art, as well as our construal of any given detail or device.

One of the great feats of Platonic dialogue is to make, in Socrates, a new kind of hero.[33] Plato's Socrates simply could not be a hero in Homeric epic, or Sophoclean tragedy

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[31] Constance Meinwald, "What Do We Think We're Doing?," *PLATO JOURNAL: The Journal of the International Plato Society* 16 (2016): 9, http://impactum-journals.uc.pt/platojournal/article/view/4420.

[32] Gary Saul Morson and Caryl Emerson, *Mikhail Bakhtin: Creation of a Prosaics* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990), 277.

[33] Emily Wilson observes "Socrates is multi-faceted in a way unparalleled by almost any other character, either fictional or real. He was a new kind of hero…." Emily R. Wilson, *The Death of Socrates* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), 5. A. A. Long describes Socrates as "a new kind of hero, a living embodiment

(although Plato is happy to weave allusions to both). "To introduce a new hero, a new taste has to be established, and the taste for Socrates is unique, counter to all previous tastes."[34] It falls beyond the bounds of this dissertation to explore Plato's "new hero." But we must take Platonic dialogue seriously as literature because it is *as literature*—marshaling all the tools of the "rhetoric of fiction"—that Plato develops our taste not only for the philosopher, but for *philosophizing*.[35]

My dissertation, then, is an attempt to grapple with these two genre questions—What kind of text is Platonic dialogue? How does it "see" reality?—and proposes a deceptively simple tool for doing so. Where tragedy (and most Western narrative) is "the mimesis of action," Platonic dialogue is "the mimesis of speech, or *logos*," in its aspect as thought and in its aspect as action. The hybridity of speech as both thought and action gives Platonic dialogue its dual nature: when we read Platonic dialogue as philosophy, we read it as the expression of *thought*. When we read Platonic dialogue as a literature, we read it as the dramatization of *speech*.

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of philosophical power" and Angela Hobbs, who literally wrote the book on Plato and heroes, accepts the idea that "Socrates may be setting up the philosopher as a new hero, and Plato may be setting up Socrates as the paradigm of such heroism." A. A. Long, *From Epicurus to Epictetus: Studies in Hellenistic and Roman Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 7; Angela Hobbs, *Plato and the Hero: Courage, Manliness, and the Impersonal Good* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 245. Ruby Blondell writes that Plato portrays in Socrates "a new kind of heroic self." Ruby Blondell, *The Play of Character in Plato's Dialogues* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 73. The list goes on…. Indeed, in her recent book, *Platonic Dialogue and the Education of the Reader*, A.K. Cotton observes that "the idea that Socrates is a hero…designed to replace the figures of myth and literature, a model for readers to admire and emulate" has become a commonplace in Platonic studies. A. K. Cotton, *Platonic Dialogue and the Education of the Reader* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 107-8.

[34] Allan Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987), 281.

[35] Booth describes the "rhetoric of fiction," the title of his great work of literary criticism, as "the art of communicating with readers—the rhetorical resources available to the writer…as he tries, consciously or unconsciously, to impose his fictional world upon the reader." Wayne C. Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961), xiii.

At the same time, Platonic dialogue invents a new role for speech in literature. The human being is, for Plato, first and foremost, a *speaking* human being. He "appears" in his discourse: "Handsome is as handsome says" Socrates tells Theaetetus (185e). In epic and tragedy, the body is the fundamental site of human identity, and mortality—the frailty and fleetingness of the body—the primary fact of human existence. Plato shifts the site of identity from the body to speech and renders man in light of his life in language.

Chapter Summaries

Chapter 1 describes the "genre confusion" at the heart of Plato's dialogues: Unlike other texts which combine conceptual argument and mimetic fiction, we do not know how to reconcile these disparate modes of expression in the dialogues. From this confusion arises two stubborn interpretive problems, which I call the Integrity Problem (does literary form trump the autonomy of the arguments, or vice versa?) and the Problem of Authorial Position (is "what Socrates says" different from "what Plato means"?). Each problem is typically resolved by methodological schism: Those who read Platonic dialogue as philosophy argue the arguments have a life of their own and that Socrates speaks for Plato; those who read Platonic dialogue as literature claim the arguments are subordinated to the integrity of the whole, and that Socrates is a "character" in the Platonic drama, no more likely to speak for Plato than Oedipus does for Sophocles.

In Chapters 2 and 3, I turn from this "top down" approach to reading the dialogues, in which genre problems are adjudicated by disciplinary procedures, to a "ground up" approach, in which I build a genre 'definition' of Platonic dialogue by describing its component parts—e.g. object, mode and medium. To this end, I contrast Platonic dialogue

to tragedy (and other forms) to demonstrate how Plato alternately assembles setting, characters and incident into a plot or plot-*like* structure (the subject of Chapter 2) and uses speech to represent human character and depict moral choice (the subject of Chapter 3). In an effort to marry the close reading literary criticism requires with the expansiveness generic criticism requires, I constrain my attention to a single dialogue, the *Euthyphro*, while supplementing my analysis with evidence from other dialogues.

Chapter 2 argues that Plato bucks the narrative tradition begun in Homeric epic, crystallized by fifth century tragedy, and articulated in Aristotle's *Poetics*. While the "classical plot" is committed to action, unity and closure, Plato's deviation from these norms allow him to represent time as episodic and open-ended, challenge narrative as a mode of explanation, and effect philosophical wonder rather than aesthetic katharsis. Plato insists it is philosophy, not story, that can relate the universal, and re-routes our attention from the world of flux to the world of forms.

In eschewing "the mimesis of action," Plato points us away from goal-oriented human action and towards eternal truths. Yet every human thing happens in time, even contemplation of the eternal. The first half of Chapter 3 argues that Platonic dialogue is best understood as the representation of arg*uing* rather than the presentation of argu*ments*. The dialogues' devotion to representing "people in speech" means they are powered by the temporal, characterological and linguistic process of talking as much as by the formal structures of ratiocination. The second half of Chapter 3 argues that Plato's mimesis of "people in speech" doesn't just swap "speech" for "action," but shows "people" to be a

rather different kind of creature than tragedy imagines them to be—and philosophy to be a *self*-reforming as well as *truth*-directed process.

In these chapters, Aristotle's *Poetics* plays an important role, both as foil and template. On the one hand, I use Aristotle's theory of tragedy to distinguish Plato's compositional practices from the tragedians'. On the other, I find a great deal of profit in cashing out Aristotle's method of investigation: What is Plato's mimesis mimesis of? How do character, action, and thought stand in relation to each other in the dialogue form? What do the dialogues *effect* in the reader? Indeed, I build my "ground up" description of Platonic dialogue—the mimesis of Socratic conversation, in direct speech alone, in prose, effecting wonder in the soul of the reader—as an answer to Aristotle's definition of tragedy, and in accord with his categories of investigation.[36]

In the Conclusion, I return to the problems laid out in Chapter 1 and suggest the dialogues' combination of conceptual argument and mimetic fiction is a result of the hybrid nature of speech, which both expresses thought and acts in and on the world. I also return to the "Integrity Problem" and "Problem of Authorial Position" to which I apply the insights won in Chapters 2 and 3. These problems, I argue, emerge from Plato's use of form, which he designs not only to mimic but to *instigate* the philosopher's necessary oscillation between the temporal and atemporal, particulars and intelligibles, the world of flux and the world of forms.

An Objection

[36] I.e., by naming object, mode, medium and effect.

You may notice in these chapter summaries a glaring absence: where is Plato's *own* theory of literature? It may surprise, even irk, some readers that I spend more time analyzing rumors of Plato's reading habits than I do *Republic* 3 and 10! Shouldn't a project titled "Problems of Plato's Poetics" take into account what Plato has to say about poetry and its problems?

I have, with trepidation, picked another path. To treat Plato as, first and foremost a writer, is to grant him the charity to theorize and practice art without judging one by the other. In other words, what Plato achieves, artistically, cannot be limited to what he argues about art, as if these must stand in perfect symmetry to one another. As Socrates says of the poets when he asks them what their works mean, "any one of the onlookers could have answered better." (*Apology* 22b-c) Philosophy, of course—following Plato's lead—takes itself to be exactly that discourse which can account for its every word. Non-contradiction is its standard of excellence and reasoning should be able to provide reasons for everything. But this standard, I think, applies undue pressure to Plato's writing.

François Renaud, for example, in attempting to explicate the dialogue form, writes: "If Plato deliberately chose the dialogue form, rather than simply following a fashion, he must have had reasons for doing so, he must have had some theory about the relation between drama and argument, between methods and content."[37] Does Renaud have a theory of the academic journal article, and the relationship between essayistic writing and

[37] François Renaud, "The Twofold Requirements of Truth and Justice in the Gorgias," *Plato Journal* 16, no. 16 (December 2016): 95. Notice the oblique reference to *Sokraitkoi Logoi*. But the summative word choice, "fashion"—rather than, say, "emerging literary genre"—already disqualifies this position from consideration. How could our great Plato merely "follow a fashion?"

argument, between methods and content? If not, is he “simply following a fashion”? Surely it’s something more fundamental: Renaud communicates in the mode appropriate to the people he wants to communicate with and the subject about which he wants to communicate. He no doubt has “reasons” for choosing his form (collegiality, professional advancement, habit and training, etc) but those reasons no more entail a “theory of communication” than riding a bike requires a theory of motion.

Plato’s well-deserved reputation for greatness occasionally shades into deification, transforming him into a self-sufficient superman. Plato never “nods”—he merely conceals ever more elaborate meanings into ever more byzantine codes requiring ever more ambitious readings! If nothing else, I hope my thesis will bring to view a mortal, “writerly” Plato, both free to make and forced to make the hundreds of choices writers make when—because—their pen is not moved by the hand of God. Plato is no less a genius for being a craftsman.

Chapter 1: Genre Problems

What does it mean to treat the dialogues "as literature" or "as philosophy"? That is the subject of this chapter. In the first half of the chapter, I argue (I) that Platonic dialogues can be read as philosophy or literature because they contain elements of both conceptual argument and literary fiction. Yet (II) these modes of expression are fundamentally incompatible without (III) the instructions of genre. Without understanding its genre, we have no clear cut procedures for interpreting Platonic dialogue.

In the second half of the chapter (IV), I lay out two problems of Plato's poetics and how those problems are answered by those who treat the dialogues as arguments versus those who treat them as literature. While these procedures for reading Platonic dialogue are at odds with one another, I remain neutral in my discussion of them. Why not make common cause with those scholars who treat the dialogues as literature? Because they tend to impose literature *upon* Plato, rather than read the literary *out of* Plato. That is, they are interested in using literary-critical methods to *read* Plato while I am interested in discovering the literary-compositional methods Plato used to *write*. In laying out the problems of Plato's poetics in this chapter, I do not mean to solve them but to use those problems as evidence—evidence of a writer whose experimental form and occluded purpose defy decisive categorization as either literature or philosophy.

I. The *Euthyphro* problem

Before you are two summaries. The first reads:

> Two acquaintances meet by coincidence in front of the religious court. One has been summoned to answer a charge of impiety. The other has come to prosecute his father for a man's death. The man, a murderer, died of exposure while in his father's custody. The first man is shocked. It is highly unusual, impious even, for a son to

> accuse his father of murder—especially on behalf of a stranger. But the son is something of a divine (albeit an unpopular one) and is sure he knows better. The first man goads him to prove it, and the two discuss the nature of piety. When they reach an impasse, the indicted man presses on, but the second makes an excuse and hurries off.

The second reads:

> What is the definition of piety? $Attempt_1$: The pious is what is dear to the gods. $Objection_1$: The gods are diverse in their valuation of the good, just and beautiful. A_2: The pious is what all the gods love. O_2: The definition fails to establish causality. Do the gods love the pious because it is the pious, or is the pious only pious because it is loved by the gods? A_3: Piety is the part of justice concerned with care of the gods. O_3: Care betters those who receive it and the gods cannot be bettered. A_4: Piety is the part of justice concerned with making gifts to and asking favors from the gods. O_4: Our gifts to the gods, since they cannot benefit from them, must trade on what is "dear" to them. This returns us to A_1/O_2. Conclusion: inconclusive.

If you know Plato, you already know that both these summaries gloss the *Euthyphro*. The former takes it to be, first and foremost, a story—and is therefore concerned with its setting, characters, plot, and moral. The latter takes it to be, first and foremost, an argument—and is therefore concerned with its definitions, propositions, arguments and counter-arguments. Which is the more accurate summary? Should we read *Euthyphro* as literature or as philosophy?

The question itself invites scrutiny. "Why 'should'?" someone objects. "Philosophy" and "literature" are pragmatic designations. We call a work "philosophy" or "literature" by how we use it, not because of any essential feature. "The same genre, or even the same text, can be literary in one period and nonliterary in another"[38] and the same holds true for philosophy. Emerson's essays and More's *Utopia* have been considered philosophy, or not,

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[38] Gary Saul Morson, *Boundaries of Genre: Dostoevsky's Diary of a Writer and the Traditions of Literary Utopia* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1981), 40.

in different historical periods, places… and departments. For of course we can switch out "period" for "discipline." After all, a great deal of what makes a "discipline" is how it disciplines us to read. If Platonic dialogue is unusual, it is because it has resisted being fully and finally claimed by either literature or philosophy.

'Should' sounds less naïve to others. They say, "Plato's dialogues don't just 'happen' to be read by philosophy departments, they *invented* philosophy."[39] Moreover, in the "old quarrel" between philosophy and poetry—a quarrel Plato may himself have provoked—it's very clear which side he's on.

For others, the evidence is obviously on the other side. Plato's dialogues are *mimetic*, and, as such, are indisputably literary. Aristotle himself classifies the *Sokratikoi logoi* in his *Poetics* on this basis. Plato himself makes no statements—for, Ruby Blondell reminds us, "dramatic mimesis just *is* the suppression of the authorial voice."[40] Rather, like the writer of fiction, Plato *creates* or represents statements. [41]

But there's another way of looking at the question "Should we read Plato's dialogues as philosophy or literature?": as evidence. *That* we argue over Plato's dialogues in this way suggests something peculiar about them. Plato's dialogues (a) contain elements of the kinds

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[39] E.g. Kraut, Plato was "the first Western thinker to produce a body of writing that touches upon the wide range of topics that are still discussed by philosophers today…. He may in this sense be said to have invented philosophy as a distinct subject…." Moreover, according to Nightingale, Plato's dialogues were engaged in legitimizing philosophy as a cultural practice, exclusive of other modes of intellectual cultivation. Richard Kraut, "Introduction to the Study of Plato," in *The Cambridge Companion to Plato,* ed. Richard Kraut (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 1; Andrea Nightingale, *Genres in Dialogue: Plato and the Construct of Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).
[40] Ruby Blondell, *The Play of Character in Plato's Dialogues* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 16.
[41] More on this distinction—borrowed from Saul Morson—below.

of writing we call literature and philosophy, and (b) contain no explicit directions for how to read them.

Kenneth Dorter puts the problem well:

> Any philosopher of worth gives rise to difficulties of interpretation since he presents us with unaccustomed ways of thinking, but Plato occasions special difficulty because of his mixture of two such disparate modes of expression as conceptual argument and literary drama. How are they meant to react upon each other? Are they meant to be reconciled in interpretation, or is one to be subordinated to the other, or, indeed, is their conflict meant to prevent any interpretation from giving a fully satisfactory account of the dialogue as a whole?[42]

Reconciliation, dominance, or unsatisfied dialectic? "Conceptual argument" and "literary drama," it would seem, are not easy bedfellows. Why not? Because conceptual argument and literary fiction differ—incompatibly—in how their authors speak, how their texts mean, and how their readers treat them. In the next section, I will outline these distinctions.

II. Argument and its Opposite

Although there are no regimented formal features that make one kind of writing "argument" and another kind "fiction," it may help to exaggerate the typical tendencies of each. Let's begin with the proposition that an argument is (or aspires to be) (1) logical, (2) explicit, (3) operable independent of its context (*extractable*) and specific wording (*paraphrasable*), (4) *avowed* (committing oneself to one's statements) and (5) *assertive* (claiming the truth of one's statements). A fictional story, on the other hand, is arguably none of these. By virtue of being *narrative*, it does not "think" by logic, by virtue of being

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[42] Kenneth Dorter, "Reply to Joachim Dalfen," in *Platonic Writings/Platonic Readings,* ed. Charles L. Griswold Jr. (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1988), 225.

literature it is neither explicit nor operable independent of its original utterance or wording, and by virtue of being *fiction* it is neither avowed nor obviously assertive. I'll discuss each opposition in turn.

(1) Argument is linear and logical. Narrative, whether literary or not, fictional or not, *is* linear in form; like argument and music and unlike painting, the reader begins at a beginning and proceeds in one direction to the end. But narrative doesn't proceed from beginning to end by virtue of logical thinking. Logic is a step-by-step progression in which each step results from the last and leads to the next. One "follows" an argument because an argument proceeds by logical sequence that results, ideally, in an unimpeachable conclusion. If done right, this form of reasoning has "legislative authority"—that is, the right to compel assent from another rational agent. If the argument is true, the author has successfully claimed the right to speak on my behalf.[43] Argument has greater affinity with math in this way than it does with many other narrative modes.

Stories "think" too—anecdote differently than biography, creative nonfiction differently from journalism. In the case of narrative *fiction*, plot is typically the means by which the author controls the flow of information. And the causal (or associative) chain set in motion by the plot does not accord with the dictates of logic, but in pursuit of other aims: to focus the reader's attention and quicken expectation, or, say, to create dramatic irony or tragic inevitability.

[43] I owe this formulation to Anthony Laden's book *Reasoning: A Social Picture*.

To "follow" a work of literary fiction requires the reader to "translate the linear text directly into a series of linear events in time"[44] but also to construct and revise a global model of the fictional universe. Like a jigsaw puzzle, narrative requires piecing together information through the confluence of strategy, hypothesis, experimentation and luck. Arguments help the reader by constantly referring to the relations between their elements ("first," "second," "therefore," "as a result," "in conclusion"…) Narrative art, on the other hand, purposefully obscures its ultimate structure and the relationships between its parts. To read a novel, as Martin Price argues, is something like playing a game. The object is to "shape the unpredictable into a form that is prescribed."[45] We the readers are involved in "imposing, discovering, at any rate achieving" form, "to shape the causality of events to the order of our minds, to abolish waste and obscurity by converting disorder to design."[46]

Lowe aptly extends the metaphor. Plot is the

> partially-finished jigsaw picture of the story as a whole. The lower parts are gradually filling up in an orderly sequence, left to right and one layer at a time, but even here a few strategic blank areas may still be waiting to be tiled. The borders are mostly in place, and some areas of the upper picture are beginning to take tentative shape—especially at the top, where a patch of colour on the border seems to match a number of still unplaced pieces. There will be patches of partly connected fragments still looking for a place, and scatters of pieces loosely laid in the regions where they seem to belong…. Sometimes [we will discover] that what we thought all along was a piece of sky was actually a part of the characters' coats.[47]

[44] Nicholas J. Lowe, *The Classical Plot and the Invention of Western Narrative* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 27.
[45] Martin Price, *Forms of Life*, 3.
[46] Ibid., 6.
[47] Lowe, *Classical Plot*, 26-27.

Without stepwise instructions to follow, the reader of fiction is invited into a dynamic process of making meaning and discovering form in the interplay between an art work's "local details and global structures."[48]

(2) Argument aims to articulate every significant logical entailment and leave nothing essential merely implied. Literature thrives on the implicit—in its use of language and its use of forms. In Yeats' poem "A Prayer for my Daughter," the poem benefits from multiple readings of "still" in the line "She can…be happy still."[49] "Still" means "nevertheless," which best fits the sense (or "message") of the utterance, but also evokes "quiet," which answers the "howling" with which the poem opens, and "unmoving," which harkens back to important imagery and etymologies ("tree," "rooted," "radical") in previous lines. The poem exploits polysemy, and profits from it: our estimation of the poem grows when we identify it. The poem becomes more *interpretable*, and therefore *meaning-ful*, because of it.

Argument, on the other hand, purposefully represses polysemy. The ideal of logic is clarity and argument strives towards the authority of mathematics: 1+2=3. The more *interpretable,* the less *definitive*. That's why the author of an argument will take pains to clarify and delimit their message ("what I mean is…", "in other words…"). An excellent poem uses words in ways that multiply meanings; an excellent argument uses words in way that delimit meanings.

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[48] Schur, *Plato's Wayward Path*, 44.

[49] I owe this point to Leon Kass.

Literature makes use of other kinds of implicit meaning in non-literal modes of representation —e.g. symbol, metaphor or allegory. These modes invite and affirm the cliché that a work "has many layers" or "works on many levels." Take, as an example from fiction, the death of Tess's horse in Hardy's novel. The horse's death is meaningful to the plot: Tess has to go to work when her family loses their workhorse. But his gruesome death is also a symbol, and foreshadowing, of Tess's doom.[50] Readers read literary forms with the expectation that such "layers" or "levels" are intentional, discoverable and vital to the work's purpose.

(3) An argument is operable independent of its original context (hence extractable) or specific wording (hence paraphrasable). The author of a journal article, for example, paraphrases her own argument (in the introduction, conclusion and "in other words…"). Every time I cite that argument in my own work, I do so having extracted it from its original utterance.

Both paraphrase and extraction, however, are inherently suspect to readers of literature.[51] In a work of literature the meaning of its parts come from its relationship to the whole and each part is essential to that whole. Indeed, to treat a text as such, argues Morson, defines it as literature: "To take a verbal text as a literary work" requires one to "assume in principle that everything in the text is potentially relevant to its design."[52] On

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[50] This example was suggested in Peter Lamarque and Stein Haugom Olsen's *Truth, Fiction, and Literature: A Philosophical Perspective.*

[51] The classic argument against the irreducibility of literature to propositional content is "The Heresy of Paraphrase" in Cleanth Brooks, *The Well Wrought Urn: Studies in the Structure of Poetry* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1947), 192-201.

[52] Morson, *Boundaries of Genre*, 41.

the one hand, excerption amputates the part from the whole. On the other, paraphrase flouts the rule that "No detail can be completely irrelevant."[53]

Treated as literature, a text is "a specific arrangement of specific words."[54] It cannot be rearranged or revised and remain itself. A literary work is such that to extract from it or put it into other words creates a new, second text. Not so arguments, which (as I will detail below) are defined by their "autonomy"—their freedom from an originating utterance.[55]

(4) Argument is avowed. The author of an argument commits herself to her statements. Fiction is, by definition, not avowed. As Morson puts it, the author "represents" rather than "makes" statements: The difference between nonfiction and fiction

> lies in the kind of responsibility the author takes for his or her statements. In one case, we are asked to believe, and invited to look for, outside confirmation of the speaker's statements; in the other, we are not, because no one in fact is making (as opposed to representing) statements.[56]

The author does not commit herself to her fictive statements; they are not endorsed or *avowed*. Readers of fiction relinquish the right to infer "from a fictive utterance back to the speaker or writer" in the same way we can non-fictive utterances, especially those inferences "about the speaker's or writer's beliefs."[57]

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[53] Ibid., 42.
[54] Schur, *Plato's Wayward Path*, 23.
[55] Nehamas puts the contrast well: "Literary ideas, however 'philosophical,' remain tied to the texts in which they appear. [Thomas] Mann's speculations about the mixture of the sensual and the intellectual in the human soul, for example, are not—and cannot—be discussed without being constantly illustrated by the affair between Hans and Clawdia. By contrast, Plato's distinction between the appetitive and the rational parts of the soul, despite the fact that it is in great part motivated by his specific desire to account for, justify and systematize Socrates' way of life, also has a life of its own…. Philosophical ideas are in that sense abstract, capable of living independently of their original manifestations. " Alexander Nehamas, *The Art of Living: Socratic Reflections from Plato to Foucault* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 33.
[56] Morson, *Boundaries of Genre,* 47.
[57] Lamarque and Olson, *Truth, Fiction, and Literature,* 44.

(5) Argument is assertive (where "making an assertion…is making a knowledge claim.")[58] Fiction's relationship to assertion is complicated.[59] There is a great deal of philosophical thought devoted to how or whether fictive discourse makes claims, or pretends to make, claims about truth. Most interesting is the case of the author's "thematic statements" (propositions "which express generalizations of judgments based on or referring to these described situations, events, characters, and places") rather than "subject descriptions" (propositions that "describe or mention particular situations and events, characters, and places").[60] Whether George Eliot is asserting, or only pretending to assert, that "Miss Brooke had that kind of beauty which seems to be thrown into relief by poor dress" is a question of interest only to the philosopher—it bears no significance to how readers make sense of the utterance. But the question of whether Eliot asserts a thematic statement— e.g. "That element of tragedy which lies in the very fact of frequency, has not yet wrought itself into the coarse emotion of mankind; and perhaps our frames could hardly bear much of it"—*does* implicate us ordinary readers. Such an utterance seems to belong to the fictional world and to the real world—either simultaneously or undecidably. But is it both/and or either/or?

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[58] Robert Brandom, *Making It Explicit: Reasoning, Representing, and Discursive* Commitment (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994), 201.
[59] It may seem to follow that if authors of fiction don't "make" statements then they don't make assertions. Gaskin argues that they do. Although Dickens is "not asserting, *propia voce*," that Gradgrind is *F*, "he *is* so asserting." The assertion is merely of the form, "It is fictionally the case that Gradngrind is *F*." Others, eg Beardsley, claim that no sentence in a fictional work is truly asserted. Richard Gaskin, *Language, Truth, and Literature: A Defence of Literary Humanism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 95.
[60] Lamarque and Olson, *Truth, Fiction, and Literature,* 324.

Tolstoy's famous first line "All happy families…" has a special status its next line, "Everything was in confusion in the Oblonskys' house," doesn't share. Its "quotability" is evidence of such: The statement circulates in the real world amputated from its fictive context and evaluated according to our ordinary conventions of truth and falsity. Sometimes the origin of the statement is attributed to its author ("—Leo Tolstoy") sometimes to the work of art ("—*Anna Karenina*").[61] Is there such a thing as non-fictive discourse within a fictional text? Or is it only when amputated, extracted from its fictional utterance and "read" non-fictionally that such a sentence gains the status of "genuine assertion"?[62] For our purposes, it is enough to note that fiction's claim-making is questionable and qualified at best.

III. Genre Matters

The purpose of the preceding section was to demonstrate that conceptual argument and literary fiction are not just different from each other, but often in direct opposition with respect to how they are authored, constructed and decoded by readers. Still, this doesn't explain what makes their confluence in Platonic dialogue so difficult to interpret. After all, argument and story co-exist not just in Plato's dialogues but in many other works, from the Melian dialogue in Thucydides' *History* to Menippean satire to Mann's *Magic Mountain*.

[61] See Morson, *The Words of Others* and Lamarque and Olson on dual perspectives of generalizations/thematic statements, 147-148.
[62] Searle considered the line a "genuine assertion," not a pretended one.

Yet in each other case, we know the *kind* of text we are reading. Indeed, its kind is often described by or in the text. Thucydides, for example, makes the effort to describe his method and product as "an examination of the facts" aimed at "accuracy."[63] More simply, the first edition of *Magic Mountain* was printed with the subtitle "*Roman*." By describing or naming its genre, each work provides instructions for how it reconciles the "disparate modes of expression" within. In Thucydides, we can expect that, in the Melian dialogue, both the argument's soundness and its dramatic tension and resolution are subordinated to the writer's goal of reporting historical events. In Mann, we can expect that the philosophical concerns of the characters serve the ends of orchestrating a fictional world. As in Thucydides's history and Mann's novel, "most works will manifest in their design an overriding, dominant goal even as they may instantiate secondary goals, or enlist the techniques and forms we associate with these secondary goals."[64]

By contrast, the genre of Platonic dialogue—and therefore its "overriding, dominant goal"— is in doubt. The dialogues include no explicit description of their aim or how to read them. This is a problem of another order of magnitude than the problems of interpreting other texts.

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[63] While acknowledging that, where reliability or memory fail, "my habit has been to make the speakers say what was in my opinion demanded of them by the various occasions, of course adhering as closely as possible to the general sense of what they really said." (Thucydides, *The Peloponnesian War*, 1.21.2-1.22.3)

[64] Murray Smith, "Film Art, Argument, and Ambiguity," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 64, no. 1 (2006): 40. The debate in philosophy, initiated by Stanley Cavell and Stephen Mulhall, about film "as philosophy," has been a surprising source of aid in thinking through Plato's relationship to philosophy and literature, or, as Smith distinguishes the two, epistemic and artistic values. Smith's paper is especially intelligent on the tension between the "goals of philosophy and the goals of art" being reconciled by a work's implicit (generic?) subordination of one to the other. So, while the Steve Martin film *All of Me* gives "expression to inconsistencies in our assumptions about personal identity" just as a philosophical thought experiment might, it is designed to "maximize" comic rather than epistemic value. Ibid., 39-40.

Consider Shakespeare criticism. There are feminist, historicist, materialist, post-colonial, humanist and anti-humanist readings of Shakespeare. Yet despite this diversity, no one argues that Henry V's St. Crispin's Day speech is accurate reportage. No one tests the truth value of "Juliet is the sun." No one argues Shakespeare intended Hamlet's "to be or not to be" speech as a training exercise in critical thinking. That's because we know *Henry V* is fictional, not factual. We understand Shakespeare's metaphor is interested not in the ontology of Juliet but in the character of Romeo. And we accept—because Shakespeare's plays were staged for customers and patrons—the simplest explanation for why they were written and for whom. Scholars can argue up and down about who Shakespeare was, when the plays were drafted, or what the plays mean, but they agree on something much more fundamental.

In Platonic studies, there *is* serious debate about whether the *Apology* accurately reports Socrates' speech at his trial.[65] One can argue intelligently that when Diotima tells Socrates the aim of love is to "give birth in beauty" (*Sym*. 206b) she is making a claim not a metaphor.[66] And some argue Platonic dialogues are designed as "training exercises" in critical thinking, while others think they were "prose plays," while others claim they are "treatise-like" in stating "conclusions [Plato] believes for reasons he accepts".[67]

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[65] See, e.g., Brickhouse and Smith who argue against a "fiction theory" in favor of its accuracy and Wallace (2013) for a recent interpretation that takes a counter-stance. Thomas C. Brickhouse and Nicholas D. Smith, *Socrates on Trial* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), 5-10.
[66] I have in mind Nguyen, "Birth in Beauty: Truth, Goodness and Happiness in Plato's Dialogues" which offers a "sophisticated literalist reading" of this phrase. Hung Nguyen, "Birth in Beauty: Truth, Goodness and Happiness in Plato's Dialogues" (PhD diss., Northwestern University, 2016).
[67] Kraut, "Introduction to the Study of Plato," 30. I'm thinking here of Joshua Landy who hypothesizes that the dialogues are designed as "training exercises" in spotting good arguments and bad and Nikos Charalabopoulos who argues that Plato is "the first prose playwright." Joshua Landy, *How to Do Things with*

With Platonic dialogue, we lack consensus about the most basic genre knowledge, meaning not only "Why Plato Wrote" and for whom, but by what codes the dialogues are meant to be read. Without the guidelines of genre, it's surprisingly difficult to adjudicate whether any given utterance is an act of reportage, assertion, or "make believe."[68] We are left to wonder not just what a given statement means, but about "the appropriate procedures for discovering meaning."[69]

Which means we are left to wonder (and debate) how art and argument "react on one another." Without genre to tell us how to mediate between these "disparate modes of expression," they become rivals. Each mode threatens to lay claim to the executive function, to "read" the other through its own procedures. And the procedures for "discovering meaning" in arguments (codified in the discipline of philosophy) and "discovering meaning" in verbal art (codified in the discipline of literary studies) are very different indeed.

IV. Two Problems of Plato's Poetics

These methodological differences emerge—often unspoken—when scholars aim to interpret Platonic texts. In what follows, I will lay out two problems of Plato's poetics, which I call the Integrity Problem and the Problem of Authorial Position.[70] Each of these

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Fictions (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012); Nikos Charalabopoulos, *Platonic Drama and Its Ancient Reception* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2012), xii.

[68] One popular strain of philosophy of literature describes fictional utterance as "make believe."

[69] Morson, *Boundaries of Genre*, 49.

[70] The second is a canonical problem; the first will, I believe, be recognizable to interpreters of Plato but is less often articulated. This, I believe, is the consequence of Platonic studies privileging hermeneutics ("What does a dialogue mean?") over poetics ("How does a dialogue mean?")— which inevitably involves forms of thinking (call it literary theory) that point beyond the text in question. There is wisdom in the caution that general arguments about Plato devolve into quarrels that mean "little or nothing addressed in the abstract" and that

problems is born from the "genre confusion" at the heart of Plato's dialogue. Each problem is resolved by methodological schism: Some of his readers choose to treat the dialogues as "arguments," prioritizing their autonomy, assertions, and explicit meaning while others treat them as "fiction," prioritizing their integrity, disavowal, and implicit meaning.

The Integrity Problem

"It is astonishing what a different result one gets by changing the metaphor!" – George Eliot, *Mill on the Floss*

In a recent issue of the PLATO journal, Constance Meinwald and Marina McCoy each offer a metaphor to construe the "interdependence" of literature and argument. Meinwald uses the metaphor of a frame to suggest that the "literary elements" of each dialogue serve as signals or "indications" about how to proceed in our interpretation of the arguments:

> In the case of a painting, the job of a frame is (in part) to set off the inner work in a certain way: such things as the color, texture, size and shape of the frame affect how the painting looks to us. So when the original artist has herself or himself selected the frame, its effect on how the painting looks to us shows something about how the artist wanted us to see the inner work: after all, the artist was guiding our perceptions in the way this particular choice of frame does.[71]

Often, these hints act as "footnotes" allowing Plato to refer to passages in his own work or those of other authors.[72]

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it's best to proceed by "interpreting a particular dialogue and having the aptness of one's methodology assessed by its specific results." But, as Morson points out, "in order to understand an author's intentions regarding a work one must first understand his intentions regarding the *kind* of work he was writing." Francisco J. Gonzalez, "Plato's Perspectivism," PLATO JOURNAL: The Journal of the International Plato Society 16 (2016): 32, http://impactum-journals.uc.pt/platojournal/article/view/4422; Morson, *Boundaries of Genre,* 59.

[71] Constance Meinwald, "What Do We Think We're Doing?" *PLATO JOURNAL: The Journal of the International Plato Society* 16 (2016): 14, http://impactum-journals.uc.pt/platojournal/article/view/4420.

[72] By way of example she suggests that, by making Cephalus, the narrator of the *Parmenides*, be from Clazomenae, Plato "prepares us for and confirms the relevance to the dialogue of the work of Anaxagoras." Or that the last word of the *Philebus, 'Alethestata'* ("Most true") "amounts to a suggestion from Plato that we try to figure out how to understand [the argument's paradoxical conclusions] such that they are fine and they don't contradict each other." Ibid., 16.

Marina McCoy, on the other hand, describes the Platonic dialogue as "multilayered." Indeed, each dialogue has as many as four layers: First (1), "the ideas and arguments of each character." Second, (2) "dramatic information about the characters known to (some of) the characters; third, (3) dramatic information about the characters they don't know (e.g. historic irony); fourth (4) "intertextuality with Plato's predecessors and contemporaries." Each layer recontextualizes the others so that "we use one layer to fully enhance our understanding of what is happening at another level of the dialogue, or to see where one level is as of yet incomplete in its analysis."[73]

What do the metaphors of "frame" or "layer" matter for how we assign "integrity" to the dialogue? As Meinwald points out, it makes no sense to interpret the 'significance' of the frame in isolation, to, so to speak, "read off its meaning when it is empty."[74] But she doesn't make the same claim for reading the painting without the frame. After all, most paintings are fully interpretable without their frame, just as most scholarly essays are fully interpretable without their footnotes.[75] The "frame" metaphor suggests the dialogues' "literary elements" are auxillary—meaning both "helpful" and "supplementary." The arguments—like the painting—are aided by the dramatic frame but can be extracted from

[73] McCoy uses the *Meno* for her example. At level (1), Socrates and Meno engage in arguments about virtue and how to acquire it. "This level is fundamental to our philosophical exploration of the question of whether virtue can be taught." (2) We learn about Meno's character from his manner of address and the motion of his mind. McCoy characterizes him as passive and hubristic "in terms of how he wishes to learn." (3) We the readers know "something about Meno's future than neither Socrates nor Meno as characters" know—that Meno will end up dishonored and dishonest as a military leader. Marina McCoy. "Perspectivism and the Philosophical Rhetoric of the Dialogue Form," *PLATO JOURNAL: The Journal of the International Plato Society* 16 (2016): 51-52. http://impactum-journals.uc.pt/platojournal/article/view/4423.
[74] Meinwald, "What Do We Think," 14.
[75] Indeed, the footnotes are where we relegate what is *in*essential to the integrity or unity of the essay's argument.

the frame without harm to them. If they are interdependent, only the arguments are essential: the "literary elements" are there to make them more intelligible.

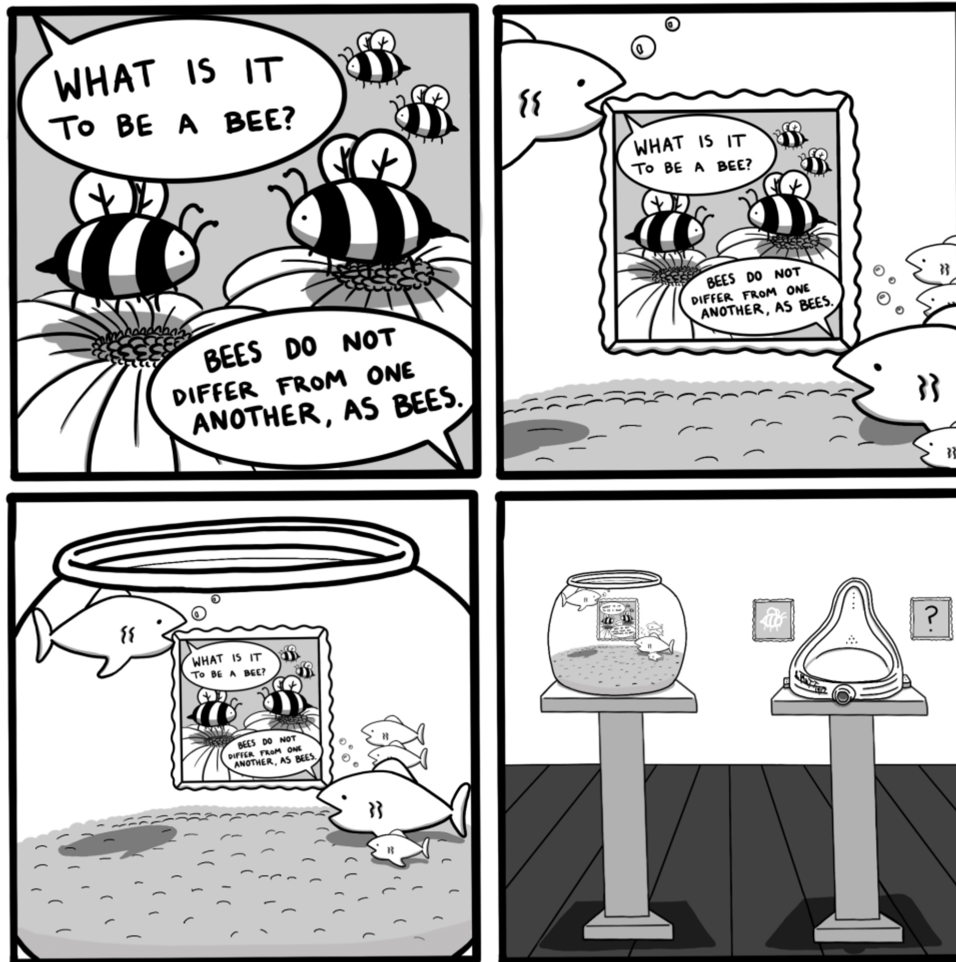
McCoy's multi-layered object, on the other hand, suggests something altogether different: a unity in which no part is less than essential. The arguments are therefore inextractable—or rather, extract them at your risk. (We're now talking about cutting the background out of the *Mona Lisa* rather than unframing her). Moreover, by McCoy's lights, a reading that contends only with what the characters say—that is, the arguments—is a *superficial* reading of the text, for the effect of layers is to produce depth. To put it another way, a reading that contends only with what the characters say is the least *contextualized* reading of the text. For the effect of moving through the layers is the effect of increasingly contextualizing the original utterance.

Imagine a cartoon of four panels. In the first, two speech bubbles face each other. "What is it to be a bee?" reads one. "Bees do not differ from one another, as bees" replies the other. In the second panel, the speech bubbles remain but the cartoonist has enlarged our frame of reference. We now see the speakers as well as the speech bubbles. One fish asks another, "What is it to be a bee?" The other, amidst a school of a dozen fish, answers, "Bees do not differ from one another, as bees." In the next frame, we zoom out more: Now we see the fish are captive in their own bubble—a fish bowl. In the final frame, we zoom out still further: We see the fish bowl is on a pedestal in a museum next to Duchamp's

urinal. Now, in each panel the words remain the same, but their effects change. Every time the frame of reference widens, it changes the *sense* of the frame(s) before.[76]

Meinwald and McCoy's metaphors are wholly incompatible with each other. The "frame" metaphor subordinates the literary drama to conceptual argument, while the former signals how to work on the latter. The "layer" metaphor subordinates the conceptual argument to literary drama, because the former gains its final meaning only in the full context of the latter. The frame metaphor renders literary interpretation untenable—because literary interpretation relies on an integral design of which each part is essential. The later metaphor renders most kinds of philosophical work untenable—because sounding propositions for their truth value relies on extracting them from context.

[76] I say that subsequent layers, subsequent context, changes the "sense" not the "meaning" of the first layer in keeping with a distinction Bakhtin makes in "The Problem of Speech Genres." See below.



[77]

Indeed, contextualization is, in large part, the enemy of philosophy's procedures for truth-seeking. Take the "proposition," a self-consciously artificial form whose purpose lies in abstracting content from form and context. A may say to B, "Huh, the sky ain't blue." There are any number of reasons to be intrigued by the statement as a voiced *utterance*, but a philosopher wants to know if it's true or not. To do so, she turns to the proposition: Philosophy translates the utterance into a proposition ("that the sky is not blue"), from a natural into a formal language, in order to rescue its content from the vicissitudes of

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[77] Drawing courtesy of Caroline Brown, CJBCreations, LLC.

expression. If context must be taken into account to judge the truth of what A says, I can't do philosophy anymore—at least, not philosophy with propositions. Philosophy depends on the extractability and formalizability of argument. The "integrity" of the *argument* is what counts—its coherence and completeness—not the integrity of the artifact from which it's extracted. Therefore, it's reasonable to discard what is irrelevant to the argument.

Mikhail Bakhtin, on the other hand, argues on behalf of context and against abstraction in his essay "The Problem of Speech Genres," although his target is linguistics not philosophy. Linguists, he writes, suffer from their own sleight of hand in substituting concrete utterances for the semi-abstract, conventional "sentence." The linguist studies a sentence (e.g. "The sun has risen") in a laboratory, as it were, abstracted from use. Such a sentence, Bakhtin writes, is "completely comprehensible," that is, we can fully understand its "*meaning*." But without context we cannot understand its "*sense*."[78] To whom is this statement addressed? What is its purpose? To understand language *as* communication, we need to place it in the context of its utterance (e.g. "The sun has risen. It's time to get up" or "The sun has risen. A new day is born.") The sentence "acquires its *final* meaning" only in the whole utterance.

Literary study tends to side with Bakhtin. A work of literature is a single utterance and every statement in it acquires its "final meaning" only in the context of the whole. So the "best" reading of Dostoevsky's Legend of the Grand Inquisitor—although widely excerpted for use in philosophy anthologies—is one that takes into account Ivan's

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[78] Mikhail Bakhtin, "The Problem of Speech Genres," in *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays,* trans. Vern W. McGee (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986), 82-83.

character, his relationship with Alyosha, and how this episode contributes to the action of the plot and the themes developed by the author over the course of the novel.

Philosophy, on the other hand, treats arguments as having "a life of their own." Or, we might say, a discourse of their own. As Gerson points out, if Ivan Karamazov makes the argument "if A is greater than B, and B is greater than C, then A is greater than C," it is in some way *his* argument. Yet the argument is not "character bound" exactly because it stands or falls on its own two feet. It has autonomy. "Freeing the argument from the character who expresses it does not mean that we have to take arguments 'out of context.'"[79] "[T]he purpose for enunciating an argument is quite independent of the validity of the argument or the truth value of the premises."[80]

The Problem of Authorial Position

I've borrowed the title of this dissertation from another of Bakhtin's great works, *Problems of Dostoevksy's Poetic*s, which begins with this insight: When literary critics sit down to write about Dostoevsky, they end up arguing with Raskolnikov and Prince Myshkin and the Grand Inquistor, as if these fictional characters were "authoritative and independent," authors of their own "philosophical statements." "For the purposes of critical thought," Bakhtin writes, "Dostoevsky's work has been broken down into a series of

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[79] Lloyd Gerson, "Who Speaks for Plato? Everybody!," in *Who Speaks for Plato?: Studies in Platonic Anonymity*, ed. Gerald A. Press (Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2000), 205.
[80] Ibid., 206.

disparate, contradictory philosophical stances, each defended by one or another character."[81]

But Bakhtin spots a wrong turn: that we argue with Myshkin or Ivan, get entangled "in the contradictions that entangle them, [stop] in bewilderment before the problems they failed to solve," is, in fact, a product of *Dostoevsky*'s design.[82] It is an *achievement* of Dostoevsky's poetics for these characters to call forth an "unmediated response" in the reader—but because it works so well, we fail to see and assess this achievement. We fail to rise above the plane on which the characters speak, where they are subjects of discourse, to the plane on which the characters are spoken, on which they are objects of discourse.

Dostoevsky's effect on his readers is a pretty good analog to Plato's effect on his. When we say we're at work on a Platonic dialogue we're usually at work on the arguments voiced by the characters of the dialogues. And for good reason— the dialogues invite our participation at this level and, of course, as the history of philosophy bears out, arguing with Socrates or Thrasymachus or the Athenian Stranger has been tremendously generative. But how should we account for the difference (if any) between "what the characters say" and "what the dialogue says," or more pointedly, between "what Socrates[83] says" and "what Plato means"?

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[81] Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics,* ed. and trans. by Caryl Emerson (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 5.
[82] B. M. Engelhardt quoted in Ibid., 6.
[83] Or Timaeus or the Athenian Stranger, etc.

The majority of mainstream analytic philosophers elide the distinction, subscribing to some form of the "mouthpiece" theory[84] by which what Plato has Socrates say can be attributed to what Plato believes at the time. Kraut defends this "working hypothesis" by comparing the dialogues to treatises.[85] Like treatises, "they are vehicles for the articulation and defense of certain theses and the defeat of others."[86] If the dialogue is such an instrument, it is best

> to begin with the assumption that in each dialogue [Plato] uses his principal interlocutors to support or oppose certain conclusions by means of certain arguments because he, Plato, supports or opposes those conclusions for those reasons.[87]

Kraut's opponents stress the dialogues' difference from rather than similarity to treatises, insisting that character and author "speak" on different planes. ("Who speaks for Plato?" Debra Nails asks, "The dialogues do, irreducibly."[88]) Those who would discard the mouthpiece theory often produce their own analogy: Socrates no more speaks for Plato than Antigone for Sophocles or Hamlet for Shakespeare.[89] Given the dialogue form, in

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[84] Is Socrates Plato's "mouthpiece"? This is the problem of Plato's poetics that has received the most attention over the last thirty years, and the most popular form in which it's been asked. But it's worth noting, again, that a metaphor constrains the way we see the problem. The "mouthpiece" metaphor suggests Socrates is Plato's instrument, rather than Plato's character. Moreover, to ask "Is Socrates Plato's mouthpiece" allows answers of this ilk: "yes," "no," "sometimes." Try, instead, "Does Plato endorse Socrates' views?" and we might answer, "yes," "no" "sometimes" but also "only to this extent" or "in this assertion, yes, but in this sentiment he's endorsing Euthyphro."

[85] Kraut, "Introduction to the Study of Plato," 29.

[86] Ibid., 26.

[87] Ibid., 29.

[88] Debra Nails, "Mouthpiece Schmouthpiece," in *Who Speaks for Plato?: Studies in Platonic Anonymity,* ed. Gerald A. Press (Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2000), 16.

[89] Eg Strauss, Nails [in *Who Speaks for Plato*?] or more recently, Lehman and Weinman, "we cannot take Timaeus's words—or any single knowledge claim offered in the dialogues more generally—as Plato's "at face value"—any more than we can simply accept, say, Polonius's views as Shakespeare's, or Antigone's views as Sophocles's." Geoff Lehman and Michael Weinman. *The Parthenon and Liberal Education* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2018), 9.

which communication by the author is "implicit, suggested, rather than stated clearly and openly," the burden of proof lies on those who would infer Plato's mind from the words of his characters.[90]

As with the Integrity Problem, Plato's authorial position is resolved by schism. Those who take the dialogues to be "treatise-like" treat the dialogues as expository writing in a different guise. And expository writing simply *is* that kind of writing to which its writer commits himself. Socrates 'must' speak for Plato if Plato's dialogues are philosophy in the normal sense, that is, assertive. It makes sense, then, to characterize Socrates not so much as a character but as a device—a "mouth piece" for Plato to speak.

In the other camp are those who read the dialogues from the position of what Joshua Landy calls the "literary principle of charity," that is "refraining from the temptation to attribute to an author the views of one of his characters."[91] Since Plato is technically not "making" but "creating" statements, his writing simply is NOT expository. Plato created distance between what Socrates says and what he says and that distance requires interpretation.

Ferrari, however, disputes the claim that "only if we refuse to identify Plato's views with those of any of his characters are we giving his dialogues a literary reading." Drawing on Lerner's *The Truthtellers*, Ferrari points out that some kinds of literature ("the committed") do recommend positions—sometimes represented by characters—whereas others ("the dramatic") do not. Reading a text "as literature" does not demand that we

[90] Gerald A. Press, "The Logic of Attributing Characters' Views to Plato," in *Who Speaks for Plato?: Studies in Platonic Anonymity,* ed. Gerald A. Press (Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2000), 29.
[91] Landy, *How to Do Things*, 95-96.

"resist the temptation to treat any [voice] as authoritative." In other words, he makes the distinction between "avowed" and "assertive" writing and points out that an author can make authoritative statements even if not *propia voce*.[92]

Ferrari is right to point out that there's no necessary connection between reading a text as literature and reading it as non-dogmatic. There is, after all, a healthy canon of dogmatic or propagandistic literature in which the character speaks for the author without qualification. Dorrit Cohn makes the same point in her article, "Does Socrates Speak for Plato?" using the formulation of "closed perspectival structure" (in which the author clearly guides "the reader to favor one dramatic figure over another") and "open perspectival structure" in which there is no such backing. But, Cohn reminds us, "*it is only in literary works*…that disagreements can exist as to where an author stands, what ideological values he intends his work to convey."[93] In expository writing, no such debate is needed. So while it is not necessary to refute Plato's dogmatism in order to read the dialogues as literature, the problem of authorial position itself may be taken as evidence that the dialogues be read as literature.

Looking Ahead

In this chapter we've seen that, by composing works that combine literary mimesis and conceptual argument, Plato has joined alien forms of writing not easily reconciled. Without the instructions of genre, we are left to argue about the fundamental procedures

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[92] G.R.F. Ferrari, review of *Who Speaks for Plato? Studies in Platonic Anonymity*, ed. by Gerald R. Press. *Bryn Mawr Classical Review* 11, no. 10 (2000). http://bmcr.brynmawr.edu/2000/2000-11-10.html
[93] Dorrit Cohn, "Does Socrates Speak for Plato? Reflections on an Open Question," *New Literary History* 32, no. 3 (Summer 2001): 489. https://doi.org/10.1353/nlh.2001.0030. Italics mine.

for reading the dialogues. And, more often than not, we stake our interpretations on methodological procedures learned from our disciplines.

So who's right? Should we read Platonic dialogue as philosophy or as literature? What we need, I contend, is not a decisive classification of Platonic dialogue, but more—and better—genre *knowledge*.

There are a number of ways to seek genre knowledge. One way is to consider Platonic dialogue in relation to other *Sokratikoi logoi* written by Socrates' close associates. Another way is to group the dialogues of Plato with those they inspired: the philosophical dialogues of Cicero, Hume and Diderot among others.[94] As well as belonging to the *Sokratikoi logoi*, a short-lived literary practice more or less co-extensive with a social group, Plato's dialogues belong to, indeed instantiate, a tradition of philosophic writing two millennia long and going strong.

My approach, however, does not seek genre knowledge by classifying Plato's dialogues with "like" texts. Rather, in the following chapters, I compare Platonic dialogue to *un*like texts: tragedy, mainly, but also epic, history, rhetorical prose works, other *Sokratikoi logoi*—even Hollywood film. My hope is that each contrast will help us see the dialogues' compositional principles that much more clearly.

I focus on tragedy for two reasons: 1) As mimetic works without narratorial intrusion, tragedy and Platonic dialogue share the most formal features in common—yet demonstrate totally different aesthetic commitments and effects. 2) Aristotle's brilliant

[94] This approach is explored by Vittorio Hösle in his book *The Philosophical Dialogue: A Poetics and a Hermeneutics*.

theory of tragedy, the *Poetics*, has had an outsize influence on how we read *all* literature. But, as Morson and Emerson remind us, by taking tragedy—poetry—as its lodestar, our "poetics" may overlook or distort features of literary *prose*.[95] Similarly, we have—thanks to the *Poetics*—a much defter grammar and vocabulary to analyze the mimesis of "people in action" than we do the mimesis of "people in speech." By contrasting Platonic dialogue with tragedy, and testing Aristotle's *Poetics* against Plato's prose, we can hope not only to understand Plato's compositional practices but to reflect on our own critical practices.

[95] "For if literature is defined primarily with verse genres (or dramas) in mind, then prose necessarily emerges as something less than fully literary, as literary only by association, or, perhaps, as not really literary at all. At best, poetics tends to describe prose as poetry with some poetic features missing and some unpoetic features added; which is something like defining mammals as reptiles who do not lay eggs and who have warm blood." Gary Saul Morson and Caryl Emerson, *Mikhail Bakhtin: Creation of a Prosaics* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990), 15. If Aristotle had written a "Prosaics" (Morson and Emerson's term) about the "nameless" genre in which he includes "the mimes of Sophron and Xenarchus and Socratic dialogues," the history of Western literary criticism may have turned out quite differently!

Chapter 2: Plot

This chapter has a dual purpose. Most immediately, it demonstrates how Platonic dialogue—using *Euthyphro* as a case study—revises the plot structure of epic and tragedy, a plot structure I will call, following N. J. Lowe, "the classical plot." Homeric epic and fifth century tragedy shaped a paradigm for the "art of plotting"—a paradigm articulated in Aristotle's *Poetics* and still dominant in Hollywood today—committed to the primacy of action, the intelligibility of cause and consequences, and the resolution of loose ends. Platonic dialogue, I will argue, bucks this narrative tradition. The *Euthyphro*'s "anti-classical" plot directs our interest away from human action, complicates the legibility of "cause" and "consequence," and resists closure. In doing so, Plato challenges the authority of *muthos* (plot, story) to render the world intelligible and meaningful—and excites us to philosophical inquiry.

Secondly, this chapter will contribute to the problems of Plato's poetics articulated in Chapter 1. Aristotle's *Poetics* is not just a theory of narrative practice. It is also a manual for critical practice—or has become one. I argued in Chapter 1 that, compensating for a lack of genre knowledge, scholars stake their interpretations of Platonic dialogue on methodological procedures rooted in their disciplines. For traditional literary scholars this means exercising a critical method inherited from the *Poetics*—which largely takes for granted that the integrity of an artwork depends on its overarching and all-encompassing design.[96] But, as we will see, Platonic dialogue deviates from this ideal—it's meaningfully

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[96] For more on how the *Poetics* has shaped literary theory, see Morson, "Contingency and the Literature of Process."

incomplete. This means we must revise how we understand the *purpose* of Plato's literary form—a topic I renew in the Conclusion to the dissertation.

The majority of this chapter is devoted to outlining the commitments of classical plot, as theorized by Aristotle, to (I) action, (II) unity and (III) closure, and demonstrating how the *Euthyphro* flouts—not flubs— those commitments. Finally (IV), I will suggest how Plato's alternative plotting represents time, challenges narrative as a mode of explanation, and produces effects. But first, I will delimit and justify my use of the term "classical plot."

The Classical Plot

I take the term "classical plot" from Lowe, who trades on both the "historical as well as… cultural sense" of 'classical' in his work *The Classical Plot and the Invention of Western Narrative*.[97] In other words, the "classical" plot, derived from Greek poetic practice, is also the "classic" plot, its paradigmatic form. Not only the literature of archaic and classical Greece, Lowe argues, but the whole of Western storytelling that follows, is indebted to the "art of plotting" discovered in Homeric epic, developed in the tragedies of Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides, reconstituted in New Comedy and exported by the ancient Greek novel. "Plotting"—emphasizing technique—is indeed a better word than "plot," which suggests static structure. It's not that the *Iliad* and the *Euminides* and *The Ethiopian Tale* have the same plot (e.g. "boy meets girl, boy loses girl, boy gets girl"), it's that they are plot*ted* according to the same narrative principles. These principles are articulated—and

[97] Lowe, *The Classical Plot*, x.

championed—in Aristotle's *Poetics*: the primacy of action, the intelligibility of cause and consequences, and a strong commitment to closure.[98]

By contrasting Plato's artistic choices in *Euthyphro* to the priorities of classical plot, I hope to demonstrate that:

(i) Classical Plot is oriented towards the "the active pursuit of goals."[99] By contrast, Platonic dialogue redirects our interest from events in the temporal world to timeless universals.

(ii) Classical Plot privileges intelligibility by eliminating chance and organizing events into a closed causal chain. By contrast, Platonic dialogue represents the world of flux, in which events are overdetermined and underdetermined.

(iii) Classical Plot is strongly closed. By contrast, Platonic dialogue resists closure and extends into an indeterminate future, eschewing closure and katharsis to prompt us to continued philosophical activity.

In order to see these contrasts more clearly, I will explain (and illustrate) the principles of action, unity and closure articulated in Aristotle's *Poetics*, contrasting each with the alternatives governing *Euthyphro*'s plot construction.[100]

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[98] It's essential to Lowe's argument, as it is to mine, that Aristotle "articulately theorized" what was already a long-standing "narrative *practice*": "the *ideas* that define classical plotting were around long before Aristotle, and were available to Greek readers in much more immediately accessible forms," i.e. Homeric epic and Attic tragedy. Lowe and I part ways in naming the most pertinent Aristotelian principles of plot. Lowe takes "the primacy of action" for granted and considers "transparency" (authorial self-effacement) and "amplitude" (that "the story should sit within certain broad limits of scale," 62) essential to classical plotting. While these may be additional, controlling features of classical plotting, I take action, unity and closure to be the most salient. Ibid., 61-62.

[99] Stephen Halliwell, *The Poetics of Aristotle: Translation and Commentary* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1987), 73.

[100] The *Poetics* is ostensibly a treatise on tragedy. It might seem odd, then, that I will illustrate its principles with examples from Homer's *Odyssey,* Herodotus's *History* and Hitchcock's *Strangers on a Train*. In grouping

I. Action

The *Poetics'* attention to plot turns on a very simple syllogism: Tragedy is the mimesis (imitation or representation) of an action; plot is the component of tragedy that represents action; therefore, plot is the defining feature—the "soul (*psyche*)"—of tragedy (1450a38). Aristotle's close examination of plot, then, follows from his identification of action as the *primary* object of tragic mimesis. Indeed, Aristotle takes great pains to establish that tragedy, first and foremost, imitates *action* not *people*. True, as he states in Ch. 2, mimesis is mimesis of "people in action." (μιμοῦνται οἱ μιμούμενοι πράττοντας). Tragedy must, therefore, represent both *actions* and *agents*:

> Since tragedy is a representation (*mimesis*) of an action (*praxis*), and is enacted by agents, who must be characterized in both their character (*ethos*) and their thought (*dianoia*) (for it is through these that we can judge the qualities of their actions, and it is in their actions that all men either succeed or fail), we have the plot-structure (*mythos*) as the mimesis of the action (*praxis*) (for by this term 'plot-structure' I mean the organization of events) while characterization (*ethos*) is what allows us to judge the nature of the agents, and 'thought' (*dianoia*) represents the parts in which by their speech they put forward arguments or make statements.[101]

Plot, character and thought are, all three, the "objects" of tragedy. But "the most important of these" is plot—

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epic with tragedy, I am justified from Aristotle's own mouth: First, in Chapter 24, he acknowledges that "epic should have the same [plot] types as tragedy…And epic shares all the same elements, apart from lyrics and spectacle."[100] That is, of the six elements which "make "tragedy" what it is" (Chapter 6), epic shares four (plot-structure, character, thought and style). Second, in key passages elaborating the principles of unity and closure (Chapter 8 and 23), Aristotle takes his paradigmatic examples *solely* from Homeric epic. And finally, in Chapter 26, Aristotle compares epic to tragedy claiming "tragedy possesses all epic's attributes" but produces more "vivid pleasures," achieves its mimesis in "a shorter scope" and tends to be more unified. In other words, "tragedy…carried to superior fulfillment certain goals which had been powerfully adumbrated, but not wholly crystallised, in the poetry of Homer." Stephen Halliwell, "Introduction," in *Poetics,* by Aristotle, trans. by Stephen Halliwell (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), 11. I hope my other exempla justify themselves. They attempt to evince the ubiquity of classical plotting—from "Homer" to "Hollywood" as Lowe puts it.

[101] All translations from *The Poetics of Aristotle* by Stephen Halliwell (1987).

> because tragedy is a representation not of people as such but of actions (*praxeon*) and life, and both happiness and unhappiness rest on action. The goal is a certain activity, not a qualitative state; and while men do have certain qualities by virtue of their character (*ethe*), it is in their actions that they achieve or fail to achieve, happiness. (Ch. 2)

Thus, "tragedy is a mimesis of action, and only for the sake of this is it mimesis of the agents themselves."

The *Poetics*' insistence on the primacy of plot over character, action over agent, is difficult to make sense of without reference to the *Nicomachean Ethics*. Human flourishing, Aristotle tells us, is an activity and—as suggested above—we achieve or fail to achieve happiness on the basis of what we *do*. While character is central to the *Ethics*, Aristotle insists that activity take first place:

> With those who identify happiness with virtue (*arete*) or some one virtue our account is in harmony; for to virtue belongs virtuous activity (*energeia*). But it makes, perhaps, no small difference whether we place the chief good in possession or in use, in state of mind or in activity. For the state of mind may exist without producing any good result, as in a man who is asleep or in some other way quite inactive, but the activity cannot; for one who has the activity will of necessity be acting (*praxei*), and acting well (*eu praxei*). And as in the Olympic Games it is not the most beautiful and the strongest that are crowned but those who compete (for it is some of these that are victorious), so those who act (*prattontes*) win, and rightly win, the noble and good things in life.[102]

Aristotle's analogy to the Olympic Games suggests a great deal about what we should understand *as* action: a) Action is *intentional*. Happiness does not "crown" the virtuous like a blessing; you must throw your hat into the ring. b) Action is *goal-oriented*—"like archers who have a mark to aim at" (*Ethics.*1094), action seeks an object. c) Action is *consequential.* "[T]hose who act win"…and lose.

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[102] Translated by W.D. Ross.

That Aristotle associates the "end" (*telos*) of tragedy with action is the highest possible compliment he could pay to the moral seriousness of poetry. As Halliwell puts it:

> Tragic drama offers us images of the actions on which depends the difference between happiness and unhappiness, terms which for Aristotle signify judgements on the success of failure of a life in the fullest ethical sense. Against such a background, 'action' is no loose or empty term for whatever may occur in a play, but a way of denoting tragedy's encompassment of the significant goals of life.[103]

If "action" is dignified by its association with Aristotelian ethics, it is also circumscribed. Action is not merely "whatever may occur"—the plot's *events*—but a specialized species of purposive, human activity. From "event" to "action" a great deal falls away: an earthquake is not an action, being swept up in the arms of a god is not an action. But can we really speak of tragedy as the representation of "what men do" when so much of it is concerned with "what men *suffer*"?

Indeed, commentators before Halliwell are much less sanguine as to the distinction. Murray would at least keep the boundary passable:

> *prattein*, like our 'do', also has an intransitive meaning 'to fare' either well or ill; and Professor Margoliouth has pointed out that is seems more true to say that tragedy shows how men 'fare' than how they 'act.' It shows their experiences or fortunes rather than merely their deeds. But one must not draw the line too bluntly….[104]

Yet, when offered the choice, Aristotle does seem to align plot with intentional, goal-seeking, and consequential action. Take his summary of the *Odyssey*:

> [A] man is abroad for many years, is persecuted by Poseidon, and is left desolate: further, circumstances at home mean that his property is consumed by suitors, and his son is a target for conspiracy; but the man survives shipwreck to reach home again, reveals his identity to certain people, and launches an attack—his own safety is restored, and he destroys his enemies.

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[103] Halliwell, *The Poetics of Aristotle*, 95.

[104] Gilbert Murray, "Preface," in *Aristotle on the Art of Poetry,* trans. Ingram Bywater (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1920), 10.

"This much is essential," he concludes, "the rest consists of episodes." (Ch 17) Yet a rival summary might look something like this:

> Odysseus is stranded on Kalypso's island while Penelope and Telamachus try to stave off the suitors at home. Athena sends Hermes to convince Kalpyso to let Odysseus go, and meanwhile convinces Telamachus to sail in search of his father. Odysseus gets aid from the Phaeacians and tells them the woeful story of his adventures on the sea. They return him to Ithaka where, disguised by Athena, he plots to reclaim his kingdom and kin. Telamachus returns and helps him to defeat the suitors. Odysseus reunites with Penelope and his father. Athena prevents all-out war.

Aristotle's rival summarizes the *Odyssey*'s story by neutrally dispatching its chronological events and main characters. Aristotle, on the other hand, summarizes the *Odyssey*'s story by conceiving it as an *arc*, built around key conflicts (Odysseus is abroad, desolate, his property and family threatened) and resolution (Odysseus reaches home again, is restored to safety, destroys his enemies). True, by word count, Aristotle spends most of his summary on what happens *to* Odysseus. But the structure of the summary suggests that what *befalls* Odysseus is "set-up" for what he *does.* From the Odyssey's *events*, Aristotle has disentangled a single *action*: Odysseus overcomes obstacles to obtain his goal. As Lowe points out, the classical plot takes a "goal-based life-model and treats it as conventionally true." In other words, plot is both generated from—and structured by—the aspect of human life oriented to the pursuit and fulfillment of aims. Both story contents and their organization mimic the structure of action: "the reader's model of the unfolding story is programmed with a set of output conditions"—often aligned with the protagonist's "fulfillment of goals" (e.g. Odysseus's homecoming, Oedipus's public declaration to avenge

the death of Lauis). "When these conditions have been met,"—Odysseus returns home, Oedipus discovers the murderer—"the story is deemed to have ended satisfactorily."[105]

Action in the *Euthyphro*

Tragedy is a representation of an action. In the last section, we began to untangle human "action"—purposive, consequential activity of the kind that determines whether men "achieve or fail to achieve happiness"—from mere event. As we saw from Aristotle's summary of the *Odyssey*, while a great deal "befalls" our hero it is what he *does* that gives the plot its essential structure.

Even ignoring Aristotle's high bar for action (as intentional, goal-oriented and consequential), it's far from obvious that the *Euthyphro* qualifies as eventful. After all, does anything *happen*? Certainly, the *context* of the *Euthyphro* is eventful: Euthyphro is on his way to prosecute his father for the death of his hired hand, who murdered his father's slave. Socrates is on his way to confront his indictment. Murder, manslaughter, miasma, intergenerational conflict, and two court cases in the offing: It's the stuff of tragedy—literally. Plato serves up the ingredients of the *Orestia* with comic garnish. (Euthyphro is briskly bureaucratic about what drives Orestes mad!)[106] Meanwhile, a real tragedy looms: Socrates' trial, conviction, and execution.

Euthyphro and Socrates' conversation takes place under heightened circumstances, to say the last. But the dramatic *circumstances* of the dialogue reveal, by contrast, its relative inertia: two men meet, talk of piety, and part. Indeed, by setting *Euthyphro*'s

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[105] Lowe, *Classical Plot*, 59.

[106] I owe this point, comparing the comedy of Euthyphro's voluntary punishment of his father to the tragedy of Orestes' unwilling prosecution of his mother, to Paul Woodruff.

conversation *outside* the court we are reminded that *inside* the court—but only inside?—opinion about matters of justice are effective. In the courts, as in the senate, speech is goal-oriented and consequential. Upon it the lives of men and nations are won and lost. But with one notable exception (the *Apology*), Socratic conversations never take place "in the arena." While the setting and timing of the *Euthyphro* heighten its dramatic tension, Plato constructs his scene *between* transformative events and *outside* institutions that lend speech power.

Can mere conversation—absent the "felicity conditions" for performative utterance (e.g. "we the jury sentence you to death" or "Athens declares war")—be counted as action in the Aristotelian sense? Conversation, of course, is an essential component of tragic plot. Indeed, since the fatal (or happy) deed is done *off* stage, almost all the actors *do* is talk.[107] But conversation is the means by which tragic characters pursue—through speech—goals external to the conversation: Admetus conceals his wife's death from Hercules; Haemon advises his father to reconsider Antigone's arrest; Oedipus investigates the circumstances of his birth.[108] Yes, these deeds (deception, diplomacy, detection) are done through speech but we could imagine them done otherwise. Just as Aristotle conjures a tragedy without characterization to prove *praxis* outranks *ethos*, classical ballets—like *Gisele* and *Romeo and Juliet*—remind us tragic plot can dispense with speech.[109]

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[107] Regarding a happy deed, I am thinking of Hercules's rescue of Alcestis from Death.
[108] As David Ball points out, "What a character wants motivates talking. A human being thinks many things never spoken. From the many things one thinks, one selects what to say according to what one wants. Put another way: if you want nothing, you say nothing." David Ball, *Backwards and Forwards: A Technical Manual for Reading Plays (Carbondale:* Southern Illinois University Press, 1983), 28.
[109] "Besides without action you would not have a tragedy, but one without character would be feasible, for the tragedies of most recent poets are lacking in characterization, and in general there are many such poets….

The conversation between Euthyphro and Socrates works differently. Euthyphro and Socrates *do* pursue, through talk, a goal—the answer to the question "What is piety?" We even sense, beneath their avowed aims, *conflicting* goals: Euthyphro's desire to show himself to be wise, Socrates's desire to show Euthyphro that he is not wise. The interaction of these goals—the pursuit of knowledge and the defense, and attack, of Euthyphro's self-concept—produce a dynamic that at least no modern critic would have trouble considering "dramatic."[110] If we attend to the conversation's push-pull of attention and withdrawal, cooperation and falling out, headway and false starts, "two men talk of piety" begins to take on a decidedly "eventful" aspect.

But the goals of Socratic conversation are always *internal* to the conversation. It is a feature of Plato's—although not Xenophon's—Socrates that he converts practical concerns (is it impious for Euthyphro to prosecute his father? how should Lysimachus and Melesias educate their sons?) into theoretical questions (what is piety? what is courage?)[111] By doing so, Socrates abstracts the goals of the conversation from any "outside event or action

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Furthermore, if a poet strings together speeches to illustrate character, even allowing he composes them well in style and thought, he will not achieve the stated aim of tragedy. Much more effective will be a play with a plot and structure of events, even if it is deficient in style and thought." (Ch. 6)

[110] Since Beckett, the stage is accustomed to plays in which "nothing happens—twice." (Thanks to Reg Gibbons for this reminder). Even excluding the avant-garde, the theater has room for such works as "Freud's Last Session" (2009), a play of "mere conversation" between an ailing Sigmund Freud and a young C.S. Lewis. Although "nothing happens"—except for a clash of wits and words over the existence of God—the conversation's dramatic setting, the day Britain and France declare war on Germany, lends it power. Is the same true of *Euthyphro*? Is its power "borrowed" from its circumstances? Not entirely, I will argue in Chapter 3.

[111] Xenophon's Socrates, on the other hand, is a ready advice-giver who questions his interlocutors in order to prompt them to some further action, e.g. for Charmides to enter public life (Xenophon, *Memorabilia* 3.4), or for Chaerecrates to treat his brother better (Xenophon, *Memorabilia* 2.3).

to which the exchange of views ultimately connects."[112] If Socratic conversation is to be counted as an activity upon which one's happiness or unhappiness depends, it must be because that conversation is "the action itself" not the "threshold to action."[113]

Chapter 3 continues this line of argument. There I suggest that Platonic dialogue is the mimesis of *speech*. Through his representation of speech, Plato reveals conversation (at least Socratic conversation) to be an activity equal in moral seriousness to any other deed. But because Platonic dialogue mimics the structure of conversation—full of cul-de-sacs yet essentially open-ended—it does not conform to the shape of dramatic action.

In one aspect, however, the *Euthyphro* suggests a classically dramatic structure. Euthyphro begins the dialogue with a goal—to prosecute his father. His conversation with Socrates intervenes. Then Euthyphro leaves—whether to fulfill his intention, or with a change of heart. Does his conversation with Socrates make a difference? Is the end of the dialogue an "effect" of what comes before, or merely what comes after what comes before? The answer to these questions will determine whether the dialogue conforms to Aristotle's principle of "unity."

II. Unity

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[112] Lowe, *Classical* Plot, 95. Having transformed a problem relevant to the "active pursuit of goals" into a question appropriate to philosophical inquiry, does the conversation pay off in practical terms? As I will discuss below, the *Euthyphro* flirts with the possibility that the conversation between Euthyphro and Socrates has meaningful consequences external to the conversation: perhaps Euthyphro is persuaded not to prosecute his father. But Plato makes a riddle of the relationship between seeking knowledge in speech (what is piety?) and acting on it.

[113] What Bakhtin says of Dostoevsky's novels is, in fact, original to Plato's dialogues: Dialogue is not "the threshold to action, it is the action itself." Bakhtin, *Problem of Dostoyevsky's Poetics,* 252. If the fate of a conversation—roused, flagging, revived, failed—doesn't seem enough grist for plot's mill, you've never tried to sustain one for an hour! Any *teacher* will recognize it as an activity upon which a day's happiness or misery depends.

Tragedy is a representation of action. Yet plot must not only imitate action, it must imitate a "unitary and complete" action. (Ch8) What makes an action "unitary and complete"?

In Chapter 8, Aristotle rails against those poets who believe that "because Heracles was a single individual, a plot-structure about him ought thereby to have unity." Not so. According to Aristotle, it is causality—not character—that confers unity. Homer's *Odyssey* makes no use of Odysseus's pretended madness at the advent of the Trojan war—*because it has "no necessary or probable connection"* with the poem's other events. A plot-maker must be selective, choosing only those incidents that form a tightly interlocking chain of events. Events should occur "on account of one another" not merely after one another. (Ch. 9) To possess "unity," a plot-structure must exhibit intelligible causality: A leads to B leads to C.

Three precepts are intimately tied to Aristotle's principle of "unified" action. First, the plot should include no unnecessary events. Second, agents and actions should be more rule-bound—more consistent and coherent—than in real life. Third, the irrational (both miracle and happenstance) should be eliminated or, at least, camouflaged.

First, and most obviously, Aristotle indicates that a plot should contain no events which do not "move the plot along." In a later chapter, he criticizes poets who, in "composing declamatory set-pieces" "distort the dramatic sequence" of the plot. (Ch 9) The plot-structure should rather "be constructed that the displacement or removal of any one of [its parts] will disturb and disjoint the work's wholeness." (Ch 8)

It's worth noting that this passage offers instructions for reading as well as writing. It is the first articulation of the Integrity principle I summarized in Chapter 1: no part of a

literary work is less than essential, and therefore no part can be innocently excerpted, deleted or re-worded. Conversely, because no part is arbitrary, every part is significant (although not equally significant).[114] Lowe calls this classical plot's principle of "economy." "[A]s much as possible of the contents of the story world should play an essential role in the narrative game: Chekhov's gun on the wall is there to be fired."[115]

To represent "unified action" in the life of a Heracles or Odysseus, then, means clearing that life of its detritus—its extraneous details, unrelated episodes, and unfired shotguns. "Poetry must make more sense than the raw material of life does," Halliwell writes in his commentary on Chapter 8, "and this higher intelligibility is part and parcel of what Aristotle means by unity."[116] This is the second precept attached to artistic unity: because plot conforms (or should conform) to the "standards of probability and necessity" (Ch 9), poetry exhibits a greater lucidity than reality. The historian must deal with what *did* occur – an incoherent mess of particulars (Ch 9) that offers no ready-made unity and tends to no single result. (Ch 23) But the plot-maker has a "more philosophical and more serious" calling: to show us the "*kind* of speech or action which belongs by probability or necessity to a certain *kind* of character." (Ch 9) Action and agent are more rule-bound in the story-world—and therefore more coherent and comprehensible—than in the world we live in.[117]

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[114] I owe the parenthetical remark to Saul Morson.
[115] Lowe, *Classical Plot*, 63.
[116] Halliwell, *The Poetics of Aristotle*, 103.
[117] Aristotle suggests that probability and necessity should rule the agent as well as the action in Ch 15 where he writes characterization should aim at "consistency of character" such that "even where an inconsistent person is portrayed, and such a character is presupposed, there should still be consistency in the inconsistency."

Thus while real life is episodic—one day's events follow another's but not necessarily because of one another—only bad poets create episodic plots (Ch 9). Yes poetic mimesis imitates reality, but the demands of structure supersede. Even in the most realistic literary genres, "the causality of art differs from the causality of life."[118] In plot, events must follow a stricter logical succession than they do in life.

This brings us to the final entailment of Aristotle's commitment to "unity": the classical plot's effacement of chance. Aristotle frowns on supernatural causality—criticizing the use of *deus ex machina*, for example, because "no irrational element should have a part in the events" (Ch 15). Indeed, to insist that tragedy both produce pity and fear *and* be governed by "necessity or probability" is to insist that even the most awesome, awful changes of fortune be explicable.[119] Yet while ruling out the "fantastic" and irrational (e.g. epiphany), the law of probability and necessity also rules out the "quotidian" and irrational. Thus, as Lowe points out, "Odysseus does not suffer a fatal mishap with a javelin at the Phaecian games" nor do the suitors "come down in a mass with food poisoning on the day of the showdown."[120] Things just don't "happen to happen" in tightly-plotted works of art. "If tragedy is to teach us anything of universal importance," goes Frede's gloss on Aristotle, then the sequence of events must be necessary, or at least nearly so since *we can learn nothing* from "what happens randomly and for no inherent reason."[121]

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[118] Morson, "Contingency and the Literature of Process," 252.
[119] I owe this point to Halliwell: "Aristotle is unequivocally prescribing that tragedy should dramatise pitiful and fearful swings of fortune *and yet* make them explicable" Halliwell, *The Poetics of Aristotle,* 100-101.
[120] Lowe, *Classical Plot*, 55.
[121] Dorothea Frede, "Necessity, Chance, and 'What Happens for the Most Part' in Aristotle's *Poetics*," in *Essays on Aristotle's* Poetics, ed. Amélie Oksenberg Rorty (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 204.

Yet, coincidence is a favorite device of the classical plot![122] How does classical plotting reconcile an uncaused and improbable event to its rules of "necessary or probable causation"? The same way we are apt to in ordinary life: By converting chanciness into purposiveness.

Consider: Your friend tells you about an open apartment just as you open your mouth to complain about your own. You meet your spouse because both of you miss a flight. In a crowd of strangers, you bump into exactly the person you are trying to avoid. There is perhaps no ordinary occurrence so likely to tempt us to superstition as coincidence. We weigh probability against meaning—and vanity tips the scales. When accident conforms to my desire (or my undoing) I can't help but take it personally. Because things chanced to turn out a certain way, it seems to me they must have turned out that way. Taplin writes, "The ultimate shaping of events looks like mere random coincidence to man until he can look back on it."[123] But in truth, it is our backward glance that gives events their "ultimate shaping." In accident we discover providence.

To tell events as if "everything happened for a reason" is simply to tell a story according to Aristotle's instructions. The origin of mimetic art, Aristotle writes, is found in

[122] Oliver Taplin enumerates just those coincidences upon which the plot-structure of *Oedipus Rex* depends: "Just as it was a coincidence that on leaving Delphi Oedipus should at a lonely place meet Laius on his way to Delphi and that he should then go on to Thebes, so it is coincidentally neat that Polybus should die and the messenger from Corinth arrive at this particular juncture. It is even more crucially coincidental that the messenger from Corinth should be the very same man who received the baby on Cithaeron, and that the old man who was eye-witness to the murder should also be the man who took the baby to Cithaeron." He goes on to point out, "In mundane terms these are the most extraordinary, disastrous chances, yet they all add up to a pattern—a pattern known all along to the gods—which makes only too much sense." Oliver Taplin, *Greek Tragedy in Action* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), 111.
[123] Ibid.

the fact that our "greatest pleasure is derived from exercising the understanding." Art objects allow us to "contemplate" them, to apply our "understanding and reasoning to each element." (Ch 2) We long for an intelligible and meaningful world; art fulfills that longing by subordinating the irrational into a pattern of design.[124]

This human instinct for converting chance—non-purposive activity—into meaningful activity is not lost on Aristotle. Indeed, he recommends it to the tragedian's attention:

> Since tragic mimesis portrays not just a whole action, but events which are fearful and pitiful, this can best be achieved when things occur contrary to expectation yet still on account of one another. A sense of wonder will be more likely to be aroused in this way than as a result of the arbitrary or fortuitous, since even chance events make the greatest impact of wonder when they *appear* to have a purpose (as in the case where Mitys's statue at Argos fell on Mitys's murderer and killed him, while he was looking at it; such things do not *seem* to happen without reason).

Halliwell's translation stresses "appear" and "seem" for good reason. Aristotle does not believe that Mitys's statue fell on his murderer *because* his murderer killed him. But this chance event fulfills our *desire* for purposeful action and the logical sequence of cause and consequence.

Although Aristotle doesn't make it explicit, the conversion of chance into design at the very least implies, at the most acknowledges, a "supervisory intelligence" at work within the story world.[125] Since Mitys's murder does not provide cause for Mitys's

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[124] "If the world were certain, if our instincts provided clear and inflexible rules for dealing with it, and if experience manifested an evident harmony, we would not need art." Gary Saul Morson, "Contingency and Poetics," *Philosophy and Literature* 22, no. 2 (1998): 287. This chapter, especially its work on chance and contingency, owes a tremendous debt to this article and Morson's *Narrative and Freedom* (1994).
[125] Lowe, *Classical Plot*, 58.

murderer's death, we are left to interpolate. As Heath suggests, "If we introduce into this story an avenger (human or divine) who dislodges the statue at a crucial moment, connectedness is restored…."[126] In order to camouflage chance, coincidence is used "to imply an underlying causality"—fate, or the will of the gods.[127] In other words, the formal unity of the classical plot applies metaphysical pressure on its story world: a narrative constructed by the principle of unity creates a world in which nothing just happens to happen and everything has a meaning.

Unity in the *Euthyphro*

In a unified plot, every event moves the action along. Events are connected through probability or necessity. And chance is eliminated, or redeemed by design. Alfred Hitchcock's *Strangers on a Train* has just such a plot. Two men meet by chance, talk and—through a causal sequence of events—fight to the death on a runaway carousel! That A leads to Zed surprises but satisfies the dictates of dramatic logic: A perfect Aristotelian plot. "[T]hings occur contrary to expectation yet still on account of one another."

In *Euthyphro*, two men meet by chance, talk and—what? Some readers produce their own satisfying ending:

> "[Socrates] showed equal ability in both directions, in persuading and dissuading men; thus, after conversing with Theaetetus about knowledge, he sent him away, as Plato says, fired with a divine impulse; but when Euthyphro had indicted his father for manslaughter, Socrates, after some conversation with him upon piety, diverted him from his purpose."[128]

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[126] Malcolm Heath, "The Universality of Poetry in Aristotle's *Poetics,*" *Classical Quarterly* 41, no.2 (1991): 393.
[127] Lowe, *The Classical Plot,* 75.
[128] Laertius, Diogenes. *Lives of Eminent Philosophers.* Translated by R.D. Hicks. Cambridge, MA. Harvard University Press. 1972.

Diogenes Laertius takes the *Euthyphro* as evidence of Socrates' powers of persuasion. Here at last is proof that dialectic can usefully be brought to bear on practical judgment! By showing Euthyphro that he does not know what he thinks he knows, Socrates diverts him from his purpose. It's no Hollywood thriller, but Diogenes Laertius does read the *Euthyphro* as a unified action.

Does the text support Diogenes Laertius's reading? Yes and no—or rather, maybe. On the one hand, Euthyphro is a man who takes pride in being laughed at, who is sure he alone possesses knowledge of what the gods want, who, upon being asked for the first time 'what is piety?' answers "what I am doing now." Is this a man to be turned aside—by any evidence—from his righteous mission? And yet…

It is the *many* whom Euthyphro despises. On the other hand, he couldn't be more eager to ally himself with Socrates. Despite his petulance later in the conversation (11b-d), Euthyphro shows Socrates respect the best way he knows how—by comparing Socrates to himself! (At 3b-c: "The same is true in my case… [the many] envy all of us [who tell the truth].") Isn't it possible that, over the course of four attempts to articulate his "superior" knowledge of piety, and four failures which lead, him, humiliatingly, back to his very first mistake, even Euthyphro's overweening confidence has been struck a fatal blow? In a man with untainted faith in his own righteousness, wouldn't even a tincture of doubt undo him?

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http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.01.0258%3Abook%3D1%3Achapter%3Dprologue.

Either Euthyphro goes on to prosecute his father or not. But Plato leaves Euthyphro's choice unexpressed. By doing so, he not only ruptures the "finality or conclusiveness" which we expect from a classical plot's ending, but the "coherence and completeness" we expect from a classical plot's unity.[129]

In the next section we will explore Plato's violation of "finality." Here we will limit our concern to the *Euthyphro*'s "completeness"—meaning, having all the necessary parts—and "coherence"—the intelligible integration of those parts. In the classical plot, those parts are the parts of the plot-structure and their coherence is a function of *causality*.

E. M. Forster reminds us that the difference between a "story" and a "plot" is that a story can be told as events linked temporally ("The king died and then the queen died") but a plot must be told as events linked casually ("The king died and the queen died of grief"). "If [the queen's death] is in a story we say: 'And then?' If it is in a plot we ask: 'Why?'"[130] Causality is essential to classical plot's intelligibility because causality answers the question "Why?" Understood thus, plot is an *explanatory* mechanism.[131]

Let's try asking "why" about the events in *Strangers on a Train*. Why do Bruno and Guy fight to the death on a runaway carousel? Because Bruno is trying to frame Guy for

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[129] I take the distinction between "closure" as the termination of a temporal sequence lending it "finality and conclusiveness" and "closure" as the integrity of a "coherent, complete and stable form" from Barbara Hernstein Smith, *Poetic Closure; a Study of How Poems End* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968), 2.
[130] E.M. Forster, *Aspects of the Novel* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2012), 84.
[131] "[N]arrative is a common form of explanation. In ordinary speech we use narratives to explain how things happened and why certain standing conditions were important. Narrative is capable of performing this role because it tracks causal networks." Noël Carroll, "On the Narrative Connection," in *Beyond Aesthetics: Philosophical Essays* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 128. It's worth noting the earliest attested meaning of narrative (in English) is: "A part of a legal document which contains a statement of alleged or relevant facts closely connected with the matter or purpose of the document." We tend to think of stories as belonging to creative, mimetic expression. But narrative—the recounting of events—has been an essential aspect of juridical speech at least since the Greeks. Oxford English Dictionary quoted in Ruth Evans and Ana M. Montero, "Medieval Narratives: Living On," *Essays in Medieval Studies* 31 (2015): 1.

murder. Why is Bruno trying to frame Guy for murder? Because Bruno killed Guy's wife. Why does Bruno kill Guy's wife?" "Because…." This question returns us to the very beginning of the story's causal sequence—and its answer is the only answer that could meaningfully vary between competent viewers. One viewer might answer, "Because he wanted to blackmail Guy into killing his (Bruno's) father"—she interprets Bruno's actions as knowing and calculated. Another viewer might answer: "Because he thought that he and Guy made a pact to kill each other's unwanted relations"—he interprets Bruno's actions as the product of a mistake, if a mistake only a psychopath could make. Character motives are among the most interpretable— because the least explicit— of causes.

Yet very little of the classical plot's *structure* is elusive. Even a much more complicated story than that of *Strangers on a Train* is *least* complicated in its causal connections. Take my example in Chapter 1, the death of Prince, the family horse, in *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*: It is both an incident of significance at the explicit level of the story's plot—it is an event in the life of the heroine—and at the implicit level of the story's meaning—it is a symbol, and foreshadowing, of Tess's doom. As a teacher, I expect to have to help students understand the *symbolic* function of the horse's death, notice the *irony* of the horse's name, and its *allusion* to the family's aspirations. But I take for granted that they will understand the causal connection between the death of the family's bread-winner and Tess subsequently seeking employment.[132]

[132] It seems reasonable to attribute our natural literacy in cause and effect, as Lowe does, to the fact that our brains have to master cause and effect to survive in the real world. Thus we have to teach symbolism, irony and allusion in ENG 101, but not that things fall downward.

So it's worth noting that the *Euthyphro*'s plot requires interpretation—not just in divining Euthyphro's motives, nor in how the plot ultimately relates to the *Euthyphro'*s arguments—but *even qua events.* We don't know "what happens" at the end of the *Euthyphro.* We don't even know if what happens is the result of what *has* happened.

When Euthyphro puts an end to his conversation with Socrates, is he slinking away to lick his wounds, or running away to preserve his safety? Has he been deterred from prosecuting his father, or will he press on? We can't be sure of the outcome. Even more pointedly, we don't know there *is* "an outcome." If we take Euthyphro's excuse at face value (νῦν γὰρ σπεύδω ποι is translated by Grube as "I am in a hurry now" but should be "I am in a hurry to get *somewhere*"), the conversation ends for reasons totally independent of the conversation! Euthyphro hurries off not because he is ashamed or threatened by the conversation, neither because it has changed his mind nor because (like Quixote deciding not to test his visor[133]) he's decided not to let it change his mind, but because prior to the conversation's beginning he made an appointment subsequent to the conversation's end.[134] Events occur after one another not "on account of one another."

The principle of unity makes sure that when something happens, we have the right to expect something to follow *from* it. When Pip gives a pie to a convict at the beginning of *Great Expectations*, Morson points out, we know "in advance that this event will prove

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[133] The first time Quixote tests his visor, it breaks. So he makes a second visor and—with his characteristic mix of foolishness and wisdom—decides not to test it, so that it won't break.

[134] This is simply unimaginable in tragedy or epic. For Tiresias to abandon his argument with Oedipus because he has a prior engagement is to turn tragedy into comedy!

important or the author would not have included it."[135] Earlier events supply the "causally necessary conditions" for subsequent events.[136]

If *Euthyphro*'s end is not an outcome, its beginning is not an antecedent. Unlike the strangers on a train, Euthyphro and Socrates' chance meeting acquires no "retrospective significance" by virtue of subsequent events.[137] It retains what a "unified" action never could: chanciness. Their encounter happens to happen, and its effects are indeterminate.[138] Coincidence is unredeemed by design.

III. Closure

Tragedy is an imitation of an action, unified by a strict and interlocking causal chain. If this were the only requirement for unity, you might tell a story of indefinite length in which A→B→C ad infinitum: a never-ending serial publication. But intelligibility, Aristotle notes, is also limited by *magnitude*. A story of 10,000 pages, like "an animal a thousand miles long" could not be "perceived all together" (Ch 7). To be intelligible, a story must come to an end. And so we turn our attention to art's greatest artifice: closure.

To be whole and complete, Aristotle argues, a plot must have a beginning, middle, and end. Is this so artificial? After all, each life begins and ends with a middle of varying length. But Aristotle is, as usual, more punctilious than that. Just as the "natural" unity of a

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[135] Morson, "Contingency and the Literature of Process," 254

[136] Carroll, "Narrative Connection," 127.

[137] I borrow the phrase "retrospective significance" from Noel Carroll. In brief it means that: "Later events in the narrative disclose the significance of earlier events" Ibid.

[138] This is enough to call into question whether Euthyphro represents "an action" at all: "Action occurs when something happens that makes or permits something else to happen. Action is two 'something happenings,' one leading to the other. Something causes or permits something else. I let go of my pencil (half an action); it falls to the floor (the other half of the action). Together those two connected events make an action. If I say 'How are you?' it is half an action. The second half is your saying, 'Fine, thank you.' The first leads to the second; the two compose an action." Ball, *Backwards and Forwards,* 9.

single individual isn't sufficient for artistic unity, so the "natural" lifecycle of birth and death isn't sufficient for artistic wholeness. "Well designed plot structures ought not to begin or finish at arbitrary points" (Ch 7) but are governed by the rules of causality we articulated in the preceding section. A "beginning" is that "which does not have a necessary connection with a preceding event" but which causes some "further fact or occurrence." A "middle" "involves causal connections with both what precedes and what ensues." And an "end" is that which is caused by prior events but does not result in a further event.

It's possible to read Aristotle's "beginning," "middle" and "end" as simply formal markers of the plot-structure's closed causal chain. But something more is added in Chapter 23, when Aristotle returns to the distinction between history and poetry:

> plots should not resemble histories, in which one need not find the exposition of a unitary action but of all the contingently connected events which happened to one or more persons in a particular time. For just as the battle of Salamis and the Sicilian battle against the Carthaginians occurred at the same time, but without contributing to a common end, so events can sometimes succeed one another in time without yielding any particular end. (Ch 23)

That the Greeks won victories against King Xerxes and King Hamilcar on the same day is a true coincidence. But so is Mitys's statue falling on Mitys' killer. The Battle of Salamis is as "contingently connected" to the Battle of Himera as Mitys's murder is to the death of Mitys's murderer. So why is the fall of Mitys's statue appropriate to tragedy? Because the fates of Mitys and his murderer *converge*.

The "end," in the end, controls the plot's "complex interrelation of parts" for those parts must not only "follow" from one another but meet somewhere.[139] Indeed, the end is

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[139] Halliwell, *The Poetics of Aristotle*, 165.

what determines the unity of all that came before. As we read or watch a play, causation works forward, as it does in life—earlier events "control" the range of possibilities that manifest in later events: because Herakles shows up on the day Alcestis dies, he can rescue her. But structurally, the end "controls" its antecedents: because Herakles saves Alcestis, he must show up on the day she dies. The plot-maker selects events because of where they lead. The end bends the arc of the story to itself.[140]

As John Lyons points out, "If Mitys's statue had fallen on anyone other than his murderer, its fall would hardly be remembered more than two millennia later."[141] More to the point, if Mitys's statue had fallen on anyone other than his murderer, Mitys's *murder* would hardly be remembered more than two millennia later. A "common end" more than ties up the story's loose ends—it makes the story worth telling.

Thus while endings ("something which naturally occurs after a preceding event…but need not be followed by anything else") and beginnings ("that which does not have a necessary connection with a preceding event but which can itself give rise naturally to some further fact") are *formally* symmetrical, endings have an outsized role not only in how

[140] Thus the drama teacher's insistence that a play be read "backwards and forwards": "Only when we look at events in reverse order can we see, with certainty, how the dominoes fell, which fell against which" whereas "an examination of dominoes only as they move forward through a play leaves everything arbitrary. You (1) walk into a bookstore, (2) find the drama shelf, (3) take down this book, (4) pay for it, and (5) leave. But you could have (1) walked into a bookstore and (2) found the candy counter. Or you might have (2) seen the place full of books and (3) fled in chagrin. Even had you picked up this book, instead of paying for it you might have slipped it under your ethics text and sneaked out. And you might have got away with it, or you might have not. Life goes on; it goes forward — but never predictably." On the other hand "Going backwards exposes that which is required" David Ball, *Backwards and Forwards,* 15. It should come as no surprise that this drama teacher had a second career as a jury consultant. Narrative's explanatory power is daily exploited for both fictional and non-fictional discourse.

[141] John D. Lyons, "Sublime Accidents," in *Chance, Literature, and Culture in Early Modern France*, ed. John D. Lyons and Kathleen Wine (Farnham, UK: Ashgate, 2009), 108.

we *perceive* a unified action but in how we *value* it. Studios audience-test endings not beginnings. Why? Because endings "pay off"—or don't—the attention we have devoted to the beginning and middle. An ending "like the finality of the last chords of a sonata, seems to confirm *retrospectively*, as if with a final stamp of approval, the valued qualities of the entire experience we have just sustained."[142]

Interlude: Adrastus and Atys

In my senior year of college, I took a seminar on *King Lear*. Our teacher, the great Amy Kass, began class by handing out Herodotus's story of Adrastus and Atys (*Histories* 1.34-45)—with a few words missing. Croesus, King of Lydia, has a dream that his son, Atys, will die by an iron spear. He forbids his son from war and removes all weapons from the palace to prevent an accident. Meanwhile, Adrastus, a Phrygian, comes to Lydia asking to be purified for accidentally killing his own brother. Croesus agrees and invites him to live in the palace. When a great boar terrorizes Lydia, Croesus reluctantly allows Atys to join the chase, sending Adrastus to protect him. When Adrastus's spear falls astray and kills Atys, Croesus cries out to Zeus in agony that he has entertained his son's murderer, yet forgives the distraught Adrastus: "it is not you that I hold the cause of this evil, except in so far as you were the unwilling doer of it, but one of the gods." Croesus buries his son. But Adrastus….

Mrs. Kass left out the last line of the story. "What happens?" she asked, prompting each student in turn. "Adrastus kills himself," each answered. When she got to me, I had no interest in repeating what seemed obviously the case. And after all, isn't one rewarded for

[142] Smith, *Poetic Closure,* 4. Emphasis mine.

originality in the college classroom? "Adrastus kills the boar in compensation and Croesus adopts him as his son," I offered. Mrs. Kass drew herself up tall and looked at me with piercing eyes—"Ms. Martin, do you *really* believe…?"—and repeated back my little fiction. What seemed novel on my tongue sounded cockamamie on hers. It was a lesson on many fronts: One of those lessons, it turns out, was about tragedy and necessity.[143]

As far as fiction goes, mine wasn't the worst ending to Herodotus's tale: it used story elements already present (the boar, for example) rather than introducing new ones (but Adrastus… "is swept up by Hermes to Mt. Olympos"). It "ends" the story by completing its arc (Adrastus compensates, Croesus is compensated) rather than continuing it (but Adrastus… "goes on a long journey, where he meets a river nymph and…"). In other words, my attempt at an ending met the rules of intelligibility. It wasn't implausible. But did I "really believe" it? No. Something about the story of Adrastus and Atys compelled agreement—even mine, it turned out—as to how is should end. Its ending was not just plausible but *necessary*.

Why did Herodotus's story "have" to end this way? It's easier to feel than to say why.[144] But feeling itself is valid testimony. Aristotle builds tragedy's emotional effects into his definition of it: "Tragedy is a representation of an action which is serious and complete… in the mode of dramatic enactment, not narrative—and through the arousal of pity and fear effecting *katharsis* of such emotions." (Ch. 6) Whether katharsis means simply

[143] Another lesson—which I take up in Chapter 3— was to take to heart Socrates' rule and only set forth arguments that I myself believed.

[144] One thing to say is that the end is what makes the story tragic. It is in tragedy that the "unwilling doer" takes responsibility for all of his or her actions, no matter the gap between intention and consequence. Then, of course, there is the finality of death: anything less is less climactic and conclusive.

a "purgation" of emotions or a "purification" of those emotions, the events of classical plot are arranged to produce *emotional* as well as causal resolution:

> Good plots are reasons for watching theater even when we don't care about the characters. A plot can keep us caring about events, by stringing our emotions onto what happens next, as the plot works steadily through complication toward resolution. Some plots keep us in suspense, like the cliffhanger football game, but some plots do not, like those of Oedipus Rex or Hamlet. We know the endings of those plays already, *but we still long for resolution, and we can't bear to leave until the play has given us the promised release*….[145]

"The end" is not just the last in a sequence of events, the way Kimball is the last stop on Chicago's Brown Line. Nor is it merely the final "puzzle piece," revealing and resolving the artwork's design. The end is the classical plot's "grand finale," providing "the final translation of narrative potential into kinetic forms."[146] The end must not only reveal and resolve but *release*—the plot's "stored narrative power," and us from plot's thrall. As Smith points out, "Closure allows the reader to be satisfied by the failure of continuation or, put another way, it creates in the reader the expectation of nothing."[147] The end of a story allows us to be done with it.

Closure in the *Euthyphro*

Classical plot is organized with respect to its end. The end controls the unity of the plot and justifies our commitment to following it. Finally, the end produces emotional as well as causal resolution.

The end of the *Euthyphro* has nothing like the gravitational pull of the end of Herodotus's story. Yet, it's worth noting that the dialogue does *come* to an end rather than

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[145] Paul Woodruff, *The Necessity of Theater: The Art of Watching and Being Watched* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 154. Italics mine.
[146] Lowe, *The Classical Plot*, 60.
[147] Smith, *Poetic Closure*, 34.

merely break off. It's clear that Plato *finished* the *Euthyphro*—on the other hand, it's unclear whether the *Critias* is unfinished, or finished so as to seem unfinished. The *Euthyphro* even comes to an end "qua events"—that is, by staging a parting between Euthyphro and Socrates. On the other hand, Plato ends the *Sophist* at a natural break in the conversation (the Visitor has finally defined the "sophist") but does not dramatize the conversants parting ways. But, as I discussed in the previous section, the *Euthyphro* does not come to an end by providing an *outcome*—despite, and this is important, arousing our interest in one.

Noel Carroll writes, "Closure transpires when all of the questions that have been saliently posed by the narrative get answered."[148] It would be an incurious reader indeed who didn't wonder whether Euthyphro really prosecutes his father! But even if Socrates, as Plato's proxy, successfully effaces our interest in that question by posing and developing his own—"What is piety?"— neither question is answered at or by the dialogue's end.

How different from the classical plot's "grand finale" in which all the "stored narrative power" is translated into "kinetic form": Odysseus goes to war against the suitors, Achilles and Priam meet over the body of Hector, Orestes kills his mother. The *Euthyphro*, on the other hand, retains *potential* energy: Euthyphro indicts his father or he doesn't. Neither possible ending happens; either *might* happen.

How different, too, from standard argument, which—as Lowe points out—has its own "negentropic movement" from confusion to clarity.[149] Socrates and Euthyphro, on the other hand, while apparently making progress in their inquiry, end up back at the

[148] Carroll, "On the Narrative Question," 4.
[149] Lowe, *The Classical Plot*, 96.

beginning. Their argument, Socrates tells Euthyphro, "has moved around and come again to the same place." A few lines later he concludes, "So we must investigate again from the beginning what piety is…." (15c)

The end of a classical plot offers the reader an epistemically privileged position. In Forster's words, "The facts in a highly organized novel [are such that] the ideal spectator cannot expect to view them properly until he is sitting up on a hill at the end."[150] In other words, the best place to "see" the work as a whole is at its end. No accident that Forester uses the language of optics ("spectator," "view"). Sight is the sense that allows us to perceive something as a whole; when we listen, we listen in pieces, through time. At the end of a verbal text, we graduate from its listeners—bound to the temporal experience of its unfolding—to become its spectators, able to survey its "actions and events, although represented as occurring in the order of time…in a single glance."[151] We attain, in other words, a god's eye view of human action.[152]

There's no hill at the end of *Euthyphro,* no final revelation. When the dialogue concludes, no explanatory mechanism has sorted the miscellaneous from the meaningful, effectively ordered cause and effect, or redeemed confusion with clarity. Instead of

[150] Forster, *Aspects of the Novel*, 85. Ricouer uses similar language. The end of a story, he writes, provides "a point of view from which the story can be perceived as forming a whole." Paul Ricouer, *Time and Narrative* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 66-67. So too Smith: the end of a poem provides the "point from which all the preceding elements may be viewed comprehensively and their relations grasped as part of a significant design." Smith, *Poetic Closure*, 36.
[151] Luise O. Mink, *Historical Understanding* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987), 50.
[152] Those of us who study literature are likely to accuse the metaphysicians and ontologists of striving for a more than human knowledge. But literature was born in the invocation, "Sing, O Muse… *the will of Zeus accomplished*." The poet, through the Muse, claims access to things as they *really are*, not only as they are experienced by mortals but as they are known to the gods. I owe this point, and a lot more, to Leon Kass.

resolving its form through closure, the dialogue is organized by what Morson calls "aperture," renouncing "the privilege of an ending that would tie up all loose ends and complete a pattern."[153]

Nor is the *Euthyphro*'s ending "final." Its argument requires us to circle back and start again while its human actors are thrust onward by time's ongoingness. There is no point in the *Euthyphro* when we are "satisfied by [the dialogue's] failure of continuation." Without an answer to our questions (will Euthyphro prosecute? what is piety?), we keep *wondering…* The *Euthyphro* doesn't allow us to be done with it.

IV Conclusions

Thus far I have only described Plato's poetics in the negative: in *Euthyphro*, Plato eschews action, causal intelligibility, and closure. But what conclusions can we draw from Plato's deviation from the priorities of classical plotting? What kind of story world *does* Plato build? What do the dialogues give up, and gain, by flouting the architecture of classical plot? And how—and to what purpose—do the dialogues move us?

First, by deviating from Aristotelian poetics, the dialogues are able to represent life in its familiar aspect: episodic, open-ended, and evasive of perfect intelligibility. Plato's story world has the texture of our real one—or rather, to an idealist, our *less* real one—the world of flux. Second, I suggest that while Plato retains certain aspects of classical plotting, he does so having hollowed plot of its explanatory power: it's philosophy, not story, that has the power to convey universals. Finally, Aristotle's definition of tragedy would not be complete without describing tragic *effects*—"the arousal of pity and fear effecting *katharsis*

[153] Morson, "Contingency and the Literature of Process," p. 268.

of such emotions." So too I attempt to sketch the ways in which Platonic dialogues rouse our wonder, pleasure and investment in order to inspire us to philosophical activity.

My conclusions reach beyond the bounds of the *Euthyphro*—the individual work—to make claims on behalf of Platonic dialogue—the genre entire. I recognize the perils of this ambition, given my limited case study and the diversity of the dialogues. There is no paradigmatic Platonic dialogue. Yet *Euthyphro* shows certain aspects of Plato's dialogues in their most potent form: the *Euthyphro*'s resistance to closure is especially dramatic, even given the "inconclusive conclusion characteristic of 'Socratic' dialogues."[154] But all the dialogues, even those that don't end in aporia, are characterized by their provisionality and extensibility. Indeed, we might say the history of philosophy is the result of Plato's evasion of closure! Western philosophy is not a series of footnotes to, but a continued failure to finish, Plato's dialogues. Similarly, the *Euthyphro*'s circumvention of plot's causal intelligibility—and circumspection regarding "outcomes"—is characteristic, although most evident in those dialogues with strong dramatic content and characterization. (In other words, Plato's deviation from classical plot is most noticeable in those dialogues which arouse our expectations for classical plot.) I beg some leeway, therefore, in joining evidence from the *Euthyphro* with that of other Platonic dialogues in pursuit of "genre knowledge."

Plato's Narrative World

"…the more we study Art, the less we care for Nature. What Art really reveals to us is Nature's lack of design, her curious crudities, her extraordinary monotony, her absolutely unfinished condition." –from Oscar Wilde's *The Decay of Lying*

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[154] John M. Cooper, ed. *Plato: Complete Works* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1997), 870.

In the mouth of Wilde's character, the epigram above is a defense of artistic unity, the perfection of which puts nature to shame. Plato, I suggest, reintroduces nature's "lack of design," "curious crudities," "monotony" and "unfinished conditions" back into art—perhaps not in order to produce a more naturalistic artform (although this he achieves) but in order to put artistic unity to shame. Classical plotting makes the world of flux *seemingly* intelligible but in doing so misrepresents it.

Plato's dialogues, on the other hand, show forth Nature's "absolutely unfinished condition." And Plato's greatest mimetic innovation to that effect is his representation of time. Instead of "ending," the dialogues retain an eternal present tense: incomplete and open-ended.

<u>Time without Fate</u>

It's no accident that the Greek Fates were the Μοῖραι, from μοῖρᾰ, "part, portion" as well as "lot, destiny." They are the "apportioners" who decide when the thread of life begins and ends, as well as what pattern it weaves. Under the rule of the Fates, your future already has *shape*.

As we watch Oedipus struggle towards the truth, our aesthetic experience benefits from epistemic privilege—we know at every point in the play what *will* happen as well as what *has* happened. Such is "dramatic irony." But from *within* the plot, Tireseis is in the same position—that of "prophetic irony." He knows what we and the Fates know: the shape

of Oedipus's life from beginning to end. Prophecy is possible because in every meaningful sense, Oedipus's life was finished when it started.[155]

As Morson points out, the temporality of *Oedipus Rex* is perfectly "isomorphic" with its structure.[156] In both form and fate, the end bends the arc of the story to itself. Indeed all "narratives, insofar as they rely on structure, are predisposed to convey a sense of fatalism, determinism, or otherwise closed time."[157] Plato, by eschewing the structure of classical plot, also relieves its metaphysical pressure on his story world. He revokes Fate's spindle and shears. By resisting closure, Plato is able to represent the tapestry of existence on its loom rather than in its cut and complete pattern.

Throughout his works, Plato embraces the episodic tempo Aristotle is so quick to denigrate. The *Euthyphro* takes place within hours of the *Theatetus* and a day of the *Sophist* and *Statesman*. But the concentration of incident doesn't build dramatic tension—in the way, say that the compression of arrivals and departures in *Oedipus at Colonus* does—it deflates it. If catastrophe concentrates time, Socratic conversation expands it.[158] What happens in *Oedipus at Colonus*, or in any tragedy, can only happen once in a lifetime. It is a life event at the extreme. We might say it is life in the "aorist" aspect—self-complete and unique. A Socratic conversation can happen every day—indeed, every hour. It is a *day's* event, life lived in the "imperfect": continuous, incomplete, customary. If tragedy brings

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[155] This is a paraphrase of Morson's reading of the *Oedipus,* although the distinction between "dramatic" and "prophetic" irony is mine. Morson, *Narrative and Freedom*, 58-61.
[156] Ibid., 60.
[157] Ibid., 8.
[158] *Phaedo* is a marvelous example of how Socratic conversation elongates time, even while portraying the unique event of Socrates's death. And to the next point: What Socrates does on his last day is the same thing he did every day.

"remote possibility closer to home," Socratic dialogue hews close to Annie Dillard's line, "How we spend our days is how we spend our lives."[159]

The dialogues, in other words, take place in ordinary time, in which each hour follows from and leads to another, each day passes from and to another: "Today I went to the Chamber..." (*Menexenus* 234b), "Just the other day, as it happens, I was walking to the city…" (*Symposium* 172a), "But let's be off, since the heat has died down" (*Phaedrus* 279b).[160] As in an episodic plot, one event follows another but not *because* of one another. This is the tempo of daily life: "monotonous," not because it is dull (daily life keeps our interest well enough, too well perhaps) but because it follows a steady beat.

By contrast, there is tragic time. Woodruff glosses Chapter 7 of the *Poetics* when he writes, "A good plot does not merely fit into the measured time; it is itself the measure of the time."[161] In drama, the duration of the plot—what Aristotle calls "the sufficient limit" of its scale—is "the scope required for a probable or necessary succession of events which produce a transformation." In other words, action determines duration. The end comes when we reach the part of the action in which "there is nothing else after."

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[159] Jonathan Lear, "Katharsis," *Phronesis* 33, no. 3 (1988): 324. Lear's argument is that tragedy "awakens us to the fact that there are certain emotional possibilities which we ignore in ordinary life. On the one hand, these possibilities are remote, so it is not completely unreasonable to ignore them in ordinary life; on the other hand, they lend content to the idea that in ordinary life we are living 'inside the plain': and they fuel our desire imaginatively to experience life outside the plain. Even if tragedy does not befall us, it goes to the root of the human condition that it is a possibility we must live with." Ibid., 324. Dillard's line comes from *The Writing Life* and is perfectly quoted as, ""How we spend our days is, of course, how we spend our lives." But the quotation circulates without the adverb—its very circulation suggests the sentiment can *not* be taken "of course"!

[160] In Bakhtin's charming phrase, the dialogues emphasize "the 'todayness' of the day." "Epic and Novel," 26.

[161] Woodruff, *The Necessity of Theater*, 72.

The *Euthyphro* ends because Euthyphro is late for an appointment—because there *is* "something else after."[162] Time doesn't bend to the will of incident; incident bends to the will of time. *Euthyphro* ends not for its own, necessary reasons but because of the arbitrary forward movement of time. Like so much of life's work, the conversation doesn't finish but merely stops.

Excepting drama and baseball, the duration of an event is most often dictated by nature (sunrise and sunset) or convention (class is from 1:00 – 2:50 pm, dissertation forms are due on March 8). Plato, it seems to me, has a keen sense of the *comedy* of life as lived within temporal constraints. Some of his slyest moments occur when his characters battle time and lose: Hippocrates barging in at day break to tell Socrates 'news' he already knew, Aristodemus arriving "just in time" (*Symposium* 174e), but uninvited, to Agathon's dinner, Aristophanes falling asleep just as Socrates is about to clinch the argument.

It is a sign of Plato's special treatment of Socrates that Socrates is never hurried and never seems to tire. Neither the conventional constraints on time (e.g. appointments) nor the natural constrains on time (the recurring need to eat and sleep) seem to touch him. Unlike the "man of the courts" who is "always in a hurry," the philosopher "always has what you mentioned just now—plenty of time." (*Theaetetus* 172d-e)

<u>Consequence without Cause</u>

[162] Of course, Euthyphro may be lying about having an appointment. Perhaps he's ashamed, perhaps merely tired of it—not all Socratic conversations even sustain the interlocutor's attention through to the end. Imagine if a tragic character "got bored" in the middle of their tragedy! But I take the *form* of his lie, if it is a lie, to be Plato's masterstroke. The conversation begins with a chance encounter and ends with an appointed one.

Plato leaves us in doubt about the effects of the dialogue on Euthyphro. But doesn't history itself provide the "closure" that he otherwise withholds? After all, *historical* irony looms over this, as so many, of his dialogues: We know, as the characters do not, the "outcome" of Socrates' trial.[163] We know that Charmides, the likeable teenager we meet in the dialogue that bears his name, will later join the Thirty's reign of terror. Plato himself frames the *Theaetetus* with news of the man's imminent demise.

Yet these "ends" are not "outcomes." Young Charmides's bashfulness makes a puzzle of his later outrages. Nor does the portrait of Theaetetus as a "manly" boy of "gentle temper" (144a) point forward to the nature of his death. Yes, he suffers a wound from battle—as befitting a courageous sprit—but "the real trouble" (142a) Plato goes out of his way to say, is dysentery. Plato does not rid nature of its "curious crudities." If Plato creates a narrative world in which fate (*Moira*) does not operate on time he also creates a world in which chance (*Tyche*) does.

That there can be "consequence without cause"—by which I mean, consequences that don't *admit* their cause, or are caused by something other than the "intentional, goal-oriented, and consequential" action that drama imitates—is illustrated in the case Euthyphro plans to bring to court. A freeman kills a servant in "drunken anger"—that's clear enough. But the murderer dies after Euthyphro's father

> bound him hand and foot and threw him in a ditch, then sent a man [to Athens] to inquire from the priest what should be done. During that time he gave no thought nor care to the bound man, as being a killer, and it was no matter if he died, which he did. Hunger and cold and his bonds caused his death before the messenger came back from the seer. Both my father and my other relatives are angry that I am

[163] Historical irony is Blondell's term. Blondell, *The Play of Character*, 32 (and throughout).

> prosecuting my father for murder on behalf of a murderer when he *hadn't even killed him*…. (4c-d)

Did Euthyphro's father "cause" the murderer's death even if he "hadn't even killed him"? Inaction, rather than action, is the cause of death. Plato has created a case of tremendous subtlety, in which, far from clearing life of its accidents (and unfired shotguns), he shows moral complexity to depend on them. While we wait for an authority to find out "what should be done," things happen anyway.

Indeed, when Socrates summarizes the case later in the dialogue, he emphasizes the *temporal* rather than *causal* sequence of events:

> "[the murderer] died in his bonds before the one who bound him found out from the seer what was to be done with him." (9a)
>
> φθάσῃ τελευτήσας διὰ τὰ δεσμὰ πρὶν τὸν συνδήσαντα παρὰ τῶν ἐξηγητῶν περὶ αὐτοῦ πυθέσθαι τί χρὴ ποιεῖν

The word φθάσῃ from φθάνω, means "to be beforehand" and is "often used before πρὶν to emphasize the idea of priority."[164] In other words, the murderer "happened to die first."[165] Chanciness reigns when events happen after one another but not on account of one another.

Through historical irony, Plato uses the opposite effect as that of "aperture." We *know* what happens to Socrates, to Charmides, to Theaetetus. But do we know *why*?

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[164] Ian Walker, ed.. *Plato's* Euthyphro, Textbook Series (American Philological Association); No. 10 (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1984), 84.

[165] This is Geach's gloss: P.T. Geach, "Plato's Euthyphro: An Analysis and Commentary," in *Plato's Euthyphro, Apology, and Crito: Critical Essays*, ed. Rachana Kamtekar (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2005.), 28.

In acknowledgment of the 'curious crudities' of nature and the messy particulars of history, Plato's plots never draw a direct line between cause and consequence.[166] Any event is over- or under-determined. Euthyphro and Socrates bump into each other and their chance encounter may—or may not—change the course of a man's life. Theatetus dies from a bad wound *and* from dysentery. Blushing Charmides grows up to be a tyrant. By incorporating the contingencies of history, Plato shows the lucid intelligibility which art and prophecy promise to be false.

Without the shaping hand of fate, Plato's storyworld is accident-prone. But that does not mean Plato takes sides with Jocasta when she claims "chance rules our lives" so better we "live at random." Rather, Plato's Socrates offers a new, heroic model of how to live: by inquiry.[167] The *Crito* is an especially strong rebuke to both those who live by omens and

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[166] Xenophon, in his more heavy-handed way, argues explicitly what Plato suggests by form: that it would be absurd to draw a direct line between Socrates and the corruption of his young associates, particularly Alcibiades and Critias: "since they were exalted by their birth, elated by their wealth, puffed up with their power, and spoiled by many people, is it any wonder that, when they were corrupted for all these reasons and long separated from Socrates, they became overbearing?" (Mem.1.2.24) However Xenophon suggests Socrates made these men good ("as long we they kept company with Socrates, [they] were able to master their ignoble desires") and it was their separation from him that led each to deteriorate. But this is just the same moral simplification turned the other direction: that x can make y "good" but that in this case intervening c, d, e, f prevented it. I don't think that's a lesson we can draw from Plato's moral universe.
[167] I'm especially careful to distinguish Plato's Socrates from the historical Socrates because of Xenophon's account of Socrates's piety in the *Memorabilia*. Here he explicitly names Socrates as a believer in prophecy, who recommends to friends that they "consult a diviner to see if the action should be taken" when "the result of an action was uncertain." However, Xenophon goes on to say that Socrates "said it was superstition to consult diviners about questions which the gods had enabled us to decide by use of our wits…or to which the answers can be found by calculation or measuring or weighing. People who put this sort of question to the gods were, in his opinion, acting wrongly. He said that where the gods have given us power to act by the use of our intelligence, we ought to us it; but where the outcome is concealed from human beings, we should try to discover it from the gods by divination; for the gods communicate to those whom they favour." (Mem I.I.9) There is much in this to consider, but it's worth saying—at risk to Xenophon's intelligence—that he might not be on the 'inside' of Socratic irony. Ethical issues, as Plato's Socrates points out in the *Euthyphro*, can't be calculated, measured or weighed—because of that, our differences of opinion "make us angry and hostile to each other." (7c). But they, too, should be examined "by the use of our intelligence" rather than handed over

those who live at random. On the one hand, Socrates will refuse to escape his fate. On the other, it won't be because he capitulates to forces larger than himself.[168] As he says to Crito, "We must therefore examine whether we should act in this way or not, as not only now but at all times I am the kind of man who listens to nothing within me but the argument that on reflection seems best to me." (46b)

If Fate (*Moira*) or Chance (*Tyche*) rules our lives, we are not free to make meaningful choices. Either our lives are meaningful-by-design, but therefore unfree, or play out willy-nilly, and therefore without meaning. Under the rule of Fate, our best hope is prophecy.[169] Under the rule of Chance, we "live at random, best we can." But if we live in a world where we can access truth through reason, we can make choices that are both necessary and free. Despite living in a world of flux, we can ground our lives in what is timelessly and necessarily true.

Plot's Pretense

Like drama or epic, Plato's mimesis represents "people in action." And yet, Plato shows little interest in plot's fullest ambitions: to "make sense of" the world. My contention in this section is that Plato ignores (to put it weakly) or vacates (to put it strongly) plot's explanatory power—its pretense to reliable knowledge. Again, I will use Aristotle as Plato's foil.

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to a diviner (like Euthyphro!) Indeed, these passages almost seem to respond to one another: Could it be Plato's *Euthyphro* harbors a "hidden polemic" with Xenophon's *Memorabilia* or vis versa?

[168] As Polynices does when he tells his sisters, "that's in the hands of a dark power, destiny—whether we live or die, who knows?" (OC l.1641-2, Fagles trans.)

[169] Hence the Leader says of Tireseis, "Anyone searching for the truth, my king / might learn it from the prophet, clear as day." (OT, l. 324-325, Fagles translation) and "The truth lives inside him, him alone." (l. 339)

The *Poetics* consistently champions *intelligibility* as primary to aesthetic success. Aristotle dictates every aspect of plot composition accordingly: its magnitude (not too long that it can't be held in the mind), organization (a non-arbitrary beginning and end), and story contents (connected through probability or necessity). Indeed, by describing plot coherence in terms of necessary of probable connection, Aristotle suggests "the causal or explanatory significance of a dramatic sequence of action is analogous…to the degree of cogency obtaining between the elements of a connected argument."[170] In Chapter 1, I argued that conceptual argument and literary fiction are not just different from each other, but often in direct opposition. Perhaps argument and plot are *not* so very different.

After all, plot, like argument, is a means of structuring and presenting information. Just as we may "follow" or fail to follow our colleague's argument, we may "follow" or fail to follow the novel's plot. Both are cognitive activities, both require us to reorganize information "as told" (as narrated in time, piece by piece) into information "as is" (as each piece ultimately stands in relation to an atemporal whole). "Wait, why did the murderess kill her dog?" is not so different a question from "wait, why is disinterestedness necessary for aesthetic appreciation?" In both cases, the reader is trying to put pieces of information together in search of the structure of the whole.[171] Classical plot structure promises a lucid intelligibility that we expect, too, in conceptual argument.

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[170] Halliwell, *The Poetics of Aristotle*, 100.

[171] If we are better, on average, at following narrative plots than logical entailments perhaps it is because we are exposed earlier and more often to "Once upon a time…" than to "Socrates is a man, all men are mortal…." Or perhaps, as Lowe suggests, it is because storytelling puts to work the same cognitive apparatus we use to make sense of our experience on a daily basis.

Indeed, in one of the most stunning "moves" of the *Poetics* Aristotle recognizes poetry as more "philosophical" than history because it "relates…the universal." (Ch 9) By selecting and sequencing events into a legible history of cause and effect, plot discovers—in events of mere temporal succession—an internal logic *and* reliable paradigm. Thanks to *muthos* we can say "this *because* that" instead of just "that then this." The poet thus lays claim to knowledge. Fiction, James Redfield writes, "is the outcome of a kind of inquiry," "an inquiry into the intermediate causes of action…which has led the poet to the discovery and communication in a story of some universal pattern of human probability and necessity."[172]

Narrative intelligibility is the result of its disclosure of *causal* networks. Plato, on the other hand, seems to go out of his way to avoid causal linkages: Wouldn't it be even easier— and better PR for his hero—for Plato to write the *Euthyphro* as Diogenes Laertes read it, "Socrates dissuades Euthyphro from his intention"? At minimum, Plato makes the conversation's efficacy a matter of interpretation; at most, he denies it causal force altogether.

By obscuring or effacing the causal connections between events, Plato abandons plot as an explanatory mechanism. In other words, he eschews the kind of "because"—the kind of reasoning—plot has to offer. It is no great imaginative leap to suggest that Plato's evasion of narrative intelligibility corresponds to a disregard for narrative *intelligence*. Narrative can only ever describe "what is" by "what happens." "The world unfolded by every narrative," Paul Ricouer observes, is "always a *temporal* world."[173]

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[172] James M. Redfield, *Nature and Culture in the Iliad: The Tragedy of Hector (*Durham: Duke University Press, 1994), 79, 59-60.
[173] Ricouer, *Time and Narrative*, 3. Emphasis mine.

Even knowledge of the immortal gods is organized by *muthos*—also translated as "myth." Myth assigns the gods motives, actions and consequences. In the eternal realm, things happen *because of* x,y,z, just as they do on earth: man and god are bound to the same causal logic. That, in any case, is Euthyphro's argument—but it is also the only argument narrative, *taken literally* (as Euthyphro does), can offer.[174]

If, however, ultimate causes (Forms) are atemporal and unchanging than we need a much different explanatory mechanism than *muthos* to link cause to consequence. Philosophical inquiry can probe the realm of "being" while story-telling, even in its discovery of universals, must "tell" them in the grammar of "becoming." If the world is "what it is" because Forms are "what they are" then narrative can't show us the world as it is.[175] It is only by directing our attention beyond the world of human action that we can find secure knowledge.

Ironically, it may be Plato's idealism which makes him a great realist writer. Rather than imposing order on the messy particularities of life, as classical plot does, he points *up* that mess. He creates a narrative world which refuses to satisfy our desire for understanding. It is in philosophical pursuit, not in tragic wonder, that we will discover the intelligible world.

Plato's Poetic Effects: Desire, Pleasure and Risk

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[174] It is knowledge of the gods "*as told by the poets, and other sacred stories*" (6c) that Euthyphro takes as evidence of his piety: "Observe Socrates, that I can cite powerful evidence that the law is so," he says, and cites the story of Zeus binding his father and Cronos castrating his.

[175] This is R.E. Allen's formulation, "Metaphysically, Forms affect the career of the world: they are the real natures of things, and the world is what it is because they are what they are." R.E. Allen, *Plato's* Euthyphro *and the Earlier Theory of Forms* (London: Routledge, 2013), 68.

Tragedy is only complete—and successful—in its *effects*. Platonic dialogue too, I believe, aims at effects—but not those of tragic katharsis. In this final section, I will argue that Platonic dialogue is not only formally distinct from tragedy and epic, it arouses new desires, pleasures—and risks—alien to those forms.

Desire

Plot doesn't just represent time; it works on the reader *through* time. The well-crafted plot, unlike the well-wrought urn, has at its command all those emotions governed by our relationship to time: anticipation, desire, hope, fear, suspense. In Chapter 1, I borrowed Lowe's analogy of a puzzle and a puzzler to suggest how a good plot feeds us information over time in order that we may piece together its narrative logic: a satisfying application of intelligence and memory.[176] But the metaphor overly intellectualizes the pleasures of plot, which controls information in order to whet our appetite for more, to keep us riveted to the stage or page. It stokes in us the desire to know "what's next?" and "how will it all turn out?"[177]

In epic and tragedy, the narrative conflict (Achilles' endless grief) and narrative goals (Odysseus's homecoming) are not only finally accomplished *according to the will of Zeus*, they are accomplished *to our satisfaction*. In *The Company We Keep: An Ethics of Fiction*, Wayne Booth reminds us that, upon reading a story, we "enter the pattern of hopes,

[176] In his chapter on Plot in *Aspects of the Novel*, Forster names "memory and intelligence" the proper faculties for apprehending plot (poo-pooing curiosity, wrongly I think, as "the lowest of the human faculties.") Forster, *Aspects of the Novel,* 84.
[177] I would argue this is true even when we know the events to come—as with the Passion, or *Oedipus Tyrannus*.

fears and expectations that every story asks for" and thereby become, for better or worse, the kind of reader the text invites us to be.[178] A story makes me want what it has to offer. (It has to: otherwise, I put the book down.) When I enter a story world, I surrender myself to the narrative's enticements to value what the narrative values. Thus, "I…become, if I enter this world, *that kind of desirer*" — whether after *Jaws*' titillating bloodshed or romantic resolution for Elizabeth Bennet and Mr. Darcy.[179]

A story makes me want not only "what's next" but, in Booth's words, the "satisfying completion of form," the completion of the art work's design.[180] When I watch *Oedipus Rex*, I may be dreading the final revelation and its bloody effects but—I also desire the final resolution and its bloody effects. One effect of plot is to make us "long for resolution": "we can't bear to leave until the play has given us the promised release…."[181]

So what does it mean for the *Euthyphro* to leave us un-resolved? It means that Plato's plot works differently on my desire and promises compensations other than that of emotional release. For one thing, the *Euthyphro*, like other aporetic dialogues, is designed, like tragedy, to stimulate wonder (*thaumazein*)—but without analogous resolution.

Tragic wonder is aroused by events which occur "contrary to expectation yet still on account of one another." Aristotle goes on to say, "A sense of wonder will be more likely to

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[178] Wayne C. Booth, *The Company We Keep: An Ethics of Fiction* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 255.

[179] Ibid., 202, 204. "This means that the most powerful effect on my own ethos, at least during my reading, is the concentration of my desires and fears and expectations, leading with as much concentration as possible towards some further, some future fulfillment: I am made to want something that I do not yet have enough of. So long as I continue to read, my whole being is concentrated on 'how it will all turn out,' or on 'what is will turn out to *be*.'" Ibid., 201.

[180] Ibid., 202.

[181] Woodruff, *The Necessity of Theater*, 154.

be aroused in this way than as a result of the arbitrary or fortuitous, since even chance events make the greatest impact of wonder when they appear to have a purpose" (Ch 9)—citing the example of Mitys's statue. Tragic wonder is provoked by *surprise* met by *lucidity*. It is the unexpected revelation of a greater intelligibility (or *seeming* intelligibility). While tragic wonder "startles and challenges our capacity to understand what we witness in a play," Halliwell writes, "it must give way to a recognition of how things do after all cohere through 'probability or necessity.'"[182]

Philosophical wonder, too, is produced in moments that challenge our capacity to understand. In the *Theatetus*, Socrates demonstrates that three statements that appear true are actually in contradiction with one another:

> Socrates: You follow me, I take it, Theaetetus—I think you must be familiar with this kind of puzzle.
>
> Theaetetus: Oh yes, indeed, Socrates, I often wonder like mad what these things can mean; sometimes when I'm looking at them I begin to feel quite giddy.
>
> Socrates: I dare say you do, my dear boy. It seems that Theodorus was not far from the truth when he guessed what kind of person you are. For this is an experience which is characteristic of a philosopher, this wondering: this is where philosophy begins and nowhere else. (155c-d)

Philosophical wonder is aroused by recognizing *un*intelligibility—surprise unredeemed by lucidity.[183] True, for the stout-hearted philosopher, puzzlement and confusion may eventually "give way" to a higher intelligibility. But this is not where Plato

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[182] Halliwell*, The Poetics of Aristotle*, 111-112.
[183] Aristotle also recognizes the difference between tragic and philosophic wonder: "in the *Poetics*…Aristotle seems to be suggesting that the relation between wonder and understanding is precisely the opposite of that suggested by the *Metaphysics*: it is by cognitively grasping that the events, though unexpected, are intelligibly linked to one another that wonder is produced in us. So while in the *Metaphysics* wonder provokes us to understand, in the *Poetics* understanding provokes us to experience wonder." Lear, "Katharsis," 311.

leads or leaves us in his aporetic dialogues. First we must be brought to acknowledge, as Berns puts it, "the inadequacy" of our own opinions.[184] We must be made dizzy.

Plato, plot-maker, pulls off a neat trick: he reroutes our narrative desire—desire for an intelligible and meaningful world—to philosophical pursuit rather than aesthetic closure. Indeed, in philosophy our desire is not ultimately satisfied by the completion of form—but, as Socrates tells us in the *Symposium*, in sight of The Form. Until then, it is not satisfied at all. As Socrates tells Euthyphro, "the lover of inquiry must follow his beloved wherever it may lead him." (14c) And, as in all of Plato's dialogues, where the inquiry leads is "onward." Philosophy only *begins* where so many Socratic dialogues *end*—in the head-splitting confusion of aporia. We do not enjoy the "promised release" of a satisfying ending— rather, we are further *enthralled* to the pursuit, the process, of the inquiry. That is—as Socrates teases Cratylus—"unless you want us to behave like tragic poets, who introduce a *deus ex machina* whenever they're perplexed."

Pleasure

For theater to make itself "worth watching" it must make it worthwhile for me to make myself a spectator. An exciting plot that makes me hungry for "what's next," catastrophic events that surprise my expectations, characters who make me feel fear and pity—these are apt compensations for sitting still and *doing nothing* for awhile. To watch human action on stage, the price of admission is to forego our own agency.

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[184] Lawrence Berns, "Aristotle's *Poetics,*" in *Ancients and Moderns: Essays on the Tradition of Political Philosophy, In Honor of Leo Strauss*, ed. Joseph Cropsey (New York: Basic Books, 1964), 81.

Platonic dialogue, on the other hand, invites my agency. It is not only the characters in the drama who throw their hat into the ring—we, too, are spurred to action. In the words of Jacob Klein, we are not "casual and indifferent spectators" but "silent participants" (6) in Platonic dialogue.[185] And this means

> that we, the readers, are implicitly questioned and examined, that we have to weigh Socratic irony, that we are compelled to admit to ourselves our ignorance, that it is up to us to get out of the impasse and to reach a conclusion, if it is reachable at all. We are one of the elements of the dialogues and perhaps the most important one.[186]

Oedipus's investigation of his birth can't mean the same thing to him as it does to me. For him, the investigation is a "compelling task," in which he grasps towards his goals in the open-ended and ongoing project of living. For me, his investigation is a "beautiful given," part of an aesthetic experience in which I can emotionally—but not ethically—participate.[187]

By converting practical concerns (is Euthyphro impious to prosecute his father? how should Lysimachus and Melesias educate their sons?) into theoretical questions (what is piety? what is courage?) Socrates doesn't just modulate from advice to philosophy. He also makes Euthyphro's problem *my* problem.[188] The compensatory pleasure of Socratic

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[185] Klein, *A Commentary on Plato's* Meno, 6. These are what Thucydides' Cleon calls mere "spectators of speech" (theatoi ton logon) (III.38)

[186] Ibid., 9.

[187] I borrow the distinction between a "compelling task" and "beautiful given" from Bakhtin's *Author and Hero in Aesthetic Activity*: In telling the hero's story, an author must "move the very center of value from the hero's existence as a compelling *task* into his existence as a beautiful *given*." Mikhail Bakhtin, "Author and Hero in Aesthetic Activity," in *Art and Answerability: Early Philosophical Essays,* ed. Michael Holquist and Vadim Liapunov, trans. Vadim Liapunov (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1990), 19. The distinction here is between the ethical plane and aesthetic plane but even a friend's investigation into her birth—say, locating her birth mother—cannot be the same thing to me as it is to her. I can witness, support and advise her, but our tasks, like our lives, are separate.

[188] I owe this formulation to Cotton: "Because these problems have disturbed us, we want to resolve them satisfactorily: they become, in a sense, *our* problems." A. K. Cotton, *Platonic Dialogue and the Education of the Reader* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 215.

dialogue—missing, as it is, the katharsis of pity and fear, the satisfying intelligibility of a fully legible and resolved artwork—is that, when we read a Socratic dialogue, we *do* philosophy. We experience first-hand, not by proxy, what the characters experience. And because of this, we are not "safe."

Risk

Thomas Pavel has a wonderful phrase to describe the pleasures of great fiction: "safely watching wild adventures." "Attending a tragedy, we are safely watching wild adventures, grasp their meaning, and imaginatively participate in them," Pavel writes, and quotes Jonathan Lear's essay "Katharsis": "We imaginatively live life to the full, but we risk nothing."[189] So it is with "virtually all stories that *naturally* attract our attention"— that is, stories "focused on human actions and passions."[190] These stories grant us the pleasures of hearing exciting events while knowing "that the dangers, bad decisions, unfortunate events, ridiculous attitudes they report won't necessarily affect us."[191]

It is exactly that risk that I take on when I engage in Socratic dialogue: that the "dangers, bad decisions, unfortunate events" and "ridiculous attitudes" of the interlocutors are my own; that my own beliefs—those which undergird my actions in the world—are as flimsy, inarticulate and inadequate as any of theirs. What have I done in the name of holiness, without knowing what holiness is? When have I accused an elder, sure of my own righteousness? How often would an honest answer be "what I'm doing now" when put the question, "what is right to do?" (5d)

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[189] Thomas Pavel, "Safely Watching Wild Adventures," *Narrative* 24, no. 1 (2016): 10; Lear quoted in Ibid.
[190] Ibid., 9-10.
[191] Ibid., 10.

Of course, in some ways, we are "safe"—because we can't be directly interrogated by Socrates. And this safety can make us relax into self-satisfaction. Watching Socrates unmask the 'wise men' of his day is not a bad spectator sport. As Socrates himself admits, rich kids "take pleasure in hearing people questioned" (*Apology* 23c) and it is *this* pleasure that has brought many a bright, callow teenager to first engage with Socratic dialogue.

Not everyone is touched by Socratic dialogue, just as not every reader is moved by Aeschylus or titillated by *Jaws*. But when Socratic dialogue works, it works *on us*, just as plot does. Where an exciting plot directs our desire to know "what's next?" Plato directs our desire to know "what is." By closing off routes to find "how it all turns out," he points us away from goal-oriented human action and towards eternal truths. Plato knows "the stories that *naturally* attract our attention"—but he re-engineers them to reroute our attention elsewhere.

Yet, as I will describe in the next chapter, the dialogues offer constant reminding that even contemplation of the eternal takes place in time, in place, and in person. While *reason* stands aloof of particularities, reasoni*ng* does not. At the same time Plato directs our attention beyond ordinary human "actions and passions," I argue, he dramatizes a new *praxis* and *pathos*: the harrowing confrontation of the soul with itself.

Chapter 3: Speech

Introduction

In considering Platonic dialogue as a kind of writing—and Plato as a writer—scholars have increasingly turned to Plato's ancient reception, paying renewed attention to the Platonic commentaries of Proclus (412-485 CE) or Olympiodorus (ca. 500-570 CE) or—as in a recent work by Richard Hunter—by tracing individual lines of influence: Longus read Plato and read Theocritus who read Plato; Lucian reworks *Phaedrus* into *Hermotimus*.[192] I begin this chapter, following a hint from Leslie Kurke, by suggesting another point of reception, one with particular promise for revealing Plato's literary inventiveness: the *Platonica*, or anecdotal tradition which grew up around Plato as his reputation did. I do not suggest we take these biographical anecdotes literally—nor even as biographical, although scholars pour a great deal of energy into making arguments about why such and such piece of evidence about Plato or Socrates should be taken as "reliable" or "dubious," that is, of historical value or not.[193] But this is a narrow view of "evidence," or rather of what stories can *evince*.[194] When we put aside worry about whether a story is accurate, we can pick it up again with an eye to how it tells the truth.

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[192] R. L. Hunter, *Plato and the Traditions of Ancient Literature: The Silent Stream* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

[193] See, e.g., Brickhouse and Smith, *Socrates on Trial* who argue the *Apology* accurately reports Socrates' speech at his trial and Wallace "Plato Logographos" for a recent interpretation that takes a counter-stance.

[194] "The literalist asks whether the [work of art] is accurate but not what other statements it might be making." Robert Hariman and John Louis Lucaites, *The Public Image: Photography and Civic Spectatorship* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016), 69.

Thus I begin this chapter by considering two particularly compelling stories of Plato as a writer, both found in Diogenes Laertius's third century CE *Lives of the Philosophers*.[195] The first is an origin story. Young Plato, it's reported, was a painter and poet, writing "first dithyrambs, afterwards lyric poems and tragedies." Then one day, as he prepared to submit his tragedy for a prize, he stopped to listen to Socrates in front of the theater of Dionysus. After that fateful encounter he "consigned his poems to the flames, with the words: Come hither, O fire-god, Plato now has need of thee" (κατέφλεξε τὰ ποιήματα είπών: Ἥφαιστε, πρόμολ᾽ ὧδε: Πλάτων νύ τι σεῖο χατίζει.) (D.L. 3.1).

Another anecdote finds Plato snuggling up with the 4th century equivalent of sketch comedy[196]: "Plato, it seems, was the first to bring to Athens the mimes of Sophron which had been neglected, and to draw characters in the style of that writer; a copy of the mimes, they say, was actually found under his pillow" (D.L. 3.18).

There's no reason to believe either anecdote is accurate. But biographical anecdotes do not need to be accurate to be insightful. Take Plutarch's tale of Alcibiades cutting the tail off his dog:

> Possessing a dog of wonderful size and beauty, which had cost him seventy minas, he had its tail cut off, and a beautiful tail it was, too. His comrades chid him for this, and declared that everybody was furious about the dog and abusive of its owner.

[195] Translations from Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers,* trans. R.D. Hicks (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1972), http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.01.0258%3Abook%3D1%3Achapter%3Dprologue.
[196] I'm on the search for the right analogy. Monty Python is likely too high-brow, *Saturday Night Live* too topical. Based on their content (see below), Sophronic mime might have most in common with a Vaudeville act!

> But Alcibiades burst out laughing and said: "That's just what I want; I want Athens to talk about this, that it may say nothing worse about me."[197] (Plut. Alc. 9.1)

Whether or not Alcibiades actually did and said those things, we learn that Alcibiades was the *kind* of person to do and say those things, or was *taken to be* that kind of person. Plutarch's anecdotes translate reputation into character and character into incident, re-presenting human complexity in story form.

Anecdotes about a *writer*'s life, however, may be up to something else. Take the ancient rumor that Socrates helped write Euripides' plays.[198] Here the association seems to characterize neither Socrates nor Euripides but *the plays themselves*. The story suggests there is something Socratic—in tone or topic—in Euripidean tragedy. Anecdote acts as rudimentary literary criticism. Perhaps Nietzsche's critique of Euripides's "aesthetic Socratism" is pre-figured in a circulating joke about Socrates whispering in Euripides's ear?

Similarly, I would argue, our Platonic anecdotes are less interested in characterizing Plato than in characterizing the writer of the Platonic dialogues. They are a portrait of Plato as *implied* author. They construct the author (Plato) from the kind of thing he writes (Platonic dialogue).[199]

Just who is this implied author? For one thing, he is a retired poet—more, a converted poet. He was trained as a writer by the traditional, prestige genres of his culture.

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[197] Plutarch, *Plutarch's Lives, trans.* Bernadotte Perrin (Cambridge, MA. Harvard University Press, 1916). http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A2008.01.0006%3Achapter%3D9%3Asection%3D1.
[198] Also testified to in Diogenes Laertius. In fact, it's one of the first "facts" he reports about Socrates!
[199] I am building, here, on the essential insight of Kurke: "The fact that these stories [Plato sleeping with Sophron's mimes under his pillow, that Plato borrowed from Epicharmus, etc.] get told and retold suggests that there was felt to be a kinship between Plato's dialogues and the mimes of Sophron that extended beyond the commonality of mimetic prose medium." Kurke, *Aesopic Conversations*, 16.

And he meant to compete: poetry, after all, was practically a sport in ancient Athens. But then he heard Socrates. And what he heard made this form of writing, and this form of striving, unacceptable to him.

The story leaves the details of Plato's conversion wonderfully opaque. Perhaps he was convinced he should attend to the care of his soul rather than strive for prizes. Perhaps he was persuaded that the poets lie. Or perhaps the powerful plainness of Socrates' talk trivialized the metrical intricacy of tragic verse. Whatever he heard Socrates say, it was Socrates' voice that moved him.

When the playwright was converted to philosophy, he was also converted from poetry to prose. Yet the repentant tragedian destroys his poems with poetry.[200] Indeed, "Come hither, O fire-god, Plato now has need of thee" is a perfect distillation of poetry's authority, its double authorization from the divine and from its own long tradition.[201]

Invocation requires formulaic, marked, ritual language—it's natural medium is poetry. This specific invocation is borrowed from *Iliad* 18, when Thetis calls on Hephaestus to replace Achilles's armor—an example of the power of poetry to make language "available for re-performance in many contexts," "flexible and 'vague' enough to allow repetition, which may or may not be 'citation' or 'quotation.'"[202] Poetry can be repeated without being quoted, recited as well as cited, because of its special relationship with ritual.

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[200] Blondell's gloss on this anecdote — "Philosophy emerges from the ashes of poetry" — is lovely, but I read it differently. Philosophy emerges from the sound of Socrates' voice, which turns poetry to ash. Blondell, *Play of Characters*, 15.
[201] I have been helped a great deal in thinking about poetry's relationship to the divine by Reg Gibbons's *How Poems Think*, especially chapter 6.
[202] Hunter, *The Silent Stream*, 72. Hunter here is referring to elegiac verses from the Theognidea, but I believe the description applies.

Each articulation of an invocation is authorized by tradition yet is a new event, just as the language of Christian Eucharist ("Do this in remembrance of me") is not "quoting" Jesus at the last supper but making the last supper present again.

Prose operates otherwise. It does not speak in a sacred way. It is the language of ordinary citizens.[203] It is the language of secular transaction: private letters, technical instructions, lists, laws and bedtime stories.[204] It's the language of conversation.

How does our second anecdote sketch the author of the Platonic dialogues? At first glance, Plato's dialogues seem to share very little with Sophron's mimes.[205] We have mere fragments of those once admired scripts, perhaps written for sympotic performance. One of Sophron's recent editors suggests that, while Diogenes Laertius claims Plato borrowed

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[203] Compared to the poets, who can coin new words or introduce foreign words, Isocrates describes prose-writers as circumscribed by τῶν ὀνομάτων τοῖς πολιτικοῖς or, "the words of the citizens." From Isocrates' prose eulogy of Evagoras (ix.9.f.), quoted in Kenneth James Dover, *The Evolution of Greek Prose Style* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 96. Isocrates also points out that while the poets can "represent the gods as associating with men," (πλησιάζοντας τοὺς θεοὺς τοῖς ἀνθρώποις) or literally "bring near the gods to men" prose-writers must use "only those ideas which bear on the actual facts" (τῶν ἐνθυμημάτων τοῖς περὶ αὐτὰς τὰς πράξεις ἀναγκαῖόν ἐστι χρῆσθαι). Transl. Larue Van Hook, Loew Classic Library, Isocrates III, 1968.

[204] This list is inspired by Dover's division of prose. Dover, *Greek Prose Style*, 57. I reproduce it here:

I. Poetry
II. Prose
- A. Written
  - (1) Laws, decrees, regulations, calendars, lists.
  - (2) Letters and messages.
  - (3) Graffiti and dipinti.
- B. Unwritten
  - (1) Transmitted:
    - Ritual formulae, prayers, curses, spells, proverbs.
  - (2) Rehearsed:
    - Political and forensic speeches.
  - (3) Semi-rehearsed:
    - (a) Stories.
    - (b) Instructions and technical explanations.
  - (4) Unrehearsed:
    - Conversation.

[205] Indeed, the anecdote was probably originally an insult: its first attestation is by Duris (340-260 BC), who was critical of Plato's style.

Sophron's talent for "character-drawing" (3:18), "the extant fragments present more evidence for simple coarseness and bawdy humor."[206] Indeed the subject of the fragments range from sex acts, to the preparation of food and drugs and magic, to all manner of ill-health, like diarrhea, runny nose, wrinkled skin, and itching, as in this unplaced fragment: "I'm scratching myself even though I've got no strength left; and the itch is galloping from my feet to my head."[207] The humor is bodily, the images earthy, the dialogue lively but coarse. What on earth could this tale of "bedtime reading" have to say about Plato as a writer?

And yet… Doesn't it account for Plato's gifted ear for natural speech, the dialogues' everydayness of incident and occasional intrusion of bodily humor or shame (like Aristophanes's hiccups in *Symposium* or Thrasymachus's blush in *Republic*—or Socrates's itch, in *Phaedo*)?[208] The image of Plato sleeping with Sophron's mimes under his pillow is particularly apt: it suggests the mimes have entered Plato's writing through his dreams. Plato the philosopher spends the afternoon arguing about justice and virtue, puts himself to sleep laughing about cooks and tuna fishers, and sets to write the next morning about justice and virtue, "pack asses and smiths."

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[206] J. H. Hordern, *Sophron's Mimes: Text, Translation, and Commentary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 5. Plato's 6th century commentator, Olympiodorus, also suggests Plato very much enjoyed Aristophanes and Sophron, "from whom he received aid in the mimesis of individuals in his dialogues." Olymp.*Vita Plat*. 3 Noted and translated in William John Kennedy, 2017, "Antisthenes' Literary Fragments: Edited with Introduction, Translations, and Commentary," PhD diss., University of Sydney.
[207] Hordern, *Sophron's Mimes,* 75, fragment 53.
[208] Hordern comments that Sophron's "fondness for occasional short clauses, less frequently for extended sequences of short clauses, also characterizes Platonic prose, no doubt reflecting the liveliness and rapidity of everyday speech." Hordern, *Sophron's Mimes*, 11-12. Lowe applauds Plato's "naturalistic attention to verbal idiosyncrasy and detail" and credits the dialogues as "the closest attempt before New Comedy to capture the cadences of everyday Attic conversation." Lowe, *The Classical Plot*, 95.

Indeed, Plato himself attributes a certain “lowness” to Socrates’s manner of speech—meaning, of course, he attributes a certain lowness *to his own representation* of Socrates’s speech. In the *Symposium,* Alcibiades characterizes Socrates’ talk as “clothed in words as coarse as the hides worn by the most vulgar satyrs”: “He’s always going on about pack-asses (ὄνους…κανθηλίους), or blacksmiths, or cobblers, or tanners” (221e). Yet, like the hideous Silenus, there are images of gods within. Now compare Socrates’ “pack-asses” to Sophocles’ “offspring of horses” (ἱππείῳ γένει, l.340) in the famous “Ode to Man”:

> And Gaia, the Earth,
> Forever undestroyed and
> Untiring, highest of
> All the gods, he
> Wears away, year
> After year as his plows
> Cross ceaselessly
> Back and forth, turning
> Her soil with the
> Offspring of horses.[209]

Gibbons writes:

> needing to mention plow mules, [Sophocles] must get his *thought* as far as possible from the ignoble Greek mule and his diction as far as possible from the Greek *word* for ‘mule,’ because it simply isn’t a word that can be put into the same stanza as the sacred name of Gaia.[210]

Tragedy approaches the divine by distancing itself from ordinary language. The language of philosophy, on the other hand, isn’t just prose, it’s prosaic… yet the divine lurks within.

Why do these ancient rumors highlight Plato’s abandonment of poetry and embrace of vulgar prose works? Why does Plato, no particular friend to *hoi polloi*, highlight the

[209] Sophocles, “[Ode to Man],” trans. Reg Gibbons, *Poetry* 181, no. 5 (March 2003): 325.
[210] Gibbons, *How Poems Think*, 129.

extraordinary Socrates' ordinary diction? Perhaps to register a revolution in wisdom: the pursuit of the highest truths through lowly means— common, naked *speech*.

In this chapter, I will argue that speech is the "soul" of Platonic dialogue. Plato imitates "people in speech"—and, in doing so, develops not only a new form, but a new view of human nature and significant action. Whereas the mimesis of "people in action" represents the aspect of life oriented to the pursuit and fulfillment of aims, Plato's dialogues reveal our life as lived in language.

The first half of the chapter attends to the formal features of Plato's commitment to the mimesis of speech. In Chapter 2, I described what deviation from a form (classical plot) freed Plato to do: represent ordinary time, replace narrative intelligibility with philosophical inquiry, and incite his reader's agency. In this chapter, I will argue what dedication *to* form, dialogue form, *disciplines* Plato to do.[211] First, as a practitioner of *Sokratikoi logoi*, he learns to imitate the ebb, flow, and eddies of conversation. Second, by eschewing narration, Plato discovers how to represent character(s) by speech alone. Finally, as a prose writer, Plato exploits the capacity of prose to represent not only diverse individual voices but "socially significant worldviews."[212]

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[211] I have argued against treating Plato's choice of dialogue form as entailing "some theory about the relation between drama and argument, between methods and content." To insist every writer begins with a theory of his form is too high a standard for adoption (I have no theory of the dissertation, and yet…). It also undervalues the influence of form *on* the writer. Every form excludes certain artistic or intellectual possibilities and develops others, demands mastery of certain techniques and neglects others. Writing limericks will develop your wits in one direction, sonnet in another. Indeed, thinking-by-limerick not only produces different results as thinking-by-sonnet, it produces different *thinkers*. Whether he maintained a "theory" of the dialogue form or not, dialogue provided Plato a writing *practice* which encouraged him to develop as an imitator of speech.

[212] Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays,* ed. Michael Holquist, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), 290. The work of Mikhail Bakhtin is a persistent, if understated, influence on this chapter, especially in how I characterize prose.

In the second half of the chapter, I argue that Plato's mimesis of "people in speech" doesn't just swap "speech" for "action," but shows "people" to be a rather different kind of creature than tragedy imagines them to be. Plato represents people as unreliable narrators of their own beliefs—our very capacity for *logos* (both reason and speech) makes us not only rational but rationalizing animals—and relocates moral choice from external to internal events. In doing so, Plato shows conversation, at least Socratic conversation, to be as harrowing as any other adventure.

In the Conclusion to the dissertation, I will address how this chapter contributes to the problems of Plato's poetics articulated in Chapter 1. First, the dual participation of speech in thought and action accounts for the status of the argument as both extractable content—operable independent of its original context—and utterance—dependent on its communicative context for meaning. It is, in other words, within the power of logos to make and represent statements *simultaneously*. Second, I will consider the problems of Plato's "voice"—or authorial position—by returning to the peculiar fact that he only ever speaks in the words of others.

I. The mimesis of speech

Platonic dialogue is the mimesis of speech, not of action. Following the procedures of the *Poetics*, we can further specify: Platonic dialogue is (i) the mimesis of *conversation*, through (ii) *direct speech* alone, (iii) in *prose*. I take up each of these generic markers in turn—object, mode and medium—to demonstrate how they shape the form and content of Platonic dialogue. I have found it useful, in each case, to contrast the dialogues' object, mode, and medium with an alternative: in imitating *conversation*, the dialogue form differs

from rhetorical logoi, which imitate highly structured and continuous speech; in imitating conversation through *direct speech* alone, Platonic dialogue differs from Xenophon's dialogues which mix narration and direct speech; and in imitating conversation in direct speech alone in *prose*, Platonic dialogue exploits features of language the dramatists cannot.

This may seem a coldly formal way of articulating what Platonic dialogue is in "its essential nature"—just as Aristotle's definition of tragedy doesn't touch the "meaning" of tragedy or its vision of the world.[213] I do not claim my definition is complete. It's only the beginning, just as "Tragedy is a mimesis of action" is the first clause in a paragraph-length definition and a guiding, but not lonely, thesis in a book-length argument. But it's an essential step in understanding Plato's art, and in understanding Platonic dialogue *as* art.

In Chapter 2, I showed how Plato disarms narrative explanation and denies us aesthetic closure and katharsis. Platonic dialogue prompts us *to philosophize*. One might read this as the triumph of the "philosophical" way of reading the dialogues—as arguments— over the "literary" way of reading the dialogues—as representations. If it is only by directing our attention *away* from the world of action that we can find secure knowledge, aren't we justified in taking up the *Euthyphro*'s arguments—and leaving its "narrative world" to itself?

[213] "Tragedy, then, is a representation of an action which is serious, complete, and of a certain magnitude—in language which is garnished in various forms in its different parts—in the mode of dramatic enactment, not narrative—and through the arousal of pity and fear effecting the katharsis of such emotions." (Ch VI)

N. J. Lowe comes to this conclusion when he turns from his analysis of "the classical plot" to "unclassical plots," including Plato's. Absent plot, Lowe argues, Plato's dialogues replace the "narrative system of structuring story" with a "dialectical system of structuring argument."[214] Without any "outside event or action to which the exchange of views ultimately connects," the dialogues' "dialectic drama" accrues no further traction by its embodiment in the world of action: "[M]ost of [the dialogue's] structural dynamics would be equally apparent if the arguments alone were presented, stripped of these dramatizing elements, in a continuous, impersonal tract."[215]

I disagree. Yes, the arguments are a "product" of the dialogues and can be reconstituted in a "continuous, impersonal tract"—or in a formal language. But argument is also a *process*—argu*ing*—which cannot be reduced to its products without loss. Would we say that most of a baseball game's structural dynamics are apparent in the scoreboard's final tallies?

Careful attention to Plato's mimetic techniques suggests the dialogues imitate the temporal and interpersonal dynamics native to conversation, as well as the "structural dynamics" of dialectic. By sketching his characters' "speech physiognomy" Plato indicates how character and cognition complexly interact.[216] And by drawing into dialogue not just speakers but speech *types*, Plato shows reasoning to be importantly embedded in natural language. Although Plato turns our thoughts to eternal truths, he also shows thinking to be temporal, characterological and socially embedded.

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[214] Lowe, *Classical Plot*, 96.
[215] Ibid., 95.
[216] I take the phrase "speech physiognomy" from Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, 182.

i. Object: conversation

Sokratikoi Logoi

In his 1991 book *Interpreting Plato: The Dialogue as Drama* James Arieti writes, "Simply put, Plato's dialogues are *sui generis*. Because they are *sui generis*, they are hard to study. As Aristotle would say, whatever cannot be placed into a genus does not admit of a definition."[217] It's a familiar, but puzzling, attitude to Platonic dialogue: familiar, because Plato's genius is widely considered without peer; puzzling, because Plato's genus is not only known, but named by no less an authority than Aristotle himself![218] Surely Platonic dialogue is a species of *Sokratikoi logoi* (Socratic discourse, or more colloquially, Socratic conversations), written by Socrates' friends and followers in the decades after (and perhaps preceding) his death.[219] True, Plato's dialogues are much more philosophically ambitious than Xenophon's (the only extant *Sokratikoi logoi* besides a few fragments of Antisthenes'). But as representational works of art they share, at the very least, a common object: they imitate conversation with Socrates.

That *Sokratikoi logoi* share this mimetic aim is suggested in Plato's *Theaetetus*. A framing conversation between Euclides and Terpsion introduces the dialogue between Socrates, Theodorus and Theaetetus, which Euclides reads off a scroll. It's a careful transcription, Euclides tells his companion, of the discussion as reported by Socrates:

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[217] James A. Arieti, *Interpreting Plato: The Dialogues as Drama* (Savage, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1991), 2.

[218] In the Poetics (ch1; Poetics 1 1447a28-1447b10) and Rhetoric (Rhetoric 3 1417a21-30).

[219] One scholar, Ford notes, suggests the evidence supports an estimate of 300 *Sokratikoi Logoi* composed between 395 and 370 BC. Andrew Ford, "The Beginnings of Dialogue: Socratic Discourse and Fourth-Century Prose," in The End of Dialogue in Antiquity, ed. Simon Goldhill (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2008), x. If we read the origin story Plato provides the *Theaetetus* at face value (see below), we could take it as evidence that *Sokratikoi logoi* were written before Socrates' death.

> **Euclides:** It was not long before his death, if I remember rightly, that he came across Theaetetus, who was a boy at the time. Socrates met him and had a talk with him and was very much struck with his natural ability; and when I went to Athens, he repeated to me the discussion they had had (τούς τε λόγους οὓς διελέχθη αύτῷ διηγήσατο), which was well worth listening to (μάλα ἀξίους ἀκοῆς). And he said to me then that we should inevitably hear more of Theaetetus, if he lived to grow up.
>
> **Terpsion:** Well, he appears to have been right enough—But what was the discussion? Could you tell it to me?
>
> **Euclides:** Good Lord, no. Not from memory (ἀπὸ στόματος [literally, "from mouth"]), anyway. But I made some notes (ἐγραψάμην …ὑπόμνημα) of it at the time, as soon as I got home; then afterwards I recalled it ay my leisure and wrote it out (ἀναμιμνῃσκόμενος ἔγραφον), and whenever I went to Athens, I used to ask Socrates about the points I couldn't remember (ὃ μὴ έμεμνήμην), and correct my version when I got home. The result is that I have got pretty well the whole discussion in writing. (142d-143a)

Euclides, a well-known Socratic and (according to Diogenes Laertius) author of six dialogues, goes on to read this "transcript," undoubtedly written by Plato's own hand. Whether Plato's attribution of the dialogue to Euclides is a generous citation or inside joke, he's careful to describe a specific chain of custody: a participant of a memorable conversation repeats it to another.[220] That auditor in turn writes it down—by memory and as an *aid* to memory—in order to repeat it to still others.

As with the tales of Diogenes Laertius, I do not suggest we take this "origin story" literally. It would be naïve to treat any given *Sokraitkoi logoi*—to say nothing of Plato's dense and lengthy dialogues— as a transcript of a real conversation. But the *pretense* of the

[220] The ancient record is full of gossip suggesting a lively intertextual rivalry between the Socratics, e.g. Diogenes Laertius reports Plato's grudge against Aeschines made him attribute Aeschines' words to Crito instead (in *Crito* DL 3.35-36), and Athenaeus says Aeschines made fun of Critobolus, Crito's son, by portraying him as "unwashed and uneducated" in his dialogue *Telauges* (in *The Learned Banqueters* 5, 200A). These anecdotes are collected in *The Circle of Socrates,* Chapter 11.

correlation says a lot about the Socratics' artistic ambitions: to *imitate* conversation with Socrates.[221] That ambition meaningfully differs from those animating other fourth-century prose works (*logoi*)—and the imitation of conversation produces a different kind of writer.

Andrew Ford suggests otherwise, making a compelling case that "the rhetorical culture of the fourth century shaped early dialogue at least as deeply as …the activities of Socrates."[222] The fourth century witnessed an explosion of prose forms, "especially speeches, either orations 'actually' delivered or samples of the kinds of speeches suitable for given occasions."[223] Socratic *logoi* emerged as one of many new genres of prose that documented, imitated, or fictionalized speech. Indeed, while Plato succeeded in canonizing the difference between philosophical dialogue and other *logoi*, Ford suggests that he's motivated to do so because "the difference between them [is] at times so slight."[224]

But while *Sokratikoi logoi* may have been born of the same *logoi*-mania as Antiphon's fictitious forensic speeches and Gorgias' show pieces, the Socratics' aspiration to imitate *informal* and *interactive* speech shaped and honed their abilities and sensibilities quite differently from those of the speech writers and sophists. As I argue below, imitating *informal* speech develops Plato's ear for speech as it naturally unfolds in time; imitating *interactive* speech makes him expert in miscommunication as well as communication.

Informal Speech

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[221] This pretense is even more striking in Xenophon, who makes repeatedly claims to have been an eye witness to the conversations he "recalls."
[222] Ford, "The Beginnings of Dialogue," 44.
[223] Ibid., 39.
[224] Ibid., 42. In the *Phaedrus*, Socrates argues that the real distinction between prose writers, poets and lawmakers is not the genre or medium in which they write but whether or not they have knowledge. Those with knowledge can call themselves "philosophers" and drop their other affiliations.

Greek prose literature developed much later than poetry—and likely in close relationship to oratory. Dover suggests "the most important single model for the first prose-writer" was the trove of political and forensic speeches transcribed and circulated in the last quarter of the fifth century.[225] Writing prose was, in other words, a byproduct of *writing down* speech—not "natural" but *formal* speech. Prose writing began first to record, then to imitate, an oratorical tradition already freighted with "stylistic expectations"—each according to its genre—which were "the product of evolution over many centuries."[226] When the sophist or *logographos* (speech writer) tried his hand at writing encomium or apology, he did so according to the *topoi* (topics) and *lexis* (diction, style) appropriate to the genre.

On the other hand, the writers of *Sokratikoi logoi* modeled their writing on *informal* speech. Indeed, Hordern suggests Plato's reputed affection for Sophron's mimes may pick up on their mutual interest in mimicking "the liveliness and rapidity of everyday speech."[227] Unlike writers imitating formal speech genres, Plato and friends imitated "words as they chanceably fall from the mouth"—as Sir Philip Sidney put it—"table-talk fashion."[228]

Indeed, in Plato's *Apology,* Socrates refers to his usual manner of speaking as "chancy"—"things spoken at random and expressed in the first words that come to mind"

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[225] Dover, *Evolution of Greek Prose Style,* 59.
[226] Ibid., 60.
[227] Hordern, *Sophron's Mimes*, 11-12.
[228] Philip Sidney, "The Defense of Poesy," in *Classic Writings on Poetry*, ed. William Harmon (New York: Columbia University Press: 2003), 124.

(ούδὲ κεκοσμημένους, ἀλλ᾽ ἀκούσεσθε εἰκῇ λεγόμενα τοῖς ἐπιτυχοῦσιν ὀνόμασιν). In doing so, he distinguishes his speech from the conventions of forensic oratory practiced by his accusers—"expressed in embroidered and stylized phrases," literally "embellished with verbs and nouns" (κεκαλλιεπημένους γε λόγους… ῥήμασί τε καὶ ὀνόμασιν) (17c) Eschewing *generic* speech—the way of speaking appropriate to the law courts—Socrates will make his defense, he says, "in the same kind of language as I am accustomed to use in the marketplace by the bankers' tables" (17c).[229] Sidney's "table-talk fashion" is Socrates' "marketplace fashion": improvised speech using the words at hand. (Even the word "speech" is too formal, too clinical: Socrates *talks*.)

The ambition to imitate improvised speech is always met with paradox. The intentional representation—rather than spontaneous effusion—of improvised speech leaves traces of premeditation and revision. The purposiveness of art always interferes with spontaneity. But there are wonderful examples of Plato's commitment to the texture of "talk" in the dialogues. Victor Hösle points to a moment in the *Protagoras* (359b) when "Socrates does not quote verbatim Protagoras's earlier statement (349d) as one would do in a written work, but only paraphrases it—because that is what is done in a conversation"[230] (Hösle 29-30 f28). Plato *wrote* Protagoras's words at 349d; he might

[229] See also Sym 199b. In order to inoculate himself against comparison to Agathon's speech, notable for "the beauty of the words and phrases" (198b), Socrates warns "I'd like to tell the truth my way… You will hear the truth about Love, and the words and phrasing will take care of themselves" (ὀνομάσει δὲ καὶ θέσει ῥημάτων τοιαύτῃ ὁποία δἄν τις τύχῃ ἐπελθοῦσα.)

[230] At 349d Protagoras says, "What I am saying to you, Socrates, is that all these are parts of virtue, and that while four of them are reasonably close to each other, courage is completely different from the rest. The proof that what I am saying is true is that you will find many people who are extremely unjust, impious, intemperate, and ignorant, and yet exceptionally courageous." At 359b, Socrates paraphrases, "And he said that I would know this by the following evidence: 'You will find, Socrates, many people who are extremely

easily "take advantage of the material permanence" of his text, to use Jane Gallop's phrase, to place in Socrates' mouth those self-same words, just as I can copy and paste anything I typed above.[231] Instead, Plato has Socrates respond to the words *as spoken*, e.g. by memory and in his own words. As Gallop reminds us, "spoken language exists in time, not space, [so we must] catch what we can, forming impressions as we go along."[232]

Indeed, conversation exists in time and *takes* time. As I argued in Chapter 2, the *Euthyphro*'s ending pointedly reminds us that the conversation has both taken time (time passes) and is limited by time (time goes on). But the *Euthyphro*'s beginning, in its very form, demonstrates Plato's sensitivity to time as the medium of spoken language. Take the exchange between Euthyphro and Socrates at 3e.

S: What is your case, Euthyphro? Are you the defendant or the prosecutor?

E: The prosecutor.

S: Whom do you prosecute?

E: One whom I am thought crazy to prosecute.

S: Are you pursuing someone who will easily escape you?

E: Far from it, for he is quite old.

S: Who is it?

E: My father.

S: My dear sir! Your own father?

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impious, unjust, intemperate and ignorant, and yet exceptionally courageous; by this you will recognize that courage differs very much from all the other parts of virtue.'"

[231] Jane Gallop, "The Ethics of Close Reading: Close Encounters," *Journal of Curricular Theory* 16, no. 3 (Fall 2000): 12.

[232] Ibid.

E: Certainly.

S: What is the charge? What is the case about?

E: Murder, Socrates.

A lesser artist might have Euthyphro answer Socrates' original question once and for all, e.g.

S: What is your case, Euthyphro? Are you the defendant or the prosecutor?

E: I am prosecuting my father for murder, Socrates.

Instead, Plato *paces* the exchange. Protraction (Euthyphro takes six lines to say what he could have in one), indirection ("one whom I am thought crazy to prosecute") and gradation (feeding Socrates information bit by bit, e.g. "The prosecutor," "My father," "Murder") are native to conversation. Conversation unfolds at its own speed, and rarely maximizes "information flow."

A geometric proof, while it progresses from premises to conclusions, does not progress in time. By committing to the mimesis of conversation, Plato yokes himself to the temporal, as well as dialectical, unfolding of Socratic conversation. Indeed, even the irritating chorus of "yes, Socrates," "certainly" familiar to any reader of the dialogues—irritating to the logical mind for interrupting the argument, irritating to the artistic mind for disarming the interlocutor—is a temporal marker, a persistent reminder that the argument is being arg*ued*.

Interactive Speech

Because improvised speech unfolds temporally, the speaker must organize her thinking as she goes. Masterful speakers can achieve a high level of organization, even when speaking extemporaneously. When the auditors of Agathon's speech in the

Symposium break into applause at the end, they are no doubt impressed—as Socrates says he is—by the elaborate poetical rhythms in its peroration.[233] Rhythm is one way speech can be organized, although it is not the way typical of *prose* (Agathon is a tragedian, after all). A speaker can also organize speech by describing its own organization ("First," "then," "in conclusion"). Socrates "praises" Agathon's speech by comparing him to Gorgias (198c), perhaps a reference to Agathon's first lines, "I wish first to speak of how I should speak, and then to speak" which Dover compares to a fragment of Gorgias, "May I be able to say what I wish to say, and may I wish to say what I should" (Gorgias AS B vII 42 = DK 82 B 6).[234]

Thus even improvised speech—if practiced by the likes of Gorgias and Agathon—can attain a high level of organization.[235] But when improvised speech is also *interactive*—exchanged between two or more speakers—it tends towards disorganization. Whereas, in continuous and extended speech, I can settle on a line of inquiry and develop my arguments point by point, to share inquiry is to risk confusion and cross-purposes.

The *Euthyphro*'s "argument" begins when Socrates first asks Euthyphro "what kind of thing godliness and ungodliness are" (5d). Euthyphro replies:

> I say that the pious is to do what I am doing now, to prosecute the wrongdoer, be it about murder or temple robbery or anything else, whether the wrongdoer is your father or your mother or anyone else; not to prosecute is impious. (5d-e)

Euthyphro hasn't answered the question Socrates asked. Socrates stressed that he wanted to know the *kind* of thing holiness and unholiness are—"both as regards murder and other

[233] Socrates: "The other parts may not have been so wonderful, but that at the end! Who would not be struck dumb on hearing the beauty of the words and phrases?" (198b).
[234] Dover, *Greek Prose Style*, 171.
[235] Gorgias, according to ancient sources, began the practice of improvised oratory.

things"—and got Euthyphro to agree that "everything that is to be impious presents us with one form or appearance in so far as it is impious" (5c-d). Euthyphro's answer picks up on the extension of murder to "other things"—"murder or temple robbery or anything else"—but can't make the leap to "one form or appearance." Euthyphro is able to abstract away from his own, particular case to a certain extent (from "prosecuting my father for murder" to "prosecuting the wrongdoer") but not to the degree Socrates calls for. He's still tethered to "what I am doing now."

We can call the inadequacy of Euthyphro's first definition a "logical" failure; it is also a failure of communication.[236] Conversation is prone to disorganization because our ability to communicate to others, and listen to others, is imperfect. What the first speaker wants is not perfectly expressed. What the second speaker hears is partially determined by what *he* wants. To truly imitate conversation one must become a student of miscommunication.

Euthyphro offers his first definition of piety at 5d. If Platonic dialogue conformed solely to the logic of rational argument, Socrates' rebuttal would immediately follow. But the rebuttal comes at 6d—some *thirty lines* later. Euthyphro only partially answers the question the way Socrates wants, then continues on to the themes *he* wants to talk about. "I will, if you wish," he offers hopefully, "relate many other things about the gods which I know will amaze you" (6c).

A philosophy professor of mine recounted a story to his graduate class about an undergraduate who came to office hours to argue about an exam grade. He was applying

[236] This is hardly a failure unique to Euthyphro. Socrates gently chastises Theaetetus for a similar confusion—"I asked you for one thing and you have given me many" (146d)—although he isn't nearly as explicit with Theaetetus about what kind of thing he was after in the first place.

for law school, he pleaded, and anything lower than an A would hurt him. When this approach failed, he pointed out the exam was graded wrong. Our class laughed at this, rolling our eyes ("Northwestern students"). We laughed because the student failed to lead with the *actual* argument for changing his grade. But the story offers a more profound lesson: the young man argued, first, from what mattered most to *him*.

We're likely to be hard on Euthyphro for pulling the conversation off course (or rather, off *Socrates'* course). But it's a feature of conversation that things "come up" while other topics pass away. Left to its own devices, conversation—unlike narrative or argument— is a matter of "this and that" rather than "that because of this."

Of course, "Socratic" conversation is no ordinary conversation.[237] Socrates is on a *truth*-seeking mission, conducted through the examination of arguments, and he's spectacularly tenacious in his quest. Indeed, Socrates repeatedly buttresses inquiry against conversation's natural entropy. In *Euthyphro*, he avoids wrong turns (deferring Euthyphro's offer to relate amazing things about the gods to "some other time," 6d), he produces new avenues of inquiry when others dead end ("See whether you think that all that is pious is of necessity just," 11e), he helps his interlocutor better express what he means ("so that no word of yours may fall to the ground," 14d). He also keeps up the momentum of the conversation ("do not give up," 11e), bucks up his interlocutor ("pull yourself together," 12a) and reminds him of their aim ("the lover of inquiry must follow his beloved," 14c; "so we must investigate from the beginning…" 15d). Any teacher who has

[237] Although, as I endeavor to demonstrate, it is a *species* of conversation. I have been buoyed in this way of thinking by Anthony Laden's *Reasoning: A Social Picture*, which "casts reasoning as a species of casual conversation," not a thing apart from, but a more specialized form of, talking together. Laden, *Reasoning*, 48.

tried to marshal a classroom conversation can appreciate that rousing the flagging attention and energies of the conversants is half the battle, and Plato does not fail to represent the fog of war. Socrates directs the conversation not only by pursuing the argument, but by attending to the human motives—shame, pique, pride, exhaustion—which aid or interfere with its pursuit.

This adds evidence that the *Euthyphro* is not best described as a series of arguments, but as a representation of argu*ing.* Reasoning is a social activity and Socrates applies himself to the "*socius*" as well as to the activity. Indeed, as I will argue later in this chapter, Socratic conversation is aimed not only at seeking an object of knowledge—what is *x*?—but at revealing the soul of the subject in speech—who are *you*?

ii. Mode: direct speech alone

In the last section I suggested that the ambitions of *Sokratikoi logoi*—to imitate Socratic conversation—shaped Plato's writing practice in two ways: first, it encouraged him to imitate improvised speech; second, it made him fluent in miscommunication. In contrast to the writers of forensic speeches or sophistic logoi, the writers of *Sokratikoi logoi* learned to represent freewheeling conversation in everyday speech rather than extended and continuous speech circumscribed by genre conventions.

In this section, my distinctions grow finer: Platonic dialogue is the mimesis of conversation through direct speech *alone*. This differentiates Plato's dialogues from other *Sokratikoi logoi* —notably Xenophon's—which use both direct speech *and* narration. As in the previous section, I argue the distinction is not merely formal but formative. Because Plato only speaks in the words of others, he discovers the power of speech to *characterize*.

Like the dramatist, he has only speech. Xenophon, on the other hand, can use the ordinary means of gossip: direct commentary. Take for instance his portrait of Glaucon in the *Memorobilia*:

> When Glaucon the son of Ariston was trying to become a popular orator, because he was set on being the head of the State although he was not yet twenty years old, none of his friends and intimates could stop him; he was always getting dragged off the public platform and laughed at. The one person who prevailed upon him was Socrates, who was kindly disposed towards him for the sake of two people: Charmides the son of Glaucon, and Plato. Socrates happened to meet him and first won his attention by addressing him in the following way: 'Glaucon,' he said, "have you made up your mind to become the head of our State?"
>
> "I have, Socrates," he replied.
>
> "Yes, that is, without a doubt, a fine thing; I don't know that there is any higher human ambition. Clearly, if you succeed in it, you will have the power to obtain whatever you desire… you will gain distinction for your family…and you will win a name for yourself, first in our city, and then in Greece… Wherever you are, every eye will be fixed upon you."
>
> This description appealed to Glaucon's vanity, and he was glad to linger. (ταῦτ᾽ οὖν ἀκούων ὁ Γλαύκων ἐμεγαλύνετο καὶ ἡδέως παρέμενε.)
>
> (Xen. Mem.3.6) [238]

It's worth noting not only how much Xenophon *tells* us about Glaucon, but how this telling begins to shape a simple, but recognizable, plot: a concatenation of circumstances, motives, even outcome (we are clued in in advance that "the one person who prevailed upon him was Socrates"). While this beginning may seem mere "preface" to the conversation that comes, Xenophon functionally provides the "moral" of what's to come: Socrates diverts Glaucon from his purpose. As Diogenes Laertius reads *Euthyphro*, so Xenophon presents Socratic conversation: as a practical intervention in the life of his interlocutor.

[238] Xenophon, *Conversations of Socrates,* ed. Robin Waterfield, trans. Hugh Tredennick and Robin Waterfield (London: Penguin Books, 1990), 152-153.

In Xenophon's characterization of Glaucon, we can certainly see the young man we know from the *Republic*, the Glaucon whose ambitious nature inspires the luxurious city and, therefore, the whole of the discourse that follows.[239] But what Xenophon can simply tell us—Glaucon's political aspirations, Socrates' disposition towards him, Glaucon's vanity—Plato must show us. And what Xenophon tells us *in his own words*, Plato must show us *in the words of others*. Upon this distinction, Plato's art turns.[240]

Indeed, it's a fact so obvious it's hard to remember: not once does Plato speak *as Plato* in his dialogues. Even more remarkable, not once does Plato speak *as narrator*. Xenophon, on the other hand, both vouches for his work in his own voice (e.g. "I think it is worth recording what Socrates thought about his defence…" *Ap* 1) and uses the techniques of omniscient narration (e.g. "Now Euthydemus was glad to hear this, for he guessed that in the opinion of Socrates he was on the road to wisdom" [*Mem* 4.2.9]; καὶ ὁ Εὐθύδημος ἔχαιρεν ἀκούων ταῦτα, νομίζων δοκεῖν τῷ Σωκράτει ὀρθῶς μετιέναι τὴν σοφίαν.) On the other hand, every detail of a Platonic dialogue—from setting to shifts in mood to moments of silence—come to us *voiced* and in someone *else*'s voice.[241] Even dialogues that include

[239] Glaucon interrupts Socrates' description of the "healthy" city—that which is created to meet human needs (369c)—to complain that its inhabitants are fed no better than pigs. What about "delicacies and desserts"? (372d) In other words, what about *desire*? In Socrates' opinion "the true city…is the one we've described, the healthy one" (372e) but for Glaucon's sake—we might say, to account *for* as well as on account *of* Glaucon—the luxurious city, and therefore the Guardians, are born. Note with what complexity Glaucon's character, the vicissitudes of conversation, and theoretical content are linked!

[240] Kurke points out that "scholars have asked repeatedly, why does Plato *write*? And why does he write *dialogues*?" She would add, "why does he write *prose*?" Kurke, *Aesopic Conversations*, 246 fn 14. By my standards, these questions are satisfactorily answered with reference to the *Sokratikoi logoi*—like many of Socrates' other friends and disciples, Plato wrote, wrote dialogues, and wrote them in prose. The really interesting question is: Why did he write *without* narration?

[241] E.g. the Hippias Minor begins with Eudicus noting Socrates' silence.

long stretches of narration are *impersonated* narration: Socrates narrates the *Republic*, not Plato.

In the Conclusion of this dissertation, I will explore how these facts come to bear on our reading of the dialogues. For now I am interested in how these facts explain Plato as a writer. And the most obvious entailment of representing human beings by means of speech alone is that you must learn to represent a man by his *own way* of seeing (or "speaking") the world.

In the passage above, Xenophon says Glaucon ἐμεγαλύνετο (from μεγαλύνω, "to make great," in the middle voice, "to boast oneself"). Xenophon's description of Glaucon's could not be Glaucon's description of himself. Nobody can say "I boast" and *also* be boasting. Nobody truly vain would call themselves vain. From the inside, excessive pride or self-regard is appropriate pride or self-regard.

It's "from the inside"—from within their own ways of cognizing the world—that Plato makes his characters speak. Take, for example, Euthyphro's reaction to hearing the charges (being a "maker of gods" and disbelieving the old ones) leveled against Socrates.

> I understand, Socrates. This is because you say that the divine sign keeps coming to you. So [Meletus] has written this indictment against you as one who makes innovations in religious matters, and he comes to court to slander you, knowing that such things are easily misrepresented to the crowd. The same is true in my case (ἐμοῦ… τοι). Whenever I speak of divine matters in the assembly and foretell the future, they laugh me down as if I were crazy; and yet I have foretold nothing that did not happen. Nevertheless, they envy all of us who do this. One need not worry about them, but meet them head on. (3b-c)

Euthyphro makes sense of the world by reference to his "own case." In Socrates' persecution, he is quick to see his own; indeed, he *perceives* Socrates' persecution in such a way as to *confirm* his own. Later, Socrates suggests he is persecuted because he does *not*

believe what Euthyphro believes about the gods, one of many attempts to highlight the differences between them.[242] But egotism pulls everything into its own orbit, constellating new information into pre-existing patterns ("such things are easily misrepresented to the crowd," "they envy all of us who do this").

In Plato's representation of speech, character and cognition go hand in hand. Indeed, Plato's art allows us to see that *character* flaws become *cognitive* errors and vice versa. Euthyphro's inability to look beyond *his own* case results in the failure of his first definition of piety, discussed in the section above. More troubling, Euthyphro proves immune to distress that his arguments don't hold up—it is sufficient that they are *his own* to satisfy him.[243] Meanwhile, Euthyphro's quickness to compare himself to Socrates is reproduced in the untroubled analogy he makes between himself and Zeus.[244] Euthyphro's habit of self-reference coercively organizes his thinking.

In his portrait of Glaucon, Xenophon efficiently captures the man's manners—his outward behavior and social bearing. But by representing man in *his own* words, Plato develops the knack for representing his manner of mind: the strategies for making meaning he habitually turns to (or from), his mental posture and mode of address, his preoccupations and blindspots. It is certainly possible to examine the "matter" of Euthyphro's mind—his definitions and propositions—stripped from the "manner" of Euthyphro's mind. But to do so sacrifices the essential connection between them.

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[242]At 6a. Compare Euthyphro's "all of us" at 3c to Socrates' "you prophets" at 3e. Walker, *Plato's* Euthyphro, p. 48.

[243] "[A]s far as I am concerned [my arguments] would remain as they were" (11d1-2).

[244] "These people themselves believe that Zeus is the best and most just of gods, yet they agree he bound his father because he unjustly swallowed his sons…. But they are angry with me because I am prosecuting my father for his wrongdoing" (5e).

iii. Medium: prose

In the last section, I suggested that Plato's choice to write in direct speech alone affects his characterization of human beings. By impersonating the speech of others, Plato is able to show how his characters cognize the world. In this section, I add a final qualification: Platonic dialogue is the mimesis of conversation, in direct speech alone, in *prose*.

As I demonstrated in Chapter 2, tragedy and Platonic dialogue sit at opposite poles with respect to their ultimate ends and effects. But in how they represent speech, they share much in common. Tragedies, like the *Sokratikoi logoi*, represent conversation (as well as extended speech, choral chant, and other forms of speech). And, like Plato, dramatists characterize their dramatis personae without the aid of narrative surplus. But the dramatists write mimetic *poetry* where Plato writes mimetic *prose* and, as I will argue in this section, the difference makes a difference.

That tragedy and Platonic dialogue share formal similarities can be seen in a glance by pairing an excerpt from *Euthyphro* with an excerpt from Euripides' *Alcestis*:

Euthyphro (3e-4a)

S: What is your case, Euthyphro? Are you the defendant or the prosecutor?	Σ :ἔστιν δὲ δὴ σοί, ὦ Εὐθύφρων, τίς ἡ δίκη; φεύγεις αὐτὴν ἢ διώκεις;
E: The prosecutor.	Ε: διώκω.
S: Whom do you prosecute?	Σ: τίνα;
E: One whom I am thought crazy to prosecute.	Ε: ὃν διώκων αὖ δοκῶ μαίνεσθαι.
S: Are you pursuing someone who will easily escape you?	Σ: τί δέ; πετόμενόν τινα διώκεις;
E: Far from it, for he is quite old.	Ε: πολλοῦ γε δεῖ πέτεσθαι, ὅς γε τυγχάνει ὢν εὖ μάλα πρεσβύτης.
S: Who is it?	Σ: τίς οὗτος;
E: My father.	Ε: ὁ ἐμὸς πατήρ.
S: My dear sir! Your own father?	Σ: ὁ σός, ὦ βέλτιστε;
E: Certainly.	Ε: πάνυ μὲν οὖν.
S: What is the charge? What is the case about?	Σ: ἔστιν δὲ τί τὸ ἔγκλημα καὶ τίνος ἡ δίκη;
E: Murder, Socrates.	Ε: φόνου, ὦ Σώκρατες.

Alcestis[245] (512-522)

H: What trouble do you mark by these shorn locks?

Ἡ: τί χρῆμα κουρᾷ τῇδε πενθίμῳ πρέπεις;

A: I am going to bury a corpse on this very day.

Ἄ: θάπτειν τιν᾽ ἐν τῇδ᾽ ἡμέρᾳ μέλλω νεκρόν.

H: God keep woe from your children!

Ἡ: ἀπ᾽ οὖν τέκνων σῶν πημονὴν εἴργοι θεός.

A: My own begotten still live within the house.

Ἄ: ζῶσιν κατ᾽ οἴκους παῖδες οὓς ἔφυσ᾽ ἐγώ.

H: Your father, if it is he who perished, was, at any rate, well on in years.

Ἡ: πατήρ γε μὴν ὡραῖος, εἴπερ οἴχεται.

A: Yet he still lives and so, too, Heracles, she who bore me.

Ἄ: κἀκεῖνος ἔστι χή τεκοῦσά μ᾽, Ἡράκλεις.

H: Surely, then, it is not our wife Alcestis who has perished?

Ἡ: οὐ μὴν γυνή γ᾽ ὄλωλεν Ἄλκηστις σέθεν;

A: Twofold is the story I might give of her.

Ἄ: διπλοῦς ἐπ᾽ αὐτῇ μῦθος ἔστι μοι λέγειν.

H: Do you mean she's dead or still alive?

Ἡ: πότερα θανούσης εἶπας ἢ ζώσης ἔτι;

A: She lives, and yet no longer lives, and this gives me pain.

Ἄ: ἔστιν τε κοὐκέτ᾽ ἔστιν, ἀλγύνει δέ με.

H: I'm none the wiser, for you speak in riddles.

Ἡ: οὐδέν τι μᾶλλον οἶδ᾽: ἄσημα γὰρ λέγεις

[245] The dialogue is between Ademetus, in mourning, greeting Herakles, who has just arrived and is ignorant of Alcestis' death.

All excerpts from Euripedes, *Alcestis,* ed. and trans. D. J. Conacher, Aris and Phillips Classical Texts (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2004).

Euthyphro and Socrates' exchange looks an awful lot like stichomythia—tragic dialogue in which characters speak alternating lines of verse. Moreover, Plato creates the effect of natural speech through a combination of protraction, indirection, and gradation. These same techniques shape the exchange between Herakles and Admetus. Admetus' reluctance to tell Herakles the truth modulates into full-blown deception rather than revelation, but the steps are the same: protracting the exchange and answering indirectly, bit by bit.

We can see why the author of Platonic dialogue might have been—or might be thought to have been—an aspiring playwright. Plato is happy to borrow the tragedians' techniques. But there are also notable differences in how these passages produce meaning that can help us understand how prose and poetry inflect speech differently.

First, poetry adheres to stricter requirements than prose in representing speech: the tragic poet must "fill the line." When Herakles complains, "you speak in riddles" he points out a feature of Admetus' speech, which must elaborately avoid telling the truth, but also of poetic speech, which must tell—whether truth or lie—elaborately. A. E. Housman parodies stichomythia by showing the strain verse places on natural speech:

> Chorus: To learn your name would not displease me much.
> Alcmaeon: Not all that men desire do they obtain.
> Chorus: Might I then hear at what thy presence shoots?
> Alcemaeon: A shepherd's questioned mouth informed me that—
> Chorus: What? For I know not yet what you will say.[246]

[246] Quoted to wonderful effect in Simon Goldhill, *Sophocles and the Language of Tragedy,* Onassis Series in Hellenic Culture (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 56.

The rhythmic requirements of stichomythia disallow brevity and bluntness…but insist on balance. Socrates's interlocutors would not be able to acquiesce so easily ("Certainly, Socrates," "Very true,") if Plato was forced to fill his line! Indeed, Xenophon may be teasing Plato, rather than Socrates, when he writes of Socrates' interlocutors: "'Certainly,', they said; and having once said 'Certainly', they all kept to this answer for the rest of the discussion." (Xen. *Symp*. 4.56)

"Filling the line" makes impossible a simple, single word answer to Herakles' question, "Do you mean she's dead or still alive?" That prose serves no such master makes Euthyphro's elaborate evasion of Socrates' simple, single word question (τίνα?) that much more noticeable. But there is something else remarkable in the reply, "One whom I am thought crazy to prosecute": Euthyphro's answer is not only evasive, it is filtered through the opinions of others.[247]

If Euthyphro's regard for others is refracted through his own egotism ("The same is true in my case"), his egotism is refracted through the regard of others ("they laugh me down as if I were crazy," "they envy all of us," "one whom I am thought crazy to prosecute"). Bakhtin, referring to a character of Dostoevsky,

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[247] Or perhaps Euthyphro's indirection is 'coy'… There's another way of reading Euthyphro's protraction, indirection and gradation: by drawing out the exchange, he maintains the upper hand, hinting at knowledge he stintingly distributes. After all, mystique must be maintained…. This is exactly the motive Socrates accuses him of at 3d ("perhaps you seem to make yourself but rarely available"), 11b ("do not hide things from me"), 12a ("you are making difficulties because of your wealth of wisdom"), 14c ("you are not keen to teach me"), and 15d ("you know [what piety is] and I must not let you go, like Proteus, before you tell me") But that's how we know this *isn't* what Euthyphro is up to. Socrates's irony works by ascribing Euthyphro agency where he demonstrates incompetence.

describes the phenomenon well: "the hero's words about himself are structured under the continual influence of someone else's words about him."[248] In *Euthyphro*, in Greek life generally, this "someone else" is pluralized: *they* are "the many."[249] This suggests a second deviation between the ways tragedy and Platonic dialogue imitate speech: tragedy externalizes the voices of "the many," Platonic dialogue internalizes them.

There are few soliloquys in Greek tragedy. Nearly every word is spoken to be heard or is *over*heard: the Chorus is almost always present on stage, watching, narrating, or commenting on the action. In *Alcestis*, once the deceived Herakles exits, the Chorus is ready to pounce: "Admetus, what are you doing? With so great a disaster confronting you, can you endure entertaining guests? How can you be so insensitive?" (551-2) In other words—what, are you crazy?

In *Euthyphro*, there is no Chorus. Indeed, there are no spectators at all. Unlike Plato's many dialogues that highlight the *witnessing* of Socratic conversation, there are no additional auditors.[250] And yet "they" are present, *internalized* in Euthyphro's speech. Euthyphro's words are in dialogue not only with Socrates, but with the many who think he's crazy (3c and 4a), the relatives who despise him (4d-e), and

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[248] Bakhtin*, Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics,* 207.
[249] The influence of "the many" on Euthyphro's speech is enough to consider the dialogue a companion to *Crito*, in which Crito's worry that, if Socrates does not escape, "many people…will think (πολλοῖς δόξω) that I could have saved you" (44b) prompts the argument. Where Crito is a conformist, Euthyphro is a contrarian, but both are keyed to the opinions of others.
[250] E.g. the crowd of boys in *Theaetetus*, the auditors gathered for Hippias's speech in *Hippias Minor*, Callias's guests in the *Protagoras*, the partygoers of the *Symposium*, the jury and audience of the *Apology*, the deathbed vigil of the *Phaedo*, etc.

the supporters of ordinary piety (5e -6a). Euthyphro is constantly referencing what "they say" and what they say about *him*. His angry family members, the laughing crowd are "present invisibly;" "deep traces left by [their] words have a determining influence" over Euthyphro's own.[251] Prior enmities and arguments animate his speech ("they say it is impious…"; "I have already said to others…"). The chorus is *inside* Euthyphro's head.

But what does this have to do with the difference between poetry and prose? The presence of the Chorus is a matter of stage craft, after all. Yet there is reason to believe prose is better able to exploit the essential sociability—or, "dialogicity"—of language.[252] Poetry (that is, tragic poetry) is restricted by decorum and rhythm, placing language at a remove from its "social life" in speech.[253] Prose is oppositely restricted—in Isocrates' phrase, to "the words of the citizens" (τῶν ὀνομάτων τοῖς πολιτικοῖς). It is exactly in virtue of using *common* words—words in common—that prose writers can exploit the diverse social contexts of language. Unlike Sophocles' Adamic "offspring of horses," "pack mule" belongs to a *community* of speakers. It does not shake off its past life on the lips of tradesmen and laborers. (Hence there is

[251] Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, 197.

[252] The essential "dialogicity" of language is one of Bakhtin's most profound insights and has *nothing to do* (as is often claimed) with "dialogue form." Dialogicity is a feature of two qualities of language. First, that no one of us is Adam, naming an object in the world for the first time. Every word picks a path to an object already spoken about, "entangled, shot through with shared thoughts, points of view, alien value judgments and accents." Bakhtin, *Dialogic Imagination*, 276. (Every time a student presses Shift F7 and chooses among the list of synonyms offered by Microsoft Word, she is self-consciously participating in the same process by which we choose all our words: confronting "a multitude of route, roads and paths that have been laid down in the objects by social consciousness" Ibid., 278.) Second, that every word is *addressed*, directed towards, and already anticipating, an answer. You might say, each word is in dialogue with its possible alternatives, as well as its possible hearings.

[253] As Bakhtin points out, rhythm strengthens the "hermetic quality" of poetry. Ibid., 298.

aristocratic disdain, as well as awe, in Alcibiades' comment: how could Socrates put a word like ἀρετή—excellence, virtue—in the same thought with a word like ὄνος—ass? In our demotic culture, we're more likely to cringe at the word "virtue"!) Prose words are borrowed, and exhibit traces of former use. The poetic word, on the other hand, must "immerse itself in Lethe, and forget its previous life in any other contexts."

Until now, in order to challenge the orthodox view of Plato's dialogues emerging, like Athena, out of the godhead, I have espoused a tempered view of their singularity. Plato shares his mimetic object— "conversation with Socrates"—with other writers of *Sokratikoi logoi*. He shares with the tragedians the representation of character by direct speech alone. But in developing the capacities of prose to represent the heterogeneity of speech, Plato has no precedent.

Consider the *Symposium*: all of the participants speak Greek… but with an accent. Compare Glaucon's street banter and Agathon's rhetorical polish, Diotima's mysticism and Eryximachus' technical tedium. Glaucon speaks in the vernacular register, appropriate to his context; Agathon speech modulates into poetry, appropriate to his profession. But Diotima and Eryximachus represent a divergence even more profound: Diotima speaks the language of the mystery cults, Eryximachus medicine's materialism. In other words, Plato puts into dialogue not just idiosyncratic viewpoints but whole worldviews—his society's modes of explanation and valuation, aesthetic tastes and common sense. Plato's "people in

speech" come not only from different regions and classes (dialects represented in tragedy) but also from different conceptual realms.

Plato's mimesis of speech, in other words, includes the mimesis of many *kinds* of speech, from idiolects, to discourses of knowledge, to rhetorical and literary genres.[254] Indeed, Plato makes use of speech not only to characterize men and their manners, but to demonstrate how speech speaks *us*.[255] In *Cratylus*, Socrates becomes "possessed" by language, able to spout etymological fireworks in the style of Euthyphro (our Euthyphro?); in *Phaedrus* he improvises a seduction speech he credits to "the lovely Sappho or the wise Anacreon (235c)."[256] Some things are only sayable—it seems—in someone else's language. Speech is not just "thought made flesh," emerging from interior experience to public expression, but also foreign substance, like drugs or food, that passes from the outer world to take up residence in the inner.[257]

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[254] See Andrea Nightingale's brilliant *Genres in Dialogue* which shows Plato's "intertexual encounters with traditional genres of poetry and rhetoric" including funeral oration, eulogy, tragedy and Old comedy. Nightingale, *Genres*, 193.

[255] By comparison, when Gogol, in his short story "The Tale of How Ivan Ivanovich Quarreled with Ivan Nikiforovich," compares Ivan Ivanovich's manner of offering snuff ("Dare I beg you, sir, though I have not the honour of knowing your rank, name, and family, to do me the favour?") to Ivan Nikiforovich's ("Do me the favour") he is characterizing men by their speech. On the other hand, when Gogol represents Ivan Nikiforovich's legal appeal ("Wherefore, I, the noble Ivan Dovgotchkun, son of Nikifor, declare to the said district judge in proper form that if the said brown sow, or the man Pererepenko, be not summoned to the court …") he is characterizing a speech genre (officalese) that speaks *through,* even *in lieu of*, the man.

[256] In *Cratylus*, Hermogenes says Socrates is speaking "exactly like a prophet" and Socrates blames Euthyphro, whom he listened to at length earlier that day: "He must have been inspired, because it looks as though he has not only filled my ears with his superhuman wisdom but taken possession of my soul as well" (369d-e).

[257] Michael P. Zuckert, "The Insoluble Problem of Free Speech," *National Affairs* 37 (Fall 2018): 153. On speech as *pharmaka*, see *Phaedrus.* (Nightingale persuasively argues that both speech *and* writing stand accused: "it is clear that the logoi which Socrates has heard function in the same way as written discourse—as aliens that have (allegedly) occupied Socrates' psyche" Nightingale, *Genres*, 134). On

Indeed, Plato is acutely sensitive to the circulation of opinion on the back of language, i.e. that we adopt other people's thoughts through their language, and language through their thoughts. Euthyphro defensively fends off the opinions of others in a deeply internalized and unsettled dialogue that acknowledges (by trying to resist) them. Others—especially the young— absorb opinion osmotically. In *Theaetetus*, Socrates is quick to hear, behind Theaetetus's reply, a half-digested thought of Protagoras'. Theaetetus is "quoting," without quite knowing it, Protagoras' *Truth* (151e-152a). In *Charmides*, the titular hero is more blatant; having run out of steam he offers a definition of temperance based on what he "heard someone say" (161b). We are porous creatures, Socrates slyly warns the speech-loving Phaedrus, vulnerable to being "filled, like an empty jar" by the "words of other people" (235c-d).[258]

The masterworks of Greek epic, rhetoric and tragedy show men in their mastery of language. "Words also, and thought as rapid as air, He *fashions to his good use*," the Chorus sings in the "Ode to Man" (emphasis mine). Plato, on the other hand, shows the human being to be as much the creature of language as its master. Our words and thoughts are only half our own, shored up or entrenched in battle with

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speech—although Socrates chooses the word "teachings" (*mathemasin*)—as food, see *Protagoras*, 313d-314c: "When you buy food and drink from the merchant you can take each item back home from the store in its own container and before you ingest it into your body you can lay it all out and call in an expert for consultation as to what should be eaten or drunk and what not, and how much and when. So there's not much risk in your purchase. But you cannot carry teachings away in a separate container."

[258] Compare to what Socrates says about knowledge in the *Symposium*: "How wonderful it would be…if the foolish were filled with wisdom simply by touching the wise. If only wisdom were like water, which always flows from a full cup into an empty one when we connect them with a piece of yarn…." (175d)

the words of others. In other words, Plato marries the heterogeneity of speech to a psychological insight: our inner lives, too, are heteroglot. As I'll argue later in the chapter, Plato makes speech the fundamental site of human identity. Unlike our body, bestowed upon us by nature, we receive speech from human community. Therefore, unlike the body we're born with, we must *acquire* the identity of our speaking self.

Plato's orchestration of socially-distinct speech styles and genres — rendering "the full range of knowledge and beliefs" of his culture "while identifying the ideological perspectives from which that culture shapes and interprets its knowledge"— also testifies against stripping "arguments" from "utterances."[259] When the philosopher converts a statement from a natural into a formal language, he stops up his ears. The "proposition," abstracting content from form and context, is tone deaf. It can't tell Socrates speaking *as if* from Socrates speaking. It's perplexed by the incongruity of Theaetetus's reply, not sensitive—as Socrates is—to its "voice."[260] It converts Diotima's mysticism and Eryximachus's materialism into the same language. Surely, we must read the dialogues with our ears wide open.

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[259] This is Mendelson's description of the "encyclopedic author": "one whose work attends to the whole social and linguistic range of his nation, who makes use of all the literary styles and conventions known to his countrymen…who takes his place as national poet or national classic, and who becomes the focus of a large and persistent exegetic and textual industry comparable to the industry founded upon the Bible." Mendelson doesn't include him, but Plato fits the description. Edward Mendelson, "Encyclopedic Normatives: From Dante to Pynchon." *Modern Language Notes* 91, no. 6 (1976): 1268-9.

[260] Multiple commentators express surprise that, after identifying knowledge with geometry, Theaetetus is willing to describe knowledge as "perception."

Let me offer one concrete example, pertinent to the *Euthyphro*. Many scholars take for granted that the Euthyphro of the *Euthyphro* (Euthyphro$_E$) is the same Euthyphro referenced in *Cratylus* (Euthyphro$_C$).[261] Euthyphro$_C$ is "Euthyphro the Prospaltian," a prophet whom Socrates credits with inspiring his speech: "he not only filled my ears but took possession of my soul with his superhuman wisdom" (369d-e). So far, so good: Euthyphro$_E$ is a prophet and, we could imagine, prone to "lengthy discussion" of his knowledge of the divine (396d).

But the whole of Socrates' "inspired" discourse in *Cratylus* is a masterpiece of etymological rationalization. It is an imaginative, clever and rather elegant form of nonsense (e.g. Why are the gods named "*theoi*"? Because the first Greeks identified them with the celestial bodies—sun, moon and stars—which *run* [*thein*] across the sky). Euthyphro$_E$, on the other hand, shows no mark of sophistic virtuosity. The "strong proof" (μέγα… τεκμήριον) he brings to bear on his innocence from impiety is that Zeus "bound his father because he unjustly swallowed his sons, and that he [Cronos] in turn castrated his father for similar reasons" (5e-6a). This is the thinking of a fundamentalist, someone who takes stories of the gods literally—that is word for word, interpreting those words in their most obvious sense.

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[261] E.g. Nehamas: "What do we know about the character of Euthyphro? Nothing apart from what this dialogue and a few scattered references in Plato's Cratylus tell us." Nehemas, *Art of* Living, 36. Also McPherran: "There is also no evidence to support the idea that the Euthyphro of our dialogue is based on any particular historical individual, although most scholars agree that the character is the one mentioned in the Cratylus…." Mark L. McPherran, "Justice and Pollution in the Euthyphro," in *Plato's* Euthyphro, Apology, *and* Crito: *Critical Essays*, ed. Rachana Kamtekar (Lantham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2005), 12 fn 1.

Indeed, Euthyphro$_E$ might be a complicated joke at the expense of Euthyphro$_C$. Socrates tells Cratylus that the name "Orestes" ("Mountain Man") may have been given to him "by some poet, who displayed in his name the brutality, savagery and ruggedness of his nature" (394e). A more ironic poet, Plato has given his character, Euthyphro$_E$, a name meaning "straight thinker" from *euthys* (straight) and *phroneo* (to think or reason). But to get the joke you need to think etymologically, in the vein of Euthyphro$_C$.

This may seem a trivial discovery—and as the "punchline" of a Platonic joke, it is. But it also reveals something profound: our identity is *in* our speech. For, as I will argue at the end of Part II, the human being is, for Plato, first and foremost a *speaking* human being.

II. Plato's "People in speech"

In part I, I offered an "Aristotelian" definition of Platonic dialogue: "Platonic dialogue is the mimesis of Socratic conversation, in direct speech alone, in prose." Adding the contributions of Chapter 2 we could add "effecting wonder in the soul of the reader." But Platonic dialogue is not interested in speech alone, untethered from its speakers. Like the tragedians, Plato represents the character (*ethos*) and thought (*dianoia*) of his "people in speech"—but in revised constellation, re-imagining human psychology and the nature of moral choice (*prohairesis*). Specifically, I will argue:

(i) Plato revises the relationship between self and speech by showing us to be unreliable narrators of our own beliefs and motives.

(ii) Plato relocates moral choice from the conflict between "self and world" to "self and self."

(iii) The Socratic method ("elenchus") applies itself to our self-division by drawing out conflicting beliefs into open contradiction.

(iv) Speech attains to significant action when I *reveal myself* in speech.

Part II suggests that Plato proffers a vision, in his artistic representation of "people in speech," new to literature. It also advances the argument of Part I: that rending the arguments from their narrative world cuts an essential cord between thought, on the one hand, and think*ing* and think*er*. To this end, I will take a closer look at the Socratic "elenchus"—the method of argument by refutation which characterizes Socratic conversation in the so-called "Socratic dialogues."[262] Gregory Vlastos, who has more sensitivity to the dialogues' humanity than most, describes the Socratic elenchus as a "truth-seeking device," one which "search(es) out and destoy(s) his interlocutors' conceit of knowledge" while advancing "the search for truth."[263] I do not deny this description but aim to complicate it. Like Jonathan Lear, I worry that one will not fully appreciate the elenchus if one "focuses solely on the interlocutor's propositional attitudes" or "concentrates on [its] formal structure."[264] The Socratic elenchus, I'll argue, is not merely a "truth-seeking device" but a therapeutic tool for a

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[262] Sometimes called the "Socratic dialogues," sometimes called the "early dialogues," these are the nine or ten dialogues which feature a Socrates who only refutes but does not put forth claims. Gregory Vlastos lists them the early/Elenchic dialogues as: Apology, Charmides, Crito, Euthyphro, Gorgias, Hippias Minor, Ion, Laches, Protagoras, and the first book of the Republic. Gregory Vlastos, *Socrates: Ironist and Moral Philosopher* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 46.
[263] Ibid., 111-114.
[264] Jonathan Lear, "The Socratic Method and Psychoanalysis," in *A Companion to Socrates*, eds. Sara Ahbel-Rape and Rachana Kamtekar, Blackwell Companions to Philosophy (West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 457.

malady no one, before Plato, knew us to suffer. The elenchus seeks truth, but it also seeks to make us honest.[265]

i. *Ethos* and *Dianoia*

I begin by renewing the helpful contrast between tragedy and Platonic dialogue, aided by Aristotle's *Poetics*. Tragedy is, first and foremost, the mimesis of "people in action." But in addition to "action," Aristotle tells us, there are two other "objects" of tragic mimesis: *ethos* (character) and *dianoia* (thought):

> [*Dianoia*] is the capacity to produce pertinent and appropriate arguments, which is the task in prose speeches of the arts of politics and rhetoric. The older poets used to make their characters speak in a political vein, whereas modern poets do so in a rhetorical vein. Character (*ethos*) is the element which reveals the nature of a moral choice (*prohairesis*), in cases where it is not anyway clear what a person is choosing or avoiding (and so speeches in which the speaker chooses or avoids nothing at all do not possess character); while thought arises in passages where people show that something is or is not the case, or present some universal proposition. (Ch 6)

Euripides's *Alcestis* proves an excellent illustration of how praxis, ethos and dianoia hang together in tragedy. In the scene excerpted above, Admetus misleads Heracles about Alcestis's death so as to convince Heracles to stay as his guest. On Admetus's decision, the whole plot will turn. Once Heracles discovers Alcestis has died, he determines to repay Admetus by returning Alcestis to life. The scene supplies, therefore, a crucial plot point in the play's causal sequence of events.

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[265] This is Hannah Arendt's insight: "The role of the philosopher [is]…not to tell philosophical truths but to make citizens more truthful." Hannah Arendt, "Socrates," in *The Promise of Politics,* ed. Jerome Kohn (New York: Shocken, 2005), 15.

It also does the work of representing Admetus' *ethos* and *dianoia*, and by the means Aristotle describes. When the Chorus reprimands Admetus for encouraging Herakles to stay, he responds:

> But if I had sent him away from the house and from the city, when he came as a guest, would you have praised me more? Surely not, for my misfortune would have been in no way less and I would have been inhospitable as well. Then this would have been a further evil, in addition to my present woes, that my house should be called hostile to guests. Besides, I find this lord the best of hosts whenever at any time I go to thirsty Argos. (553-560)

Admetus' speech justifies his action by showing "what is" and what "is not the case": turning Heracles away would in no way be more praiseworthy; to be called hostile to guests is a further evil. In prizing hospitality above all else, we learn Admetus, like his wife, upholds traditional household virtues. In other words, Admetus' *ethos* is revealed by his *choice* and his *dianoia* through reasoned speech. Meanwhile, Admetus' choice will have consequences upon which his happiness depends. Character and thought, motive and consequence are thus knit together in a "single action."[266] No doubt this is an oversimplification of tragic practice.[267] Still, Aristotle's conceptual analysis captures something true of fifth-century Greek tragedy: "the

[266] Cf Blundell about Sophocles' *Ajax*: "In reaching this decision [to die], Ajax displays the kind of reasoning from moral premises to purposeful choice and action that qualifies him as the bearer of a well-articulated dramatic ethos." Mary Whitlock Blundell, "Ethos and Dianoia Reconsidered," in *Essays on Aristotle's* Poetics, ed. Amélie Oksenberg Rorty (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 170.

[267] It may be that the playwright discloses "a level of motive that the characters do not suspect." Price, *Forms of Life*, xii. Perhaps we are supposed to take Antigone's self-justification—that she might get another husband or child, but never another brother—at face value. But don't these lines represent *more* than Antigone's "reason" for burying her brother? Doesn't it also suggest the family curse—to privilege the birth family over exogamy – at work, but darkly, in her motives?

presentation of character…through explicit and even rhetorical statements of purpose" that clarify motives and justify actions.[268]

Let's compare Euripides' scene—and its representation of choice, character and thought—to the opening scene of the *Euthyphro*. It develops with certain superficial parallels. Like Admetus, Euthyphro has made a significant and non-obvious decision. ("Whom do you prosecute?" "One whom I am thought crazy to prosecute.") Like the Chorus, Socrates expresses surprise at his choice. ("Good heavens! Certainly, Euthyphro, most men would not know how they could do this and be right.") And like Euripides, Plato offers Euthyphro the chance to "reveal the nature of a moral choice" through reasoned speech:

> It is ridiculous, Socrates, for you to think it makes any difference whether the victim is a stranger or a relative. One should only watch whether the killer acted justly or not; if he acted justly, let him go, but if not, one should prosecute, if, that is to say, the killer shares your hearth and table. The pollution is the same if you knowingly keep company with such a man and do not cleanse yourself and him by bringing him to justice. (4b-c)

Indeed, Euthyphro produces a "universal proposition" to justify his actions. Like Admetus, he has chosen a course of action which subordinates personal considerations to an impersonal code of conduct. Admetus honors the obligations of hospitality, despite his personal loss; Euthyphro accepts the obligations of justice, whomever the victim or killer may be. Euthyphro's reasoned decision for prosecuting his father seems to meet Aristotle's criteria for *ethos* and *dianoia*. And

[268] Halliwell, *The Poetics of Aristotle*, 94.

yet… our willingness to accept Euthyphro's representation of his own motives has been undermined—by Euthyphro himself.

Euthyphro, like many of Socrates' interlocutors, is a man who claims to have "superior knowledge." But unlike Protagoras or Gorgias or Hippias, Euthyphro does not lay claim to a *reputation* for knowledge. Far from selling his wisdom at a profit, he admits to being laughed out of the assembly "whenever [he] speaks of divine matters" (3c)—a fact Euthyphro reports to Socrates with pride rather than shame. Twice he points out that people think him "crazy," but he wears the slight as a badge of honor: *he*, like Socrates, like "all of us" who tell the truth, is a victim of "*envy*" (3c4). In other words, Euthyphro is a man whose self-regard is flattered by his marginalization. It is proof of his superiority to be badly treated by the majority.

Yet, as we saw in Part I, Euthyphro can't disentangle himself from the opinions he claims to shun. One reminder of this can be found at 4e-5a. Euthyphro has just forcefully repudiated his family members' accusation of impiety: "For, they say, it is impious for a son to prosecute his father for murder. But their ideas of the divine attitude to piety and impiety are wrong, Socrates." Socrates prods, "Whereas…you think that your knowledge of the divine, and of piety and impiety, is so accurate that…you have no fear of having acted impiously?" Euthyphro answers: "I should be of no use, Socrates, and Euthyphro would not be superior to the majority of men, if I did not have accurate knowledge of these things" (ούδὲν γὰρ ἄν μου ὄφελος εΐη, ὦ Σώκρατες, ούδέ τῳ ἂν διαφέροι Εύθύφρων τῶν πολλῶν άνθρώπων, εί μὴ τὰ τοιαῦτα πάντα άκριβῶς είδείην). Euthyphro is

simultaneously distinguishing his identity from others (διαφέροι with the genitive means "to differ from," in this case from "the many") while naming that identity *from the perspective* of others—that is, in the third, rather than first person.

According to Euthyphro, Euthyphro is a principled actor, conducting himself according to a rigorous code of conduct whatever the cost. But by following the counter-currents of Euthyphro's *proclaimed* reasons for prosecuting his father, we might conclude that he prosecutes his father not *in spite* of popular opinion but *because* of it. If a conformist is enslaved to the opinions of others, so is Euthyphro: like every contrarian, he must continually consult those opinions in order to eschew them.

Tragedy gives great words to great deeds—and great powers of expression to great doers. The hero is fully endowed with the capacity to articulate her reasons and internal states. Except in moments of tremendous pathos, her expressive capacities are adequate to the task of expression.[269] No daylight appears between the self and the self reported.

Euthyphro, on the other hand, appears to be an unreliable narrator of his own motives and beliefs. The Euthyphro Euthyprho knows is not the Euthyphro we know. He has reasons for his reasons he does not understand.

In other words, Plato has revised the relationship between self and self-reporting speech. In Platonic dialogue, we can't count on speech to be a neutral

[269] As an example of incoherent speech there is, e.g. Philoctetes, whose speech, under the pressure of extreme pain, becomes nonsense.

vehicle for the expression of character or thought. Instead, speech is a dubious middleman, enabling the speaker to think (or "speak") himself other than who he is while, at the same time, betraying himself to us. Oedipus's Oedipus, of course, is not the Oedipus we know, and until he knows what we know, we hear his words differently than he can mean them. But Oedipus's identity is a secret in the past, waiting to be revealed. Euthyphro's identity, on the other hand, is a secret he keeps from himself.

ii. *Prohairesis*: Big and Small

"Character (*ethos*)," Aristotle writes in the *Poetics*, "is the element which reveals the nature of a moral choice (*prohairesis*)." In his commentary on the passage, Fyfe describes *prohairesis* as "a technical term in Aristotle's ethics, corresponding to our use of the term 'Will,' the deliberate adoption of any course of conduct of line of action" and continues:

> If character is to be revealed in drama, a man must be shown in the exercise of his will, choosing between one line of conduct and another, and he must be placed in circumstances in which the choice is not obvious, i.e., circumstances in which everybody's choice would not be the same. The choice of death rather than dishonourable wealth reveals character; the choice of a nectarine rather than a turnip does not. [270]

Of Plato's dialogues, only the *Apology* and *Crito* appear to represent such a choice: Socrates is willing to die rather than forsake his service to the god and chooses to obey the laws rather than escape his punishment. It would seem, in eschewing the

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[270] Aristotle, *Aristotle in 23 Volumes, Vol. 23,* trans. W.H. Fyfe (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1932) http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.01.0056%3Asection%3D1450b.

imitation of action for the imitation of speech, Plato loses the opportunity to show "man…in the exercise of his will." And yet, Aristotle's *Rhetoric* suggests otherwise, assigning to Socratic dialogue not only characterization, but characterization through *choice*:

> The narration ought to be indicative of character (*ethike*). This will be so if we know what makes for character (*ethos*). One way, certainly, is to make deliberate choice (*prohairesis*) clear: what the character is on the basis of what sort of choice [has been made.] And choice is what it is because of the end aimed at. Mathematical works do not have moral character because they do not show deliberate choice (for they do not have purpose), but the Socratic dialogues do (for they speak of such things)." (*Rhetoric* 1417a)[271]

What could he mean? This is the puzzle I will work out in the following two sections.

In his gloss on the *Poetics*, Fyfe unintentionally highlights the divide between artforms "ensouled" by plot and those animated otherwise. Plot-driven artworks are structured by the *assumption* that the choices that reveal character are the "big" ones: Do you bury your brother? Surrender your virginity? Save your hometown? Met by external threats, temptations, and exigencies, Antigone, Charicleia and George Bailey stand on character, reason from belief, and apply their wills to a course of action. The plot's formative conflict is between the hero and her world.

But what about life's "small" choices?[272] Two sisters look through their mother's jewelry. The elder bemoans the woeful lives of miners but is attracted to

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[271] Transl. Kennedy

[272] The visibility of "small choices" and other "small" movements of the human mind is often attributed to the realist novel. Pavel notes that Jane Austen examines her characters' "smallest…hesitations…least noticeable errors of interpretation, with the meticulous respect once reserved for grand moral dilemmas and monumental choices." Thomas G. Pavel, *The Lives of the Novel: A History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013), 205. Morson notes the (prosaic) novel's propensity to follow Tolstoy in insisting that "although we may imagine our lives are decided

an emerald ring and bracelet. She keeps them, giving the rest of the jewelry to her sister.

No conflict initiates the decision, and no consequences follow from it. Dorothea's choice is not much more than that of a sweet peach over a root vegetable (conventional over organic perhaps?). Like many of our daily decisions, it is less a conscious act of "Will" than mere precipitate of desires she only dimly perceives. Yet this early scene in *Middlemarch* certainly *does* reveal the character of its heroine. From her sister's perspective, "Dorothea was inconsistent: either she should have taken her full share of the jewels, or, after what she had said, she should have renounced them altogether."

The moral of this scene is not that Dorothea should have renounced the jewels, as "consistency" dictates—we could hardly wish on Dorothea a more consistent puritanism! Indeed, we are glad to learn Dorothea's innocent appreciation for sensuous beauty is not quite mastered by haughty asceticism. Rather, Eliot's *ethopoiia* (the Greek term for the "representation of character") reveals what Plato, too, reveals so well: human beings *who do not know themselves*. And—at least in Dorothea and Euthyphro's case—not for lack of principle, but because of it.[273]

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at important and intense moments of choice, in fact our choices are shaped by the whole climate of our minds, which themselves result from countless small decisions at ordinary moments." Gary Saul Morson, "Prosaics: An Approach to the Humanities," *The American Scholar* 57, no. 4 (1988): 521.

[273] Characters like Euthyphro and Dorothea (and Mr. Bulstrode) are less likely to see themselves clearly because they mould themselves on an idea. Celia, who has no such aspiration, has no such blindness.

Dorothea, like Euthyphro, has an image of herself, a “Dorothea’s Dorothea.” While she is taken by the color and beauty of the jewels she can’t square a purely sensuous pleasure with the self she takes herself to be: “All the while her thought was trying to justify her delight in the colors by merging them in her mystic religious joy.” Thought, seeking consistency, can think itself into anything: reason can supply reasons. Our very capacity for *logos* (both reason and speech) makes us not only rational but rationalizing creatures.

Euthyphro, too, makes consistency an idol, willing away the competing demands of piety to one’s father and reverence for the gods.

> These people themselves believe that Zeus is the best and most just of the gods, yet they agree that he bound his father because he unjustly swallowed his sons, and that he in turn castrated his father for similar reasons. But they are angry with me because I am prosecuting my father for his wrongdoing. They contradict themselves in what they say about the god and about me. (5e-6a)

Both characters are dimly worried by an inconsistency—but both locate the problem outside of themselves. Dorothea hurries to metabolize contradictory impulses; Euthyphro disavows competing demands. Both try “dispelling and removing the perplexity” rather than “understanding its true grounds.”[274]

The novel is a spacious art form and Eliot has the whole of her novel—years in the life of her heroine—to develop her heroine’s contradictory desires and bring them to crisis. Experience is Dorothea’s midwife. Plato has—in lieu of the “varying experiments of Time”—the varying experiments of Socrates. The Socratic elenchus, I

[274] Leon R. Kass, "The Aims of Liberal Education,” in *The Aims of Education*, ed. John Boyer (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1997), 88.

will argue, is not just a logical test for consistency, but a quickened crisis of self against self. Mathematical works give us problems to work out, but Socratic examination (to crib St. Augustine) makes us a problem to ourselves.

iii. The Elenchus

Eliot's novel demonstrates that our beliefs are likely to have less mastery over us than we believe. Plato's dialogue demonstrates that we have less mastery over our beliefs than we believe. Euthyphro, frustrated by Socrates' request to "tell me again from the beginning what piety is," after the failure of his first three attempts, replies:

> E: But Socrates, I have no way of telling you (ούκ ἔχω ἔγωγε ὅπως σοι εἴπω) what I have in mind, for whatever proposition we put forward (προθώμεθα) goes around and refuses to stay put where we establish it (ἱδρυσώμεθα).
>
> S: Your statements (σοῦ λεγόμενα), Euthyphro, seem to belong to my ancestor (ἡμετέρου προγόνου) Daedalus. If I (ἐγὼ) were stating them and putting them forward, you would perhaps be making fun of me and say that because of my kinship with him my conclusions in discussion run away and will not stay where one puts them. As these propositions (ὑποθέσεις) are yours (σαὶ), however, we need some other jest, for they will not stay put for you (σοὶ), as you say yourself (αὑτῷ σοι δοκεῖ). (11b-c)

Throughout the dialogue, Euthyphro and Socrates have engaged in a tug-of-war waged through verb forms and pronouns. From the beginning, Euthyphro has tried to unite himself and Socrates in a persecuted brotherhood. From the beginning, Socrates has pointedly disentangled their interests and beliefs.[275] Here,

[275] At 3c Euthyphro suggests he and Socrates are in the same boat ("the same is true in my case;" "they envy all of us who do this") because the many indict Socrates and laugh at him. Socrates objects: "to be laughed at does not matter perhaps" and "if then they were intending to laugh at me, as you say they laugh at you, there would be nothing unpleasant" but "if they are going to be serious, the outcome is not clear except to you prophets" (3c-e). Later, Socrates also makes a point of disavowing the stories of the gods Euthyphro confirms he believes (6a-c).

Socrates' effort to escape Euthyphro's "we" is especially noticeable in his intensification of second person pronouns ("your statements" σοῦ λεγόμενα; "the hypotheses are yours," σαὶ … αἱ ὑποθέσεις εἰσίν; "as you say yourself" αὐτῷ σοι δοκεῖ) and first person pronouns ("our ancestor," i.e. the ancestor of me and mine, ἡμετέρου προγόνου; "if I were stating them" εἰ μὲν αὐτὰ ἐγὼ ἔλεγον).

But Euthyphro, if he's not going to share responsibility for the argument's failure, is going to evade it, complaining, "I am not the one who makes them go around and not remain in the same place; it is you who are the Daedalus (σύ μοι δοκεῖς ὁ Δαίδαλος); for as far as I am concerned (ἐπεὶ ἐμοῦ γε ἕνεκα, perhaps better translated as "if it were up to me") they would remain as they are." Socrates again demurs, joking that he must be far cleverer than his ancestor for Daedalus "could only cause to move the things he made himself, but I can make other people's things move" despite wishing "your statements to me (μοι τοὺς λόγους) remain unmoved…." (11c)

Why is Socrates so insistent Euthyphro's statements are *his own*? In other conversations, Socrates takes the opposite tack, describing inquiry as a joint search[276] and sharing in its failures.[277] While typically considered an "interlude"

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[276] E.g. the *Meno*, "I want to examine and seek together with you what [virtue] may be" (80d). Importantly, Socrates suggests this joint venture only *after* Meno has admitted to his own failure to define what virtue is: "Yet I have made many speeches about virtue before large audiences on a thousand occasions…now I cannot even say what it is" (80b). While Meno blames Socrates of disorienting him ("like the broad torpedo fish…[which] makes anyone who comes close and touches it feel numb") he acknowledges his own perplexity—something Euthyphro never does.

[277] E.g. the *Laches*, in which Socrates goes out of his way to share responsibility for the argument's failure. Note the repeated use of plural pronouns and verb forms: ": …our deeds do not accord with our words. By our deeds, most likely, the world might judge us to have our share of courage, but not

between arguments, this scene, I suggest, represents the moral center of the *Euthyphro*—and of every elenchic encounter. It represents the *prohairesis* at the heart of Socratic dialogue: the choice to confront one's self, to set Euthyphro and Euthyphro's Euthyphro at odds with one another. This is not an element of the elenchus that can be captured or conducted in formal logic.

Love of knowledge begins in acknowledging our lack of it. The *Meno*, which embeds in the exchange between Socrates and Meno's slave the elenchic method in miniature, describes its stages well. At first "[the slave] thought he knew, and answered confidently" (84a) but then he "realized he did not know and longed to know" (84c). But the necessary throughway from mistaken possession of knowledge to desirous longing for it is *loss*: "before, he did not think himself at a loss, but now he does" (καὶ ούχ ἡγεῖτο άπορεῖν: νῦν δὲ ἡγεῖται άπορεῖν ἤδη) (84a-b).

The Socratic method doesn't just confront us with contradictory propositions; it compels us to *self*-contradiction. We often talk loosely about Socrates' method as "unmasking" his interlocutors—as if Socrates' targets were mere hypocrites, or, as Celia judges Dorothea, "inconsistent."[278] This vastly underestimates philosophy's threat. Elenchus doesn't merely "catch out" a wise guy's ignorance or bring low the

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by our words, I fancy, if they should hear the way we are talking now."(ἐγώ τε καὶ σύ, ὦ Λάχης: τὰ γὰρ ἔργα ού συμφωνεῖ ἡμῖν τοῖςλόγοις. ἔργῳ μὲν γάρ, ὡς ἔοικε, φαίη ἄν τις ἡμᾶς άνδρείας μετέχειν, λόγῳ δ', ὡς ἐγῷμαι, ούκ ἄν, εί νῦν ἡμῶν άκούσειε διαλεγομένω.) (193e) Similarly, *Phaedo*: "This then is the first thing we should guard against…. We should not allow into our minds the conviction that argumentation has nothing sound about it; much rather we should believe that it is we who are not yet sound and that we must take courage and be eager to attain soundness." (90e-91a)

[278] The opposite of self-contradiction is not self-consistency. Dorothea, if she consistently lived by the principles she held at the beginning of the novel, would merely be a consistent prig. The opposite of self-contradiction is self-knowledge.

high and mighty; it attacks a man's *integrity*— that is, his sense of being whole and complete. The Socratic method leads man to discover his self-division.

But only if we acknowledge the contradiction is *in us*. For this reason, Socrates must urge Euthyphro to take responsibility for his propositions; otherwise Euthyphro can't be led to *self*-contradiction. Euthyphro sees that the arguments "[refuse] to stay put"—but without acknowledging they are *his* arguments, their failure *his* failure, he will never "think himself at a loss." Indeed, he never does: "for as far as I am concerned, [the propositions] would remain as they are" (11d). In the choice of honorable inadequacy over dishonorable integrity, Euthyphro choses to remain as he is.

In the last chapter, I pointed out that Plato sets his dialogues outside "the arena"—the courts, the senate—where matters of opinion are effective. But elenchus creates its own kind of arena, within the soul of the interlocutor. Socrates tells Theaetetus contradictory statements "fight one another in our souls" (ὁμολογήματα …μάχεται αύτὰ αὑτοῖς έν τῇ ἡμετέρᾳ ψυχῇ) (155b). And the soul suffers for it. In the last chapter, I described the pleasures of philosophical agency. But Socrates describes wonder (τὸ θαυμάζειν)—that where "philosophy begins and nowhere else"—as a pathos (τὸ πάθος), a feeling or experience one undergoes *passively*. Theaetetus describes its symptoms: "I often wonder like mad what these things can mean; sometimes when I am looking at them I begin to feel quite giddy" (ὑπερφυῶς ὡς θαυμάζω τί ποτ᾽ έστὶ ταῦτα, καὶ ένίοτε ὡς άληθῶς βλέπων είς αύτὰ σκοτοδινιῶ). (155c) While contradiction "fights" within the soul, the soul suffers

dizziness (σκοτοδινιάω, "to suffer from dizziness or vertigo"). The "headiness" of philosophical inquiry is also a kind of nausea. As Hannah Arendt writes, "the difference between the philosophers, who are few, and the multitude is by no means…that the majority know nothing of the pathos of wonder, but rather than they refuse to endure it."[279]

Some escape self-contradiction by disowning it (Euthyphro) or by turning paradox into mere play.[280] For others, like Adam after his fatal apple, inadequacy brings shame. Alcibiades escapes shame by running from Socrates; others turn on him, "literally ready to bite" (Theaet.151c). Others change their lives. Socrates (speaking as Protagoras) asserts that those who take such examination seriously "will loathe themselves, and seek refuge from themselves in philosophy, in the hope that they may thereby become different people and be rid forever of the men that they once were" (168a). If these converts suggest the therapeutic potential of Socratic examination, they also suggest its existential threat.[281]

Self-division is not foreign to Greek literature. Homer writes of Achilles "divided" (διάνδιχα μερμήριξεν, idiomatically, "halted between two opinions," Il.1.189) —as to whether to kill Agamemnon or stay his anger —and Hector "at a loss" (δίζω, from the root δίς twice, doubly; Il.16.710) whether to attack or retreat.

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[279] Arendt, "Socrates," 34.

[280] While Euthydemus and Dionysodorus play the role of interrogators, rather than interlocutors, in *Euthydemus*, they represent a style of argument that seeks contradiction—in others, not in themselves—for sport.

[281] At the edge of shame is a kind of terror. Our beliefs, true or false, are part of us. If they are threatened, we are.

In Euripides' justly famous *Medea* monologue, Medea is turned from, then back to, her bloody intention, swayed by and finally overcoming her love for her children.[282] But in each case, self-division is healed by decision. The indicative mood of action resolves the multiple hypotheses of thought. In Platonic dialogue, self-division is healed only by more thinking—if it can be endured. Indeed, real thinking requires continued acts of self-division: in Socrates' words, thinking is "the conversation the soul has with itself."

iv. Speech as Thought, Speech as Action

> "'Yet what difference does it make?' he said: 'if you like, let us assume that justice is holy and holiness just.'
>
> 'No, no,' I said; 'I do not want this "if you like" or "if you agree" sort of thing to be put to the proof, but you and me together; and when I say "you and me" I mean that our statement will be most properly tested if we take away the "if."'" –*Protagoras* 331c-d
>
> "Your If is the /only peacemaker; much virtue in If." -Touchstone, *As You Like It*

In my second chapter, I noted that Plato's Socrates converts practical concerns (is it impious for Euthyphro to prosecute his father? how should Lysimachus and Melesias educate their sons?) into theoretical questions (what is piety? what is courage?) By doing so, Socrates abstracts the goals of the conversation from any "outside event or action to which the exchange of views ultimately connects."[283] This, after all, is what theory does: it creates distance

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[282] Knox notes "This speech was undoubtedly a new experience for the Athenian audience. The dramatic wavering back and forth between alternatives—four complete changes of purpose in less than twenty lines—marks the beginning of an entirely new style of dramatic presentation. Even six years later, in the *Archanians*, Aristophanes is still regaling the audience with parodies of this speech…. It is excellent fooling, but shows clearly that the scene in the Medea had made an indelible and disturbing impression." Bernard M. W. Knox, "Second Thoughts in Greek Tragedy," *Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies* 7, no. 3 (2003): 225.

[283] Lowe, *Classical Plot*, 95.

between the facts on the ground and the matter under question, suspends the time-bound urgency of action for the contemplation of truth. Yet I also hold Plato represents Socratic conversation as "the action itself." How can conversation which pursues theoretical questions—abstracted from specific conditions, practical considerations, or immediate consequences—carry the existential investment of action?

After all, except under special conditions, speech allows us to be non-committal. Speech does not require me to commit myself, or commit to saying something true. In fact, that's the genius of speech in its aspect of thought: it allows us to hypothesize, to consider alternative possibilities—to reason. Theorizing is thinking "off line." By "if p, then q" we can entertain, rather than merely express, beliefs. Much virtue in "If."

Action, on the other hand, has no conditional mood. Action is always indicative. Only play, pretend—acting "as if"— shelters action from real conditions or consequences.

But—exactly because of its provisionality—speech can divorce the speaker and his speech. "If you like" rends assent from belief. By "if p then q" we accept a premise without committing to it. Unleashed from praxis, theorizing can also disassociate *dianoia* from *ethos* and nullify *prohairesis*.[284]

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[284] This explains Aristophanes' attitude towards Socrates and his ilk in *The Clouds*. On how rationality can divorce us from our identity, see A Kass, "Taming of the Shrewd."

Yet Socratic examination calls us, at key moments, to take responsibility for our speech, as when Socrates insists to Euthyphro "these propositions are yours" or tells Protagoras "I do not want this 'if you like' or 'if you agree' sort of thing to be put to the proof, but you and me together" (331c-d) or chastens Callicles "you'd no longer be adequately inquiring into the truth of the matter with me if you speak contrary to what you think" (*Gorgias* 495a) or asks Meno "But Meno…what do you yourself say that virtue is?"(71d) or Hippias "And do you yourself think so, Hippias?" (*Lesser Hippias* 365c) Mrs. Kass did the same when she asked me, "Ms. Martin, do you *really believe*...?"

By demanding we say only what we believe, Socrates insists both that speech be *truth*-seeking, and at the same time, *self*-revealing. Belief is belief that something is *true*. To speak my belief is to *avow*. "Ms. Martin, do you *really believe*...?" is also "Ms. Martin, do *you* really believe...?" In saying what I believe, speaker and speech are made accountable to one another. I put myself, with my speech, "on the line" (*Protagoras* 331c). Such a commitment ushers speech into the arena of critical action: one's speech and self will stand or suffer together.

In trying to goad Theodorus to take part in his conversation with Theaetetus, Socrates uses a wrestling metaphor—"Would you think it right to sit and watch other men exercising naked…and refuse to strip yourself alongside of them, and take your turn of letting people see what you look like?" (162b) His metaphor suggests that the courage to *expose* oneself in speech—to be vulnerable to loss, to risk inadequacy, to suffer shame—is essential to truth-seeking. Like the wrestler or

warrior, the lover of wisdom *risks* himself, risks his *self*, each time he offers his beliefs to the crucible of argument. Thus Socratic conversation unites, in speech, the excellence of *truth-ful* thought and *meaning-ful* action.

The Speaking Being

I wrote in the Introduction to the dissertation that Plato must develop a "taste" for philosophizing. This he achieves by a revolution of values: by claiming for the activity of philosophy the significance of action. No mere presentation of arguments could do as much. By revealing what is worth doing ("the unexamined life is not worth living…")—indeed, what *counts* as "a doing"—Plato re-imagines what a human being is ("…for a human being.") The human being is, first and foremost, a speaking human being.

"Handsome is as handsome says," Socrates says in the *Theaetetus* (185e). There's something intrinsically honest about our *body* as a site of identity: beauty and ugliness reveal themselves immediately to the senses. When Eurikleia discovers the perpetually-lying Odysseus' identity by the scar on his thigh, it's because his body *cannot* lie. But we can hide our souls, including from ourselves.

In epic and tragedy, the body is the fundamental site of human identity, and mortality—the frailty and fleetingness of the body—the primary fact of human existence. Heroic activity *risks* that self—"life and limb"—in full view of men and gods. Glorious deeds, heroic deeds, are done by the light of day so that they may be *seen*.

In Platonic dialogue, speech is the fundamental site of human identity. When we orient our speech to truth, we willingly expose the soul. In avowed speech, I appear to myself as well as to others.[285] To participate in Socratic conversation is to put oneself inside the arena, risking not “life and limb” but, just as dear, self and belief.

But unlike the epic or tragic hero, the “hero of speech” is she who willingly *loses*. We think of the moral hero as he who “stands up for his beliefs.” As Bernard Knox points out, Sophocles’ heroes, to a one, refuse to *yield*. Ajax and Antigone remain stubbornly Ajax and Antigone to the bitter end. Oedipus, even though he learns he is not who he thinks he is, is admirable for continuing to be—under the most extreme circumstances—who he is.

> The inflexible resolution of the Sophoclean hero stems from…the aristocratic idea of a man's *physis*, his ‘nature'. “Physis,” says Albin Lesky, is a man's permanent possession, his inalienable and unchanging inheritance ... what man inherited through his descent determined his essence once and for all.[286]

Rendered by Plato, human nature is quite a different thing, and heroism, while it requires traditional virtues (courage, temperance, justice), directs them to different ends. In the philosophical arena, he who wins is he who is willing to lose, and endure his loss. The philosopher must always remain willing to expose himself to logos and, if logos and life are to be responsible to one another, to its life-altering implications.

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[285] Arendt claims this virtue only for the polis as “the public-political realm in which men attain their full humanity, and their full reality as men, not only because they *are* (as in the privacy of the household) but also because they *appear*.” Arendt, “Socrates,” 21.
[286] Knox, “Second Thoughts in Greek Tragedy,” 220.

Conclusion

In the last two chapters, I have argued that Plato, by abandoning the explanatory mechanism and structural unity of plot, shows us a more “realistic” world as well as points us to a more “real” one. I have argued that Plato’s imitation of speech reveals the temporal, characterological and linguistic aspects of reasoning. And I have argued that Plato’s human being is fundamentally a speaking being, whose identity can be alienated, and must be acquired, by speech. This completes one half of my quest for genre knowledge, revealing how Platonic dialogue helps us “to see aspects of reality in a new way.”[287]

We have also gained the key to unlocking the “genre confusion” at the heart of our interpretive impasse. But the answer to the question “Is Platonic dialogue philosophy or literature?” is not “philosophy” or “literature.” To put it boldly: Platonic dialogue is the mimesis of people in speech.[288] This best explains the “kind of text” it is.

How so? The key is the dual nature of speech. Michael Zuckert reminds us:

> Speech is a hybrid in that it partakes of both thought and action. Thought is inward, silent, and concealed. So long as it remains purely inward, it has minimal effects on the world. Speech is the *expression* of thought, whether vocally or via the written word….
>
> Understood this way, speech is *thought made flesh* — made actual in the world, either visibly or audibly. Speech becomes a presence in the social

[287] Morson and Emerson, *Creation of a Prosaics*, 277. Of course, attention to plot, speech, character and choice hardly exhaust the “literary elements” of Platonic dialogue. To complete an anatomy, we would need to attend to Plato’s myths, intertextual allusions, “first words,” and, perhaps his most significant achievement, his heroization of Socrates.

[288] More specifically, the mimesis of truth-seeking, self-revealing conversation in direct speech alone in prose effecting wonder in the souls of the reader!

> world, and can directly affect those in it. Speech as thought made flesh is also a form of action.[289]

Put another way, *logos*—the word— is both referential, a "tool for general reasoning about universal subject matter," and performative, something we *say* and *do*.[290] Plato's writing is organized to disclose the hybrid nature of speech—its ability to point beyond the here-and-now, and its agency *in* the here-and-now.

In Chapter 1, I described Platonic dialogue as a discomforting "combination" of conceptual thought and literary mimesis. But from this new vantage point we can see more clearly: Plato is not "combining" alien forms of writing so much as he is refusing to *alienate* the dual aspects of speech. In order to represent speech *both* in its truth-seeking *and* transformative aspects he must use *both* argument *and* mimesis. Argument in a "continuous, impersonal tract" — or geometric proof — represents reasoned *thought*.[291] It molts the characterological and time-bound aspect of think*ing*. Mimetic fiction, on the other hand, subordinates the thought-fulness of speech to its agency in the social world. Dialogue, the novelist Elizabeth Bowen writes, "[s]hould not on any account be a vehicle for ideas for their own sake." Rather, literary mimesis represents speech in its aspect as action: "speech is

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[289] Zuckert, "Insoluble Problem," 153.

[290] Susan Prince, "Words of Representation and Words of Action in the Speech of Antisthenes' *Ajax,*" in *Antisthenica Cynica Socratica,* ed. Vladislav Suvák, Mathésis, vol. 9 (Prague: Oikoymenh, 2014), 178.

[291] Lowe, *Classical Plot*, 95.

what the characters *do* to each other" [292] (emphasis mine). Only by using the techniques of both argument and mimesis can Plato represent our life in language.

Plato represents speech in its aspect as both thought and action and, therefore, resists being read *only* as argument or *only* as mimetic fiction. It neither conforms (a) to the *logical structure* of expository argument nor (b) to the *plot-structure* of epic, tragedy and much of Western narrative.

(i) While rational concepts stand aloof of time and perspective, Plato represents reasoning unfolding in time and between people. Therefore, Platonic dialogue is only partially organized by logical entailment and constantly threatened by rupture (e.g. from hiccups, non-sequitur, hurt feelings, long-windedness, sleepiness, unexpected arrivals and prior appointments— to list a few featured in the dialogues). "What happens next" in a conversation with Socrates is only sometimes determined by logical entailment. At other times human motives rule: Socrates' need to buck up a flagging interlocutor, for example, or coax a shy one. The "logic" of Socratic argument is also dictated by the "logic" of human shame, pique, pride and desire.

(ii) On the other hand, readers who love "a good story" expect events sequenced in a legible history of cause and effect that show human beings

[292] Elizabeth Bowen, "Notes on Writing a Novel," *Narrative Magazine* (Fall 2006): https://www.narrativemagazine.com/issues/fall-2006/classics/notes-writing-novel-elizabeth-bowen. Thanks to Reg Gibbons for this citation.

> in the "active pursuit of goals."[293] But Plato's Socrates abstracts the goals of the conversation from any "outside event or action to which the exchange of views ultimately connects."[294] The dialogues are not ultimately powered by the explanatory mechanism of *muthos* (plot)—which organizes knowledge in and of events, agents, motives and consequences—but that of *logos* (reason).

To take Platonic dialogue as the mimesis of speech helps us understand its "mixture of two such disparate modes of expression as conceptual argument and literary drama."[295] It even helps us understand *why* we argue about whether Platonic dialogue is philosophy or literature: when we treat the speech of Socrates and Euthyphro in its aspect as thought, we read Platonic dialogue as philosophy. When we treat the speech of Socrates and Euthyphro in its aspect as action, we read Platonic dialogue as literature. Understanding Platonic dialogue as the mimesis of speech can also help us understand the "problems of Plato's poetics."

The Integrity Problem

"And while we were thus speaking and straining after [Wisdom], we just barely touched her with the whole effort of our hearts. Then with a sigh, leaving the first fruits of the Spirit bound to that ecstasy, we returned to the sounds of our own tongue, where the spoken word had both beginning and end."
-*Confessions,* St. Augustine

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[293] Halliwell, *Poetics of Aristotle*, 97.

[294] Lowe, *Classical* Plot, 95.

[295] Dorter, "Reply to Joachim Dalfen," 225. Although I do not care for the word "mixture," which suggests quantitatively separate "components" rather than qualitatively distinguishable *aspects*. The duck-rabbit illusion is not a "mixture" of a duck and rabbit but a hybrid.

The Integrity Problem, as I described it in the first chapter, is this: are the arguments in Platonic dialogue subordinate to the literary fiction—so that the former gain their final meaning only in the full context of the latter—or do the arguments have a "life" and integrity of their own? Traditional literary scholars, following the *Poetics*, insist that each part of a work is integral to its overarching and all-encompassing design.[296] Therefore, in a work of literature, every statement acquires its final meaning only in the context of the whole. By that measure, "What's new, Socrates?..." (2a) and "[A thing seen] is not being seen because it is a thing seen but on the contrary it is a thing seen because it is being seen…" (10b) are equally *context*-dependent. From this point of view, the arguments of Socratic conversation are embedded in a larger structure of meaning and aren't disposed to extraction.

Alexander Nehamas agrees that, in literature, ideas must be considered with reference to the plot and characters and "remain tied to the texts in which they appear."[297] On the other hand,

> Plato's distinction between the appetitive and the rational part of the soul, despite the fact that it is in great part motivated by his specific desire to account for, justify and systematize Socrates' way of life, also has a life of its own. It can and must be discussed without any reference to Socrates; its reference to Socrates could even be unknown—as, unfortunately it is—to many who reflect upon it. Philosophical ideas are in that sense abstract, capable of living independently of their original manifestations.[298]

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[296] I have already shown this to be an inadequate model for the dialogues—which are meaningfully unclosed. But there's still the question of how this affects the statements of the dialogues.
[297] Nehamas, *The Art of Living*, 33.
[298] Ibid., 33-34. Emphasis mine.

Arguments can be extracted from the dialogues—and paraphrased, or formalized—because the argument lives beyond its originating context.

The nature of speech—in particular, reasoned speech— can help explain this discrepancy. Uttered speech belongs to a specific occasion and "hath both beginning and end." But the products of reason fly loose of that context. As Morson points out, "if we should state that the angles of a triangle equal two right angles today in Corinth,"—or today in Corinth *to me*—"we would demonstrate we have not understood what this kind of reasoning entails."[299] Platonic dialogue, by practicing mimesis, shows speech as an act peculiar to a speaker and situation and, by practicing argument, *decontextualizes* speech from speaker and situation.[300]

Reasoned speech belongs simultaneously to the world of flux and the world of forms. But the dialogue form requires us to oscillate between these points of view. In the Introduction, I described the experience of reading the *Euthyphro* as one of *switching* modes of cognition, from that of imagining Euthyphro and Socrates reasoning, to that of reasoning *with* Euthyphro and Socrates. We can account for that experience by paying closer attention to how Plato builds, and disrupts, his fictional world.

The "Switch"

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[299] Morson, "Contingency and Literature," 258.

[300] I am likely to seem wishy-washy in insisting we see speech as both grounded in context and able to fly loose (so *both* wishy *and* washy!) That's why the duck-rabbit illusion makes for such a powerful analogy. It's not just that we *can* "see it both ways," it's that it's *designed so that* we see it both ways.

"Context matters" in a work of literature because a work of literature creates a unique "field of reference" internal to the text. "Fiction can be described as language offering propositions which make no claim for truth values in the real world." Rather "the truth value of propositions can be judged" only within the "internal field of reference" created by the text itself.[301]

Hrushovski gives an excellent example in the statement "Everything changes" from a short story, "Eveline," by James Joyce. Is this the same statement as uttered by Heraclitus (πάντα χωρεῖ)? Once placed back into its originating context, it's clear it is not:

> That was a long time ago; she and her brothers and sisters were all grown up; her mother was dead. Tizzie Dunn was dead, too, and the Waters had gone back to England. Everything changes. Now she was going to go away like the others, to leave her home.

Embedded in a fictional reality "the assertion 'everything changes' must be limited to Eveline's own point of view and to the circumstances, time and place when it is expressed." The statement belongs to the "present time of the character's point of view" and the "past of the narrator's perspective, which the reader grasps fully only at the end."[302] In "Eveline," "Everything changes" belongs to a structure of meaning, and a structured temporality, *internal* to the work.

Yet, as I wrote in Chapter 1, there are fictional statements—like "All happy families are alike, all unhappy families are unhappy in their own way"—that *do*

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[301] Benjamin Hrushovski, "Fictionality and Field of Reference: Remarks on a Theoretical Framework," *Poetics Today* 5, no. 2 (1984): 229.
[302] Ibid., 22.

seem to make "claim for truth values in the real world." Such assertions are directed both to the world of the text and to the world. The dialogue's arguments, I believe, are of this ilk. "What's new, Socrates?" is a representation of an utterance, particular to its character, temporally located, and only *internally* referential to the narrative world. It addresses Socrates alone. But "[a thing seen] is not being seen because it is a thing seen but on the contrary it is a thing seen because it is being seen" is not just the "representation" of an assertion, it *is* an assertion. It addresses me directly. To do so, the statement must achieve "escape velocity" from the dialogue's field of internal reference.

Escape Velocity

Plato's narrative world is fictional, even though some of its referents can claim factual existence, and the *Euthyphro* begins differentiating that world from its start.[303]

> Euthyphro: What's new, Socrates, to make you leave your usual haunts in the Lyceum and spend your time here by the king-archon's court? Surely you are not prosecuting anyone before the king-archon as I am? (2a)

An historical Socrates exists and surely he *did* prefer the Lyceum to the courts. But this detail is clearly applied to establish an *internal* context: The King-archon's court appears to us as Euthyphro refers to it and the strangeness of Socrates' presence there announces itself as relevant to the dialogue's structure of meaning. The

[303] "Even when relying heavily on the external world, imitating it or using its referents, the literary text selects elements and reshuffles their hierarchies while creating its own autonomous Field." Ibid, 236.

"language of the text contributes to the establishment of this Internal Field and refers to it at the same time."[304]

As the dialogue unfolds, its field of reference grows increasingly complex as Socrates and Euthyphro continue to refer to, and thereby continue to establish, themselves and their situatedness. The reader organizes her reading by constructing and revising a global model of this narrative universe, sorting its details for relevance, inferring implicit values, intuiting possible outcomes, "converting disorder to design."[305] In other words, she feels out the contours and boundaries of the dialogue's internal field of reference through a dynamic process of inference, integration, projection, and revision.

But then something begins to shift. The "argument" begins. Socrates asks, "Tell me then, what is the pious and what the impious do you say?" Euthyphro gives it a go, although—as we observed in the last chapter—he is initially unable to make the leap from "his own" case to "what is" the case.

> I say that the pious is to do what I am doing now, to prosecute the wrongdoer, be it about murder or temple robbery or anything else… And observe, Socrates, that I can cite powerful evidence that the law is so. I have already said to others that such actions are right, not to favor the ungodly, whoever they are. These people themselves believe that Zeus is the best and most just of the gods, yet they agree that he bound his father…. (5d-e)

The reader applies her developing heuristic of Euthyphro's character to evaluate this speech which, in turn, reinforces that heuristic, adding new evidence to

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[304] Ibid., 230.
[305] Price, *Forms of Life*, 6

Euthyphro's pattern of self-reference and self-assurance. After all, the good reader is she who maximizes the amount of information she can absorb, integrate and apply to her modeling of the narrative world and the meaning of the text.[306]

But the more Socrates steers the conversation, the more he aligns their speech with formal structures—structures *independent* of the internal field of reference.

> S: So there is also something loved and—a different thing—something loving.
>
> E: Of course.
>
> S: Tell me then whether the thing carries is a carried thing because it is being carried, or for some other reason?
>
> E: No, that is the reason.
>
> S: And the thing led is so because it is being led, and the thing seen because it is being seen?
>
> E: Certainly.
>
> S: It is not being seen because it is a thing seen but on the contrary it is a thing seen because it is being seen…. (10a-c)

Confronting this passage, our reader's narrative modeling of the *Euthyhro* is neither called on nor accumulates new specificity.[307] Socrates (or we could say philosophy, in the figure of Socrates) essentially de-narrativizes speech, freeing it

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[306] Indeed, Nehamas suggests a literary text's "ideal interpretation" is that which "would account for all of the text's features" although it's difficult to say even what counts as "'all the features' of anything." Nehamas, "The Postulated Author: Critical Monism as a Regulative Ideal," *Critical Inquiry* 8, no. 1 (1981): 144.

[307] It is no longer meaningful to describe this exchange as "dialogue" in the sense Bowen means it: "Every sentence in dialogue should be descriptive of the character who is speaking. Idiom, tempo, and shape of each spoken sentence should be calculated by novelist, towards this descriptive end." Bowen, "Notes on Writing a Novel."

from the limits of point-of-view and here-and-now. Socrates leads Euthyphro through a series of steps which unbind the inquiry from "his own case." In doing so, he frees the assertions they exchange from the "point of view … circumstances, [and] time and place when [they are] expressed."[308]

As I argued in Chapter 3, Plato never fully relinquishes the temporal or interpersonal markers of the arguments' unfolding—as the alternating lines of dialogue attest. But the arguments achieve "escape velocity" from their internal field of reference. By the process of Socratic inquiry itself, they are made "autonomous" of place, person and time.

From the reader's point of view, the arguments interrupt the narrative modeling in which she is engaged and activates a new cognitive process, that of modeling the argument. The dialogue, in other words, re-routes her cognition from contemplating a world in which characters contemplate "what is piety?" to *contemplating* "what is piety?" Like an Orthodox icon, the dialogue does not merely *represent* what it imitates but *is* what it imitates.[309]

It is by breaking the "internal field of reference" he so skillfully weaves that Plato is able to invite his readers' agency, as I described in Chapter 2. That the

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[308] Hrushovski, "Fictionality and Field of Reference," 22.

[309] You might say that philosophers are the iconodules of Plato's dialogues: "As part of their argument in defense of veneration, the iconodules developed theories of the iconic image according to which in looking at an image of a person one sees the person—provided the image has been proceeds as a rendering of the person. And since surely it would be appropriate to offer gestures of veneration if one were looking at a saint in the flesh before one, how could it be wrong to offer such gestures when one was seeing the saint by way of looking at an icon of him or her?" Nicholas Wolterstorff, "Art and Aesthetic: The Religious Dimension," in *The Blackwell Guide to Aesthetics*, ed. Peter Kivy (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2004), 337.

dialogues make us *think* the arguments is essential to their purpose. As Klein points out, "Words can be repeated or imitated; the thoughts conveyed by the words cannot: an 'imitated' thought is not a *thought*."[310] Freed of its "internal field of reference," we experience the inquiry first-hand, not by proxy. The question "what is piety?" is un-cloistered from its narrative world and intrudes on mine. Yet the dialogue will oscillate *back* to its mimesis of a temporal world where— time having passed, despite seeming to stand still—Euthyphro hurries off to his appointment. Wonderfully, in oscillating between mimesis and argument, the dialogue form not only represents but *instigates* oscillation between temporal reality and atemporal truth.

The Problem of Authorial Position

Should we account for a difference between "what the characters say" and "what the dialogue says," or more pointedly, between "what Socrates says" and "what Plato means"? Are the dialogues like treatises, such that we should "begin with the assumption that in each dialogue [Plato] uses his principal interlocutors to support or oppose certain conclusions by means of certain arguments because he, Plato, supports or opposes those conclusions for those reasons"?[311] Or are the dialogues like plays, so that Socrates no more speaks for Plato than Antigone for Sophocles?

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[310] Klein, *Commentary*, 17.
[311] Kraut, "Introduction to the Study of Plato," 29.

If this dissertation testifies to anything, it's that Plato does his thinking in art as well as argument. My position certainly allows for the possibility, even the likelihood, that Plato recommends Socrates' arguments as truthful.[312] But it also insists Plato has more to say—or to signify.[313] I can't do justice, in just a few pages, to the hermeneutic endeavor that the *Euthyphro* deserves. Allow me, instead, to sketch one hypothesis of "what Plato means" by it: namely, that the *Euthyphro* aims to defend not just Socrates but philosophy against the charge of impiety.

It is hardly controversial to suggest the *Euthyphro* belongs to a sequence of Platonic dialogues that defend Socrates, post-mortem, against the charges that condemned him to death.[314] The *Theaetetus,* like the *Euthyphro*, takes place on the day Socrates goes to the King-archon's court for his preliminary hearing— and can be read as answering the charge that Socrates corrupts the young. The dialogue demonstrates Socrates' careful nurture of the honorable Theaetetus and invites us to compare Socrates favorably with the other teachers—Theodorus and Protagoras—offered up as models.

The *Euthyphro,* it seems, should defend Socrates against the charge of impiety. But how? The arguments don't do the job. Only by attending to the

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[312] To ask "Is Socrates Plato's mouthpiece" allows answers of this ilk: "yes," "no," "sometimes." Try, instead, "Does Plato endorse Socrates' views?" and we might answer, "yes," "no" "sometimes" but also "only to this extent" or "in this assertion, yes, but in this sentiment he's endorsing Euthyphro."

[313] Perhaps, like the Oracle, Plato "does not speak or hide but signifies." Translated in Rebecca W. Bushnell "Speech and Silence: Oedipus the King," in *Sophocles*' Oedipus Rex, Bloom's Modern Critical Interpretation, edited by Harold Bloom (New York: Chelsea House, 2007), 96.

[314] A larger class than we usually acknowledge: I would include not only the *Apology*, *Crito* and *Phaedo*, but also the *Euthyphro* and *Theatetus*, *Meno* and *Symposium*.

dialogues' use of *implicit* meaning—its indulgence in art as well as argument—does such a defense take shape.

Myles Burnyeat, in his "First Words: A Valedictory Lecture," suggests that we pay careful attention to the first words of Plato's dialogues. The first words of the *Euthyphro*: τί νεώτερον, ὦ Σώκρατες? "What's new, Socrates?" are innocuous enough. They "mean" in the ordinary sense— except that "νεώτερον" is multiply connotative. For the neuter comparative of νέος (which can mean "new," "young" or "unexpected") "regularly implies that the new is worse than the old."[315] This twinning of "newer" with "lesser" testifies to the *pious* disposition to the world—built into Greek language itself—in which "first is best" and each successive generation can only fall away from the right ways of its ancestors.[316] Reverence is reverence for the *past*.

Therefore, Socrates' accusation is couched in the language of the "new": he is accused of making new gods (καινοὺς ποιοῦντα θεοὺs, 3b) and being "innovative" (καινοτομῶ from καινοτομέω, "to begin something new," 16a) with regard to religious matters. But the dialogue turns the tables on who—and what— stands accused. By reminding us that Euthyphro and Meletus are young men prosecuting old ones ("it is no small thing for a young man (τὸ…νέον) to have knowledge of such an important subject," 2c, "you are younger (νεώτερός) than I by as much as you are

[315] J. Adam and A. M. Adam, *Platonis Protagoras: With Introduction, Notes, and Appendices* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1962), 79. Emphasis mine. "νεώτερον" can also refer to the young, the "new-comers" who will inherit the earth, whether we like it or not.
[316] Thanks to Leon Kass for this insight.

wiser," 12a; "you… have ventured to prosecute your old father (ἄνδρα πρεσβύτην),"15d), Plato suggests an intergenerational revolt at the heart of their prosecutorial spirit. Indeed, Euthyphro, thinking he's a Socrates, is really a Meletus—an upstart preaching "traditional" values. Plato plays on the spectrum of connotations in "νέος, νεώτερός" to suggest the danger of impiety comes not from the old corrupting the young, but the young (οἱ νεώτεροι) usurping the old. Meletus, Euthyphro says, strikes at "the very heart"—but the word, in Greek, is ἑστίας "hearth"—"of the city" by indicting Socrates (3a). He could be talking to himself. He *is* talking to himself. By twinning Euthyphro and Meletus, Plato condemns one through the other.

Yet there is real weight behind Socrates' indictment. The spirit of inquiry must *necessarily* come to conflict with traditional wisdom. Plato's defense of Socrates must demonstrate that philosophy can stand up to the charge. No accident, then, that Socrates chooses for his demonstration of "part" and "whole" the relationship of "fear and shame":

> I am saying the opposite of what the poet said who wrote:
>
> > *You do not wish to name Zeus, who had done I, and who made all*
> > *Things grow, for where there is fear there is also shame.*
>
> I disagree with the poet…. But where there is shame there is also fear. (12a-c)

Euthyphro is an especially contemptible interlocutor not because he is especially stupid (although some have thought so) but because he is especially *shameless*. As I argued in Chapter 3, Euthyphro refuses to acknowledge his own incompleteness, the insufficiency of his own opinions: it is enough that they are "his own." Euthyphro, claiming to uphold the laws of the gods, actually acts on a radical autonomy.

At the end of the dialogue, Socrates emphasizes the point: "If you had no clear knowledge of piety and impiety you would never have ventured to prosecute…For fear of the gods you would have been afraid to take the risk lest you should not be acting right, and would have been ashamed before men" (15d). By this indictment, Plato surely means to include Socrates' accusers.[317] He also aligns Socrates—and Socrates' unique "human wisdom" ("I know that I know nothing")—with the very virtues they claim to protect. In disrupting the traditional wisdom culture, philosophy can be mistaken for promoting radical autonomy. But Plato reminds us that the Socratic elenchus—if it re-orients our reverence from ancestral gods to eternal truth—also produces shame, and that love of truth produces fear of wrong-doing.

If I am right in reading the *Euthyphro* in this way—as a network of multiplying and contested meanings of "impiety," won through the many resources of language beyond simple denotation—then Socrates, if a "mouthpiece," is the mouthpiece of a musical instrument not a megaphone. Music is not made by "mouthpiece" alone but by modulating the pressure of the generating vibration, by shortening or increasing the sounding length of the tube, by depressing valves, etc. In other words, we have to widen our appreciation for the many ways by which Plato makes meaning to begin to discover "what Plato means."

But we should also ask ourselves if discovering "what Socrates says" or "what Plato means" is the final object of the dialogues. If the dialogues are, indeed,

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[317] Plato also plays on Meletus's name, which has the same root as "to care," by mocking him

meaningfully incomplete, perhaps they require even more of us—to find out what *we* "really believe." To sound this idea, I return to Plato's rejection of narration as a compositional principle.

First Witness

Booth writes that one of narration's great artifices is "the trick of going beneath the surface of the action to obtain a reliable view of a character's mind and heart." Even the most intimate relationships in real life don't yield this access—and, as Booth points us, "most of us achieve an all too partial view even of ourselves."[318] To witness the narrator at work, let's return to the passage from Xenophon's *Memorobilia* we explored in Chapter 3:

> When Glaucon the son of Ariston was trying to become a popular orator, because he was set on being the head of the State although he was not yet twenty years old, none of his friends and intimates could stop him; he was always getting dragged off the public platform and laughed at. The one person who prevailed upon him was Socrates, who was kindly disposed towards him for the sake of two people: Charmides the son of Glaucon, and Plato. Socrates happened to meet him and first won his attention by addressing him in the following way: "Glaucon," he said, "have you made up your mind to become the head of our State?"
> (Xen. Mem.3.6)[319]

In just the few lines of narration preceding the "dialogue" proper, Xenophon designates the conversation's most relevant circumstances, clarifies the motives of its participants, and establishes the significance of the event. In doing so, he controls "our beliefs, our interests and our sympathies" in what follows.[320] We know, before

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[318] Booth, *Rhetoric of Fiction*, 3.
[319] *Conversations of Socrates*, trans. Hugh Tredennick and Robin Waterfield.
[320] Booth, *Rhetoric of Fiction,* 5.

he speaks, in what state we'll find Glaucon's soul; we're assured, before Socrates gets started, his intentions toward Glaucon; and we're promised, and begin to pleasurably anticipate, Glaucon's comeuppance. Xenophon doesn't just "tell" us information which Plato has to "show"—he interprets and evaluates that information *for* us. He controls and stabilizes the interpretative field. As narrator, he is "source, guarantor, and organizer" as well as "analyst and commentator."[321]

In Plato's dialogue, on the other hand, no narratorial presence characterizes Socrates and Euthyphro, clarifies their motives, or vouches safe the dialogue's "moral." By eschewing narration, Platonic dialogue requires us "to rely on those shaky inferences about other men which we cannot avoid in our own lives."[322] Each reader stands with respect to the *Euthyphro* as "first on the scene": we are first witness, and first interpreter. The norms and values which regulate the dialogues are nowhere pre-announced—or finally secured. After all, just as in life, our "shaky inferences" vary.[323]

Plato has created not only an *interpretable* object—a work of art—but a work that throws us back on ourselves to a dizzying degree: Plato's dialogues include no explicit description of their aim or how to read them. Obstructing closure and katharsis, they require us to continue them. And Plato exercises no narratorial

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[321] Gérard Genette, "Mood," in *Narrative Theory: Critical Concepts in Literary and Cultural Studies,* vol. 1, *Major Issues in Narrative Theory*, ed. Mieke Bal (London: Routledge, 2004), 229.
[322] Booth, *Rhetoric of Fiction*, 3.
[323] This is perhaps why interpretations of Plato differ so widely, even wildly: just like Euthyphro, each reader brings "his own" way of seeing the world to the dialogues. Whether we can share a world together depends on whether we can be in dialogue about it. Platonic dialogue gives us a site for that work to begin or continue.

prerogative to stabilize the dialogues' meaning(s). At every turn, Plato grants maximal freedom to—and demands maximal participation from—the reader. In this, he follows his teacher. Vlastos writes:

> "[I]n almost everything we say we put a burden of interpretation on our hearer…. Socratic irony is not unique in accepting the burden of freedom which is inherent in all significant communication. It is unique in playing that game for bigger stakes than anyone else ever has…"[324]

Lyric and drama are kept alive by performance—by re-uttering, re-enacting. Dialogue is kept alive by rejoinder.[325] "Let's start again from the beginning" Socrates often says to his interlocutors. But, the implication is, let's go somewhere different this time.

End

"I know that the world I converse with in the city and in the farms, is not the world I think. I observe that difference, and shall observe it." -Emerson, *Experience*

Plato's dialogues are remarkable works of art not only because of how much they give us—well-observed human characters, new psychological and moral complexities, diverse individual voices and socially-inflected world views. They are remarkable works of art for how much they require *from* us—both inviting and challenging our faculties of imagination and of reason, our yearnings for causal intelligibility and for inner consistency, our love of "sights" and love of "the sight of

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[324] Vlastos, *Socrates*, 44.

[325] C.f. Nagy: The living word stays alive when "the living dialogic partner" "team[s] up with the dead words of Socrates" to bring the argument "back to life again in a live dialogue." Gregory Nagy, *The Ancient Greek Hero in 24 Hours* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013): 23§48, https://chs.harvard.edu/CHS/article/display/5967.part-iv-hour-23-the-living-word-ii-socrates-in-plato%E2%80%99s-phaedo.

the truth" (*Republic* 475e).[326] Plato requires we bring our whole person *to* the dialogue, and *into* dialogue. But to what end?

I began the dissertation with a reference to Plato's cave. In the darkness, shackled by the neck and straining forward to see the shadow play, the prisoners cannot see one another. He who is dragged from the Cave is dazzled by the sun and, returning, *again* "fails to see his next-door neighbor." Plato's dialogues, I contend, guide our ascent upwards—to the contemplation of Forms—*and* the descent downwards—to the re-presentation of our common life.

Plato re-trains the "sight-loving eye," which seeks to gaze at mere pictures of the world. A Platonic dialogue never becomes a "picture"—whole, complete and self-sufficient. It offers no vantage point for us to "see" the design of the artwork at its end.[327] Lacking closure and catharsis, its readers are harried onward, upward, *wondering.*

To the philosophical eye, Plato offers constant reminding of what its dazzled vision is blind to. Take that tragedy of knowledge *Oedipus Rex*. Oedipus is the kind of man who sees a crossroads as "where three roads meet." In other words, he takes a

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[326] I owe this contrast to Hannah Hintze, "Gluttony and Philosophical Moderation in Plato's *Republic*" (PhD diss., The University of Chicago, 2009), 205-206.

[327] Cf Klein, to whose Introduction to *A Commentary on the Meno* my dissertation is a footnote: "Under the spell of the cherished and bottomless modern notion of 'art' there is a prevailing tendency to peel the so-called artistic and poetic skin off the philosophical meat of the dialogues, or, conversely to exalt their 'poetry' regardless of the truth they might or might not contain. This tendency to isolate the 'artistry' of a work and to render it autonomous parallels closely that of the professional rhetoricians Plato is always attacking. The "art"-seeking eye does not seem to see that the deliberate and elaborate artfulness in the composition of the dialogues is imposed on them by their intent." Klein, *Commentary*, 20.

god's eye view of the world.[328] Oedipus tends to the kind of knowing—call it theoretical knowledge—that transcends ordinary, embodied perception. No accident that he can correctly identify "Man" in answer to the Sphinx's riddle, but cannot properly identify himself, *this* man.

Plato takes up Socrates's insistence that we know ourselves. This kind of learning must apply itself to *individuals*—we live as men, not Man. By showing us a pageant of human life, by sounding the language of our thoughts, by unfolding, in time, the contemplation of the timeless, the dialogues guide the "lover of wisdom" back to the world of men.

Plato's dialogues show us what it is for the human being to belong to two worlds, the world he inhabits and the world he thinks. And they demand we read with both eyes open. This double-vision of word and world, of Man and men, is Plato's great—and still unrealized—gift to us.

[328] I owe this insight to Leon Kass.

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