

PLATO'S USE OF IRONY

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I certify that the content of this thesis is my own work and that this thesis has not been submitted for any degree or other purposes.

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PREFACE

Conducting an inquiry can be very personal. Even more so when we put out thoughts on to paper. For better or worse these things can often feel like they take something of us with them. This seems especially true of Plato's works. The *character* of his philosophy is strikingly distinctive both in thought and expression; and one of his most pronounced idiosyncrasies is his irony. In this study I attempt to illustrate how Plato employs irony to address his audience in an intelligent, fruitful and characteristically Platonic way. In general, Plato uses irony to turn a defect or limitation—whether it's an unwillingness to admit ignorance or an attachment to the corporeal—into its opposite. He uses irony to breathe life into the 'dead' written word. Many scholars regard the literary form of the dialogues as essential to their philosophical message. Perhaps we may say that for Plato using a dry treatise for philosophy would be as useful as using sign language to sing a song. Irony, then, is one of the means he employs to overcome the limitations of the written word and turn them to his advantage; to make his mute texts, not just speak to us, but sing.

It is a pleasure to acknowledge the invaluable guidance and support of Rick Benitez, who always humoured my ramblings and treated me like a peer rather than a student. I've no doubt the shortcomings of this study would be far worse were it not for your help. Thank you.

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INTRODUCTION

...some truths are too important to stand or fall
by mere argument.

—Myles Burnyeat

The purpose of this study is to isolate, explain and account for Plato's use of irony. There are a growing number of articles and chapters on irony in Plato that deal with certain 'types' of irony, most notably Socratic irony; there are a few essays on particular ironic passages in Plato; and there is an increasing amount of work being done under the banner of 'Platonic irony.' My efforts, however, although not always at odds with these trends, generally do not coincide with them.

The phrase 'Platonic irony' for instance has appeared with increasing regularity in the scholarship and is often employed as if it referred to some specific thing. This suggests that scholars think they have found that one special type of irony in Plato that deserves the epithet 'Platonic.' For example Eckstein (1981) 9-12 uses the term to refer to Plato's use of deliberately fallacious arguments; Vlastos (1991) 245 uses it to describe how Plato sets up a double audience by hiding his meaning so that only certain readers perceive his true teaching. Others take this latter idea further and argue that 'Platonic irony' involves the absence of an authorial voice which forces the readers to think things through themselves. Nehamas (1998) 44 and Gordon (1999) 129-30, for example, argue that the reader is in fact tricked into becoming complacent: we think we are superior to Socrates' victims (like Euthyphro) because we perceive their mistakes, but this superiority is a self-delusion that vitiates the examined life and makes us resemble the ignorant Euthyphros. Landy (2007) 92-5, while incorporating some of these themes, limits 'Platonic irony' to implicit criticisms of Socrates. By and large 'Platonic

irony' is most often employed to refer to *authorial anonymity*.¹ This 'irony' tends to be understood as a simple concomitant of Plato's refusal to speak in his own voice. In this way the term 'irony' has simply been diluted to mean 'literary' or the like.² Virtually all fiction would be 'ironic' in this sense. The attempt to account for 'Platonic irony' in this sense is actually an attempt to explain why Plato wrote in the dialogue format. *That* topic, however, is not my primary concern. The irony that interests me is much more specific. As such my inquiry has a narrower focus and is, I believe, more original.

Plato contra Socrates and the Non-Doctrinal View

Within the scholarship on Plato's literary techniques there is a strong tendency to associate Plato's irony with the *rejection* of the following two assumptions: (1) that Socrates is put in a privileged position and (2) that Plato puts forward philosophical ideas and theories. That is, for certain scholars Plato's irony is synonymous with the idea that he does not use Socrates (or

¹ Plato's irony is also discussed by e.g. Merlan (1947), Rowe (1987), Griswold (1987) and (2002), Hyland (1988), Michelini (2000) and Long (2007). The following thematise anonymity: Edelstein (1962), Plass (1964) and (1967) and Benitez (2010); and see further Press (2000). One of the most measured assessments of 'Platonic anonymity' I have encountered is Edelstein. He argues that Plato attributed his philosophy to Socrates in the tradition of the Pythagoreans who humbly attribute their philosophy to the master (11-13). This anonymity is carried down to the level of Socrates in that 'the dialogues always divert attention from the person of Socrates and direct it to the truth; they always appeal not to his authority but rather to the strength of his argument' (17).

² See e.g. Griswold (1996) 12-3. Benitez (2010) 18, by contrast, is refreshingly explicit: 'One of the problems generic to the interpretation of literature is the gap between author and character.' Plass (1964) makes the surprising move of interpreting 'anonymity' or 'irony' as virtually anything that reduces the role of the speaker, whether attributing one's view to another or disparaging oneself.

anyone else) to put forward positive doctrine. This being so, I feel obliged to make plain from the outset that, although this is a study of Plato's irony, I do not take this approach.

Regarding Socrates, and leaving aside the other principal speakers, I do *not* think that every word he says can be attributed to Plato. Socrates, as I understand him, is frequently ironic, elusive and, as I will argue, even manipulative. Yet I maintain that he is something like an ideal philosopher in Plato. He always acts to improve the people he speaks to, even if he must administer a bitter pill. Where Socrates is found to be using bad arguments and we have reason to believe that Plato knows these are bad arguments, I tend to bring Socrates in on it and ask why *he* might behave this way. Thus I do not think that *Plato* endorses everything that Socrates says. Indeed, I do not even think that *Socrates* endorses everything that he says. And yet those scholars who wish to undermine Socrates' authority frequently argue that, since he cannot be taken as a straightforward 'mouthpiece,' he cannot be put in a privileged position.³ But this is a false dichotomy. We are not faced with an exclusive choice between the radical mouthpiece view (whereby Socrates matter-of-factly stands in for Plato) and the anti-Socrates view. A middling view whereby Socrates is privileged yet elusive has traditionally been the dominant one among literary approaches to Plato and at times it can be a little disappointing to read some of the uncharitable interpretations of Socrates that are employed by scholars to pit Plato against his Socrates.⁴

Frequently these scholars behave as if there is a burden of proof to be borne by anyone who takes Socrates as privileged. I think this is incorrect. Plato writes in such a way as to make

³ For the view that Plato never speaks in his own voice because none of his characters speak for him see e.g. Griswold (1987) 76, Hyland (1988) 318 and 332, Frede (1992) 215-7, Nails (2000) 16, Press (2000b) 27-8, Waugh (2000) 39-40 and West (2000) 100-1. Gonzalez (2000) is one of the more measured attempts to account for the distance between Plato and his Socrates; cf. Clay (2000) 100-15.

⁴ See especially Landy (2007) and Nails (2000) 18-9.

Socrates an *obvious* hero. Consider a question that is put forward by Debra Nails (2000) 15: ‘Who is Jane Austen’s mouthpiece in her novels? Is it, as is widely believed, the lively Elizabeth Bennet of *Pride and Prejudice*?’ If we leave aside the distracting mention of a ‘mouthpiece,’ talk of Jane Austen is apt to recall how easy it often is to see which characters we are supposed to identify with or sympathise with and which characters we should not. Although this can be complicated at times and characters need not be entirely good or entirely bad, but in broad strokes (and notwithstanding academic quibbles) it is usually quite obvious and intuitive what the author intends in this respect. Mr. Darcy, for instance, is made to seem a cold prig at the start of *Pride and Prejudice* only to emerge as something of a hero at the end—so much is surely obvious. And even when writers defy these canons of literature (as in Camus’ *The Stranger*, say) it is often quite obvious that this is what is happening. At any rate, it hardly seems that Plato—who consistently portrays his Socrates either refuting the arrogant or educating his friends—is such a writer. No doubt this is why generations of readers from antiquity onwards, both friends and foes of Plato, have taken it as self-evident that Socrates is put in a privileged position. Indeed, Plato’s Socrates surely counts as one of the most marvellous and potent portraits in the history of literature. And we should not forget that while Jane Austen wrote love stories, Plato wrote philosophical discussions; thus while Austen’s heroines may not always speak with wisdom (for example, the self-deluded Emma), we would not expect Plato’s philosophical heroes to be so afflicted. The burden of proof must rest with those who would deny Socrates’ privileged position.⁵

Although these scholars do raise pertinent objections against the naivety of certain analytic approaches to Plato, they do not give us sufficient reason to throw Socrates out with

⁵ See Ford (2008) for a discussion of the rise of *Sōkratikoí Logoi*. He notes that the persona of the character Socrates plays an essential role in this genre (42).

the bathwater. The anti-Socrates view is unusual and difficult, and as such it would require a compelling explanation. Instead we are told that Plato undermines Socrates because he is not interested in putting forward doctrines, but merely wants us to think for ourselves.⁶ But how could such a view even begin to explain the fabulous intricacy of the *Phaedrus* or the grandeur of the *Timaieus*? Some claim that for Plato to offer answers in the manner of an authority is anathema to philosophy.⁷ There is certainly some truth to this. But Plato—who wrote the *Republic* and the *Laws*, who knows nothing of our modern egalitarianism and who is instinctually elitist by our standards—cannot be turned into a modern progressive pluralist who cares only that we come to our *own* conclusions, regardless of what they may be. He does not reject authority in *this* sense. He is openly hostile to relativism, deeply committed to the existence of an objective moral order, and he represents one of the most extreme forms of metaphysical realism available. A better way to understand his rejection of authority is that the ‘think for yourself’ principle is pedagogical. It is not the destination, but a means to an end. To properly learn and understand something one must think it through and actively engage. Thus we should not dogmatically accept the pronouncements of Plato (or, say, Homer or Solon) on faith. But this does not imply that Plato has no beliefs or theories to give us. Only that he wants us to learn them by our own mental efforts.

⁶ While I agree that Plato requires the reader to think, I argue that this is not all they do. That is, I believe that Plato both wants to draw particular conclusions from his texts *and* he requires us to think our way through to these conclusions. For the view that Plato merely wants to make you think, see e.g. Mackenzie (1982), Woolf (1999), Michelini (2000) 180, Nails (2000) 25, Waugh (2000) 49-50, West (2000) 111 and Landy (2007) 93-4.

⁷ E.g. Nails (2000) 16 and Benitez (2000) 84.

We have, then, come to the second assumption that the irony scholars tend to reject: namely, that Plato has doctrines. To a certain point, I am sympathetic to this view: Plato's philosophy might not be concrete or systematic; perhaps he does not give us the pure unadulterated truth. Indeed, he may think the truth cannot be presented in a fixed once-and-for-all account for us mortals.⁸ On the other hand, I cannot accept the suggestion that we give over the hunt for Plato's positive philosophy full-stop. One wonders what would be left of Plato if we truly tried to apply this idea to his texts. Can we really believe that one of the most influential thinkers in Western history has nothing substantial to tell us, but only problematises and leaves us to our own devices? Even if we try to gloss his teachings as 'merely methodological' it must be acknowledged that these methods are nothing short of iconoclastic.

I appreciate that Plato's literary presentation is problematic, that he does not address us in his own voice and that this calls for careful interpretation, but I believe these scholars go too far in rejecting the two assumptions I have mentioned and, more importantly, I have found it fruitful to employ these assumptions in interpreting the dialogues. Possibly the problem is that these scholars are concerned (quite rightly) with the assumptions underpinning analytic interpretations of Plato and this orientation has understandably affected the substance and tone of their arguments. I certainly agree with these scholars that Socrates is not some simple surrogate or mouthpiece for Plato and I strongly agree that Plato writes in such a way as to encourage us to think. But this does not commit me to the view that he has no positive philosophy. The transfer of knowledge is not simply a matter of putting information into souls (see *Smp.* 175d3-7). It requires active engagement on the part of the student. Accordingly, Plato is allusive and elusive precisely so he *can* impart his message.

⁸ E.g. Merlan (1947) 429, an old but interesting essay. Consider also Benitez (2007) who urges that Plato's dialogues be given an epistemic status comparable to myth in that they attempt to give a probable and instructive *image* of reality, but not the real thing, which would be impossible.

The Ironies to Be Discussed

There can be no question that Plato had a keen eye for what would eventually come to be called ‘irony.’ Socrates marvels at how strange (ὥς ἄτοπον), how curious (ὥς θαυμάσιως), it is that pleasure and pain are unwilling to co-exist in a man at the same time yet the one almost always follows the other as though they were joined at the hip—or rather the head (*Phd.* 60b). In the *Republic* it is similarly *atopos*, ‘out of place’, that the philosopher stumbles back into the cave, blind and discombobulated from the light of the truth, while the simpletons all around him are exonerated for their counterfeit knowledge (*Rep.* 513e3-517a4). Perhaps there is something of this *atopia* in the *Apology*: we witness Socrates turn a *defence* speech into something of an *accusation* speech, in which he holds aloft the *ignorance* that makes him the *wisest* man in Athens (e.g. 23a8-b4); ultimately he argues that the guilty verdict of the jury in fact only condemns themselves, but never Socrates (30d5-e1, 38c). Or consider the thinly veiled sarcasm that Socrates levels at Polus in the *Gorgias* (461c5-d4): it is handy to keep young men like Polus around, Socrates explains, so that these youngsters can correct their elders when they stumble. I could easily go on. Indeed, I have every intention of doing just that; but to begin with I will indicate in general terms which of Plato’s many ironies I intend to discuss, and which will be passed over.

I am not interested in every little ironic passage. I am not interested in any sort of exhaustive taxonomy of Plato’s irony.⁹ I am only interested in ‘big’ ironies that are applied

⁹ Taxonomy is not the panacea it is sometimes thought to be. In and of itself it could be worthless. I could divide the dialogues according to whether they have an even or odd number of words, for instance. Any taxonomy needs to be conducted in reference to meaningful distinctions and these are not always immediately ready-to-hand. For example we should not rush to divide up ‘types’ of irony in reference

throughout a dialogue or across a range of dialogues, and even then I have been selective about the ironies I included. In conducting my research, I found a family of ideas associated with a particular pedagogic-cum-literary strategy which I have been content to focus on.¹⁰ Two of the more obvious omissions are that I do not discuss Plato's self-contradictory criticisms of writing or his use of dramatic irony. I decided against discussing Plato's criticisms of writing because it upset the overall balance of the work without adding anything substantial.¹¹ As for a discussion of dramatic irony I do not think this would have formed a natural part of the present

to structural features alone. Griswold (2002) attempts a such a taxonomy of irony in Plato which is, accordingly, rather wooden and, at times, perfunctory.

¹⁰ I have inevitably focused on Socrates rather than other main speakers, moreover I have gravitated towards the so-called middle dialogues. While Socratic irony is native to the 'early' dialogues, it is the 'middle' dialogues that showcase the literary playfulness we are largely concerned with. I stress, however, that my approach does not commit me to any theory of Plato's development.

¹¹ Inevitably Plato's critique of writing has been used to support the non-doctrinal view, but many have come to less extreme conclusions. Klein (1989) 16-7 suggests that the rejection of writing is geared to Phaedrus' character but that we should be able to decipher that there is an approach to writing that Socrates does not mention; namely, one that leads you to figure out its answers yourself. See further Strauss (1964) 54, Ebert (1973) 165 and (2002) 44 and cf. Griswold (1996) 218-226. The most thorough account I know of comes from Ronna Burger (1978). In particular she does a good job of bringing out the way Plato's criticisms themselves exonerate his work against these very criticisms. That is, she explains how Plato's text recommends itself *because of* these self-criticisms. In general terms she argues that, inasmuch as the dialogue denies the appearance of wisdom, it precludes the passivity of its readership; thus, as the reader is required to engage with the text, the 'dead' text is 'resuscitated' (114, cf. 120).

study and I suspect that the topic would be better grouped alongside Plato's treatment of historical individuals, rather than annexed off to a peninsula on the continent of irony.¹²

This study begins with a general account of irony in Chapter One. In Chapter Two I discuss Socratic irony. Here I argue against the ingenious accounts of the modern scholarship to side with the old view that Socratic irony involves trading praise for blame and blame for praise so as to expose the ignorance of one's interlocutor. In Chapter Three I turn to something I call 'Paragogic irony' whereby Socrates exploits the baser urges of his companions and puts them to good use. For instance, since Simmias and Cebes are chained to their bodily desires and fears, Socrates appeals to their somatic fear of death to turn them away from the body. They are threatened with *physical pain* unless they overcome physical attachments. Both Chapter Two and Chapter Three are concerned with the way Socrates wields his irony on other interlocutors. For this reason I group them together as Part Two (Part One being the introduction to irony). In Part Three we move from Socrates to Plato. These are the ironies aimed directly at us, the readers. Chapter Four looks at the way Plato likes to use an item to typify two opposite things. For example, *vision* is used to typify both the mind and its opposite, the physical senses. The final chapter culminates in an interpretation of the *Phaedrus*' Palinode which reveals how Plato deliberately and carefully employs irony to further his literary goal of turning his readers into philosophers. These final two chapters focus on the way Plato uses *erōs*—ironically—to typify philosophy.

It is of course inevitable that one distinguishes between the irony of Socrates and Plato, but my tendency is to let this distinction fade into the background. Take Socratic irony for example. Although it is Socrates who wields this irony on his interlocutors, *we* are the ones

¹² There is a useful essay on dramatic irony in *Republic I* by Gifford (2001), though I wonder if he overexaggerates the significance of his findings at times.

who notice it for the irony that it is. Thus even here there is a sense in which the reader is given a special role to play. Keeping in mind the privileged position Socrates holds in the dialogues, Plato and his Socrates can and do ‘work together’ in some sense. For this reasons then I do not apply a hard and fast distinction between Plato and Socrates. Rather the important distinction for me is whether an irony is aimed at a character or the reading audience. All of the ironies I examine are inevitably aimed at the reader because I am ultimately interested in *Plato’s* use of irony. But by this same token it becomes important to differentiate the intended response of the reader from the response of, say, Simmias or Euthyphro.

PART ONE

...one of the frustrations of [literary] criticism is that many of the effects that require explication are of a kind that lose their savor in being made explicit. Their authors left them implicit in the first place because open discussion threatened to destroy them.

—Wayne Booth

CHAPTER ONE

IRONY

Mit der Ironie ist durchaus nicht zu scherzen.

(There is absolutely nothing funny about irony.)¹

—Friedrich Schlegel

The Protean nature of irony and the bewildering array of scholarly literature it has generated present a rather daunting task for anyone who hopes to extract a clear and intelligible account which they can then apply to, say, the study of the Platonic dialogues.² Nevertheless, providing some concessions are made regarding conceptual exactitude, a useful account can be rendered that will assist in identifying something as ironic, understanding why it is ironic and recognising some important uses and effects of irony. Let us consider, for instance, the ample use of irony made by the ancient Greeks. It is enough to mention Odysseus on Ithaca, the term ‘Sophoclean irony’ or even the particle *δήπου* to call to mind the Greek penchant for irony. In fact, that the Greek poets told stories of which the audience already knew the outcome makes dramatic irony almost inevitable. And again, since irony can be understood as a type of

¹ Translations are my own unless otherwise stated.

² Cf. Muecke (1969) 3: ‘Getting to grips with irony seems to have something in common with gathering mist; there is plenty to take hold of if only one could...Yet if, upon examination, irony becomes less nebulous, as it does, it remains elusively Protean.’

contrast, it is noteworthy that the Greek language and thus the ‘Greek mind’ is over-fond of contrast and antithesis.³

Yet the Greeks clearly lacked a distinct term to refer to this rich and complex phenomenon. The Greek ancestor of ‘irony,’ εἰρωνεία, will at best overlap with our term only in certain contexts. The term εὐτραπεία, ‘wit,’ could at times refer to cases of verbal irony. Aristotle employs this term to label the mean in respect of joking between the overly stern and the buffoonish (e.g. *EE* 1234a4-24).⁴ We can also see our ‘dramatic irony’ in his use of ἁμαρτία, ‘ignorance’ or ‘error’ in the *Poetics*; and his περιπέτεια ‘reversal’ can often be an ironic turn in the plot, where say some apparent good leads to disaster. Thus, even though these usages can tend towards our ‘irony’ they still fall well short of it. And this absence is rather striking because, although the Greeks lacked a discrete term for it, irony is deeply rooted in their literature and even Greek thought.⁵

That the Greeks could use and appreciate irony, all the while lacking an explicit concept of it, is explained by that fact that irony is in some sense intuitive. What I mean by this can be grasped by analogy with humour. Clearly one can *get* a joke without a critical, self-reflexive

³ For examples of verbal irony in Greek literature see e.g. Denniston’s *Greek Particles* under δὴ (229-39) and Minchin (2010) entitled, ‘From Gentle Teasing to Heavy Sarcasm: Instances of Rhetorical Irony in Homer’s *Iliad*.’ She claims that ‘Homer clearly identifies rhetorical irony in all its diversity as a discourse’ (388).

⁴ See Gray (2010) 331.

⁵ Cf. Thomson (1926) 186, ‘The Greek simply took a certain view of life for granted; no other view struck him as possible, and so the need for a distinguished name did not arise’ and Sedgewick (2003e) 61, ‘the sense of contradiction as between appearance and reality in circumstance, the sense of mocking fate...colours practically the whole of Greek literature (and much later literature) as with an Aeschylean dye.’

understanding of how humour works: you hear something funny, you laugh. Indeed, nothing ruins a joke like having it explained. We might say that our appreciation of a joke is a discrete datum, instantaneously apprehended. Moreover, there is something intrinsically delightful about enjoying something comical. I submit that irony shares this same basic aesthetic quality: it can be enjoyed without a critical understanding or awareness of how it works. For this reason it could thrive in Greek literature and beyond even though a clear concept of irony would not be made fully explicit until the nineteenth century.

This in turn will have an effect on the way we need to approach irony. One needs to acknowledge the role that experiencing irony plays; we cannot rely on dry definitions alone. In practical terms it is essential to discuss irony in reference to examples, and these should not be limited to banal examples. Without further ado then, here is a brief missive penned by Groucho Marx. He is responding to the accusation made in *Confidential Magazine* that his gameshow was rigged.

To Confidential Magazine,

If you continue to publish slanderous pieces about me, I shall feel compelled to cancel my subscription.

Sincerely,

Groucho Marx⁶

Here the comic effect is coloured or informed by irony. For there can be no question that this is (intended to be) funny.⁷ And while one could make any number of observations about the

⁶ Marx (1967) 10.

⁷ Arthur Sheekman, who introduces the collection of Groucho's letters, call this line 'gently withering.'

use of irony here, we will not get ahead of ourselves and instead keep in mind this sort of ‘phenomenology of irony’ I am proposing. The ironic twist or tension relies on Groucho’s thoroughly underwhelming ‘threat.’ The effect is rather delightful. The author appears urbane, witty and charming. The joke is also rather silly. Notice then how one might ‘catch oneself in the act’ of appreciating a fine piece of irony. Hence the need for examples.

This chapter is divided into three further sections. In the next section—*A Brief History of the Word ‘Irony’*—we will track the term from its beginnings in the Greek term εἰρωνεία through the Latin *ironia* and then into the English *irony* by looking at the important junctions through which our term came about. One of the more interesting conclusions to be gleaned from this survey is the central role that Plato’s Socrates has played. The survey also makes for a useful prolegomenon to the next section, *The Nature of Irony*. This is the focal point of the present chapter: here I attempt to elucidate what irony is and how it works. In the final section—*Simplistic and Sophistic Accounts of Irony*—I discuss some alternate approaches to irony, raise some criticisms against them and use these as a foil for my own view.

I

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE WORD ‘IRONY’

Before attempting to analyse the concept of irony I would like to turn to the history of the word ‘irony,’ coming as it does out of Greek, through Latin and eventually into English. This review has at least two immediate purposes. Firstly, it provides an illuminating background to our inquiry and will furnish us with an excellent introduction to the concept of irony. Secondly, in regard to the ancient ancestors of our term (which already interest us as students of Classics) the conclusions I reach are directly relevant to the connection between Plato and irony. For this reason I discuss the Greek ancestor of the term at length. Beyond this, I shall establish more

firmly or philologically the claim made above regarding the late arrival of a dedicated term to describe irony.

Antiquity: εἰρωνεία and ironia

The basic sense of the term εἶρων and its cognates (εἰρωνεία, εἰρωνεύεσθαι etc.), stripped of their connotations, is *to conceal the truth*, often in the sense of affecting innocence or playing coy. It is useful to distinguish between four different aspects of this term. (1) Deceit: the *eirōn* was a slippery rogue trying to weasel out of something. (2) Sneering sarcasm: here he is someone who scornfully scoffs at someone (in a manner comparable to sarcasm) and his ‘lie’ is not supposed to deceive but should be clearly transparent. (3) Indolence: someone who is lethargic and underrates their own ability. And (4) an urbane affectation: here the *eirōn* finds a sophisticated outlet for his contempt. It must be stressed that these are not real distinctions, but practical expedients. We are not initially dealing with a semantically fixed concept but a slippery, changeable and loaded term. It does however take on a more technical character in certain contexts from Aristotle onwards.⁸ If there is an important distinction to be established it is between the first two senses and the second two insofar as the pejorative sense of the term recedes into the background and is ultimately replaced by its opposite, with the non-pejorative sense eventually being used as technical term in rhetoric. Curiously enough the main impetus for this change is Plato’s Socrates.

⁸ Cf. Bergson (1971) 414, 416-7 and 420. He tries to minimize the range of meanings by distinguishing between the Socrates-inspired Aristotelian usage and the everyday usage.

We begin, as does Otto Ribbeck, with Aristophanes.⁹ Ribbeck's pioneering 1876 essay *Über den Begriff des εἰρων* is the standard work on this topic and I draw from him throughout.¹⁰ He asserts that the term first appears in Aristophanes with very distinct connotations. Namely,

⁹ There is a fading tendency to see fixed character types in Aristophanes, and in particular we find a central contrast between the *eirōn* and the *alazōn* ('braggart'). Some for example look to the *Tractatus Coislinianus* which says, 'The characters of comedy are that of the buffoon the *eirōn* and the braggart [τε βωμολόχα καὶ τὰ εἰρωνικά καὶ τὰ τῶν ἀλαζόνων]' (7.12 in Janko, 1984). Thus Cornford (1914) 136-8, Thomson (1926) 20-33, McLeish (1980) 53-6 and Janko (1984) 242-50. On the other hand, Silk (2002) 232 and Ruffell (2014) argue against such fixed character types. My claims assume as little as possible and do not go beyond the observation that such-and-such plays the *eirōn* in a certain passage. This approach should be sufficiently innocuous.

¹⁰ Ribbeck (1876) is criticised by Bücher (1941) e.g. 340-1, who attempts to reduce the term to Aristotle's 'understatement.' This is easily dismissed by Bergson (1971) 409-10 and 416-7 (but see 418). The history of the term is also discussed by Thomson (1926) 3 and Cornford (1914) n. 1 on 137. They do not deviate from Ribbeck, which must be regarded as the *locus classicus*, as noted by e.g., Vlastos (1987) n. 3 on 80, Muecke (1969) 7, Booth (1974) n. 1 on 138-9 and Nehamas (1998) n. 7 on 202. Knox (1961) 3-7 gives a brief overview of the history of the term. Both he and Muecke e.g. 47 draw on Sedgewick (2003), who is also parasitic on Ribbeck (see 7 and n. 2 on 109). See also Pavlovskis (1968), Markantonatos (1975), Wolfsdorf (2008) 243-5 and Nehamas (1998) 50-62. That Lane (2006) must spend some 15,000 words to show that *eirōneia* does not mean 'irony' in the dialogues reflects something of a regression in modern scholarship. The gap between *eirōneia* and *irony* was established over a century ago by Ribbeck. In the 1970's even Wayne Booth, who is not a classicist, could say, 'As every schoolboy knows, the standard work on the concept of the *eiron* in Greek literature is Otto Ribbeck' (*ibid.*). Although Lane's main contention is correct, her account tends to oversimplify and she has an unhelpful aversion to attributing irony to Socrates (see especially her heavy-handed treatment of *eirōneia* after Plato on 78-80).

it has vulgar origins as a crude insult (*ein Schimpfwort*)¹¹ and is clearly a pejorative term (381). The *eirōn* was a slippery rogue, a fox, usually trying to weasel out of something. Ribbeck also surveys the relevant scholia and ancient lexica (382): the *eirōn* is a dissembler or actor who cheats and jokes around (ὁ πάντα παίζων καὶ διαχλευάζων, εἰρωνευόμενος, ἀπατεῶν, ὑποκριτής—scholium to the *Clouds* 443-51); Hesychius and Photius confirm that the *eirōn* is a cheat and a joker. The joking aspect will come to the fore presently, but we can keep it in the back of our minds while we explore the deceptive nature of the *eirōn*.

Of the three occurrences in Aristophanes the most illuminating is in the *Wasps*. Here the aged Philocleon is trying to escape from his home where his son has detained him, and when he gives out the excuse that it's the first of the month (when debts are due) so he must take the donkey to town and sell it, he is accused of playing the *eirōn*: 'Such an excuse he gives out! like an *eirōn* trying to make you release him' (οἷον πρόφασιν καθῆκεν, ὡς εἰρωνικῶς, / ἵν' αὐτὸν ἐκπέμψειας—174-5). In the *Clouds* we encounter the term amidst a catalogue of scoundrels. Strepsiades presents himself to Socrates' house of learning and reels off a list of things he hopes to learn from Socrates. This is informative insofar as it characterises the *eirōn* as a deceitful rogue who manipulates people with words. Strepsiades wants to learn how to be a liar, cheater or an *eirōn* so as to shirk his debts.

...if I can escape from my debts and appear to men as bold, eloquent, audacious, reckless, appalling, a fabricator of lies, resourceful, a pettifogger, a shiesty lawyer, a

¹¹ But see Bergson (1971) 411.

rattle, a fox, a knave, slippery, an *eirōn*, greasy, a braggart, a criminal, a sinner, a twister, a troublemaker, a scavenger.¹² (443-51)

We can come to a clearer idea of how exactly the *eirōn* is a scoundrel by turning to Plato's *Apology*. Here Socrates claims that he cannot cease his philosophical quest because he is following the dictates of the god, yet he worries the jury will think he is being *eirōnikos* (38a1). That is, they will think he is giving off a convenient and disingenuous excuse, much as Strepsiades might have done to weasel out of his debts.

Accordingly, Ribbeck (384-5) may be correct in claiming that Aristophanes plays with the notorious ignorance of Socrates in the *Birds* (1211). Iris, who has unexpectedly flown into the new city in the clouds, evidently oblivious that the Olympians are unwelcome, is asked which door she came in through. She gives the understandable answer, 'By Zeus! I haven't a clue which door.' The rejoinder: 'Did you hear her? What an *eirōn*' (ἤκουσας αὐτῆς, οἶον εἰρωνεύεται;). The (absurd) implication is that Iris is playing coy: she *snuck* her way in, but they're *much too clever* for all that. Here then is *feigning ignorance as a cunning excuse*.

A more general sense of *lying* appears in the *Laws* and the *Sophist*. In *Laws* 908b-d the Athenian mentions a certain type of atheist who pretends to be a theist: he is full of cunning and treachery (δόλου δὲ καὶ ἐνέδρας πλήρης—908d3) and rises to positions of power as a demagogue or a general, presumably through his concealed cunning. As with Aristophanes, the Athenian mentions sophists in this connection. Similarly in the *Sophist* (268) the Eleatic Stranger describes two 'imitators of justice,' one being an *eirōnikos* imitator. That is, from

¹² εἶπερ τὰ χρέα διαφευξοῦμαι, / τοῖς τ' ἀνθρώποις εἶναι δόξω / θρασὺς, εὐγλωττος, τολμηρὸς, ἴτης / βδελυρὸς, ψευδῶν συγκολλητὴς / εὐρησιεπὴς, περίτρυμμα δικῶν / κύρβις, κρόταλον, κίναδος, τρύμη / μάσθλης, εἴρων, γλοιὸς, ἀλαζών / κέντρων, μιάρους, στρόφις, ἀργαλέος, / ματιολοιχός.

‘rolling around in discussion’ (διὰ τὴν τοῖς λόγοις κυλίνδῃσιν—268a2) they have come to realise that they only have the appearance of knowledge which they then offer up to others so as to deceive. They can keep up the pretence in long speeches or in private discussion where they try to make their interlocutor contradict themselves (268b1-5). Here the *eirōn* is a deceptive liar, and in this case he conceals his ignorance. When we come to Aristotle we shall see a contrast between *eirōneia* and *alazoneia* (‘boasting’), the former understating what the latter overstates. This makes sense of the *Wasps* passage and is at least consistent with the *Apology* passage. However the sense of *affecting innocence*, does not square with the liars in the *Laws* and the *Sophist*. They are practically *alazones*, braggarts, in that they exaggerate or overstate by claiming a knowledge which they actually lack. Thus at the start of the *Cratylus* Hermogenes tells Socrates how Cratylus claims that words (ὀνόματα) are applied to things by nature, but he continues,

I am eager to know what on earth he means, but he doesn’t make anything clear and plays the *eirōn* with me, pretending he has some special knowledge of such things...

[εἰρωνεύεται τε πρὸς με, προσποιούμενός τι αὐτὸς ἐν ἑαυτῷ διανοεῖσθαι ὥς εἰδὼς περὶ αὐτοῦ...] (383b8-384a3)

Cratylus is thought to be lauding himself in a rather coy manner. This, again, is not feigning innocence, but the pretence of knowing something, perhaps coupled with a convenient and cunning excuse (cf. similarly *Euthydemus* 302b3-4).

Now we turn to (2) the way in which the *eirōn* is thought to *sneer* at people. This sense emerges more explicitly in Aristotle and the Romans but under the civilised guise of ‘expressing contempt.’ We can approach this aspect of the term by degrees, moving from the occurrences in the *Republic*, the *Gorgias* and finally the *Symposium*. I do not think this sense

of the term should be completely distinguished from the previous one—being deceitful, often by feigning ignorance—but I have separated out the senses to illustrate the various shades of meaning available.

In a well-known passage in Book 1 of the *Republic* Socrates is accused of *eirōneia* by Thrasymachus. The latter is getting fed up with Socrates and Polemarchus prattling on like idiots, but Socrates pleads with Thrasymachus to pity them in their paltry attempts to understand justice (336b1-337a2).

But Thrasy-machus laughed sardonically when he heard this and said, ‘By Heracles, here is that trademark *eirōneia* of Socrates [αὐτῇ ‘κείνῃ ἢ εἰωθυῖα εἰρωνεία Σωκράτους]. In fact I knew well and told these people to expect that you would be unwilling to answer, but would play the *eirōn* [εἰρωνεύσοιο] and do anything rather than answer a question someone might put to you. (337a3-7)

Plainly this is *feigning ignorance* and plainly ignorance provides a convenient excuse. But I would cautiously suggest there is something else in play here. Thrasymachus thinks that Socrates is not merely *concealing* something, but that he is obliquely insulting him. That is, when Socrates begged that ‘clever people’ (δεινοί) like Thrasymachus show pity to the humble Socrates, Thrasymachus espies a backhanded compliment, intended to insult. This is why he is angry at Socrates. The aggression in Thrasymachus’ response will find an echo in Callicles in the *Gorgias* and here we begin to see the way in which the *eirōn* transparently disparages and sneers at his victims.

In the *Gorgias* at 485e-486c Callicles expresses what appears to be sincere goodwill towards Socrates and says he feels like the Zethus to Socrates’ Amphion in Euripides’ play. That is, like Zethus, he feels compelled to criticise Socrates for neglecting practical concerns

in his enthusiasm for philosophy such that, notwithstanding his noble spirit, he could never put together a persuasive speech in the assembly or the like. But this goodwill has all but evaporated by 489d1-e4. After repeatedly failing to deal with Socrates' incessant questions, Socrates asks that Callicles 'take it easy on him' or he might quit his tutelage (καὶ ὃ θαυμάσιε πρῶτόν με προδίδασκε, ἵνα μὴ ἀποφοιτήσω παρὰ σοῦ). In response to this thinly veiled barb Callicles simply brands Socrates an *eirōn*. But Socrates, not to be outdone, throws the insult right back: 'No I'm not, Callicles, by Zethus, whom you evoked so much a moment ago in playing the *eirōn* with me' (Μὰ τὸν Ζῆθον, ὃ Καλλίκλεις, ὃ σὺ χρώμενος πολλὰ νῦν δὴ εἰρωνεύου πρὸς με). 'Playing the *eirōn*' here shades into *mocking* or *sneering at* and should not be limited to *affecting ignorance*. This is close to sarcasm and falls within the modern sense of the term irony. Socrates is suggesting (whether or not justifiably) that Callicles had been deriding him by casting him as the Zethus; and Callicles, for his part, perceives that Socrates is being cheeky and labels this *eirōneia*. We find this sense of *eirōneia* spelled out in the *Rhetoric to Alexander* at 1434a17-24 in even more strikingly modern terms: '*eirōneia* is to say something while pretending not to say something or to call things by contrary names' and this is said to be an effective means of ridiculing and showing one's superiority (1441b25-9).¹³

Finally we come to the celebrated passage in the *Symposium*. Alcibiades is essaying his case that Socrates is a Silenus, the lusty patron of sex and intoxication:

For you see that he loves the beautiful, he's always after them and is besotted, and

¹³ On the connection between Socrates, *eirōneia* and sneering see Ribbeck (1876) 385-6 and cf. Thomson (1926) 167-8 and Nehamas (1998) 58. Vlastos (1987) 83-4 argues, *pace* Burnet, Guthrie and others, that *eirōneia* was not limited to 'deceit' but extended to include 'mockery' in the late fifth century. He compares the English 'pretending,' which can mean deceiving as well as putting on a transparent act. For a different view see Wolfsdorf (2008) 242-5 and Lane (2006) 62-4.

again, he's always ignorant and knows nothing. Isn't this like the appearance of Silenus? Obviously! The man wears this on the outside, like the hollowed-out Silenus statues. But if we open him up, do you know, gentlemen, how incredibly sound of mind he is on the inside? Whether someone is beautiful means nothing to him and he's more contemptuous than you could imagine as to whether someone is rich or holds any other honour the masses esteem; he thinks all such possessions worthless and us as well. I tell you, he spends his whole life playing the *eirōn* and toying with people [εἰρωνεύόμενος δὲ καὶ παίζων πάντα τὸν βίον πρὸς τοὺς ἀνθρώπους διατελεῖ]. (216d2-e5)

Thus to play the *eirōn* can be to conceal, not least in feigning ignorance and at the same time to scorn and mock those whom you treat with *eirōneia*.¹⁴

We have seen then how *eirōneia* can be (1) *deceit* and how this can phase into (2) *sneering sarcasm*. This leaves (3) *indolence* and (4) an *urbane affectation*. We find sense (3) in Demosthenes. In the *First Philippic*, while attempting to rally the Athenians against Phillip, he chastises them for failing to take the initiative and seize the present opportunities. In a word they are indolent. Demosthenes says at section 37, 'These opportunities for action will not wait

¹⁴ Lane (2006) 71-4 denies that mocking plays a role here. Vlastos (1987) 87-90 thinks this passage is precisely where the meaning of the term shifts from *deception* to *irony*. Yet Alcibiades makes much of Socrates' deceit. Vlastos looks to *Smp.* 218d6-219a1 to support his reading. Here Alcibiades quotes something Socrates had said and describes it as μάλα εἰρωνικῶς. But the quote is not the unequivocal irony that Vlastos thinks it is and is far more complex and playful than he seems to realise. We cannot really say with precision what Alcibiades thinks is εἰρωνικῶς about the quote and the fact that he doesn't specify makes a novel usage unlikely. Cf. Burge (1969) 6 for a more subtle account that acknowledges the playful blend of praise and blame in Alcibiades' 'eulogy.'

around for your lethargy and *eirōneia*’ (οἱ δὲ τῶν πραγμάτων οὐ μένουσι καιροὶ τὴν ἡμετέραν βραδυτῆτα καὶ εἰρωνείαν). And again at section 7 he urges, ‘if each of you should throw off all your *eirōneia* [πᾶσαν ἀφείξ τὴν εἰρωνείαν] and take the initiative for action...’ (cf. his *Funeral Speech* 18). This usage involves *playing things down* and as such recalls Socrates (see also Dinarchus *Against Aristogeiton* 11). However the tone here is different. Demosthenes is, one surmises, not being quite so flippant and disparaging as to suggest the Athenians are deceptive scoundrels weaselling out of something. Rather, it is easier to take the term as a reproach of their indolence.¹⁵ Though this is still an insult, the disparaging and insulting overtones of the term are beginning to fall away to some extent.

Turning now to Aristotle, his usage of the term is obviously informed by the fact that he is employing his doctrine of the mean. For example, he sharply distinguishes between *alazoneia* and *eirōneia*, the one being a braggart who overstates and exaggerates, the other being a dissembler who understates. The latter recalls Socrates. Thus in the *Nicomachean Ethics* (1108a10-11), having discussed how the great-souled man occupies a mean in relation to honour, he turns to social interactions in words and deeds (περὶ λόγων καὶ πράξεων κοινωνίαν). The first subcategory concerns speaking the truth: *alazoneia* is excessive, *eirōneia* is deficient, pretending to be less than one is (ἢ προσποιήσις ἐπὶ τὸ ἔλαττον). Similarly in the *Eudemian Ethics* the *eirōn* pretends to be less (ὁ ἐλάττω τῶν ὑπαρχόντων προσποιούμενος—1221a8) and is said to disown or diminish his good qualities (1127a21-3).¹⁶ This all follows quite naturally from the preceding with the specification that *eirōneia* concerns playing things down, not lying in general. In the *Rhetoric* (1419b2-8) *eirōneia* is contrasted with buffoonery

¹⁵ See further Ribbeck (1876) 386-7 and see also Knox (1961) 4.

¹⁶ It is noteworthy that, although Aristotle is concerned with *speaking* the truth, he explicitly extends *eirōneia* to *praxis* or behaviour. Cf. Sedgewick (2003) 15-16.

(βωμολογία) and is said to be more gentlemanly (ἐλευθεριώτερον) than buffoonery because the buffoon acts for other people's entertainment, but the *eirōn* pleases himself.¹⁷ This recalls the dismissive sneer we found in the *Gorgias* and Aristotle explains that one should confound his opponent by being trivial about what they take seriously (just as we saw in the *Rhetoric to Alexander*). This *eirōneia* is a sign of contempt (see *Rhetoric* 1379b25).¹⁸

The exoneration of *eirōneia* (in at least some contexts) is almost complete. For the last leg we return to the *Nicomachean Ethics*.¹⁹ At 1127b21-31 *eirōneia* is said to be more refined (χαριέστεροι) than *alazoneia* because it stems from a disdain of ostentation (φεύγοντες τὸ ὀκνηρόν)—to which we might add that it seems not just to be the opposite of *alazoneia* but the remedy to it insofar as the latter is a prime example of ostentation. *Eirōneia* can be used to criticise things held in high regard by others—significantly—as Socrates did. Aristotle even goes on to grace *eirōneia* with its own *mean*: when people use it in moderation they have a

¹⁷ On the other hand, in the *Rhetoric* (1382b19-22) Aristotle strongly cautions us against *eirōnes* and brands them scoundrels (πανούργοι). On the inconsistency of his treatment see Pavlovskis (1969) 22-4. Bergson (1971) 412-3 explains the shift in Aristotle's usage thus: in the ethical works the *eirōn* is contrasted with the braggart because we are concerned with degrees of speaking the truth; in the *Rhetoric*, by contrast, we look to types of jokes and thus the *eirōn* is contrasted, favourably this time, with the buffoon. This makes good sense. However when Pavlovskis says 'Aristotle's attitude toward irony is not as clear as one may wish it to be' (22) one detects the assumption that the term *ought* to be univocal. I am not convinced that Aristotle needs saving in this regard. He is *using* the term, not explaining it.

¹⁸ Bergson (1971) 418 ties this closely to Socrates.

¹⁹ Gooch (1987) 97-8 notes that the *alazōn* comes off much worse than the *eirōn* and concludes that Aristotle gives the term *eirōn* a more positive meaning than what we find in Aristophanes and Plato because of Socrates (103-4).

certain elegance (χαρίεντες φαίνονται). Finally at 1124b30-1 we read that even the great-souled man can avail himself of *eirōneia*: ‘for he must speak and behave openly (being outspoken and frank about those he disdains, except inasmuch as he uses *eirōneia*, which he does before the masses).’ The reason for this is that it is vulgar to lord it over the feeble. Here then (4) an urbane affectation comes into view.²⁰ This is a far cry from the scoundrel we meet in Aristophanes and the move towards a more refined concept of *eirōneia* in light of the ‘Socratic revolution’ continues with the Romans.²¹

We can afford to be more brief with the Romans. Here our quarry emerges as a technical term in rhetoric. There are two main points to establish. The first is that the refined conception of *eirōneia* is usually maintained with an eye to Socrates. The second is that our modern sense of

²⁰ We will not stop to examine Theophrastus’ account in the *Characters* inasmuch as his discussion of the *eirōn* is rather unilluminating. Not only is the text corrupt, but the account he offers would be better understood in light of what we know about *eirōneia* rather than one that adds to our understanding. Ribbeck (1876) 389-95, e.g., exerts himself in untangling Theophrastus’ account of *eirōneia* and concludes that it is broadly Aristotelean (392) and Socratic (394-5), while Ussher (1977) thinks that Theophrastus’ *Characters* looks to Aristophanes (75). Bergson (1971) 415 sees an attempt to blend everyday notions with Aristotle’s. And Bücher (1941) 348 sees an indolent man who makes convenient excuses, as in Demosthenes. This view is followed by Pavlovskis (1968) 25-6, who nevertheless remarks that the account ‘baffles us.’

²¹ To gesture in the direction of a more substantive survey of Greek usage, consider some occurrences in Plutarch: *Fabius Maximus* 11.1 (overcautious); *Pompey* 30.6 (deceitful false modesty); *Agis* 19.4 (arrogant pretense); *Timoleon* 15.4 (mocking jest); *Caius Marius* 24.4 (scornful jest); *Demetrius* 18.4 (humility); *Cleomenes* 4.2 (transparent falsehood). See further Ribbeck (1987) 395-8 and Bergson (1971) 415-6.

(verbal) irony comes explicitly to the fore. Although the pejorative early sense of the term never dies out, we are interested in how the modern concept comes about and as such we will focus on the antecedents to this; though we shall do well to keep the pejorative sense in the back of our minds.²²

Our two key sources for the Romans are Cicero and Quintilian. Although Quintilian comes later, since he has more to say on the matter, I would like to foreground his account and subsequently turn to Cicero for confirmation. The key passage in Quintilian's *Institutio Oratoria* is 9.2.44-5 and it begins by noting that the Greek term εἰρωνεία has been rendered *dissimulatio* ('dissimulation' or 'disguising'). 'But,' he continues, 'this is inadequate to account for the power of this figure' (*parum totius huius figurae vires*), so he must use the Greek term. Further, he plainly uses it as a technical term. Thus he goes on to state that both the 'figure' and 'trope' of *ironia* are broadly similar: 'for in both, one is to understand the contrary of what is said' (*utroque enim contrarium ei quod dicitur intellegendum est*). This matches the modern sense of 'verbal irony' (see also 8.6.54 and Cicero *De Oratore* 2.262 and 269). Quintilian betrays a sufficiently complex understanding of this rhetorical technique. The *trope* (or 'figure of speech') employs 'local' irony where a word carries its opposite meaning and the real meaning is quite clear: for example, 'that *excellent* Metellus.' The *figure* (or 'figure of thought'), by contrast, is not so localised and can inform a whole passage; indeed, a whole life can be ironic as Socrates' was. The reference to Socrates, significant in itself, illustrates Quintilian's

²² On the persisting pejorative sense see Ribbeck (1876) 395, Markantonatos (1975) 19 and Pavlovskis (1968) 26 and cf. Bergson (1971) 415-8. It is perhaps important to recall the Epicurean criticism of Socrates, most notable in Philodemus. As Riley (1980) notes, Socrates is taken to task for being deceitful (since philosophers ought to be frank) and though Philodemus does not use the term *eirōneia*, this is clearly what he has in mind.

meaning in that Socrates' irony could inform or colour his whole approach to a conversation, not just this or that phrase or term.

Turning to 4.1.38-9 Quintilian demonstrates how irony can minimize and scorn, which accords with Aristotle and much besides. Accordingly, Quintilian can refer to the trope as *illusio* (8.6.54-9); mocking or jeering which reveals itself via an incongruity between the words used and the delivery, the character of the speaker or the nature of the topic. Revealingly, he gives the Socratic technique of 'praising via blame' and 'blaming via praise' as examples. In 6.3.68 Quintilian notes that not only can *ironia* be used to joke but it can be *urbana*, 'refined' or 'urbane.' Indeed, this technique is even more delightful (*periucunda*) when used in conversation (9.1.29-30). In sum then, *ironia* is a particularly Socratic affectation that can be used effectively in speeches or in conversation, either as a general approach or in a specific quip. It can be derisive, humorous, urbane and delightful.

This is confirmed by Cicero.²³ Firstly, *ironia* is Socratic (see *Brutus* 292 and cf. *De Officiis* 1.108). Indeed, where necessary Socrates can be used to vindicate irony. Thus Cicero rehearses the story that the historian Fannius, having attributed *ironia* to Scipio Africanus the younger, forestalled any aversion to irony by noting that Socrates had the same habit (*Academica* 2.15).²⁴ But even still, Cicero maintains, no one compares to the master: 'In my view Socrates far outstripped all with the charm and refinement of his irony and dissimulation' (*Socratem opinor in hac ironia dissimulantiaque longe lepore et humanitate omnibus praestitisse—De Oratore* 2.270-1). And he continues: irony blends wit and gravitas (*salsum cum gravitate*) and is suitable for oratory and conversation (see further *De Oratore* 2.269). While these may not be the only usages of our term in this period, they will certainly prove to

²³ See further Tarrant (2000) 26, who discusses the role of the speakers used in Cicero's dialogues.

²⁴ See further Ribbeck (1876) 398-9 and see also Knox (1961) 5 with n. 2.

be the most important. Moreover, it is clear to see the important effect that Plato's Socrates has had.²⁵ This term was originally an insult designating a slippery and deceitful fox which attached itself to Socrates only for him to turn around and put his stamp on the word. For the term changes from a derisive insult to an urbane rhetorical technique, quintessentially associated with his name. Better still, our term comes to be through an act of *ironia*. One of the trademark features of this Socratic technique is trading praise for blame and blame for praise. I leave it for the reader to decide if it is ironic or apt that the word which indicates this exchange has itself moved from a reproach to a compliment.

The Modern Period

Here we turn to Norman Knox (1961) *The Word Irony and its Context, 1500-1755*. He registers the inseparability of irony from Socrates (e.g. 4 and 20) and states that the basic sense of 'saying one thing but meaning the contrary' persists from Cicero and Quintilian through the medieval

²⁵ Socrates appears constantly throughout studies of this term. Thus Ribbeck (1876) emphasizes how he functions as a model for subsequent writers which ultimately exonerated the *eirōn* (e.g. 386 and 399); as does Bergson (1971) 414 ('*Der "alte" Eiron lebte indessen weiter, nur für die Nachwelt ist die sokratische Eironeia musterhaft geworden*'). Cornford (1914) 161 mentions that the Greek term lost its negative association in this connection. And Thomson (1926) 3-4 acknowledges Plato's mastery of irony and notes that he recreated the Greek term. Regarding Socratic irony he says that, although it left people insulted and confused, 'they were sure it was irony. They called it so, and it is because they so called it that it has its modern meaning' (168). Sedgewick (2003) lavishes praise on Socrates and his irony calling it 'the most famous and noble of all ironies' and 'the most important of all the ironic forms' (18); few ironies stray far from the Socratic (20), which is 'the germ of all newer ironies' (21). See further Pavlovskis (1968) 25 and 27-8, Knox (1961) 3-4, Markantonatos (1975) 17 and Vlastos (1987) 84-5.

rhetoricians into the sixteenth century and beyond.²⁶ Although focusing on *blame-through-praise* (12-13), the original sense of *deception* (thus *dissimulatio*) does not entirely disappear (11-12).²⁷ Knox identifies three phases in the development of the term. (1) In the sixteenth century it was a seldom used and erudite technical term. (2) In the seventeenth it came into wider use but was still very erudite. (3) In the eighteenth century, by 1730, it had gained currency in English largely due to its extensive use surrounding the writings of Jonathan Swift and Daniel Defoe (24). Regarding the meaning of the term, the most popular meaning cited (as opposed to implicit in usage) was ‘saying the contrary or opposite of what one means.’ Knox traces this from the *Rhetoric to Alexander* to Cicero and Quintilian and then through the medieval rhetoricians into English (30). Another formulation, which Knox prefers, is ‘using praise to blame and blame to praise’ (33) for which he cites Quintilian (8.6.54-58) adding that the sense of *mocking* or *scoffing* often predominates in these cases but begins to fade in the seventeenth century (34-5). None of these senses is without precedent in what we have seen already, nor do any of them stray too far from Socrates. Indeed, the preponderance of ‘blame-through-praise’ is proverbially Socratic and this will prove to be the dominant usage of ‘irony’ in the period surveyed by Knox, namely 1500-1755.²⁸ Even the more general formulation of ‘saying the opposite’ tends to revert to the Socratic model: ‘*Irony* as “saying the opposite of what one means” nearly always reduces itself to blame-through-praise or vice versa’ (76).

²⁶ Colebrook (2004) 7-10 adds that the Latin and Greek sources we have looked at were not rediscovered until the Renaissance; instead people looked to the treatments of, say, Isidore of Seville (*Etymologiae* 1.37.22-4 and 2.31.40), who was parasitic on Quintilian. Regarding the Renaissance, unsurprisingly it is Plato’s Socrates who makes the decisive difference. See D. Knox (1989) e.g. 141.

²⁷ See also Markantonatos (1975) 20-1.

²⁸ Accordingly Socrates dominates certain entries in Knox’s ‘dictionary,’ most notable III ‘blame-through-praise’ (45-7, which is roughly half the ‘dictionary’).

There is, however, a preference to limit irony to *blame* through false praise (as opposed to praise-through-blame) not least because ‘*irony* never lost its overtones of contention and spite’ (55-6).

Knox makes the important observation that situational irony is generally not recognised as ironic (92-8). However he does note, for example, how the palpable irony of Cervantes, while building on the verbal irony of Swift and Defoe, often exemplifies dramatic irony (most notable, the deluded ‘heroics’ of Don Quixote) and thus indicates how the term can be expanded to include other forms of irony (185-6).

‘Some readers may be a little surprised to see *irony* attributed to a tragic poet.’ This wonderful little line was in no way offered ironically. It is the first line of an article by Canon Thirlwall called ‘On the Irony of Sophocles’ and it marks the final development in the English word ‘irony.’ The essay appeared in 1833 though the notion may have taken some time to gain common currency.²⁹

After surmising the basic outline of ‘what we will call *verbal irony*’—that is, a contrast between thought and expression (484-5)—Thirlwall goes on, without departing from the ‘analogy of verbal irony’ to distinguish two types of “*practical*” *irony*.’ The first type of practical irony appeals to the old pejorative sense of our term, particularly in connection with the deceptive *eirōneia* (as we may call it): ‘Such is flattery under the mask of friendship’ or generally any sort of deceit that leads to the other’s downfall (485-6). The second sort of practical irony is less malicious and recalls, for example, the benign father who lets his son stumble and fall where needs be. It is something like the mockery of fate. Thus Thirlwall finds

²⁹ See Muecke (1969) 8 and Sedgewick (2003) 29. Sedgewick argues, with mild reservations, that the effects were felt almost immediately. Muecke, following Sedgewick, notes that as late as 1907 one could still speak of ‘dramatic irony, so-called’ as if in doubt over the term.

an analogue of verbal irony in the way a false smile can conceal a dagger in the back, or in the way Fate seems to look down on us knowingly as our best laid plans are undone. The author goes on, like a modern-day Herodotus, to show how this is in fact a ‘universal law which manifests itself, no less in the moral world, than in the physical.’ This solemn decree is followed by a catalogue of ancient powers (Persia, Athens, Sparta) whose greatness led to their demise (487-8), while—we may surmise—fate smiled on. Regardless of his historical musings or the putative analogy with verbal irony, Thirlwall’s discussion of Sophocles played an instrumental role in extending the term ‘irony’ from a rhetorical technique to an observable phenomenon that has nothing to do with rhetoric.³⁰

In summary we may trace the path of the word ‘irony’ into its modern English usage via four great moments. The first is Plato and his Socrates, who set the term on its trajectory, the second is its rhetorical usage in Cicero and Quintilian, the third is in the Modern period where the term came into common parlance, and the fourth follows on from Thirlwall. It is interesting to note that the original, Aristophanic sense of *deception* never really dropped out but, like a sub-plot, stayed lurking in the background so that Thirlwall could use it as a means of moving from verbal irony to ‘practical’ irony. Before moving on, however, let me register one of the more notable omissions in my survey. It is no coincidence that Thirlwall had sympathies with contemporary intellectual trends in Germany and he translated not only works by

³⁰ I have potentially oversimplified the development of the term. Thirlwall is generally thought to have brought *dramatic irony* out into the open. See Muecke (1969) 49. We need not split hairs here. Thirlwall’s innovation is generally recognised as significant for English usage, and his ‘practical irony’ certainly proceeds from verbal irony. His coinage naturally focused on drama and presumably encouraged the term ‘Sophoclean irony,’ the ancestor of ‘dramatic irony.’ Cf. Sedgewick (2003) 63.

Schleiermacher and Ludwig Tieck but also Friedrich Schlegel.³¹ These writers, especially the last, made much of irony and pioneered the so-called ‘Romantic irony’ which emerged as a programme for literature if not a philosophy unto itself.

II THE NATURE OF IRONY

We now turn to a discussion of what irony actually is and how it works. I shall aim for a somewhat prescriptive account. Certainly it is easy to be sceptical of those who seem to extend the concept of irony too broadly; not only the attempt to extend irony so that it includes all literature (discussed below), but the tendency of irony to lend itself to its ‘neighbours.’ Consider the sports journalist who tells us that the home team ‘ironically’ lost the match, when in fact there was nothing really ironic about it. Here the term, simply means ‘contrary to hopes or expectations’ and while this can lead to irony, it is not really sufficient for it. The confusion between *coincidence* and *irony* is even more prevalent.³² Or again, the Revised Third Edition of *Fowler’s Modern English Usage*, published in 1998, can give under *ironical*, ‘odd, strange, paradoxical’ where only the last item is actually ironic in the sense that I am interested in. I will return to these issues at the end of the chapter. For now I will focus on outlining an account

³¹ On Thirlwall in his connection with the Germans see further Sedgewick (2003) 26.

³² An example: ‘Ironically, George bought a new Studebaker the day before the automobile company announced it was going out of business.’ Here the irony is so slight as to be negligible. The example is from Clark and Gerrig (2007) 29, a scholarly article about irony, which identifies this as ‘irony of fate.’ Shelley (2007) 546 defends these ironies because they are commonly identified as such. This puts the cart before the horse; some words may be slaves to popular usage, but often times it is possible to misapply a term. See generally Booth (1974) xi and 2, who shows that we can and do misapply ‘irony,’ which implies that there is a standard, however inchoate.

of irony. The two main sources I have drawn on are D. C. Muecke's *The Compass of Irony* and Wayne Booth's *A Rhetoric of Irony*.

My discussion in the present section is divided into various subsections. Following a common distinction, the first two subsections look to *Verbal Irony* and *Situational Irony* respectively. However, in the subsequent subsection, entitled *The Active Ingredient*, I try to look past this distinction, insofar as we often find these two types of irony inextricably combined; especially in the complex literary usages of irony that we are ultimately concerned with. In broad strokes I argue that irony is a special type of contrast between two opposite or 'unlike' items. From here the discussion shifts away from generalities about what irony is towards a discussion of its use: I offer up a number of 'principles' designed to bring out particular or striking features of irony. These principles look mainly to the use of irony in literature and, as the discussion progresses, they tend to hone in on things that will be particularly relevant to our subsequent inquiry into Plato.

As mentioned I make extensive use of examples. My intention here is to illustrate and exemplify my claims so that you can see what I mean for yourself. This is not only an important part of any attempt to discuss irony, it also forms part of my conception of irony. Namely, that irony has an aesthetic quality that we experience or appreciate. I trust that this way of understanding irony will become increasingly apparent as we progress. Suffice it to say that, while I might reject some conceptions of irony (for example, *mere coincidence*) I am not simply stipulating what irony is. Rather I am attempting to render the implicit explicit, or to elucidate an account of irony that coheres with the readers' own intuitions.

Verbal Irony

One may be excused for coming away from certain discussions of verbal irony with the impression that the paradigmatic case of our elusive quarry is when someone utters that

profound witticism ‘Great weather we’re having’ when it is in fact raining. Not to stray too far from the familiar, we shall begin with the following case of verbal irony: it is raining cats and dogs and a chap, thoroughly soaked, comes upon a colleague and says, perfectly deadpan, ‘I do believe it’s raining.’ For this to be ironic certain things need to be stipulated, particularly in regard to the personalities of the characters involved and the relationship between them. As we have seen, Quintilian and Cicero can parse irony as ‘saying one thing but meaning another.’ Ultimately this must be rejected as a definition because it would include all non-literal modes of expression, for instance, metaphor. But Quintilian also gives us ‘saying one thing but meaning the *opposite*.’ Although some have rejected this as well, they do so on the rather unhelpful assumption that ‘opposition’ here refers to *logical opposition*.³³ Leaving this aside let us apply Quintilian’s account to some examples. A student comes in late to a class and the teacher turns on them and says, ‘How nice of you to join us.’ Here we have a *reproach* disguised as a *compliment*. These are opposite and the tension between explicit and implicit meaning creates irony. Now let us try the Groucho quote above: ‘If you continue to publish slanderous pieces about me, I shall feel compelled to cancel my subscription.’ Here the opposition is not between explicit and implicit meanings. Rather, the contrast emerges from

³³ This error is committed by Ferrari (2008) 4 and Nehamas (1998) 55 and scholars working in pragmatics: Wilson and Sperber (2007) 36; Kumon-Nakamura, Glucksberg and Brown (2007) 59 and; Shelly (2007) 139. Wilson and Spencer, for instance, use as an example the ironic remark ‘You can tell he’s upset’ (said of someone throwing a full-blown tantrum). They then test out the definition that irony is *saying the opposite* by attaching a negation to the remark. Thus they end up with, ‘You *can’t* tell he’s upset’ or perhaps ‘You can tell he’s *not* upset.’ This is unhelpful. The irony, which is litotes (ironic understatement), involves presenting the *obvious* as though it were a *shrewd observation*. These two are clearly opposite but *logical opposition* has little to do with it. As I shall argue, opposition is the essential feature of all types of irony, not just verbal irony.

the implication that cancelling his subscription is an appropriate response to slander. One way to phrase this is to talk about a contrast between *tone* and *content* (rather than between a thing said and a thing understood).³⁴ Or more generally, to employ such irony involves the transparent affectation of sincerity. Quintilian cannot accommodate this, but he does not need much to be set right: to *intimate* or *imply* something but mean the opposite.

Let us then return to our original example. Our chap is soaking wet and apparently overprone to dry jokes. A squall of wind, rain and lightning is hurling itself against a nearby window. He turns to his old friend and says, ‘Call me crazy, old friend, but I *do* believe that it’s raining.’ Our ironist here is intimating that his observation is perhaps novel or pertinent, but nothing could be further from the truth. He is ironically alluding to the fact that it’s not just raining, but it’s *really* coming down. He brings the severity of the weather to the fore precisely by playing it down. More generally, notice how unremarkable, or rather unremarked, this all is. At the beginning of this subsection when I mentioned *that profound witticism* ‘*Great weather we’re having*’ you would have intuited not just the inversion of *semantic* meaning (‘banal joke’ for ‘profound witticism’), but also the somewhat affected lofty *tone*. This is a matter of intuiting *intentions*; to which we now turn.³⁵

³⁴ Groucho’s witty remark actually leaves a lot unsaid. Perhaps he is trying to criticise the magazine all the while appearing unperturbed by the business; that is, to respond to their accusations but also trivialise them.

³⁵ I avoid the issue of how we actually identify something as ironic because it is at once obvious or intuitive and inexplicably complex. In very brief, we can interpret something as ironic in light of hints or clues in the ‘delivery’ (spoken or written) as well as contextual or background information. Booth (1974) discusses this at length (47-229) and his account is, in the final analysis, inconclusive (227-9).

Gregory Vlastos famously sought to elucidate Socratic irony by analysing irony in contradistinction to deceptive lies.³⁶ Irony is different from a lie in that it is supposed to be seen through, he claimed. But this fails to grasp how sophisticated irony can be. A clear counter example is what Muecke refers to as ‘private irony.’ Jane Austen’s Mr. Bennet, for example, is frequently seen to make ironic jokes which only he gets.³⁷ That is, he deceives his addressee even though he is employing verbal irony. Although verbal irony is deliberately employed to indicate its contrary, it need not be the case that everyone is in on the joke. If there is an audience of two people, for example, and the ironist designs his irony so that only one gets it, this is still irony. Above all, it is entirely possible for an addressee to be an unwitting *victim* of a verbal irony. Let us look at some examples.

³⁶ Vlastos (1987) 79-80.

³⁷ Muecke (1969) 59-60 also notes the ‘private irony’ of Socrates in the *Euthyphro*. He quotes the following passage from *Pride and Prejudice* on 46-7: (the vain fool, Mr. Collins, is speaking) ‘...you may imagine that I am happy on every occasion to offer those little delicate compliments which are always acceptable to ladies...’

‘You judge very properly,’ said Mr. Bennet, ‘and it is happy for you that you possess the talent of flattering with delicacy. May I ask whether these pleasing attentions proceed from the impulse of the moment, or are they the result of previous study?’

‘They arise chiefly from what is passing at the time, and though I sometimes amuse myself with suggesting and arranging such little elegant compliments as may be adapted to ordinary occasions, I always wish to give them as unstudied an air as possible.’

Mr. Bennet’s expectations were fully answered. His cousin was as absurd as he had hoped, and he listened to him with the keenest enjoyment, maintaining at the same time the most resolute composure of countenance, and except in occasional glances at Elizabeth, required no partner in his pleasure.’

Odysseus encounters the one-eyed ogre, Polyphemus, and tells him that his name is Nobody (Οὐτις). There is certainly irony here ('Nobody is hurting me!') and the poets makes excellent use of dramatic irony, but Odysseus is clearly *not* employing verbal irony. Note that Odysseus' companions are within ear-shot and they too can perceive this irony, but this does not make Odysseus' lie verbal irony. The difference lies in the intentions of the speaker. If Odysseus had said his clever lie in such a way as to draw attention to the lie as a lie, then we might have verbal irony and it would not matter if he, like Mr. Bennet, were the only one around to appreciate the irony.³⁸ We can see this more clearly when Socrates ironically mocks Euthyphro's intelligence and the latter fails to get it:

Soc.: In the name of Zeus, Euthyphro, do you really believe you know so exactly where the divine stands in regard to the holy and the unholy? Don't you fear that, assuming things turn out as you say, you would actually be committing an unholy deed *yourself* in taking your father to court?

Euth.: Yes, Socrates: I would be of no use, nor would Euthyphro stand out from the common man, if I did not have exact knowledge of all such things. (*Euthphr.* 4e4-5a2)

Plato has a keen interest in the false conceit of knowledge and in this example Euthyphro signals his own ignorance precisely by affirming his 'exact knowledge.' Socrates' remarks are deliberately ambivalent: to Euthyphro they seem complimentary, but we are supposed to understand them for the veiled insults that they are. Thus, not only do Socrates' remarks reflect

³⁸ In fact Odysseus often makes ironic remarks amidst the suitors and Penelope which only he gets (e.g. 18.384-6). These are both verbal ironies and dramatic irony.

poorly on Euthyphro, but Euthyphro's blithe ignorance actually sharpens the verbal irony. *Pace* Vlastos, the fact that Euthyphro doesn't get it *increases* the irony, it doesn't undermine it. Socratic irony is in fact a paradigmatic example of the way irony and deception overlap (which is no doubt why a Greek word for deception became the English word for irony). Note also the ability of irony to discriminate between listeners. This will play no small role in Plato's usage.

Situational Irony

The example from the *Euthyphro* contains not only verbal irony but also situational irony. Euthyphro's claim to *knowledge* actually betrays his *ignorance*. This is an ironic state of affairs. So is a gilded cage, an over-weight nutritionist or a shy attention seeker. Or again, there is irony when I lose my glasses and then cannot find them because I need my glasses to see them.

This general type of irony need not be rhetorical. That is, it need not be tied to communication. It can merely be an observed phenomenon. A striking and quintessentially Greek example of this appears in Herodotus.³⁹ For him the vicissitudes of man are deeply informed by irony. *Eudaimonia* or happiness, he says, does not tarry in one place, but the great become small and vice versa (1.5.4). God smites the great and the overweening but leaves the small intact (7.10e). In its most paradigmatic form this divine envy attacks those who are not only prosperous but excessively proud or arrogant (e.g. 1.8.1-2). The story of Croesus is a programmatic example which accordingly dominates Book 1. The turning point for Croesus comes when his Lydian empire is at the height of its prosperity (1.29.1). Ignoring the sage advice of Solon, Croesus dives headlong into a war with Persia. But, with divine Nemesis pursuing him (1.34.1), his actions inevitably lead to his own undoing. Here then we can see an

³⁹ Thomson (1926) 116-34 discusses the irony of Herodotus.

ironic situation quite devoid of anything to do with rhetoric. In a word, prosperity leads to ruin.⁴⁰

In broad strokes situational irony is a type of contrast where a situation either leads to its opposite or is endowed with some opposite significance. The loss of my glasses leads to a situation whereby it becomes harder to find my glasses. The ironic contrast does not emerge from the mere fact that I need or lack something, but from the fact that this lack itself feeds into and exacerbates the problem. However, my glasses—you shall not be surprised to hear—were on my head all along. So I was blustering about the house throwing things into disarray and brandishing accusations (‘You *must* have moved them!’) when they were with me all along. Here the contrast is not *causal* but an ironic juxtaposition between where I think my glasses are and where they actually are. In general, we may think of a contrast between (a) what actually is the case or comes to pass and (b) what we expect, desire or what is likely. To put it in a nutshell: a contrast between appearance and reality, the apparent and the actual. And yet, many unexpected things are not ironic: for example, hklaga hufaph tttt. And again, the mere fact that something is contrary to desire is also not enough for irony (like an undesirable typo). Rather, irony involves a special type of incompatibility, a particular type of contrast between the actual and the apparent.

⁴⁰ See further Gould (1989) 78-82. Herodotus’ sensitivity to irony is clearly evident in the story of Adrastus (1.43-4). Adrastus killed a family member and comes to Croesus to be purified from the pollution. The king not only cleanses him but welcomes him into his home. He also sends Adrastus out on a hunt so as to protect his son, but alas the ‘protector’ ends up killing the son and the king laments the bitter irony by calling on Zeus of the hearth because he had unwittingly *welcomed* and *supported* his son’s killer into his own home (διότι δὴ οἰκίοισι ὑποδεξάμενος τὸν ξεῖνον φονέα τοῦ παιδὸς ἐλάνθανε βόσκων) and calling on Zeus of comradeship because having sent him along as a *protector* he had found his *worst enemy*’ (ὥς φύλακα συμπέμψας αὐτὸν εὐρήκοι πολεμιώτατον) (1.44.2).

Let us play with some examples. Imagine a young man, Bruce, who has spent the whole morning berating his poor girlfriend, Bianca, for her ‘terrible driving.’ Later that afternoon Bruce crashes the car. The one event does not lead to the other, but they do contrast in the right way. Imagine that Bruce and Bianca are in the car together and he is berating her and then—*CRASH*—he has an accident. The irony is stronger. The contrast is more immediate. Finally, let us suppose that Bruce is so invested in his harangue, even pointing and indicating—‘This is how you’re supposed to do it!’—that this actually brings about the accident. In this case the irony is at its sharpest. Here is a similar sequence: (1) a tourist is pick-pocketed having bragged about how ‘clued up’ he was; (2) a tourist is pick-pocketed while he is fiddling around with an expensive ‘theft-proof’ money belt he bought just for this trip. In general then it seems that the more immediate the contrast, the sharper the irony and when one action actually leads to the opposite outcome, irony abounds.

Though much more could be said about situational irony this should suffice for our present purposes with the addition of one final observation. This irony implies a spectator or at least a point of view from which a contrast can be seen. In this connection commentators are inclined to mention that irony always ‘looks down’ on people inasmuch as it implies an ‘objective’ or ‘detached’ point of view. This is apparent in the case of dramatic irony, which is where the spectators are privy to something that the victims of an ironic situation are not. For example, the fate of Croesus or Oedipus in *Oedipus Rex*. The classic case of dramatic irony involves a speaker who utters a line that is more meaningful to us than the speaker or addressee (as when Oedipus swears to find the cause of the plague that has beset Thebes). Here then we have an objective point of view that ‘looks down’ on the unwitting characters.

The Active Ingredient

I have presented my account hitherto along the lines of the traditional distinction between verbal and situational irony. This also reflects the development of the word irony, which was only extended to ironic situations with Thirlwall (1833). Muecke (1969), offers three routes by which the term was extended. The first one recalls Thirlwall: 'Fate' or 'Fortune' is seen to mock us 'behaving like an ironist who says one thing to our hopes and expectations and another to himself' (49-50). Thus, similarly, Aristophanes readily 'mocks' his Socrates, his Cleon and his Euripides. Secondly the term might have been extended by the observation of those, like Euthyphro, who are confidently unaware of a verbal irony's implicit meaning (50-1). This, suggests Muecke, opens the way 'for the recognition, as irony, of the situation in which there is an "innocent" [who is blissfully unaware] even though there is no ironist of a Socratic or Swiftian kind' (51). Thirdly, we can understand the ironist as a 'pseudo-victim.' As the ironist says one thing but means another, some hypocrite, say, might say one thing but betray another with her actions. This is an 'ironist' who unwittingly does what the ironist does wittingly (49-50). Ultimately Muecke finds something like a common element between the two types of irony in that they both have a certain *duality* whether in respect of opposition of terms or in respect of a certain 'victim' whether a real or a pretended one (49).

To my mind we encounter some of the most striking and sophisticated cases of irony not in the verbal irony we use in conversation, nor in the situational irony we perceive in the world around us, but in the irony employed by authors and artists. Ultimately our interest is in Plato's literary use of irony and I have often found it unhelpful to analyse this in terms of verbal and situational irony. Consider the following example. Socrates has been asked what charge has brought him to the courthouse and he answers by heaping praise on his accuser, Meletus.

What charge? Not an undignified one it seems to me at least, since it is no slight

matter for a young person to have determined such an important affair. For that man, as he claims, knows how the young are being corrupted and who are corrupting them. He is probably some wise man since he identifies me as an ignoramus corrupting his peers, and thus he comes to denounce me to the state, as if to his mother. In fact, he alone, it appears to me, is beginning his political career in the right way. Because it is right that he takes care of the young first so that they turn out as well as possible, just as it is fitting for a good farmer to take care of the young plants first, but the others only after that. So too in this case, Meletus is first weeding out those of us corrupting the young shoots, as he claims; and then after this it's obvious that, having taken care of the elderly, he will turn out to be responsible for the greatest number of the most important benefits for the state; as is sure to be the likely outcome for someone setting out from such a beginning. (*Euthphr.* 2c2-3a5)

There are two basic ironies here. The first is Socrates' false praise for Meletus (which, typically, Euthyphro fails to get). This is verbal irony. The second is that Meletus is a young man charging an older man for *impiety*. But piety includes respect for one's elders and Socrates is much older than Meletus. This is situational irony. It is also the focal point of Socrates' covert diatribe. He says that it is no slight matter for someone so *young* to know these things; Socrates is corrupting Meletus' *peers*; Meletus runs to the state like a tattletale running to his mummy; he *begins* his career correctly. Naturally Meletus is among the 'young plants' that needs to be tended to.

Here Socrates alludes to an ironic state of affairs. And yet his account of the ironic situation is entirely coloured by verbal irony. It begins to emerge here how the two can in fact be fused into one: Socrates employs irony to insinuate that Meletus is an impious fool so that

false praise of his wisdom and the mischievous references to his youth all work together. Perhaps this might put us in mind of Fate as an ‘author’ who ironizes her ‘victims.’

In very broad terms verbal irony occurs when one’s explicit meaning is deliberately undermined. In an ironic situation on the other hand, although some action or thing indicates its opposite, it is not a deliberate contrivance, but a state of affairs. Even when we meet an ironic situation in literature—like the circumstances that lead to Croesus’ demise—this is not a rhetorical strategy like verbal irony. In a word, verbal irony is *used* or *employed*, situational irony is *observed*. And yet it is possible for a writer to offer up a text or a character ironically. For example, where Plato has Socrates raise doubts about the use of writing (*Phdr.* 275c5-276a9), this undermines the written text in the manner comparable to verbal irony because Plato seems to deliberately undermine his message. But at the same time it also creates a paradox in the manner of an ironic situation. In this way Plato *uses* an ironic situation. Or again, in the case of Aristophanes’ *Clouds* where the playwright seeks to expose ‘the new learning,’ Aristophanes offers up the character of Socrates in an ironic fashion. The portrait ‘undermines’ itself insofar as it is ridiculous and we are supposed to understand it as a satirical caricature. This differs from an earnest portrayal of a character in the same way a sincere utterance differs from an ironic one. And yet, an important part of this satirical caricature is situational irony. The all-too-transparent folly of Socrates is like my inability to find my glasses or Bruce the cocksure driver. Bruce’s excessive self-confidence only exposes how foolish he is. However, unlike those cases of situational irony, this ironic state of affairs has been deliberately contrived to make a point. That Aristophanes offers up his Socrates satirically cannot be separated from the situational irony. And this will often be the case in complex literary uses of irony. In saying this I do not mean to suggest that there is a distinction between (a) irony classed as verbal or situational irony and (b) irony employed by authors and artists. I am simply noting that the

distinction between verbal and situational irony does not always furnish us with the most illuminating way of understanding certain ironic usages we find in literature and the like.

Where the distinction between verbal and situational irony is useful, we do well to make use of it, but we should not be anxious to straight-jacket the thing into our terminology. Wayne Booth, for instance, looks to the use of irony in literature but does not use this distinction. And although he sets out with what is clearly verbal irony he moves from this into more complex cases of irony in literature, always with a view to the rhetorical aim of the usage.⁴¹ Thus he says of parody that the surface meaning must be rejected for a 'higher' meaning (72) and he writes as though authors 'talk about their characters behind their backs' when discussing how characters betray themselves (65 and 146).

Here then I would like to isolate the basic character of irony as I understand it, the 'active ingredient' if you will. It is a type of contrast between opposites, a sort of inversion of the ancient principle of 'like to like.' Two variants can be provisionally distinguished. The first one is where some item is endowed with a significance opposite to its usual or superficial meaning or to typical expectations. More generally it employs a contrast between appearance and reality. To offer a paradigmatic example consider the portrait Alcibiades draws of Socrates in the *Symposium* (215-216): on the outside he's a randy know-nothing, and an ugly one at that, but on the inside he is a divine paragon of self-control and wisdom. Verbal irony falls under this category along with certain situational ironies. In the second variant 'unlike' *engenders* 'unlike.' One thing causes or brings about its ironic opposite. This is also well illustrated in the *Symposium*. In Socrates' speech we hear how *Erōs* is far from beautiful. And yet he is

⁴¹ Booth (1974) does note on 236, 238, 240 and n. 7 on 241 the importance of distinguishing ironies that need to be 'reconstructed' from those that do not, like simple situational ironies. Our interests are in the ones that need reconstruction. Cf. Muecke (1969) 92-4 (and following) who can talk about those who present ironic situations as 'ironists.'

obsessed with beauty and tries everything in his power to get it (203c6-204a). In this way his lack of beauty is presented as the *cause* of his love for it. As the poet Callimachus puts it, desire is like a hunter who lives only for the thrill of the chase: ‘it is apt to pursue what runs away but ignores what lies at its feet’ (*Epigrams* 33.5-6).

Thirdly, the *combination* of these two variants is illustrated by the pregnant sense of *aporia* as we find it in the *Symposium*, namely the knowledge that one does not know something. This is ironic in the first sense in that a piece of ignorance—of *not* knowing—is presented as an advancement in knowledge. In addition to this, *aporia* properly understood also *engenders* a desire within us for the truth we lack: ‘For he who does not consider himself lacking does not desire what he does not think he lacks’ (οὐκ οὖν ἐπιθυμεῖ ὁ μὴ οἰόμενος ἐνδεὴς εἶναι οὗ ἂν μὴ οἶηται ἐπιδεῖσθαι—*Smp.* 203e5-204a7).

To round off our account of what irony is let us take a moment to look to the aesthetic quality, and thus the irreducibility, of irony. Consider the robbed robber. Suppose a pickpocket is himself pick-pocketed. We can analyse the irony here by say that the robber *ought* to know about stealing and find the contrast there. But I suspect there is more going on here. There is something intuitively striking about the contrast. Or consider again the gilded cage. Here we contrast *luxury* with *imprisonment*. Or what about going to war for peace, or an ambulance that crashes into and harms a person? What these examples show is the importance of *antonyms* or *opposing pairs*: the opposition between a victim and a criminal; luxury and imprisonment; war and peace; healer and harmer. This in turn suggests to me a certain irreducibility. The gilded cage contrasts luxury with prison—not *freedom* with imprisonment—and is more ironic on account of this even though freedom is the direct opposite of imprisonment. There is also a certain plasticity to the types of antonyms we are interested in. For instance, we could produce ironies from the following antonyms: man and beast, man and machine, man and nature. To be sure, there will often be something subjective about which antonyms are more striking to us

and more apt for irony. Intuitively war and peace, master and slave, perhaps even clean and dirty strike me as more apt for irony than hot and cold, rest and motion or tall and short. Such things are presumably subject to cultural and personal variations,⁴² but this does not mean that irony is purely subjective. On the contrary, there seems to be a basic pattern that can be realised in different things according to personal and cultural sensibilities (not unlike humour). Irony, I argue, is best understood as a type of contrast, but as to the precise nature of the contrast, it is a lot easier to observe it than it is to analytically account for it. However, I would urge that this is a concomitant of the aesthetic aspect of irony which any account needs to take stock of.

Principles

Here I would like to outline in brief some important points or ‘principles’ concerning the effect and use of irony.

Irony is drawn to the alazōn. We met the *alazōn*, or braggart, in Aristotle. For Aristotle there is an important contrast between the exaggeration of *alazoneia* and the understatement of *eirōnia*. In general, the overconfident *alazones* are magnets for satirical irony and the less work the satirist appears to do the more effective the ridicule. For instance, if someone were to boast about their rhetorical ability by saying, ‘I know words, I have the best words,’ they virtually ridicule themselves and a satirist can mock them while seeming to do virtually nothing. In this way, irony can be a very effective form of ridicule, especially for exploding over-confidence or arrogance. As Thirlwall (1833) 484 eloquently puts it, the ironist makes another’s opinion ‘sink by the weight of its own absurdity.’ This phenomenon is of course common in Aristophanes as well as Plato’s refutational dialogues.

⁴² Cf. further Muecke (1969) 96 on the ability to apprehend ironies: ‘A man with a developed sense of irony will be able to confront anything whatever with something with which it is incompatible.’ See also his (1982) 42.

Irony adds objectivity. By ‘objectivity’ I mean to refer to the way irony entails a view from ‘outside’ as it were. In the case of dramatic irony the victim is oblivious to an irony which only the audience can appreciate. With the previous principle in mind we can also see that to ridicule someone with irony is also to put oneself ‘above’ them in an analogous way.

This however leads us just as surely to the opposite principle: *Irony is often inclusive.*⁴³ Many cases of verbal irony will simply not have a victim (for example the ‘great weather’ line), but even when we do ridicule a victim, we often do so to a crowd ready to receive the ridicule. Although irony can be used to mock someone to their face it is also used to encourage us to laugh *with* the ironist. Where irony puts us ‘above’ some character, we are at the same time invited by the author to come ‘up’ and join the inner circle of those in the know. The subsequent principles are all concerned with the special bond formed between the ironists and their audience.

*Irony cannot be ‘translated’ without loss.*⁴⁴ This has already begun to emerge and is evident even in the banal cases of irony. For example, to say ironically, ‘Great weather we’re having,’ is quite different in tone from the mere statement of its implicit meaning, ‘Bad weather we’re having.’ The one cannot be reduced to the other without loss. This is even more apparent in the case of ridiculing irony where someone is made to sink by the weight of their own absurdity. Suppose someone makes a silly claim and is reproached with the ironic rejoinder, ‘What a *brilliant* observation’ or ‘Nice idea, Einstein.’ As mentioned, in such cases irony can be used to great effect because it implies that the other’s flaws are obvious. (Conversely, if the ‘silly claim’ was not silly at all, the irony will miss its mark.) Again it is not the case that we

⁴³ See Booth (1974) 27-31.

⁴⁴ See Booth (1974) 39-43. ‘The act of reconstruction...become[s] an inseparable part of what is said, and thus that act cannot be *said*, it must be *performed*’ (39).

could simply trade the ironic complaint for its literal counterpart ('It is obvious that that was a silly claim'). When we successfully employ irony in these cases we don't just suggest that a criticism is obvious, in some sense we *demonstrate* this insofar as the audience can be expected to intuit the irony. The reason for this is that irony leaves its meaning implicit.⁴⁵

Thus we may say that *irony makes its audience work*. It co-opts the audience into figuring out the meaning. Under this head, not least in connection with ridicule, we can understand the important role verbal irony has played as a rhetorical technique. In some cases we might even speak of irony being a *riddle*, especially in the more complex literary cases, like *Oedipus Rex* and *Don Quixote*. There is something intrinsically satisfying about unpacking a complex irony. Plato, as we will see, is masterful in exploiting this tantalising aspect of irony. Plato uses irony as a kind of *seduction* that hints at something while leaving it concealed; it draws us in precisely by leaving something unsaid. In a sense irony provides a seductive way of tricking the other into eagerly executing your will.

Finally: *some ironies are best left unexplained*. It is presumably true for a number of the ironies discussed above that we savour them all the more if we figure them out ourselves. Nevertheless, I do not think you missed too much in having me explain them. Which is to say that you probably still savoured and enjoyed the irony. In some cases, however, much may be lost in having an ironic riddle simply solved for you. I suspect that such a point is impossible to demonstrate, but self-evidently true. Here I would merely like to anticipate the way this idea informs the Platonic dialogues. Consider the analogy of an activity book. You would never buy an activity book that had all the activities already filled out because it is essential to figure them out yourself. For Plato education is not like pouring knowledge into a vessel to be imbibed.⁴⁶ He wants to inculcate an intellectual ability in the reader. To this end he writes in such a way

⁴⁵ Muecke (1969) 52-60 explores how ironies come in degrees ranging from the overt to the covert.

⁴⁶ See *Smp.* 175d3-7, *Rep.* 518b6-c2 and *Prt.* 314b1-4.

that without proper engagement his real meaning will remain obscure. Irony is entirely apt for this. The reason that some ironies are best left unexplained, I will argue, is that the *act* of uncovering them is essential. In other words, completing an activity, say a geometric problem, to which you already know the answer is quite different from completing one to which you don't. Regrettably, then, there is an irony in this study that by rendering Plato's ironies apparent I spoil their effect.

III SIMPLISTIC AND SOPHISTIC ACCOUNTS OF IRONY

To round off this chapter I would like to distinguish my approach from two others. On the one hand we have the 'pragmatic' approach of linguistics, which I argue is reductive and simplistic; on the other hand, there are more progressive scholars who err in the opposite direction. For them irony cannot be contained but points to the instability of language and truth. My own view, as will be apparent, tries to strike a balance between these respectively anaemic and excessive approaches.

Pragmatics

Much has been written on irony by scholars working in pragmatics and the cognitive sciences. These include both analytic accounts and empirical studies of what irony is. These empirical surveys involve questioning everyday people about what is and isn't ironic. However I wonder whether this approach is more likely to shed light on the issue than obscure it. Such empirical surveys naively assume that popular usage is immune from errors. On the contrary, although usage is important, I believe the procedure I have employed in this chapter of trying to uncover the latent essence of irony—which is exhibited by, but not in thrall to, popular usage—provides

a more meaningful and useful account.⁴⁷ As I have stressed, we are blessed with the ability to appreciate irony without a critical self-awareness of it; but this does not mean we cannot err in our application of the term. On the contrary, it fixes the referent to some degree.

With these scholars we also find the rather disappointing assumption that verbal irony always disparages.⁴⁸ This is a rudimentary error. One could just as well say ‘Great weather!’ about a miserable day as one could say ‘Terrible weather!’ about a beautiful sunny day. Other attempts to understand *why* irony is employed are no more helpful.⁴⁹ One example is the ‘allusional pretense’ theory of Kumon-Nakamura, Glucksberg and Brown (2007). They claim that verbal irony requires ‘an allusion to some prediction, expectation, or norm that has been

⁴⁷ Worse still some of these empirical surveys are appallingly inept. In an apparently model study in Colston (2007) 107-8 the participants were asked to ‘rate the degree of sarcasm.’ That they refer to ‘sarcasm’ rather than ‘irony’ clearly favours insulting irony (‘you’re *so* intelligent, Euthyphro’) and taints the study. This particular experiment purported to show that certain ironies ‘were interpreted as more sarcastic than earnest comments,’ which is not merely banal, but quite troubling. The earnest comments they used were in no way sarcastic, not merely *less* sarcastic. These studies ultimately revealed their worth in the listless ironies they employed. To give a sample: ‘You and Julie want to go to a concert but neither of you have enough money for the ticket. She says, “This is great.”’ And again: ‘You and Julie want to go to a concert and you both have enough money for the ticket. She says, “This sucks.”’ Something has gone horribly wrong here. They have all but offered up vinegar at a wine tasting.

⁴⁸ Wilson and Sperber (2007) 41 say, ‘Verbal irony, we argue, invariably involves the expression of an attitude of disapproval.’ See also Colston (2007) 100 (but see 106); Martin (1992) 78 and; Gibbs (2007) 184.

⁴⁹ Empirical studies applied to this question do not seem to go beyond the obvious: Dews, Kaplan and Winner (2007) purport to prove that irony achieves a humorous effect or dilutes an insult; Colston (2007b) shows that irony can in fact sharpen an insult.

violated' (60). That is to say, that irony is intrinsically *corrective*, it is exclusively used to indicate that something or other should have happened but didn't (or should not have happened but did). This is disconcerting. Counterexamples include any number of ironic understatements⁵⁰ as well as the usual 'Great weather!' Kumon-Nakamura, Glucksberg and Brown in fact discuss this example: 'Such statements allude to the failed expectation of good weather...' (89). Although this might be the case, it is certainly not necessary. To suggest that one could *only* say 'Great weather' ironically because they thought it ought to have been great weather is preposterous.

Above all pragmatics tries to pin down irony by *isolating its structure*. Consider for instance the 'echo mention' theory developed by Wilson and Sperber (2007). Here verbal irony is thought to be a subcategory of indirect speech. Namely, it is 'echoic' speech, which is where you indirectly quote someone but also add some interpretive element. Thus if Bill told me the weather would be 'fantastic,' but lo and behold it's atrocious, I can say to Bill, '*Fantastic* weather,' and this is ironic because I indirectly quote Bill's word to disparage him. This is to be understood as second-order speech about language because I am *mentioning* Bill's word not *using* it.⁵¹ To my mind this is needlessly technical and cumbersome. Subtracting the linguistic

⁵⁰ Ironical understatement (or litotes) is probably the most ubiquitous form of verbal irony in a spoken language. It requires little effort to think up examples of this that are not corrective in the sense stipulated by the 'allusional pretense' theory. Say you're standing at the foot of Mt. Everest and you say to your friend, 'That's not a bad hill.' Or again, you sip an exquisite red wine and ironically exclaim to the table 'It's not terrible.' And so on and so forth.

⁵¹ Thus Martin (1992) 79: 'In short, something is said *about* p, rather than *by means of* p.' The use/mention distinction might be illustrated thus: (1) 'Sydney' starts with the letter S; (2) Sydney is a city in Australia. While (2) *mentions* the world 'Sydney', (1) *uses* it.

focus of this account we end up with something like the ‘pretense theory’ of verbal irony, which is one of the most popular of these pragmatic theories.

Clark and Gerrig (2007) offer up a classic treatment of the pretense theory. The basic idea is that in being ironic one dons the pretence of being someone else and then ridicules this person’s point of view. We might gloss this as a self-mockery of an assumed ‘self.’ Thus I parroted Bill in the previous example to mock him. While this account does provide quite a useful distillation of *parody* it hardly seems a satisfactory account of verbal irony. Many cases of ironic understatement (or litotes⁵²), for example, are hard to explain on this model. If I say, ‘He’s no fool’ intending to draw attention to someone’s intelligence, it’s hard to see what parody has to do with it. Perhaps one could argue that I am positing a patsy who says ‘He’s no fool’ in earnest and I am making a parody of him. But it is not obvious that this is what is happening. I would go so far as to say that this is obviously *not* what is going on. The supposition that verbal irony is exclusively or radically employed for the rhetorical purpose of ridicule is clearly wrong. Although we may be able to fit the examples to the theory, the theory does not reflect or respect our intuitions about what is happening here. In this way I would reject the pretense and echo mention theories on grounds of insufficiency. Moreover, these parody-centred accounts also fail to provide a necessary condition. Consider the following counter example: two schoolboys are playing when one of them shoves the other. The offended party exclaims, ‘What’d you do that for?!’ The other replies by affecting a mocking, nasal tone of voice, ‘*What’d you do that for?*’ he parrots. ‘Stop it!’ replies the first boy. So again with a mocking tone of voice: ‘*Stooop it.*’ — ‘I said stop it, Thomas.’ — ‘*I said stop it, Thomas.*’ And so on.

⁵² Litotes is generally understood either as (a) an ironic understatement or (b) the use of a double negative like ‘not infrequently.’ In the latter case clearly not all instances of litotes will be ironic, in the former case they will be. I generally refer to ‘ironic understanding’ to avoid misunderstanding.

The mocking tone of voice is surely not ironic. At best it seems to almost sneak in on a sort of technicality. Yet this example is *a paradigmatic instantiation* of what the pretense theory, and even more so the echo-mention theory, identify as ironic. The ‘ironist’ pretends to be and ‘echoes’ the person whom he wishes to mock (namely, Thomas) in the most immediate and obvious sense. That such a trite exchange emerges as the quintessential instance of these theories is disconcerting to say the least. And beyond this, even if one could satisfactorily reduce irony to a tidy definition, it should be clear that a merely extensional account of irony would leave a lot to be desired.

Irony and Relativism

From German romanticism to postmodernism irony has become a touchstone for those who think truth and meaning are in a constant state of flux. In some cases this involves singling out a particular, often eccentric, usage of irony as quintessential. One example of this is the Lacan inspired study by Gary Handwerk that focuses on the way irony dissolves the notion of identity.⁵³ Or Cleanth Brooks (1949) who uses ‘irony’ to refer to ‘the kind of qualification which the various elements in a context receive from the context’ (191). This would ultimately mean that all literature is ironic. Or consider the case of Clair Colebrook (2004). In the context of a survey of postmodern models of irony she is seemingly drawn to one unjustified generalisation after the next. She glosses irony as *distancing oneself from something* (3); later

⁵³ Handwerk (1985) see e.g. viii: ‘...irony is a form of discourse that insists upon the provisional and fragmentary nature of the individual subject and thus forces us to recognize our dependence upon some mode of intersubjectivity that exceeds the furthest extension of any individual subject.’ Handwerk is interested in a particular type of irony (‘ethical irony’) in a particular period (from the Romantic period to the present), but then seems to pit his view against other, more general, accounts of irony; see, e.g., his criticisms of Booth (6-7).

it seems to refer to anything which means something other than its explicit meaning (5); irony is necessarily political (12); and again: 'Irony is just this capacity to consider a work as a text: as a production that is not reducible to conscious intent or the manifest work' (13) and so on. Then there is the not-uncommon claim that our whole postmodern world is ironic (see Colebrook, 18).

At best I can say I am simply not concerned with such 'irony.' At worst I might say that these accounts are misleading. But rather than dwell on them, let us turn to a less impenetrable or oracular example, namely Ronald Bedford (2010). He seems both to deal with a familiar notion of irony and to essay for a more sophisticated and modern understanding of it. As such he provides an easier example to engage with. He tries to undermine the 'stability' of irony thus:

'Verbal irony' occurs as a familiar phenomenon not only in Plato's Socrates but in everyday behaviour: we all know speakers (and may be such individuals ourselves) who characteristically communicate ironically—and although we may be perfectly convinced of our own ability to recognize our own irony, we may be equally convinced, as teachers or scholars, that what we recognize is not something that really exists at all except in our own claim that it does, validated—if we are fortunately understood—by the appropriate decryptions of our listeners. (167)

Thus I may know that some utterance I make is (intended to be) ironic, but I may also think that the ironic status of my utterance has no 'real' existence. This is plainly false: if I knowingly and deliberately utter an ironic statement and someone else fails to pick up on it, then this person has erred. A more fine-grained analysis would account for that fact that some ironists do an insufficient job of uttering ironies, but this only demonstrates that we sometimes fail to

convey our meaning as well as we intend. That the intentions of others must be inferred, sometimes with difficulty, in no way demonstrates that they do not exist. Moreover, given the ubiquity of irony, inexplicable or problematic cases are easily in the minority. Indeed, our daily interactions are littered with irony, for instance ironic understatments. If anything, irony furnishes us with a striking example of our miraculous ability to communicate effectively with one another.

An approach like Bedford's will naturally gravitate towards a rejection of truth. Thus Stanley Fish (1989) advances similar claims about irony (e.g.186-7) and ultimately touts the sophist's mantra: 'there are no facts that are not the product of persuasion' (194). Focusing on the case of irony, while I concede that there may be room for multiple interpretations of a text or an utterance, it is unhelpful to insist that this is all there is. Some texts may be well served by such an approach, others clearly are not. Who could deny, for example, that Sophocles deliberately built irony into his texts? Though I have endeavoured to preserve and respect the mystique of irony in my analysis, I cannot follow those who would lead us off the pier and into relativism like so many pied pipers.

By my account the central feature of irony is a special type of contrast between 'unlikes.' The main obstacle to definition is the precise nature of the contrast itself. However, it seems to me that it is as hard to define as it is easy to observe. I put this down to our intuitive appreciation of irony. I have endeavoured to show *how* irony works—through the contrast of opposites—which in turn points us to *why* it works: because it has some intrinsic, aesthetic appeal. Lastly, I hope to have indicated *what* irony can be used for: it can be humorous and urbane, it is great for ridicule, it can be used for rhetorical effect to buttress a point; it can build rapport between ironist and audience and; being indirect it can entice the audience and make them work. Above all, it is one of the ways an author can 'say' something without actually saying it.

PART TWO

Ἐπειδὴ λόγου δύναμις τυγχάνει ψυχαγωγία
οὔσα, τὸν μέλλοντα ῥητορικὸν ἔσεσθαι
ἀνάγκη εἰδέναι ψυχὴν ὅσα εἶδη ἔχει.

(Since the faculty of speech is in fact soul-guiding, the true orator must know how many types of soul there are.)

Phdr. 271c10-d2

CHAPTER TWO

SOCRATIC IRONY

There is a work that represents Napoleon's grave. Two tall trees shade the grave. There is nothing else to see in the work, and the unsophisticated observer sees nothing else. Between the two trees there is an empty space; as the eye follows the outline, suddenly Napoleon himself emerges as from nothing, and now it is impossible to have him disappear again. Once the eye has seen him, it goes on seeing him with an almost alarming necessity. So also with Socrates' rejoinders.

—Kierkegaard¹

There is a strong connection between irony and Socrates. He played the formative role in bringing this strange yet instinctual thing to light and has hovered above it ever since. Moreover, Socratic irony has received an increasing amount of scholarly attention in recent years. However, the line I take in what follows tends to be quite different from what we find in the modern scholarship. On the one hand, some scholars focus mainly on detecting the formal structure of Socrates' irony; on the other hand, some emphasise its profound impenetrability. Regrettable, I have found these approaches to be, respectively, too reductive and too vague. After addressing these issues in the scholarship, I will attempt to set out a skeletal account of

¹ Translation by H. V. and E. H. Hong from Kierkegaard (1989).

Socratic Irony from which a more rigorous treatment could be fleshed out. However, since it would prove unilluminating to pursue this topic while remaining at a general, abstract level, we will proceed through paradigmatic cases studies. I begin with a brief treatment of the character Lysis, followed by a discussion of Euthyphro and then Callicles.

I THE MODERN SCHOLARSHIP

The last three decades have seen a profusion of articles and chapters dedicated to Socratic irony.² And yet we still find a certain lack of clarity about some of the basic issues. This section will first look at three preliminary questions: (1) *What is ‘Socratic irony’?* (2) *Is it ironic?* and (3) *Is it Socratic?* Then we will move on to an overview of the main scholarly contributions regarding how Socrates uses irony in the elenchus. We shall find that those who are interested in the effect Socrates’ irony has on his *interlocutors* tend to look to the formal structure of ‘Socratic irony,’ while those interested in the effect it has on the *reader* look to the profound and the inexplicable.

Preliminary Questions

(1) *What is ‘Socratic irony’?* Some use this phrase to refer to any irony that Socrates employs. This seems understandable, yet these scholars are in the minority. Most use the phrase as

² Friedländer (1958) 137-53, Burge (1969), Burger (1987), Vlastos (1987), Gooch (1987), Gottlieb (1992), Nightingale (1993), Gellrich (1994), Roochnik (1995), Gordon (1996), Michelini (1998), Nehamas (1998) ‘Part One’, Vasiliou (1999) and (2002), Clay (2000) 93-9, Brickhouse and Smith (2000) 58-67, Griswold (2002), Sedley (2002), Edmunds (2004), Scolnicov (2004), Lear (2006), Wolfsdorf (2007), McCabe (2007), Ferrari (2008), Piering (2010), Layne (2010), Lane (2010), Futter (2013) and Cocei (2015).

something like a proper name or a technical term with a more-or-less fixed meaning—and with good reason. Consider, to begin with, Thrasymachus’ claim that Socrates is using his ‘characteristic *eirōneia*’ (αὕτη ‘κείνη ἢ εἰωθυῖα εἰρωνεία Σωκράτους) and that he *just knew* that Socrates would resort to that old ruse (*Rep.* 336d5-337a8). If we merely focus on this ‘characteristic thing’ it is hard to deny that Thrasymachus has a point. Indeed, Plato is calling attention to what is clearly a characteristically Socratic move.³ However we interpret it, so often when Socrates refutes people it seems to be hovering behind his words like a spectre: he pleads ignorant, lauds the wisdom of the other or claims to be merely inquiring in concert with someone—but he is ‘not attempting to refute them.’ Recall that Aristotle too linked *eirōneia* with Socrates and feigning ignorance while Cicero and Quintilian helped reinterpret the term in light of Socrates. Indeed, the association between Socrates and this ‘ironic’ refutational strategy will only increase over time.⁴ Socrates is not only the definitive example of irony, he

³ Plato calls attention to it in e.g. *Rep.* 337e1-3, 341a7-c4; *Ap.* 23a7-b7, *Hp. Mi.* 369d and *Meno* 79e7-80b7.

⁴ On the reception of Socrates’ characteristic irony in Antiquity see: Aristotle *EN* 1127b22-25; Cicero *Academica* 1.16, 2.15, *Brutus* 292, *De Oratore* 2.270; Seneca *De Beneficiis* 5.6.6; Quintilian 9.2.46; Gellius *Attic Nights* 18.4.1-2; Julian the Apostate *To the Cynic Heracleios* 237b-c; Proclus *In Timaeum* 1.62.21-5, *In Parmenidem* 654-655.8, *In Cratylum* 27; Olympiodorus *In Alcibiadem*. 1.147-153, 52.21-54.8, 88.3-11, *In Gorgiam*. 34.3. For discussion see Sedley (2002) and Tarrant (2000) 25-6 and 108-11. Against this connection stands a certain tradition that flourished in the Hellenistic period, most notable in the Stoic appropriation of Socrates. Socrates was practically canonized as the paradigmatic philosopher and to facilitate this he was purged of various undesirable traits, especially his coy and caustic wit. See Long (1988) 150-6. Long notes that un-ironic Socratics tend to favour Xenophon’s portrait over Plato’s.

is thought to be quintessentially ironic. By 1901 we encounter our quarry in James Murray's *Oxford English Dictionary*.⁵ The third entry on 'Irony' reads as follows: 'In etymological sense; Dissimulation, pretence; esp. in reference to the dissimulation of ignorance by Socrates as a means of confuting an adversary (*Socratic Irony*).' We need not dwell on the specifics of this account (which, quite understandably, are oversimplified); what is important is that 'Socratic irony' is proffered as a definite thing. This usage is still evident in English dictionaries today.

Thus not only is there a time-honoured connection between Socrates and this particular 'refutational irony' but 'Socratic irony' has currency as a proper name. This, however, tends to go unremarked in the modern scholarship, and can at times lead to confusion about what in fact 'Socratic irony' is. Consider, for instance, a point of dispute between Gregory Vlastos' 'Socratic Irony' and Jill Gordon's 'Against Vlastos on Complex Irony.' Vlastos (1987) argues

After Antiquity and the Middle Ages the number of writers who might refer to Socrates as a renowned ironist are positively legion. D. Knox (1989), which is a study on irony in the Medieval and Renaissance periods, finds that Socrates dominates the latter period: after a reference to *yronia Socratia* in one of Petrarch's letters from 1336, 'Socrates' *ironia* became not just his *ironia* but, as Erasmus (†1536) put it, his *ironia familiaris* ("habitual irony"). Similarly, Lorenzo Valla (1407-57) and the French theologian and historian Jene de Serres (c. 1540-98) described it as Socrates' *mos* ("habit"). Others spoke of his *ironia perpetua* ("continual irony"); and so on. At the beginning of the seventeenth-century Panfilo Persico (†1626), a secretary to many distinguished Italian ecclesiastics and princes, could refer to "that *ironia* for which Socrates is so celebrated." Εἰρων had become Socrates' epithet' (100-1). N. Knox (1961) *The Word Irony and its Content, 1500-1755* provides a host of similar cases from the time period in his title; nor would it be hard, albeit time consuming, to find more recent writers who take Socrates' irony for granted, from Goethe to Emerson, Schleiermacher to Macaulay or John Stuart Mill to Nietzsche.

⁵ Though this was officially entitled *A New Dictionary on Historical Principles*.

that Socrates uses something called ‘complex irony.’ He claims, ‘In “complex” irony what is said both is and isn’t what is meant’ (86). Vlastos applies this to Socrates’ remarks about knowledge, teaching and love. For example, where Socrates claims to know nothing, he is being earnest in one sense of ‘know,’ but in some other he is being ironic and again when he purports to ‘love’ boys. Most of Vlastos’ energy goes into explaining the ‘love’ paradigm. But how does this account relate to the dictionary account of Socratic irony? Vlastos mentions the disavowal of knowledge so perhaps it is not too far removed. More importantly, Vlastos is treating ‘Socratic irony’ as a definite or specific thing, rather than any irony that Socrates says. He thus follows the dictionary usage in at least this respect. It is then particularly noteworthy that he does *not* specify that he is using the term in this restricted sense. What then can we say to Gordon (1996) who criticizes Vlastos’ account for being too narrow? There are many types of irony produced at the hands of Socrates that are not ‘complex’ she notes. Is this a fair objection for Gordon to make? Did Vlastos really want to say that *all and every* irony we find in Socrates’ mouth is a ‘complex irony’? Then again it seems Gordon also wants ‘Socratic irony’ to be a specific term (albeit one that Vlastos has missed) since she also looks to uncover some particular type of irony consistently used by Socrates. We may wonder whether Gordon and Vlastos are even talking about the same thing. Gordon clearly thinks so since she criticises his view and endeavours to replace it. Possibly ‘Socratic irony’ refers to any (particular) irony that is deemed to be quintessentially Socratic. But what then of the dictionary account? Although Gordon tries to reject it (132), this only makes us wonder how her account squares with others’. She does not, for example, discuss the millennia-old association of Socrates with feigning ignorance so as to refute.

This much is at least clear: scholars need to explain how they are using ‘Socratic irony.’ The term comes to us with a history and with ‘baggage.’ But to my knowledge even the rudimentary question of how any given scholar employs it is scarcely broached. In general

terms, we usually find scholars employing the phrase ‘Socratic irony’ to refer to the specific ‘refutational irony’ not least in connection with false praise and false modesty. However (ironically) when we come to essays and chapters that are explicitly concerned with ‘Socratic irony,’ they scarcely seem to be aware of this traditional usage.⁶ Indeed, I have even encountered one scholar using the term to refer to an irony that takes Socrates as its victim.⁷

(2) *Is ‘Socratic Irony’ ironic?* If we follow up the narrow sense of ‘Socratic irony’ this is the next question we encounter. You may have noticed that the so-called ‘etymological sense’ of irony I quoted from Murray’s dictionary is not necessarily an example of irony. The definition was, ‘In etymological sense; Dissimulation, pretence; esp. in reference to the dissimulation of ignorance by Socrates as a means of confuting an adversary (*Socratic Irony*).’ The problem with this is that, in and of itself, it does not imply the use of verbal irony. In fact, it tends to suggest that Socrates simply wants to trick people into thinking he is a fool. This is not so much

⁶ E.g. Gellrich (1994), Roochnik (1995) and Griswold (2002). Against this, the ‘traditional’ approach to Socrates’ special brand of irony is ubiquitous and has been for some time, e.g.: Forbes (1913 [1905]) 142, ‘Against the false knowledge—the conceit of knowledge which blocked the way to the entrance of the true, he directed the force of his “irony”...’; Raven (1965) 35, ‘Invariably, with his well-known irony and professions of ignorance, he set about the merciless exposure of the self-satisfied blindness of the alleged expert...’; Enricht (1986) 9, ‘Socrates introduced irony into the world. He pretended to be ignorant—“Come now, my dear Euthyphro, inform me, that I may be made wiser”—and, under the guise of seeking to be taught by others, he taught others’; Gerson (2013) 88, ‘Socrates’ famous irony...is always expressed in relation to the pretensions of his interlocutors or in relation to his perceived inadequacies....’

⁷ Plax (2008) refers to what ‘maybe the most profound dimension of Socratic irony’ (287 cf. 303-4) in discussing how Socrates ironically betrays the hedonism of his philosophy’

irony as it is deceit; and though the two are not mutually exclusive, it is striking that the ironic part of Socratic irony seems to have dropped out of the account. Moreover, it is reasonably common to find this account of ‘Socratic irony’ in dictionaries as a sub-entry under ‘Irony.’ Here are some samples from online dictionaries accessed in April 2017: ‘pretend ignorance in discussion’ (dictionary.com); ‘the feigning of ignorance in argument; often called Socratic irony’ (Collins Dictionary, under ‘American English’); ‘a pretense of ignorance and of willingness to learn from another assumed in order to make the other’s false conceptions conspicuous by adroit questioning—called also Socratic irony’ (Merriam-Webster). We find this usage in Richard Robinson’s landmark (1953) *Plato’s Earlier Dialectic*: ‘This denial that he is conducting an elenchus is insincere, and constitutes what is known as the Socratic slyness or irony’ (8—note that the header of the page 9 is ‘Socratic Irony’). It is not insignificant that Robinson refers to ‘what is known as....’ Thus, following Thrasymachus, we may say that ‘Socratic irony’ is apparently some cunning ruse designed to trick people, but not designed to be seen through. If this is so, then Socratic irony, without further qualification, is not really an example of irony.

Let us stop to appreciate how bizarre this state of affairs is. Socrates is branded a lying scoundrel—an *eirōn*. This then becomes the term for an *ironist*. Finally, it seems ‘Socratic irony’ can shed its ironic quality and still be considered ironic. It would seem then that today’s popular usage will insist that Socrates is an ironist, even if his ‘Socratic irony’ is not an actual example of irony. Amidst this confusion, we encounter scholars who claim that Socrates is not in fact an ironist at all, which leads us to the third and final question.

(3) *Is ‘Socratic irony’ even Socratic?* There are in fact scholars who would deny this. That is, ‘Socratic irony’—understood as a technique whereby one praises the intelligence of the other

only to expose their ignorance—is not, they claim, used by Socrates.⁸ This must be false. In regard to Socrates’ disavowals of knowledge, I appreciate that there is a measure of truth to the claim that he is ignorant, but this is ignorance of a special sort and in many cases it is clear that Socrates is grossly misrepresenting the state of his knowledge by claiming to be an innocent know-nothing. The vogue for insisting that Socrates is being perfectly sincere when he disavows knowledge should not blind us to the obvious.⁹ To take but one example, when Socrates tells Meno that, far from knowing whether virtue is teachable, he has no idea even what virtue is (ἐγὼ δὲ τοσοῦτον δέω εἶτε διδακτὸν εἶτε μὴ διδακτὸν εἰδέναι, ὥστ’ οὐδὲ αὐτὸ ὅτι ποτ’ ἐστὶ τὸ παράπαν ἀρετὴ τυγχάνω εἰδώς—*Meno* 72a-b) he is obviously not being honest. There is of course truth in what Socrates says and this no doubt turns on a particular notion of what it means to truly *know* something. But this is clearly not what Socrates communicates to Meno. He presents himself as a hapless know-nothing. Note that Socrates makes this ‘disavowal’ in the context of a discussion about whether virtue is *taught*. Thus, keeping in mind that ‘virtue is knowledge’ is a core Socratic tenet, it should be quite clear that he is not ‘entirely unable to answer.’ Socrates grossly exaggerates his ignorance and misrepresents the state of

⁸ Those who explicitly deny Socrates his irony tend to employ a limited understanding of irony, typically claiming Socrates can’t be ironic unless his interlocutor perceives it. Against this view it is easy enough to recall Muecke (1969) 59-60 on ‘private irony’ (discussed in Chapter One and below), which involves an ironist ironizing over another’s head. Unsurprisingly Muecke cites Socrates as a prime example. The scholars who most emphatically deny that Socrates is ironic are Wolfsdorf (2008) 242-60, who proffers a number of unusual and unconvincing claims to vouchsafe his rejection of irony, as well as Layne (2010) and especially Lane (2010), who seem almost hostile toward the suggestion that Socrates uses irony.

⁹ Senn (2013) lists over twenty scholars who appear to endorse the view that the disavowals are sincere (n. 5 on 98), and argues forcibly against them.

his knowledge. Nor is this an isolated case. In fact, it is entirely typical in the refutational dialogues.

An important feature of Socrates' irony which has fed into the confusion is that it is Janus-faced, so to speak. It has two aspects: an *eirōnikos* one and an ironic one. It is a sly falsehood to some people and a transparent irony to others; it lets some people in, and slams the door shut in the face of others. This view appears quite often in the modern scholarship on 'Socratic irony.'¹⁰ A moment's reflection will reveal that this is a reasonably strange thing for Socrates to do. Much of the scholarship is dedicated to explaining how this irony is structured, and their accounts only tend to make the irony appear stranger. Accordingly we cannot help but ask, why on earth would Socrates behave like this? Yet I have found that this question is almost systematically obscured in the scholarship. Most notably, the claim that Plato or his Socrates *makes people think for themselves* is the means by which scholars have overlooked the question and failed to think through the answers they give.

Survey of the Scholarship

For reasons that were left implicit in the preceding and which should eventually become clear I intend to focus on that one 'characteristic' aspect of Socrates' irony we find in the elenchus whereby Socrates uses false praise and false modesty to expose the ignorance of the other. I call this 'Socratic Irony' with a capital 'I' to remind you that it is something like a proper name. I believe that this thing warrants a detailed inquiry and that to some extent it can be understood as a discrete phenomenon. Thus the following survey looks only to those scholars who are concerned with Socratic Irony in the strict sense.

¹⁰ E.g., Friedländer (1958) 145-6, Gottlieb (1992), Gordon (1996) 136, Vasiliou (1999) 463 and (2002) 221, McCabe (2007) 21, Ferrari (2008) 22-3.

Gregory Vlastos (1987) ‘Socratic Irony’ is the first full length engagement with (at least a part of) strict Socratic Irony that I know of in recent English scholarship.¹¹ At the heart of his account is the idea of ‘complex irony.’ This concerns the *structure* of Socratic irony which is thought to involve ambivalence and equivocation. When Socrates says ‘I know nothing’ this means (a) ‘I lack true, divine knowledge’—which is true—as well as (b) ‘I am a hapless fool’—which is false and ironic.¹² The *reason* Socrates does this is to encourage thought. When Alcibiades fails to get the irony and thinks Socrates *loves* him in the traditional sense of the term, Socrates lets Alcibiades deceive himself so that he might come to the truth for himself (93).

This is either incorrect or underdeveloped. *How does it help Alcibiades think?* we must ask. Is it because he is not informed of what is going on? If so, how does neglecting to mention something encourage thought? We need an explanation. At best such a concealment might *result* in independent thought, but so do a lot of things. In a discussion-based tutorial, for example, it is the tutor’s job to encourage participation and make people think, but they usually do not employ riddling complex ironies. Indeed, it is easy enough to simply ask the students to think. If this bizarre Socratic charade is employed systematically just to make people think we need a sufficient reason. In fact I broadly agree with Vlastos here, but not only does he not

¹¹ The following earlier accounts are generally cursory: Robinson (1953) 7-20, Versényi (1963) 120-21, Gully (1968) 64-4, Guthrie (1969) 442-9, Eckstein (1981) 9. Burge (1969) deals with a different sort of irony. Burger (1987) mentions ‘Socratic irony,’ but appeals to the concept rather than explains it. Friedländer (1958) 137-53, though he doubtless sheds light on the issue, is simply too obscure for our present purposes.

¹² Note that I am paraphrasing Vlastos and I have left out his notion of ‘elenctic knowledge’ which I find speculative and unhelpful.

account for how Socrates' usage ought to work, his generic account of irony leaves a lot to be desired.

Vlastos gives three examples of irony, only one of which has an important role to play. What he calls 'riddling irony' requires someone to solve an irony as a riddle: 'Paul, normally a good student, is not doing well today. He stumbles through a tutorial, exasperating his tutor, who finally lets fly with, "Paul, you are positively brilliant today"' (79). Vlastos' analysis of this is unsatisfactory. The above exchange is obviously *not* a good example of pedagogy, the tutor is simply exasperated. Note firstly, the tutor in no way requires irony here. He could simply neglect to give the reasons for Paul's shortcomings and leave it at that (for example, 'Paul, you need to do better'). More importantly, insulting someone is much more likely to engender resentment than critical reflection. Thus Vlastos continues: 'Paul feels he is being consigned to the outer darkness.' Indeed, think of Thrasymachus or Callicles. These people are overtly humiliated by Socrates. This seems important, for Plato constantly depicts Socrates making people angry. How then is Thrasymachus encouraged to 'think for himself'? On the contrary, insulting people is perhaps the surest means of reducing a philosophical conversation to a shouting contest. Vlastos *could* be on to something with his 'riddling irony' but we would desperately need an explanation of how it works and why Socrates feels inclined to use it.

Next we have Jill Gordon (1999) *Turning Towards Philosophy*, Chapter 5, a modified version of her (1996). She argues that Socrates' ironies do not yield a straightforward meaning or interpretation. They are ambiguous. Socratic irony is 'inherently unstable' so as to reflect 'the limitations of human knowledge' (129-30). Thus Plato uses Socratic irony to leave us puzzled and without an answer so that we are encouraged to do philosophy (e.g. 130-2). This putative 'instability' is another thematic misapprehension. Although Gordon's discussion has much more depth than Vlastos', we are still left with a bald inference from 'Socrates leaves

something in abeyance' to 'Socrates makes you think.' While Vlastos merely left too many questions unanswered, Gordon creates new problems of her own. She distinguishes between the impact Socrates' irony has on the reader from the impact it has on the interlocutor but says precious little about how Socrates effects his purpose on the interlocutor (see 127-8). Following Gottlieb (1992) she says Socratic irony has an 'in crowd' who get the irony, but it is far from clear how the 'outsiders' are drawn in. More significantly, in her account of the effect on the reader she relies on the view that Plato does not provide definite answers. As discussed in the Introduction, I find such claims unhelpful and unconvincing. Does Gordon mean that any conclusion is acceptable as long as it is the product of self-reflection? Or are all answers ultimately flawed? Such a meaningless position would seem to *discourage* enquiry rather than engender it. The *Phaedo's* 'misology' or Meno's paradox, for instance, identify such scepticism towards knowledge as anathema to philosophy insofar as they cause us to give up the quest for knowledge.

Vlastos' main contribution to the study of Socratic irony concerns its *form* which is 'complex' in the specific sense of his complex irony; Gordon looks to the confusion and ambiguity apparently engendered by irony (129-31). But in both cases we find the 'think for yourself' principle. This proves to be thematic: reductive accounts of the structure of 'Socratic irony' are used to show how *Socrates' interlocutors* are encouraged to think for themselves, or something approaching relativism explains why *the reader* is confounded with irony.

Iakovos Vasiliou (1999) 'Conditional Irony in the Socratic Dialogues' argues that Socrates employs a conditional that, although true, has a false protasis and that Socrates only assumes this unreal if-clause ironically. Generally, this involves the attribution of knowledge to someone (462-3). 'If you *were* wise, Euthyphro, I would praise you to the skies.' For Vlastos Socratic irony turned on an equivocation, here it is an unreal conditional. By this means,

Socrates assumes the presence of a ‘knowledge’ he wishes to mock and expose. Here is a quote from Vasiliou:

An important goal of the elenchus is to try to show the interlocutor that he does not know what he thinks he knows. Euthyphro is famously obtuse on this point. Socrates never tells the interlocutor that he does not know something. Instead Socrates always honours the person’s claim to know and proceeds to draw out the implication (469).

Socrates wants to show you something, *therefore* he neglects to mention it? Again, I actually agree with a lot of Vasiliou’s account. Although his analysis is oversimplified and reductive in places, and although I am not really interested in the conditional structure, there is much that is sound in it. Nevertheless it is ultimately underdeveloped and at times pedestrian. For example, Vasiliou claims, ‘Socrates’ use of conditional irony is a way of mocking his interlocutor into conceding his own lack of knowledge and appreciating the necessity for further examination’ (472). But it remains unclear how this is supposed to work, where we see it, and why it requires irony. Indeed, on the same page we read that it is often unintelligible to the interlocutor. Vasiliou concludes that conditional irony ‘is also a way of simultaneously revealing the character and philosophical sophistication of his audiences—both inner and outer.’ Although not wrong, this does little to actually explain Socrates’ behaviour in a meaningful way. Here, then, a detailed account of the formal structure displaces a more meaningful account.

Julie Piering (2010) ‘Irony and Shame in Socratic Ethics’ builds on Vlastos by claiming that irony induces shame to spur you on to critical reflection. She supports this with reference to Alcibiades in the *First Alcibiades* and in the *Symposium* (485-7) but makes no attempt to apply

this evidence to her claims. In fact, the *Alcibiades* scarcely contains Socratic Irony (Socrates tends to be explicit) and in the *Symposium* it remains to be seen that it is actually irony that leads to shame. Alcibiades' own comments on the matter are almost oracular and he seems to identify the *fact* that he cannot abandon his wicked ways as the cause of his shame (215d-216b). Although Piering at least acknowledges the role that humiliation plays in Socratic Irony, she claims that it encourages 'intellectual revision' (482) and then on the last page frustratingly notes that it doesn't seem to work like that in the dialogues after all. And thus having burdened Plato with this cumbersome view we read that, in fact, it was Plato's erroneous commitment to Socratic intellectualism that has led him to endorse then abandon this view (488). It is hard to see how such an account has any explanatory power at all.

Dylan Futter (2013) 'On Irony Interpretation: Socratic Method in Plato's *Euthyphro*' begins with the observation that Socrates attributes knowledge to Euthyphro and argues that Socrates is in fact (ironically) attributing irony to Euthyphro. That is, Euthyphro is interpreted as an ironist himself. In support of this unwieldy mechanism it is argued, for instance, that we can use it to explain Socrates' questioning and his *ad hominem* refutations (1034). Although this may be true, we hardly *need* this account to make sense of Socrates' behaviour here.¹³ Futter further claims that Socrates does not aim at refutation but wishes to reveal Euthyphro's inchoate wisdom (1039-43). As to why Socrates might do this, Futter argues that the interlocutor is guided to the dual recognition that he both knows the answer and that he cannot express it. It 'disrupts' one's sense of self (1047-8). Unsurprisingly, it turns out that Euthyphro does not make the necessary realisations, so instead he is encouraged to question his self-

¹³ Socrates does in fact ironically attribute irony—or more exactly 'riddling speech' (αἰνίσσασθαι)—to others. See e.g. *Ap.* 21b2-7, 27d5-6, *Phd.* 69c3-7, *Tht.* 152c5-10 *Rep.* 332b9-c3. But Futter does not remark this.

assurance (1048-9). Once again, we have an unsatisfactory formal mechanism coupled with some undercooked claims about Socrates' motives.

M. M. McCabe (2007) 'Irony in the Soul: Should Plato's Socrates Be Sincere?' gives a dense account that almost recalls a Pythagorean table of opposites. We encounter the following pairs: (i) irony and (ii) sincerity, (i) concealment and (ii) being revealed, (i) the external perspective and (ii) the internal. Socrates conceals himself while the other is revealed; we see the ironized victim from an external perspective and—importantly—we then apply this same scrutiny to ourselves (29). It is true that an ironized victim is seen 'from without' or from a 'privileged position' but the claim that we also apply this to ourselves is speculative and unsupported (see 21). It is also the linchpin of her argument. The intended effect of this irony, treated at the end of the essay, is 'to emphasize the detachment of the audience...bringing out the fictional nature of the dialogue...[and] bringing the status *of the discussion itself* into reflective scrutiny.' From this perspective, she continues, we see not what the truth *is* but how we might find it because only *you* can figure it out 'and you, or course, are not Socrates' (30-1). Although intriguing, this is undeveloped and highly speculative.

Samuel Scolnicov (2004) 'Plato's Ethics of Irony' seems of a piece with the preceding. He claims, 'Socrates' irony is an *open* irony, an irony that makes it clear what is *not* the case, but never gives us what the case *is*' (292). The reason for this seems to be that Socrates is using words in new ways (equivocating) but he cannot tell others that that is what he is doing, because they would not accept it (290-1). Or again, the reason is said to be that his irony is 'an attempt to point to the inherent contextuality of all speech and to force us to go beyond it' (293). Although Scolnicov focuses on the need for the interlocutors to think for themselves, this does seem to spill over onto the reader (299).

Much of this is speculative, most notably the important role assigned to irony, viz. to transcend the contextuality of speech (see 295). I think this is a wonderful idea and I would like nothing more than a concrete account of how such contextualisation works. Instead we read that irony points to the context-dependent nature of language, that we must find the truth in ourselves to go beyond contextual speech and that Socrates' interlocutors are in fact required to be sincere and think for themselves (see 294-7)—but none of the connections are established and we are given no indication that Plato really held this view about irony.

Alexander Nehamas (1998) *The Art of Living: Socratic Reflections from Plato to Foucault* is, after Vlastos, the most often cited account of Socratic Irony.¹⁴ In Nehamas the 'think for yourself' principle displaces everything else and the *inexplicable* as such is offered up in lieu of explanation. He begins with an account of Thomas Mann's Romantic irony in *The Magic Mountain* by which Mann apparently tricks the reader into a false sense of security only to expose their ignorance: 'The novel relentlessly undermines our ability to make unconditional judgments in the same process that it tempts us to keep doing so' (30). Thus, he claims, Plato would have to wait until Friedrich Schlegel and his account of Romantic irony before he could be properly understood (92). This is not only anachronistic towards Plato, it is dubious in its treatment of Mann and Schlegel. One might expect at least a mention of the self-aware or self-disparaging irony typically associated with Romantic irony. Instead, Nehamas follows Kierkegaard (a critic of Schlegel) in adducing a negative account of Romantic irony. On the contrary, Romanticism tends to be idealistic and for Schlegel irony is an almost religious means

¹⁴ He discusses Socratic Irony in Part One of this book. His view was first put in print in his (1992).

to enlightenment.¹⁵ Nehamas' unnecessarily negative emphasis is then carried over to Plato: Socrates is extremely 'nasty' to Euthyphro on account of the latter's self-delusion (37-8); moreover, 'Socrates' irony is directed at Euthyphro only as a means; its real goal are the readers of Plato's dialogue' (41). This Plato is thus a malicious writer who is out to trick us into feeling superior to Euthyphro in order to nurture our self-conceit. This is 'Plato's irony' and it is 'more disturbing than Socrates'' (44). Nehamas' claim that we must examine ourselves to pass Plato's test (42) seems fair enough, but the far-fetched interpretation of Socratic Irony is unconvincing. That this is *the* reason Plato depicts the irony of Socrates remains to be seen.

Nehamas then applies himself to uncovering the paradox of Socrates: namely that he was virtuous but did not have knowledge of virtue. Nehamas is particularly awed by the profundity of this paradox (e.g. 85-6) and will reject other views insofar as they are less profound or striking. Regarding the claim that Socrates did not teach he says, 'Taking Socrates' attitude towards his teaching as a complex irony robs him of much of his strangeness' (67). With this strangeness in the foreground he posits a Plato who, confounded by this paradoxical Socrates, could not understand the character he created (68-9) and who somehow ironizes *himself*, Socrates' author (87). Although there is a passion and a sincerity to Nehamas' view which cannot help but endear him to us, ultimately I believe that my explanations account for more while assuming less.

¹⁵ On Romantic irony consider F. Schlegel in *Athenaeum Fragments* §51, *Ideen* §69 and *Critical Fragments* §42 and §108 where he refers to irony as 'constant self-parody.' Further, note Mann's comments about *The Magic Mountain* in his letters (1970) translated by R. and C. Winston: 'But let us be just in the matter of hostility to life. Is my book not, despite its own inner fatality, a book of *good will*?' (125).

Finally we have G. R. F. Ferrari (2008) ‘Socratic Irony as Pretence.’ He is concerned with the question of who the audience of Socrates’ irony is (e.g. 12). Strange as it may seem it is entirely plausible for Socrates to be ‘a man alone on a mountaintop ironizing for his own amusement’ (13). To explain this Ferrari makes an excellent case for what he calls ‘solipsistic irony,’ complete with endearing examples of mothers and dog owners offering up ironies to their uncomprehending partners (15-17). We have already encountered this as Muecke’s ‘private irony’ whereby you might offer up an ironic quip even though you are the only one who gets it. Ferrari argues that this irony is constantly employed and is central to Socrates’ demeanour (21). Although he does not discuss the more important issues surrounding why Socrates uses irony, he deals with the tasks he sets for himself with rare insight and poise.

Plato is a consummate ironist and of all his ironies ‘Socratic irony’ has received the lion’s share of the scholarly attention. Yet my engagement with this scholarship has left me frustrated and disappointed. Even Ferrari’s insight was made plain decades ago by Muecke (1969) 59-60. Generally where scholars do strike on a sound intuition these are squandered on pedantries and obfuscations. As such it is better not to fall into the groove etched out by these scholars. We need to be clear about what Socratic irony is. We should not overestimate the value of a formal structure; sometimes these are revealing and enlightening, but we should not assume this from the outset. Finally, although we should respect the enigmatic charm of Socrates’ irony, we must try to be as clear and precise as possible, especially when it comes to explaining *why* Socrates is ironic.

II

SOCRATIC IRONY IN THE STRICT SENSE

Socrates’ eponymous irony, as we have seen, is historical, habitual and esoteric, and though an emerging consensus would include themselves as ‘initiates’ we are still at a loss to explain

Socrates' behaviour. This justifies, if not demands, an inquiry into Socratic Irony in the strict sense. It is well founded that Socratic Irony has two audiences—an 'in crowd' who get it and an exoteric audience who don't—and this, as mentioned, is why the Greek word for deception could become our word for irony. For the time being we will look to the effect Socrates has on the exoteric audience who are deceived or even shamed by his irony. I will argue that Socratic Irony is a technique involving false praise and false modesty which Socrates plies against those who have a false conceit of knowledge or *alazoneia*, as we may call it. In particular, Socrates uses this technique to combat their *unwillingness* to admit fault and reach *aporia*. He does so by playing off the very *alazoneia* that gave rise to their unwillingness in the first place: they are too arrogant to see the folly of their ways, so Socrates exploits this very arrogance in an attempt to combat it. As will become apparent I am interested in the motive and function of Socratic Irony rather than its structure.

Finally, a word about my approach. The present topic requires close reading of particular passages; however, it is also necessary to indicate that my claims have general or thematic relevance to other passages in other dialogues. To balance these requirements I examine particular passages while focusing on thematic features of these passages. That is, I identify certain 'themes' that appear frequently in the refutational dialogues. Although the themes I present provide a useful means of isolating certain features of Socratic Irony, they are ultimately artificial. Socrates' usage is much more fluid in practice than my 'themes' might suggest.

Lysis

We begin with a baby step: the character of Lysis in the *Lysis* as it is revealed in the first refutation of that dialogue (207d-210e). Comparatively, this young boy receives scarcely any Socratic Irony at all. There is *some* there, but nothing like we see in other dialogues. Socrates

does not laud the boy's wisdom and his affected ignorance plays a relatively minor role. Socrates begins harmlessly enough by asking Lysis if his parents love him (207d5-6). But Socrates' cunning soon becomes apparent. For he will argue that Lysis' parents do not in fact love him via the premise that *if you love someone, you let them do whatever they want*. Here is a charming little excerpt:

‘Since your father and mother love you and want you to be happy [εὐδαίμονα], obviously they will strive in every way to make you *eudaimōn*.’

‘Of course,’ he said.

‘Then they let you do whatever you want and neither punish you or stop you from doing what you want?’

‘Oh god no, Socrates, they stop me doing all sorts of things [Ναὶ μὰ Δία ἐμέ γε, ὦ Σώκρατες, καὶ μάλα γε πολλὰ κωλύουσιν].

‘How do you mean?’ I said, ‘They want you be happy [μακάριον] but don’t let you do what you want? Tell me this then. If you wanted to take out one of your father’s chariots and hold the reins in a race, they wouldn’t let you, but they stop you?’

‘By Zeus, of course they won’t let me,’ he said [Μὰ Δί’ οὐ μέντοι ἄν, ἔφη, ἐῷεν].

‘But surely they let someone?’

‘There is a charioteer my father pays.’

‘What’s this? They’d sooner entrust a hired hand than you to do as he will with the horses and they even see to it that the man gets paid? [Πῶς λέγεις; μισθωτῷ μᾶλλον ἐπιτρέπουσιν ἢ σοὶ ποιεῖν ὅτι ἂν βούληται περὶ τοὺς ἵππους, καὶ προσέτι αὐτοῦ τούτου ἀργύριον τελοῦσιν;] (207e3-208b1)

And such behaviour continues, 208d-e being particularly rich with this gentle irony. Suffice it to say Socrates is leading Lysis on. But let us turn to the end of this preliminary dialectic with Lysis. The *Lysis* is a narrated dialogue, so we have the benefit of Socrates' interpretative comments. By this stage we have already encountered one Hippothales to whom Socrates has promised an object lesson in how to speak to one's beloved (206c4-8). As Lysis' dialectic draws to a close, Socrates will explicitly insult his intelligence then stop to emphasise the importance of diminishing people. The relevant passage runs from 210c5 to 211c3. Here is the beginning of it. Socrates has just registered that neither Lysis' father nor anyone else will love Lysis until he is wise and then he says,

οἷόν τε οὖν ἐπὶ τούτοις, ὃ Λύσι, μέγα φρονεῖν, ἐν οἷς τις μήπω φρονεῖ;—Καὶ πῶς ἄν;
ἔφη.—Εἰ δ' ἄρα σὺ διδασκάλου δέῃ, οὐπω φρονεῖς.—'Αληθῆ.—Οὐδ' ἄρα
μεγαλόφρων εἶ, εἴπερ ἄφρων ἔτι.—Μὰ Δία, ἔφη, ὃ Σώκρατες, οὐ μοι δοκεῖ.

Καὶ ἐγὼ ἀκούσας αὐτοῦ ἀπέβλεψα πρὸς τὸν Ἴπποθάλῃ, καὶ ὀλίγου
ἐξήμαρτον· ἐπῆλθε γάρ μοι εἰπεῖν ὅτι Οὕτω χρή, ὃ Ἰππόθαλες, τοῖς παιδικοῖς
διαλέγεσθαι, ταπεινοῦντα καὶ συστέλλοντα, ἀλλὰ μὴ ὥσπερ σὺ χαυνοῦντα καὶ
διαθρύπτοντα.

'Can then, Lysis, someone be high minded about things they don't yet have a mind for?'—'How could they?' he said.—'And if you need a teacher, you don't yet have a mind for something.' [L. previously conceded needing teachers]—'That's right.'—'So you're not high minded, since you're still "mindless".'—'By Zeus, Socrates, it seems so to me!'

And hearing him say this I turned to Hippothales and almost slipped up. For it occurred to me to say, 'That, Hippothales, is how to talk to a beloved: humble them

and cut them down, don't pamper and gratify them like you do.'

But in an almost typical Platonic twist, these comments are relevant to Lysis precisely to the extent that they do *not* apply to him. He does not really need this treatment for the same reason that he does not require Socratic Irony: he lacks the false conceit of knowledge. Without this conceit he simply does not need a dose of Socratic Irony.

First we can glance over the character of Lysis and then we will look to the *alazōn*. It is worth emphasizing the importance of *character* here. Any approach to Socratic Irony which does not factor in the way Socrates responds to different people is unlikely to succeed.¹⁶ Lysis is revealed early on as *shy* (207a5-b1). He does of course implicitly claim to know what *philia* is—but who wouldn't? Nowhere do we find any 'high mindedness' or over-confidence. He is a ready and willing participant. The passage I mentioned earlier (210c5-211c3) includes Lysis' response to his 'humbling' refutation. It seems that he rather enjoyed himself and that he knew full well Socrates was out to refute him. He even asks Socrates to do the same thing to Menexenus. More notably, after Menexenus has received *his* refutation, Lysis interrupts the

¹⁶ See e.g. Brickhouse and Smith (2000) for an example of such a failure: 'if Socrates is attempting to deceive when he claims to be ignorant, then we must suppose that he is attempting to deceive every time we find him making such a claim' (64), or, 'Once we have convicted someone of being a liar or a riddler on one issue, we will have no clear reason to accept the person's apparent meaning in any other case' (66). Sedley (2002) 44 finds the view that Socrates tends to ironize sophists in particular in the ancient Platonists, but he makes the regrettable remark, 'The most important point, however, is not *why* Socrates speaks ironically to sophists, but *that* he does.' For the ancient commentators see e.g., Proclus *In Timaeum* 1.62.21-5, *In Parmenidem* 654-655.8 and cf. Cicero *Brutus* 292 and Seneca *De Beneficiis* 5.6.6

discussion only to stop short and blush (213c7-e3). Once again, Socrates' comments are revealing:

And as he spoke, he blushed. It seemed to me he spoke unintentionally being so wrapped up in the discussion, for this was apparent when he was listening. So I decided to give Menexenus a break since I was pleased with the other's passion for philosophy [ἐκείνου ἡσθεὶς τῇ φιλοσοφίᾳ].

Socrates poses as a naive inquirer only to expose the naivety of the other. To be sure, Lysis was encouraged and required to 'think for himself' and his ignorance was tangibly demonstrated to him. The crucial point, however, is his *curiosity*. This is essential to *aporia* properly understood. Lysis is not only willing to accept his *aporia* but he is also filled with desire to know. If this is hard to account for explicitly, it is also relatable, intuitive and easy enough to indicate. This is the germ of philosophy taking root. And it is the exact opposite of the false conceit of knowledge, *alazoneia*. For this reason the connection between arrogance and ignorance is a central theme of the refutational dialogues. This is treated explicitly in the *Apology* where Socrates details how, upon examination, those thought to be most wise or competent actually proved to be the most incapable of recognising their ignorance.¹⁷ He even claims that it is his god-given vocation to reveal people's ignorance to them (*Ap.* 23b4-7). But rather than getting carried away with this topic let me limit myself to two observations.

¹⁷ See e.g. *Ap.* 21c5-d2, 22a3-6, 22c5-6, 22d6-e1. See also *Ly.* 210e1-5, 218a2-b5; *Meno* 84a3-c9; *Chrm.* 169c3-d2; *Rep.* 338a4-8, 341a7-b2; *Grg.* 449a5-c8.

Firstly, our interest is in the way this informs a person's *disposition*.¹⁸ For our present purposes it is less important if an interlocutor believes *that p* when in fact *not p* is the case. What is important is that he is overconfident about his intellectual prowess. We are concerned with people's general attitude towards their intellectual ability. Consider this contrast: Socrates endorses a certain humility in the face of knowledge. This philosophical humility is different from the knavish ignorance he ironically affects. One must test and examine oneself, not just in regard to this or that answer, but constantly, as a way of life.¹⁹ This is a matter of habit or disposition. The *alazōn*, by contrast, overestimates his ability. His failing is not limited to a certain belief but applies to his arrogant disposition in general.

The second detail is that *alazoneia* manifests itself in *unwillingness*. Here we begin to see why irony is necessitated. Unwillingness is in fact precisely what is wrong with *alazoneia*: such arrogance makes people unwilling to see their errors or accept *aporia*, and thus they are unwilling to engage in inquiry or improve themselves. These two details are obviously related. Many of Socrates' victims can scarcely come to grips with the notion that they are ignorant. This is no doubt because of a deep-seated belief in their own abilities, it is part of how they view themselves, and it leads them to be unwilling to admit they don't know what they think they know. The significance of this issue should be obvious. Plato has dedicated an entire wing

¹⁸ That the false conceit of knowledge concerns dispositions is implicit in Socrates' tendency to look for the conceit of knowledge in people's *actions*. Thus Socrates urges that Euthyphro must surely have knowledge or he would never dare to prosecute his father (*Euthphr.* 15d2-8); Nicias and Laches must be confident in their knowledge or they would never have given their opinions so confidently and readily (*La.* 186c8-d3); so too Protagoras must be very knowledgeable, or he wouldn't be so bold in his claims to teach others (*Prt.* 348d4-349a6) and so on.

¹⁹ On the importance of self-refutation see e.g. *Grg.* 480b6-e2 and cf. 478d1-e3.

of his philosophical mansion to the study of self-delusion.²⁰ This combination of arrogance and unwillingness will play a central role in much of what follows. It was something that Lysis lacked, but which Euthyphro and Callicles, whom we now turn to, clearly exhibit. They provide two differing forms of *alazoneia*: the one a simple, unreflecting arrogance, the other a *sophos*, learned conceit.

Euthyphro

Euthyphro signals his vanity in the dialogue's opening lines. He asks Socrates why he is at the courthouse and is anxious to brag about his own trial: 'Surely you *too* don't have a suit to bring before the judge as I do' (οὐ γάρ που καὶ σοί γε δίκη τις οὔσα τυγχάνει πρὸς τὸν βασιλέα ὥσπερ ἐμοί). Euthyphro is in the peculiar position of prosecuting his own father for wrongful death, and though Plato could easily have portrayed him as some tragic figure, torn between filial piety and respect for the gods, he does absolutely nothing of the sort.²¹ He does not play down the inappropriateness of prosecuting someone on behalf of a non-relative, but emphasises the strangeness, not to mention *impiety*, of prosecuting one's father (see e.g., 4a11-b6); and Euthyphro if anything *gloats* about his trial:

Soc.: But what is the lawsuit that you have? Are you prosecuting or defending?

Euth.: Prosecuting.

Soc.: Whom?

²⁰ The textual evidence for this special unwillingness is thus conspicuously profuse in the dialogues. See e.g. *Chrm.* 169c3-d1; *Ap.* 27b3-9; *Euthyphr.* 11c7-d2, 14a11-c4; *Ion* 536d4-7, 539d4-540b2; *Hp.* *Mi.* 369b8-c1, 373a-b5; *Meno* 92d6; *Prt.* 331b8-332a3, 333b3-d3, 333e2-4, 335a4-b3, 348b1-c4, 360d1-e5, 361e5-6; *Rep.* 342e5, 344d1-345b6, 350c12-e10; *Grg.* 458b4-e2, 497a3-c2, 501c5-8, 505c1-506c4, 509e2-510a2, 513c4-8; *Euthd.* 287b2-d6, 297a1-d9.

²¹ On Euthyphro's trial see Edwards (2000) 216-8.

Euth.: A man I am thought *mad* to bring to trial.

Soc.: Why? Is he *trying* your patience and giving you the run-around?

[πετόμενόν τινα διώκεις;]

Euth.: Indeed, he's far from running around because he happens to be well old.

[Πολλοῦ γε δεῖ πέτεσθαι, ὅς γε τυγχάνει ὦν εὖ μάλα πρεσβύτης.]

Soc.: Who is this man?

Euth.: My father.

Soc.: *Your own father*, you marvellous man?

Euth.: Absolutely.

Soc.: So what is the charge and what is the case about?

Euth.: Murder, Socrates.

Soc.: Heracles! I would surely suppose, Euthyphro, that the masses are ignorant about what on earth the right course of action is here, since I for one imagine that it is not typical of the man in the street to know how to manage this correctly, but rather of someone presumably well advanced in wisdom.

Euth.: By Zeus! Well advanced indeed, Socrates. (3e7-b3)

Euthyphro, far from remorseful, is making puns about how old his father is. He positively revels in his own audacity. He is also anxious to identify Socrates with himself as a fellow victim at 3b5-c5: people tend to laugh at Euthyphro but, he assures Socrates, 'they're just jealous of those like us.' The ridicule is grist to his arrogance-mill.

Socrates is quick to heap praise on Euthyphro and to encourage him in his arrogance. We see this at the end of the passage just quoted and then again at 4e4-5d1. Here is the beginning of that passage:

Soc.: In the name of Zeus, Euthyphro, do you really believe you know so exactly where the divine stands in regard to the holy and the unholy? Don't you fear that, those things having happened as you say, you would actually be committing an unholy deed *yourself* in taking your father to court?

Euth.: Yes, Socrates: I would be of no use, nor would Euthyphro stand out from the common man, if I did not have exact knowledge of all such things.

Soc.: It would then, my marvellous Euthyphro, be best for me to become your student...

In what follows we get the ridiculous suggestion that Socrates might be retrospectively cured of his impiety *now* by learning from Euthyphro. Here, as often, Socrates diminishes himself and lauds the other. This is perhaps the single most memorable and revealing 'theme' of Socratic Irony. Socrates' opening move is to draw the other in and make them amenable, or in other words, to trap them. Socrates gets the other to explicitly confess or boast about their knowledge. He *pulls people in via false flattery*.²² This theme was largely absent with Lysis because he is not an *alazōn*. He does not vaunt his own 'knowledge.'²³ The irony by which

²² For Socrates *pulling people in* see *Ion* 530b5-d5, 532d6-e4; *Hp. Mi.* 363c7-364a9, 364c8-d6; *Grg.* 449b4-d7, 455c2-e3, 461c5-462b2, 486d2-487e7; *Euthphr.* 4a11-b6, 4e4-5a5; *Meno* 71b9-71e1; *Chrm.* 162d7-e7; *Prt.* 316b8-317d4, 318a1-b4, 320b4-320c2; *Euthd.* 273b1-274e7, 275a7-b6. Note the tendency to respond to Socrates' opening question by saying, 'But that's easy' or the like: *La.* 190e4; *Meno* 71e1, 82e2; *Prt.* 329d3.

²³ Other comparable examples include Charmides, who is not goaded into a dialectic, but explicitly urged to offer himself up to be tested (*Chrm.* 158c5-e5) and Menexenus who immediately defers to Socrates' opinion regarding whether he should pursue a political office (*Mx.* 234b3-4). Similarly the

Socrates pulls people in is virtually a pH test. Those who are not arrogant accordingly do not need to be purged of their vanity in the first place and simply don't fall into Socrates' trap.

The first point, then, regarding the *pulling people in* theme is that it is a magnet for *alazoneia*, it brings the thing out to the surface for all to see. The second point is that it can pacify it. The false conceit of knowledge is a hindrance that makes one *unwilling* to admit their ignorance, but here the unsuspecting Euthyphro can't wait to show Socrates his wisdom. I have already emphasised the importance of *unwillingness* as a key manifestation of *alazoneia* and this is clear to see in Euthyphro. For example at 11c7-d2, 14a9-c4 and the ending of the dialogue. The more important of these passages is the first. Here, having proved unable to define the holy, Euthyphro is now given the chance to accept responsibility for his failed definitions, but instead he blames Socrates. That is, Socrates implies that Euthyphro is a Daedalus who makes his answers move around like the robots Daedalus made. Euthyphro, however, insists that this is all Socrates' doing and is quite unwilling to recognise his ignorance and accept his *aporia*.

We can throw Socrates' technique into relief via a hypothetical example. If Socrates had been more direct in his attempt to challenge Euthyphro, the refutation would probably never get off the ground in the first place and even if it had, it would have been less likely to shake Euthyphro's instinctive self-delusion. 'You're just jealous,' he'd probably say. Socrates needs him to engage, to give his own answers, to stand by them and in a word to be *willing*. This in turn provides Euthyphro with a tangible proof of his inadequacies as his own lauded

Crito does not have a refutation as such: Socrates argues positively towards the claim that he should stay in prison because Crito is a willing participant.

abilities fail him. Ultimately, Socrates needs to make him sink by the weight of his own absurdity for his own good.²⁴

Socrates of course constantly appeals to people's vanity. For example, where Euthyphro is starting to feel the strain, Socrates can encourage him, keeping in key with his ironic pose: Socrates turns a failure into a compliment by saying that Euthyphro's definition fails because *he is holding out* on Socrates.

...it looks like you're unwilling [κινδυνεύεις...οὐ βούλεσθαι] to make this plain to me...don't conceal this from me, but say again from the beginning what on earth the holy is...tell me earnestly [προθύμως], what are the holy and the unholy? (11a6-b5; cf. 12a3-6).

Here Socrates employs the facetious assumption that the other has failed to instruct Socrates on purpose. This appears frequently enough that we can regard it as thematic.²⁵

²⁴ Brennan (2006) 293-5 stoutly confronts the apparent nastiness of Socrates' irony, only to argue (cautiously) that it stems from emotional scars of Socrates' youth. Namely, his resentment at being snubbed by *erastai* when he was young. I believe my interpretation provides a more satisfying explanation than this, not least in that it gives a pedagogical account of Socrates' putative nastiness.

²⁵ On this *post-refutation false praise* see *Ion* 535b1-2 (μή ἀποκρύψη), 541e1-542a6 (ἐξαπατᾷς με...περὶ ὧν δεινὸς εἶ ἐθέλεις εἰπεῖν...ὥσπερ ὁ Πρωτεὺς); *Euthphr.* 11a6-b5 (μή με ἀποκρύψη), 14b8-c3 (οὐ πρόθυμός με εἶ διδάξαι), 15b7-11 (αὐτός [sc. σὺ] ὧν πολὺ γε τεχνικώτερος τοῦ Δαιδάλου); *Hp. Mi.* 370d6-e11 (Ἐξαπατᾷς με...καὶ αὐτὸς τὸν Οδυσσεά μιμή); *Grg.* 499b4-c7 (ὥς πανοῦργος εἶ...ἐξαπατῶν με); and cf. *Chrm.* 174b11-c3 (ᾧ μισῶ...πάσαι με περιέλκεις κύκλω); *Euthd.* 288a8-d4, (οὐκ ἐθέλετον ἡμῖν ἐπιδείξασθαι σπουδάζοντε, ἀλλὰ τὸν Πρωτέα μιμεῖσθον τὸν Αἰγύπτιον σοφιστὴν γοητεύοντε ἡμᾶς. ἡμεῖς οὖν τὸν Μενέλαον μιμώμεθα...), 297d6-9.

Similarly Socrates can use false praise to get an answer to a particular question. For example at 12e1-4 Socrates is imploring Euthyphro to teach him about the relationship between the holy and justice so that, having being taught by the wise Euthyphro, he can get the better of Meletus. Socrates clearly plays on Euthyphro's arrogance to spur him on:

Now *you* try to teach me what part of the just the holy is, so that we could tell Meletus to stop treating us unjustly and not to indict us for impiety, having learnt from you sufficiently what is pious and holy, and what is not.

Here, and in many passages besides, Socrates appeals to someone's vanity to get a particular answer out them.²⁶

Finally, a word about the ending of the dialogue. The conversation in the *Euthyphro* is of course a dialectical failure—but surely not a literary or philosophical one.²⁷ In the very least we in the 'in crowd' have at least something to show for having observed this failure insofar as it displays a crucial impediment to knowledge. Moreover, it is not actually a total failure. Contrast the brazen Euthyphro from the beginning of the dialogue with the man who hurries away at the end, tail between his legs, no longer keen to show off his wisdom. By the end all Euthyphro can do is fob off Socrates questions: 'Well, some other time, Socrates, because now I am in a hurry to go somewhere, and it's time for me to go' (15e3-4). That he is no longer willing to exhibit his 'knowledge' suggests that has been improved—if at least for a moment.

²⁶ On Socrates *getting particular answers* in this way see the following passages and the text that immediately follows: *Euthphr.* 12e1-4; *Ion* 536d8-537a4; *Hp. Mi.* 366c5-e3; *La.* 191c7-e2; *Meno* 71b9-e1, 91b7-92a6; *Prt.* 328d8-329d2; *Grg.* 459e8-460a4, 466e13-467c3; and cf. *Euthd.* 286e8-287b1.

²⁷ On the literary function of Euthyphro and what we can take away from his failure see Nathan (2013).

Callicles

In keeping with the complexity of the sophists, the irony Socrates uses on them is similarly more complex. The *Gorgias* in particular is a *tour de force* of dramaturgy (for want of a better word) where virtually nothing is free from personality and power struggle. As before, I want to use the conversation with Callicles to isolate and illustrate certain ‘themes.’ Where Euthyphro was naive and simpleminded, Callicles is outrageous. His repeated claims to shamelessness are themselves shameless. Thus he lambasts Socrates for shaming Gorgias and Polus into submission, at the same time distancing himself from their ‘merely conventional’ attitudes that go ‘against nature’ (482c4-483d2). As Callicles sees it, to feel shame like this is a sign of weakness (see e.g. 491e5-429a4). Socrates for his part constantly encourages Callicles to continue in his shamelessness (487d5-6, 489a1-2, 492d1-e1 and 494c4-d5).

It makes sense to begin by looking for the *pulling people in* theme in Callicles’ dialectic. Here however we find something slightly less typical or thematic, but which nevertheless works to the same effect. Socrates does not so much compliment Callicles as insult him and in this way arouses his pride. Socrates accuses Callicles of being in thrall to popular opinion—a biting criticism Socrates seems to casually mention in passing. Just as Socrates is a slave to Philosophy, Callicles keeps shifting his stance because he’s a slave to the demos and thus he changes his mind to gratify the fickle masses (481c5-482a6). Naturally this earns Socrates an almost bellicose response followed by a lengthy speech from the sophist, who thus brazenly struts into the trap (482c4-486d1). Callicles is angry at Socrates’ insinuation. Indeed, as mentioned, he revels in his apparent freedom from conventional shame (see 481c5-483a5). In addition to this he is also angry at Socrates’ treatment of Polus and Gorgias and he is confident he can do better; he would never fall victim to the parlour tricks that Socrates practiced on those two (482c4-483a8). In *this* connection Callicles actually engages Socrates of his own

accord before Socrates even ‘pulls him in.’ And this at least is thematic.²⁸ As usual it plays off the others’ pride and *alazoneia*.

My main interest in Callicles, however, lies in a different direction. There are two key points here. First we have a major theme whereby Socrates, often protesting his innocence, claims that he is *not* conducting a refutation. For want of a better name I call this *playing coy*. It is generally employed on sophists and the like and is perhaps second in importance only to the *pulling people in* theme. Together these are the most distinctive and memorable aspects of Socratic Irony. The simpletons are assured of Socrates’ fawning admiration, the ‘learned’ man meets an earnest and innocent co-inquirer. That said, while Socrates has frequent recourse to this technique, he uses it in a range of elenctic situations that I have found difficult to pin down. Nonetheless, it is easy enough to indicate some of the main usages. For instance, Socrates frequently proclaims his good intentions to alleviate the (well founded) suspicion that he is out to refute the other. We see this when Socrates assures Hippias that he only interrogates wise people like *him* because he is so anxious to learn from them (*Hp. Mi.* 369d1-e2, 372a5-d4); and in the *Protagoras* when he assures Protagoras that his real interest is to test out arguments.²⁹ Sometimes Socrates augments these assurances of goodwill with a dash of shame,

²⁸ We find this technique even more explicitly in the way Polus came into his elenchus (461b3-c4). It is also evident with Thrasymachus (*Rep.* 336b1-337a8, 338a4-8) and Critias (*Chrm.* 162a10-d6). In all of these cases the victim is ensnared by the ardent belief that they could do better against Socrates. In the interesting case of Critias, Charmides and Socrates are discussing a definition which Critias is secretly responsible for. They claim it doesn’t matter *who* actually said it, only whether it’s true. But when Socrates refutes the definition (in part by attributing some bizarre intention to the ‘unimportant’ speaker) Critias is compelled by his pride to defend it.

²⁹ See *Prt.* 333b8-c9 (with 331c4-6) and note Protagoras’ unwillingness to subject himself to Socrates’ questions.

generally playing off the other's claims to knowledge. Thus when Critias accuses Socrates of trying to trip him up, Socrates insists that he is simply trying to root out ignorance (*Chrm.* 166b7-e3): 'Or don't you consider this a common good for almost everyone?' In this way Critias is cowed by the implication that he doesn't value truth. Similarly, when Gorgias proved unwilling to return to the fray, Socrates explicitly denies that he is merely trying to beat Gorgias amidst exaggerated claims of good will (*Grg.* 457e1-458a8). Yet he doesn't win Gorgias over until the shame gets to him. As Gorgias concedes: 'If I were unwilling [to converse with you] it would be to my shame, Socrates, since I claim I can answer any question' (*Grg.* 458d7-e2). Here Socrates plays off Gorgias' claims to knowledge.³⁰ But for all that Socrates is constantly branded as a victory-lover who merely quibbles to catch people out.³¹ Clearly, then, his protestations of innocence are often considered insincere. But here the technique really comes into its own; for it easily adapts itself to this situation. For example, in the *Republic* when Thrasymachus flatly accuses Socrates of being an *eirōn*, Socrates' denials only spur Thrasymachus on and inflame his desire to beat him (341a7-c3). Which of course is exactly what Socrates wants. As usual it is their *alazoneia* that pulls the *alazōn* into the trap by which their *alazoneia* is exposed as empty and vain.

In the case of Callicles, through an absolute masterstroke Socrates shames him via his self-proclaimed shamelessness (see 486d2-488b1). Socrates cunningly burdens Callicles with a keen intelligence, good will and fidelity to the truth, and uses this to seduce Callicles into the

³⁰ In general Socrates is very proactive in assuring Gorgias of his good intentions. See *Grg.* 453a8-453c5 with 454b8-c7, 455c5-d5, and 457e1-458b3.

³¹ See e.g. *Meno* 79e7-80b7; *Rep* 337a3-7, 337e1-3, 337e1-3, 338d3-4, 341a7-c3; *Grg.* 461b3-c4, 482c3-483a5, 497b6-b11, 515b5; *Hp. Mi.* 369b8-c; *Chrm.* 166b7-c6; and cf. *La.* 187e6-188a3 and *Prt.* 336b8-d5.

trap; for Callicles would never concede a point to Socrates ‘through lack of wisdom or excess of shame (οὔτε σοφίας ἐνδεία οὔτ’ αἰσχύνης περιουσία—487e3-5). Here is a brief excerpt:

I am confident that if *you* were to agree with me about the things I hold dear, then these very things would be true. For I recognise that to adequately examine whether a person, in their soul, is living correctly or not, one must have three things, all of which you have: knowledge, good will and a ready tongue [παρησίαν]. For I encounter many people who are unable to examine me because they aren’t wise like you are. Others may be wise but are unwilling to tell me the truth because they don’t care for me like you do. And these two guests, Gorgias and Polus, while both wise and fond of me, are wanting in frankness and more modest than one might hope [αἰσχυνηροτέρω μᾶλλον τοῦ δέοντος] (486e5-487b2)

It is genuinely difficult to say whether Callicles swallows all this and I suspect that seeking a black and white answer to this question would not be faithful to Plato’s dramaturgy. What *is* clear is that Socrates gets Callicles talking and, as usual, he pulls him in via his pride. This is significant, for once it sinks in that Callicles is unable to match Socrates he becomes increasingly and predictably *unwilling* to engage. This, in turn, leads to a total breakdown of the dialectic (see 504d5-506c5 and what follows in general). ‘Thinking for yourself’ is quite irrelevant here. Callicles is battered, bruised, humiliated and angry. This too is typical. Socrates constantly makes people angry.³² And in the present case he is unrelenting in his abuse of

³² For Socrates making people angry see e.g. *Ap.* 21a5-6 (with 21a5-6—μὴ θορυβεῖτε), 21d7-e5, 22e6-23a5, 23d9-24b1, 28a2-7, 34b7-d1, 37c5-d6; *Meno* 94e3-95a1; *Prt.* 332a2-4; *Rep.* 352b3-6; *Grg.*

Callicles. We should not however labour some account of how Socrates is actually encouraging Callicles to philosophy. Rather Callicles is what Socrates would refer to as ‘incurable.’ Ann Michelini (1998) 58-9 does well to notice in this connection that the myth at the end of the *Gorgias* makes mention of the ‘incurable soul’ (e.g. 525b1-c8).³³ Socrates explains that a corrupt soul must be kept away from that which it desires, and we must never let it be sated (504d5-505c6). A man without self-control who lets his appetites run rampant is a scourge to himself and those around him (507c8-508a8).³⁴ Rehabilitation is essential for the corrupt soul, but if they are too far gone then one must be sure not to gratify their baser urges and more importantly to make an example of them for others. This is the second point I want to stress regarding Callicles. It is worth remembering here that this conversation takes place in front of, not only Gorgias and Polus, but also many would-be students (see 455c5-d5) including the reader. In sum Socrates appeals to Callicles’ pride to lead him into a trap. And even when Socrates’ ‘innocence’ is called into question this only inflames Callicles’ pride all the more. That is, until the trap snaps shut and Socrates strikes where Callicles is most vulnerable, his pride.

Conclusions

Like a Jane Austen novel, Socrates causes the pompous fools to reveal themselves at every turn and the villains to get their comeuppance in the end. The arrogance of Socrates’ patients makes them unwilling and ashamed to admit ignorance, so Socrates plays off this arrogance to trick

462c10-463a5 (φάθι), 489b7-8, 491a1-3, 494d1, 521d6-522a7. Some good examples of Socratic Irony humiliating people are *Chrm.* 169c3-d1; *Prt.* 348c1; *Rep.* 350c12-d3.

³³ We also encounter ‘incurables’ in the afterlife myths of the *Republic* (615c5-616b1) and the *Phaedo* (113e1-6).

³⁴ And cf. *Grg.* 472e4-7, 473d7-e1, 477a2-b1, 4778d1-4 and 511e4-512b2.

them into participating. Then he shames them so as to expose their ignorance to the cold light of self-realisation. And of course by attacking their pride and making them feel shame, he communicates in a way they simply cannot ignore. It is, then, entirely apt that Socrates ministers *humiliation* to the *alazōn* since humiliation from being refuted is a consequence of *alazoneia*; a better interlocutor would not feel shame at being deprived of a false belief. And best of all, the more they struggle against him the further down they sink, like quicksand. In this way Socrates turns their very arrogance against them. His otherwise surprising pedagogical technique is in fact necessitated because the unwillingness of the *alazōn* has precluded a more congenial approach.

Yet although Socrates tries to heal people, where this is not possible he tries to prevent the disease from spreading. In the best cases, Socratic Irony is hardly required, as with Lysis. In slightly worse cases, it brings the other to see their folly by their own intellectual efforts, as seems to be the case with Gorgias.³⁵ In still worse cases it will check their *alazoneia* and in the very least starve them of harmful praise as with Euthyphro (cf. *Grg.* 518c-e1). All of these people are thus benefited and presumably so too are we for having seen them exposed. But in the case of Callicles—the worst, incurable case—only the spectators stand to benefit. Socrates must goad Callicles into a refutation not to make *him* realise how shallow his knowledge is, but so to make *others* realise it.

The ironic pattern of opposites seems to touch every aspect of Socratic Irony. One's high opinion of oneself is the very thing that undermines one's worth. Socrates' false pretence

³⁵ Gorgias is perhaps the most successful case of Socratic Irony we witness. Some achieve *aporia*, but no one seems to move from *alazoneia* into the true philosophical spirit. Gorgias, on the other hand, is overtly sure of himself to begin with (e.g. 449a7-b3) but having been refuted, he will then intervene on three occasions in *support* of Socrates against Callicles and Polus (463d6-e4, 497b4-2, 506a8-b3). It seems to me his curiosity is at least piqued.

expose the true state of affairs. Socrates appears alternatively as a knave or a sophist but is in fact the opposite. To say the least, Socratic Irony is not what it appears to its patients or victims: Socrates' fawning praise of Euthyphro exposes the latter's baser qualities; Socrates' self-disparaging pretence of ignorance—as opposed to genuine humility—conceals a pronounced superiority; the perceived attempt to injure and defeat the other is in fact an attempt to improve him.

Finally, then, we turn to the question of the effect Socratic Irony has on the 'in crowd.' Why, we may ask, has Plato left all this implicit rather than spelling it out for us? The answer is that the passages we are discussing are case studies of self-delusion.³⁶ One must be able to recognise that they don't know what they think they know and be like Socrates, who is not ashamed to learn (οὐ γὰρ αἰσχύνομαι μανθάνων—*Hp. Mi.* 372b7-c3). This is prerequisite for philosophy. As such, it is entirely apt that the text seeks out and speaks to readers of a particular temperament. Better still, Plato attempts to instil that temperament in the reader by encouraging our curiosity. He can achieve this effect by leaving it up to the reader to think things through and figure it out for themselves. I claim that my interpretation, in broad strokes, is obvious *once you've seen it*, but at the same time it is hiding in plain sight (hence the epigraph to this chapter). For Socrates never really lifts the ironic mask. Nehamas, Gordon and others tend to

³⁶ Cf. Blank (1993) on the nature and purpose of the emotional effect Socrates has on his interlocutors. Related issues are also raised by Beversluis (2000) although he approaches them from the opposite point of view (namely, from the perspective of Socrates' interlocutors) and naturally comes to rather different conclusions. Such a perspective is not immediately relevant to my purpose in the present chapter, moreover, as discussed in the Introduction, I believe that Plato consciously puts Socrates in a privileged position and expects us to draw our conclusions in light of this.

deprive Plato or Socrates of any substantive teaching by claiming that Plato makes you ‘think for yourself.’ I agree that he wants us to think but I believe that in any given context there is a particular conclusion he wants us to reach; say, about Euthyphro’s piety or Callicles’ shamelessness. Indeed, this is precisely what awakens our curiosity and encourages us to think: the belief that *something* has been concealed. I suspect that you would be able to find this idea inchoate in a number of modern accounts of Socratic Irony. Plato conceals but also hints at what is being concealed. Anyone can be obscure, but Plato is *enigmatic*; his obscurity is designed to encourage us to discover what lies beneath.

In Chapter One I discussed how irony can be a kind of seduction that draws you in and co-opts the audience’s resources towards its own ends: it makes us work to solve the riddle and is all the more persuasive or appealing because we have uncovered it for ourselves. Similarly there is something coquettish about Plato’s depiction of Socratic Irony and this proves to be an excellent way to effect his meaning because it requires active engagement on the part of the student. Although there is a certain risk involved because many will simply not get it, this too is by design, or at least a necessary evil. Above all, it is a technique that rewards and encourages that special sort of *willingness* while excluding the unwilling who already think they know. Such a state of affairs, however, is regrettably rather ironic: if it is essential to figure it out yourself, then in explaining how Socratic Irony works I have done you and Plato a disservice and robbed you of the opportunity to experience the text as it was meant to be experienced. Another failing of my survey is that it tends to present the various ‘themes’ in isolation. Although a useful expedient, this can give a distorted impression. Socratic Irony is not a mechanical, paint-by-numbers technique, it is more like a toolbox of tricks and manoeuvres that Socrates applies with grace and economy. This, in turn, should discourage us from focusing predominantly on the formal structure of Socratic Irony.

A Postscript to Socratic Irony

I stand by my decision to separate out Socratic Irony and treat it in isolation. At the same time this irony does strike me as but one facet of a bigger pattern. ‘Wisdom dressed as folly’ is virtually Socrates’ calling card. His tendency to mask the profound with the ridiculous is surely one of the most ubiquitous and far reaching aspects of his irony. Vlastos’ complex irony has certainly struck on something pertinent by observing Socrates’ strange way with words. Socrates also exhibits this inversion of values in his person. I will return to the theme of wisdom dressed as folly in Part Three and I will argue there that it characterises not only Socrates but the dialogues in general.

CHAPTER THREE

PARAGOGIC IRONY

καὶ ἡμεῖς τῷ ὄντι ἴσως τέθναμεν· ἤδη γάρ του
 ἔγωγε καὶ ἤκουσα τῶν σοφῶν ὥς νῦν ἡμεῖς
 τέθναμεν καὶ τὸ μὲν σῶμά ἐστὶν ἡμῖν σῆμα, τῆς
 δὲ ψυχῆς τοῦτο ἐν ᾧ ἐπιθυμίαι εἰσὶ τυγχάνει ὄν
 οἷον ἀναπεῖθεσθαι καὶ μεταπίπτειν ἄνω κάτω.

(And perhaps we truly are dead. In fact I've
 even heard from some wise man that we are
 indeed now dead and the body is our tomb but
 that the part of the soul where desire resides is
 just the sort of thing to be won over and easily
 redirected.)¹

Grg. 493a1-5

There is a popular idiom that distinguishes between a proverbial carrot and a stick, the former being a means of encourage good things where the latter discourages bad ones. Socratic Irony, as we have seen, is a technique for discouraging bad qualities in the manner of a ‘stick.’ In the present chapter we turn to a technique whereby Socrates can encourage people towards positive goals in the manner of a ‘carrot.’ Accordingly, Socrates only plies this irony on interlocutors who are capable of philosophical discussion and who no longer need to be purged of their conceit by Socratic Irony. Nevertheless, although these good interlocutors can, for example,

¹For μεταπίπτειν as ‘to redirect’ compare μεταβιβάζειν in 517b5-7, as noted by Lodge (1896) 167.

Note that μεταπίπτειν is used as the passive of μεταβάλλω.

acknowledge their ignorance they are still possessed by certain unphilosophical and harmful beliefs or habits. This is where irony comes into play. We saw in the last chapter how Socrates made use of and exploited the very arrogance he was trying to combat; here we will see how he turns the bad habits of his friends to good purpose. The technique he employs is actually rather deceptive in the way it plays off people's weaknesses and desires. With this in mind I have settled on 'paragogic irony' as a convenient handle. The Greek term παράγειν (παρά + ἄγω) can mean 'lead astray' or 'divert' and the noun παραγωγή can easily carry the sense of 'deception.' Notwithstanding the negative overtone, this is how Socrates deals with the bad habits of his friends—or so I hope to show. Namely, he co-opts their unhealthy desires or beliefs and diverts them towards good ends.

The bulk of this chapter is given over to a discussion of paragogic irony in the *Phaedo* inasmuch as this dialogue provides a particularly rich and interesting example. To begin with, however, we will briefly glance over a handful of examples in other dialogues. This should serve to introduce and illustrate what I mean by paragogic irony. Moreover, it demonstrates that the paradigmatic example in the *Phaedo* is not an isolated case. This is important for at least two reasons: firstly, it indicates the importance of this particular irony for the dialogues in general and; secondly, it lends credence to my interpretation in that it suggests the pattern I have identified is a deliberate contrivance of Plato.

The irony involved in the present chapter is ironic in a slightly looser sense of the term. However, even if for some readers it does not seem entirely ironic, it should become clear that it is closely related. Thinking back to my discussion of 'the active ingredient' of irony, what we have here is directly concerned with just that sort of opposition. Glaucon, I shall argue, has political ambitions which Socrates direct appeals to so as to turn him away from politics. In this way, some item leads to its opposite. And again, Simmias and Cebes see their somatic attachments exploited so that these very somatic afflictions lead them away from the body.

Moreover, the theme explored in this chapter is very much in keeping with the other ironies I discuss (especially if I am right in thinking that Plato has consciously conceptualised this ‘irony’ in the manner I discuss). In fine, whether or not it technically counts as irony, an understanding of paragogic irony enriches our understanding of Plato use of irony, or at least the pattern of unlike-to-unlike as it applies to pedagogy.

I MINOR EXAMPLES OF PARAGOGIC IRONY

In the *Phaedrus* we encounter an interlocutor, Phaedrus, who not only adores oratory but wishes to become an orator himself. Thus he steals away with Lysias’ speech and tries to practice his oratory on Socrates (e.g. 228a5-c5). He also betrays a working familiarity with the rhetorical handbooks of the day (see 273a6). Socrates, for his part, tries to exploit and undermine Phaedrus’ love for oratory. This is quite easy to observe in the second half of the dialogue where Socrates repeatedly emphasises that the true orator will require a comprehensive knowledge of the subjects he wishes to speak on as well as the souls he wishes to address.² Such a skill set could only come from philosophy and in this way Phaedrus is led away from oratory and towards philosophy *because of* his desire to become an orator. In other words, he is led away from Lysias and towards Socrates, away from Isocrates’ brand of ‘philosophy’ and towards Plato’s. (A more complex example of this protreptic technique is evident in the *Palinode*, as I argue in Chapter Five.)

² See 259e1-260d1, 262b2-c3, 263a6-c5, 269e4-272b4, 277a9-c6. Socrates all but reveals his motives at 261a3-5: ‘Come forward, you noble *logoi*! Persuade Phaedrus, who begets such fine speeches, that unless he philosophizes sufficiently, neither will he suffice to speak on any topic.’

In the *Republic* Socrates exploits Glaucon's political ambitions to turn him away from politics. Leaving aside Adeimantus, Socrates paints a picture of the city for Glaucon that he can reflect upon as he tries to mould his soul, for the city is an image of the soul after all. This at once appeals to Glaucon's political ambitions and turns him away from politics: he is allured by the promise of 'enthroning' a powerful yet benign leader in the 'citadel' of his soul; but to realise this 'political' ideal within his soul he must keep out of politics.

Glaucon's character is a blend of the philosophical and the honour-loving.³ He frequently betrays his wisdom-loving side. For example, when he challenges Socrates to defend justice at the start of Book 2, he demonstrates his critical acumen and his fidelity to the truth (357a5-362c8, esp. 358b2-d8). And we can throw into the bargain that he desires to be just (358c6-d6). On the other hand, he has a natural inclination to indulge his *thumos* and pursue honours.⁴ For example, he is unsatisfied by the simple existence of Socrates' so-called 'city of pigs' (372c2-e8) and he is explicitly called victory-loving by his brother at 548d8-9. It is of course entirely typical for someone of his pedigree to gravitate towards a career in politics.

Given that the just city would have so much appeal to his honour-loving spirit, it is striking—and ironic—that Socrates explicitly uses it to steer him away from politics. Contemporary institutions, that is democratic ones, are said to be toxic for the soul, virtually guaranteed to corrupt an otherwise philosophically inclined person (449c4-d7, 497b, cf. 493e2-494a10); Socrates is explicit that the quiet life is the only acceptable option for someone who happens to find himself in such a city. Conversely, of all the non-philosophical cities democracy is singled out with special praise for leaving one free to do what they want (557b4-558c6, esp. 557e2-558a2) and this should make it easier for Glaucon to keep out of politics.

³ On the character of Glaucon (and Adeimantus) see further Blondell (2002) 119-228.

⁴ According to Xenophon Glaucon had a keen interest in politics before he was dissuaded by Socrates (*Memorabilia* 3.6.1).

To close our discussion of the *Republic*, here is a telling exchange between Glaucon and Socrates about how a man of sense (ὁ νοῦν ἔχων) will behave:

And again, when it comes to honours, by consulting that constitution in his soul he'll deliberately take up and enjoy those honours that he thinks will make him better but he'll shun those that will undo the presiding state of his soul, whether public or private honours.

He surely won't take part in politics, Glaucon said, so long as he is concerned with having a just soul.

By the dog, I said, At least in his own kind of city he very much would, however probably not in his own fatherland unless there is some divine windfall for him.

I understand, he said, you mean in the city we have established in our discussion, a city of words since I don't think it exists anywhere on earth.

Rather, I said, like a paradigmatic city laid up in the heavens for someone who wants to look at and organise his soul. It doesn't matter whether it does or will exist somewhere, for he would take part in the affairs of *this* city and no other.

That seems reasonable, he said. (592a-b)

In the *Cratylus* Socrates exploits Cratylus' etymological interest in words (*onomata*) and diverts it away from words to the true beings 'behind' them.

Socrates quite obviously appeals to Cratylus' interest in etymology. He positions himself against Hermogenes and in support of Cratylus' view by arguing that there is indeed a 'natural' way to employ words (e.g. 390d7-391b2 and 427c6-d2). Moreover, the ensuing discussion is something of a *tour de force* of etymological ingenuity that simply must have

thrilled any budding etymologist. Certainly Cratylus endorses it. And yet, by the time we get to the end of the dialogue Socrates quite explicitly changes tack and rejects such inquiries.

Although Cratylus claims that inquiry into words is the only way to inquire into being, Socrates forces him to concede that words can in fact be misapplied. One of the key examples Socrates employs concerns how Cratylus' doctrine seems to suggest that being is in flux *and* at rest. Accordingly, Socrates rounds off the discussion by urging Cratylus, in no uncertain terms, not to rely on etymologies to lead him to the truth, but to turn to things themselves (435d7-439b9). As he says at 440c3, 'it certainly doesn't suit a man of sense to entrust himself or the cultivation of his soul to words, by trusting those words or the people who established them and confidently affirming that he has knowledge' (440c3-6). Ultimately, to settle the etymological issue of whether words point to a stable or changing reality requires one to leave aside the study of words and turn to metaphysics.

I hope it is now clear how paragogic irony works. Rather than the negative 'stick' of Socratic Irony, we have a positive 'carrot' that attempts to lead people away from their bad impulses towards good ones. With Glaucon and Phaedrus Socrates seizes on their desires—Glaucon's desire for honours, Phaedrus' desire to become an orator—and repurposes this desire to an opposite goal. This then is like a proverbial carrot, but with the ironic caveat that it leads one *away* from carrots. In a broadly analogous way, Cratylus' fondness for etymologies was exploited to turn him away from words and towards the underlying things themselves. Now we turn to our main example, the paragogic irony of the *Phaedo*.

I

PARAGOGIC IRONY IN THE *PHAEDO*

It should come as no surprise that the *Phaedo* contains some choice irony; the theme of opposites appears not infrequently in this dialogue. For example, Phaedo begins his account by

trying to explain the strange mix of pleasure and pain he felt on the day of Socrates' death (58e1): not the pity he should have felt before a dying friend, nor still the usual pleasure of philosophical discussion, but some outlandish (ἄτοπον) mixture of pleasure and pain. Indeed, all those present felt caught between weeping and laughing (58e1-59b1). This uncanny blend of pleasure and pain is given even more emphasis by Socrates in what is his opening speech: he marvels at how outlandish and strange (ὥς ἄτοπον...ὥς θαυμασίως) pleasure and pain are (60b3-c7). He claims they are joined at the hip, or as he puts it, joined at the head like a beast with two bodies; and he marvels that pleasure and pain, although opposites, always follow one another. For instance, his shackles had caused him pain and now that they are removed this brings pleasure. That Socrates is alluding to a phenomenon we would term 'ironic' is made quite explicit.⁵ This gives way to perhaps the most glaring 'opposite' of them all: death is apparently a good thing. Indeed, it is the true goal of life.⁶ We find the theme of opposites a number of other places in the dialogue and, while these are not ironic, their presence is noteworthy. As I have argued, irony is closely connected with opposition.

The first argument of the dialogue is centred on opposition. The so-called Argument from Opposites (also called the 'Cyclic Argument') claims that all things that have opposites

⁵ ὥς θαυμασίως [sc. τὸ ἥδὺ] πέφυκε πρὸς τὸ δοκοῦν ἐναντίον εἶναι, τὸ λυπηρόν, τὸ ἅμα μὲν αὐτῷ μὴ 'θέλειν παραγίγνεσθαι τῷ ἀνθρώπῳ, ἐὰν δέ τις διώκη τὸ ἕτερον καὶ λαμβάνῃ, σχεδόν τι ἀναγκάζεσθαι ἀεὶ λαμβάνειν καὶ τὸ ἕτερον (60b4-c1).

⁶ Plato draws attention to the humorous side of this at 64a10-b6: Socrates had said that philosophy is preparation for death and dying and Simmias, laughing and swearing an oath, remarks that most people would readily agree that philosophers are ripe for death and deserve no less (...ὅτι τῷ ὄντι οἱ φιλοσοφοῦντες θανατῶσι, καὶ σφᾶς γε οὐ λελήθασιν ὅτι ἄξιοι εἰσιν τοῦτο πάσχειν). The irony of Socrates' treatment of 'death' is perhaps latent in the mystic doctrine that the body (*sōma*) is a tomb (*sēma*).

come from these opposites. The second argument, on recollection, takes as its focal point the example of *equality*. Thus the first two arguments move from opposites to equality, which is another case of opposition. The third argument, the Affinity Argument, brings to the fore the central idea of the dialogue. Inevitably it is an opposition: namely, the distinction between body and soul, the bodily senses and the mind, the visible and the invisible, life and death *et cetera*.

After the Affinity Argument Socrates fields some objections from Simmias and Cebes. Simmias' objection makes mention of opposites; he claims that the soul is a harmony of opposites (86b5-c1). Socrates too, in his response to Simmias, finds another opposition concerning the soul. Namely, the soul opposes the afflictions of the body (τοῖς κατὰ τὸ σῶμα πάθεσιν...ἐναντιούμενην [ψυχὴν]) and draws it to the opposite of what it wants (94b7-9). And in his lengthy response to Cebes, Socrates' Final Argument culminates in the claim that the soul *qua* bringer of life can never admit death because death is the opposite of life. Thus, again, opposition plays a central role (see, for example, 102d6-103c9). All in all, the foregoing strongly suggests that opposition was never far from Plato's mind when composing the *Phaedo*. Irony, which bears a special relation to opposition, is thus a natural fit.

Outline

The example of paragogic irony in the *Phaedo* we shall explore involves the way Socrates appeals to the physical attachment of his companions only to undermine it; he co-opts their somatic dispositions and re-orientes them against the body. In its broad strokes my argument is quite simple. Socrates' companions are deeply afflicted by bodily concerns and emotions (notwithstanding their claims to the contrary). We see this, for example, in the emotional and tearful reaction to Socrates' death and in their fear of death in general. Socrates, however, is very critical of such attachments. So, to get through to his companions, he pitches his arguments in a 'somatic register.' For example, he threatens them with physical pain in the

afterlife if they don't abstain from a somatic existence. The irony is that if they *were* detached from bodily concerns, this argument would be meaningless to them; it only works insofar as they are attached to the bodily. In particular what makes this an example of paragoric irony is that the somatic attachments are turned against themselves. Socrates appeals to their aversion to physical pain to lead them towards a disposition that rises above such bodily concerns.⁷

Our discussion begins by examining the negative impact of the body for the aspiring philosopher. This serves as background for an understanding of the fear of death and how this works to chain the soul to the body. From here I demonstrate how Simmias and Cebes exhibit these somatic afflictions and finally we will be in a good position to understand how and why Socrates plies his paragoric irony to ween his companions off the body.

The Problem with the Body: Ethics and Epistemology

Our key sources for Socrates' view of the body are two-fold. The first is in the 'apology speech' that runs from 63b4-69c5. The second is at the tail end of the Affinity Argument: at 80e2 Socrates veers off and starts generalising about the fate of the soul in death. For the sake of convenience I call this latter section 'the Recapitulation.' These two passages frame the first half of the dialogue's argumentation (the middle of the dialogue being marked by the misology digression) and they tend to register the *moral* themes and conclusions that are otherwise

⁷ Regarding the way Socrates using fears etc. to reshape the fears of Simmias and Cebes, I have since found a similar view in Jansen (2013) 343. However, she argues that the emotional force of Socrates' approach vindicates the role of such emotions in general. I think this is mistaken. Emotional appeals of this sort should be considered a means to an end or even a necessary evil; thus Socrates appeals to somatic fears to ultimately undermine the source of these fears. Jansen tends to push her interpretation too far, even suggesting that the reader's vicarious grief over Socrates' death will somehow lead us to become philosophers (248-9).

ignored in the argumentation proper. Thus they provide a useful source for Socrates' view of the body. (Socrates' four arguments, on the other hand, focus on the narrow claim that the soul is indestructible).

To begin with Socrates makes some useful remarks about the problems created by the body at 66b7-d7 in the apology speech. First he claims that there are countless distractions (μυριάς ἀσχολίας) created by the need to tend to the body and these distractions, such as sickness, divert our attention from the hunt for truth (66b7-c2). Socrates develops this idea with special emphasis on passions, desires and fears (ἔρωτες, ἐπιθυμιαί and φόβοι) which are said to lead one away from *phronēsis* (66c2-5). Further, desires of the body are said to bring about wars because the body craves wealth, and wars are fought over wealth. Thus we become slaves to the body (δουλεύοντες τῇ τούτου θεραπείᾳ) and have no time for philosophy (66c5-d3). But not only does the body *distract* us, it also directly impedes philosophical inquiry. Socrates moves (seamlessly) from issues of character and 'free time' to an epistemological issue: even if we do get some respite from servicing the body, it is still a source of confusion to an inquiring mind (66d3-7). Socrates is clearly and predictably concerned with the epistemological limitations the body places on a would-be philosopher. For instance, at 79c2-8 he says that whenever the soul inquires in conjunction with bodily senses, it is dragged about by the body, 'led astray, agitated and confounded like a drunk,' and it never lights upon reality (79c2-8). More interestingly, Socrates will in fact marry these two strands of criticisms: the 'ethical' and the epistemological. For example he claims in the apology speech that the soul thinks most clearly when it is unencumbered by the body: 'For presumably it reasons best just when it is not troubled by the senses, neither hearing or vision, nor pain nor pleasure' (65c5-7). Socrates speaks of *pleasure and pain* in the same breath as *hearing and vision*; the sensual and the sensory are of a piece.

While it is easy enough to make sense of the ethical claim that the passions distract us and the epistemological claim that the senses impede inquiry, the combination of the two is a little more delicate. The basic idea might be expressed by saying that to indulge the senses is to place value on emotions and to make a *de facto* philosophical judgement.⁸ Consider for example the following passage where Socrates explains how bodily pleasures and the use of the senses can make us shun philosophy and come to think that only physical things exist:

But think about a soul that is released from the body, corrupted and impure from

⁸ There are a melee of issues here concerning the parts of the soul and their relationship with belief, desires, the good etc.; developmental theories being added to taste. See e.g. Moss (2006) 524-30, Beere (2010) 261-79, Barney (2010) 34-5, Young (2013) 469, Kamtekar (2017) 1-4. I am yet to be convinced that the dialogues actually attempt a disinterested topography of the soul. Socrates usually argues under the shadow of a particular ethical contention imbedded in a particular dialectical context and, as often as not, steeped in metaphor (cf. *Rep.* 611c6-d2). Regarding the point I am making in the body of the text cf. Kahn (1987) and Devereux (1995). Devereux, in his important article on Socratic intellectualism, notes the role desires can play in Plato's 'Socratic' dialogues (as opposed to the 'Platonic' view developed later). For example, he claims that desires can undermine judgements and thus: 'According to [Socrates'] preferred way of describing the experience, the agent *succumbs* to temporary ignorance' (395); see further Brickhouse and Smith (2010) e.g. the fifth chapter entitled 'Educating the Appetites and Passions.' However, where Devereux lets desire affect judgement, Kahn places reason closer to the lower desires. Discussing the psychology of the *Republic* (and the *Symposium*), he argues that reason is a type of desire. For example: 'It is precisely as a desire for what is judged to be good and beneficial that reason is set apart from appetite and the *thymoeides*' (85). For either scholar, then, the body and the mind can both play formative roles in motivating our actions and the two are seemingly brought closer together. See further Cooper (1984) and Burnyeat (2006).

always being in thrall to it, beguiled by its desires and pleasures [ἐρῶσα καὶ γοητευομένη ὑπ’ αὐτοῦ ὑπό τε τῶν ἐπιθυμιῶν καὶ ἡδονῶν] so that it holds nothing to be true except the physical things which one can touch, see, drink, eat and take sexual gratification from; but on the other hand, what is dim to the eyes, invisible, intelligible and can only be grasped by philosophy—these things the soul is accustomed to hate and fear and flee from. Do you think that such a soul will get away in a pure state, alone by itself? (81b1-c2)

Here we can note how the passions and desires lead the soul to hate the ‘invisible’ and take only the physical as true. That is, to indulge the senses seems to lead to a metaphysical-cum-ethical judgement. But I do not think that this somatic individual, captivated by physical pleasures, needs to be understood as explicitly making any metaphysical speculations. Rather, insofar as he lives a life given over to the body and in ignorance of the incorporeal, he is as one who takes only the physical as real.⁹

This comes through forcibly in one of the most striking passages in the *Phaedo* on the theme of the *sōma*. The passage runs from 82d9 to 83e3 and occurs near the end of the Recapitulation. It is particularly climactic and it helps round off the first half of the discussion.

⁹ Regarding whether Socrates endorses either a total rejection of the senses or an ‘evaluative’ asceticism (whereby bodily pleasures are permitted provided they are evaluated correctly) see Ebrey (2017) 30-1 for a bibliography. I am sympathetic to the view of Bulter (2012) 108: ‘the soul’s becoming of like character and nurture to the body are presented as necessary effects of pleasures, desires, and pains; and this is true of every person (83c5).’ At least this is what Socrates conveys to his companions in the specific context of the *Phaedo*. We might say that somatic *pathēmata* induce a sort of philosophical miasma.

The passage begins with the arresting claim that the body co-opts the soul into imprisoning itself through the seductive charm of physical pleasures (83e1-83a1): Socrates explains how the soul is bound and affixed to the body (διαδεδεμένην ἐν τῷ σώματι καὶ προσκεκολλημένην), and how it is forced to investigate *being* through the body as through a prison. But the most devious part (δαινότητα) of this prison is that it works through our own desires so that *the prisoner is the greatest accomplice to his captivity* (ὥς ἂν μάλιστα αὐτὸς ὁ δεδεμένος συλλήπτωρ εἴη τοῦ δεδέσθαι).¹⁰ In a word we are made to want to ‘imprison’ ourselves. As always, Plato has a sharp eye for irony. In a sense, this is an inverse image of what (I claim) Socrates is doing to his companions. While the body uses its intrinsic allure to trick the soul into imprisoning itself, Socrates uses the same bodily pleasures and pains against the body to free the soul.

From here Socrates explains how philosophy tries to dissuade the imprisoned soul by revealing that the body limits inquiry and so on. But he quickly returns to the theme of somatic passions and how these are cashed in as ontological and ethical convictions. Thus at 83b6-d5 we learn that when one experiences extreme sensations he ends up believing that the source of these feelings must be what is most real and most true (τοῦτο ἐναργέστατόν τε εἶναι καὶ ἀληθέστατον—83c7). And this, above all, is how the soul is bound and captured (καταδεῖται), each pleasure and pain is like a nail hammering the soul to the body until they turn it corporeal (ποιεῖ σωματοειδῆ) so that it takes as true whatever the body says (ἅπερ ἂν καὶ τὸ σῶμα φῇ)

¹⁰ For attempts to account for *how* exactly the soul is bewitched by the body see Beere (2010) 268-79; Ebrey (2017) 4-9 and 13-6 and; Bulter (2012) 108-9 and 116-8. Moss (2006) discusses the role of pleasure in other dialogues and emphasises how deceptive it can be: ‘It leads us astray with false appearances, bewitching and beguiling us, cheating and tricking us. In particular, it deceives us by appearing to be good when it is not’ (504).

and finds delight in whatever the body delights in.¹¹ In this way the ensnared soul is enculturated to value somatic existence via the immediate pleasures and pains of the body.

The Fear of Death

We are now in a good position to understand the fear of death.¹² The question that initially sets off the discussion in the *Phaedo* concerns whether Socrates is right to be sanguine about death, the implication being, naturally enough, that death is something to dread (62c9-63b2). Further, the question of whether one should fear death constantly resurfaces in the ensuing discussion and is clearly the paramount issue motivating it.¹³ We are interested in this theme because it exposes the deeply somatic nature of Socrates' companions.

One of the more memorable passages regarding the fear of death comes just after the second argument (concerning recollection) where it transpires that the companions still want Socrates to continue persuading them, even though, as he suggests, the arguments he had given should have sufficed. Socrates says,

But nevertheless it seems to me that you and Simmias would gladly go over the issue further still and that you have a childish fear that the wind might really send the soul flying in all directions once it leaves the body, especially if one happens to die in gusty weather rather than on a calm day.

And Cebes said laughing, Well on that assumption try to bring us round. Better

¹¹ Cf. 94d5-6 on the body 'speaking.'

¹² It is quite common to emphasise the role the fear of death plays in the *Phaedo*. See e.g. Klein (1989) 126, Cobb (1977) 174-5, Burger (1984) e.g. 99-100, Beere (2010) 254-60, Bailly (2010) 298 and Futter (2014) 96-7.

¹³ See e.g. 69e7-70a6, 84d9-e3, 88a10-b8 and 95d4-95e1.

yet, don't assume we are afraid, but maybe there's some child in us who fears such things. Try to convince him not to fear death like a bogeyman. (77d5-e7)

That these fears are deeply serious despite the playful trappings cannot be doubted. The many hold death to be one of the greatest evils (68d5-6) and Cebes implicitly assumes that death, understood as the destruction of the soul, is a fearful prospect (88a10-b8, cf. 95c1-4). Note, moreover, Socrates' response to the passage just quoted: 'Well then, you need to charm [ἐπαίδειν] this child every day until you charm him away [ἐξεπάσητε]' (77e3-9). Shortly after this, Socrates will encourage them to 'spare no expense nor toil' in seeking out a charmer once he has died (78a5-7). Clearly the fear of death is something one must overcome. Furthermore, all this talk of 'inner children' and 'charming' strongly suggests that we are dealing with a non-rational affliction, an affliction of the body.¹⁴ So much is to be expected insofar as the fear of death is in fact a *fear*.

In the previous section we saw how pleasure and desire, pain and fear, not only *distracted* us from philosophy but also tricked us into abandoning philosophy: we shouldn't recognise or 'obey' these bodily sensations because this lends credence and authority to the body, the senses and the material world. The fear of death fits naturally into this picture as it motivates us to act in certain ways and make to value judgements, whether consciously or not. Consider for instance what Socrates says in the *Apology* at 28b3-d5 where he imagines

¹⁴ On 'charming' as non-rational persuasion see Baima (2015) 269-70. Naddaf (2016) 122 and 133 notes that, while *logoi* persuade with reason, myths about the underworld persuade by charming and appealing to the emotions. He cites *Laws* 903b1-2. See also Gallop (2003) 324-6. Many have noted that, to some extent, Socrates employs persuasive techniques (as opposed to rational ones) to quell his companions' fear of death: e.g. Cobb (1977) 173-5, Bolotin (1987) 43, Dorter (1982) 95 Wood (2008) 20, Jansen (2013) 341-3 and Baima (2015) 269-70.

someone asking him if he is not ashamed that his behaviour might lead to a death sentence. Socrates responds that such considerations are beneath the dignity of a worthy man; rather, one should only be concerned that his actions are noble. Note the disjunction between clinging to life or nobility, that is between the fear of death or virtue. Socrates then cites that celebrated example of Greek virtue, Achilles. Given the choice between a noble death or letting Hector go unpunished, Achilles is unflinching: 'Let me die right after I've given justice to the wrongdoer, so I don't remain here being laughed at by the curved ships, a burden on the earth' (*Ap.* 28d2-4). Presumably Socrates has couched his point in terms the audience of Athenian jurors might relate to, but the principle remains sound. Indeed, Socrates' behaviour in the *Apology* in general is surely supposed to advertise the equanimity that the philosopher possesses in the face of adversity (see e.g. *Ap.* 34b6-35b8). Rather than fall under the influence of fears and pleasures the philosophers must rise above these petty concerns. I doubt any dialogue in the corpus displays the self-mastery of the philosopher more vividly than the *Phaedo*.¹⁵ Socrates seems to rise above the fear of death effortlessly, to meet his fate with dignity, poise and, above all, virtue. His friends by contrast are deeply afflicted by the fear of death. Perhaps the most poignant illustration of Socrates' virtue is his selfless desire to help his friends overcome *their* fear of death, even though *he* is the one who is actually dying.

The emotional breakdown of the companions as they watch Socrates take the poison not only functions as a foil to highlight Socrates' equanimity in the face of death, it also furnishes us with an obvious example of the companions being overawed by the fear of death. Even though they had claimed to find Socrates' argument convincing (see e.g. 107a1-3), when the final moment comes they all burst into tears (117c5-d6). A little earlier when Crito asked

¹⁵ The connection between courage and mastering the fear of death is emphasised in *Republic* 386a6-388d7, see also 486b1.

Socrates about the funeral arrangements, Socrates seized on this as proof that Crito does not actually believe Socrates, who insisted his dead body will be nothing but a discarded husk (115c4-d2). Here too Crito betrays his fear of death. And again, when Crito urges Socrates to wait as long as possible before drinking the poison, Socrates similarly remarks that such conduct only befits those non-philosophers who fear death (116e). The important connection here is that the fear of death leads one to side with the body implicitly and thus reject philosophy. The fear of death in the *Phaedo* is an emblem of the love of (somatic) life and attachment to the body.¹⁶ The fear of death engenders a preference for *life* over *death*, a preference for the life of the body over the life of the soul. But Socrates, as we will see, counters this with a vision of death that reverses these preferences so that the philosophical life is akin to being dead.

Socrates' Paragogic Irony

Socrates is up against a non-rational opponent, namely a childlike fear of death, a 'baked in' somatic attachment. Thus it is appropriate, if not necessary, that he fight fire with fire and *charm* away the fear with non-rational means.¹⁷ An obvious example of this is the myth that

¹⁶ Note that desires and fears are 'convertible.' For instance, those who *love* wealth (φιλοχρήματοι) are said to *fear* squandering their wealth or being in poverty, while those who *love* power and honour (οἱ φίλαρχοι τε καὶ φιλότιμοι) *fear* being held in low esteem (82c2-7).

¹⁷ Cf. 94d2-6 where the soul is said to use pleasures and pains to hammer the body into shape: 'it punishes some bodily urges more severely with physical pain through gymnastics or medical treatment, others it punishes more gently, now with threats, now with reproach, via desires, passions and fears [ταῖς ἐπιθυμίαις καὶ ὀργαῖς καὶ φόβοις], like one thing conversing to another.' These 'gentle' protreptics bear a similarity to what Socrates is doing to Simmias and Cebes.

caps off the argumentation.¹⁸ In general the myth attempts to persuade by the promise of wonderful things for good souls and the threat of horrible things for bad souls.¹⁹ Socrates tends to dwell on the bad souls. For example, they have a very hard time making the journey into the afterlife (108a6-c5), and when they finally get there they alternate between begging for forgiveness and enduring the torment of the underground channels—unless they are deemed incurable, in which case they are thrown into Tartarus forever (113e6-114b6). Clearly Socrates' mythologising is designed to speak to the *sōma*, but unlike the normal somatic afflictions which weigh the soul down, this one ironically demands, *shun the body or else!*

Regarding the good souls Socrates makes some otherwise odd sounding claims that reveal his somatic sales pitch. Although the good souls seem to have moved on from the sense-world, these enviable individuals boast better *eyesight*, *hearing* and intelligence, living a blessed life with the gods. They are also said to *live longer* (111b1-c3), which seems particularly bizarre given that (a) they're already dead and (b) living is supposed to be a bad

¹⁸ There is a burgeoning industry dedicated to the role of myth in Plato and here we touch on one of its key themes, the distinction between *logos* and *muthos*. On this distinction see Edmonds (2004) 162-71. On myth in Plato and philosophy in general see Benitez (2007) 226-7. My core contention is that the body needs bodily pleasures and pains to motivate it and that these are to be found in the myth. That myth speaks to the non-rational parts of the soul is a common view in the scholarship. See e.g. Janaway (1995) 160, Moss (2008) 43-5, Brisson (2007) 142 and Speliotis (2007) 212. This need not imply that that is *all* myth can do.

¹⁹ Note how Plato is careful to set off the intrinsic value of justice from the beneficial consequences in the *Republic* (357b4-358d6 and following). When he comes back to discuss the beneficial consequences, Socrates has much to say about the afterlife (e.g. *Rep.* 614a5-8 and following).

thing.²⁰ Moreover, this is only the ‘gold class’ heaven; there is said to be a better one, the platinum class if you will, which Socrates only tantalises us with (114c2-6). But it is not just the myth that is tainted by this somatic allure; the argumentation in general is complicit in the attempt to divert the somatic attachments of the companions. Ultimately, one cannot cleanly separate the somatic appeal found in the myth from the argumentation for the simple fact that the desirability of death (for the philosopher) informs the argument on the whole.²¹ For example, when Socrates promises divinity to the good souls (82b10-c1) he is in the midst of an argument, not (explicitly) mythologizing. The same is true where he tells us that philosophy is in fact practice for death and that a philosopher who fears death is a ridiculous self-contradiction (64a4-9). These claims about the afterlife (though not directly supported by the argumentation) do much to support Socrates’ conclusions. Indeed at 66b1-7 Socrates argues that since the truth is not available to the living, the philosopher ought to believe that he can get it in the afterlife. This is clearly not a rational argument if it *starts* from the claim that one lacks knowledge here and now. It is rather a spur to those who wish to live the philosophical life, especially in regard to the fear of death. This, however, is not to relegate the entirety of

²⁰ Some attempt to take the corporeal aspect of the ‘true earth’ literally. See e.g. Pender (2007) 219 and 230-3. Though one assumes they must acknowledge the figurative status of the ‘heaven’ Socrates locates on the Earth’s surface.

²¹ For the view that Socrates *charms* even with his arguments see Klein (1965) 147-8: ‘had not Socrates said (77e8-9), playfully and truthfully, that daily incantations are required for that child until that fear is charmed away? Are not the λόγοι of the dialogue a series of such “incantations,” including the very last tale (114d5-7)?’ See also Friedländer (1969) e.g. 43-4, 49-50, Cobb (1977) 175, Morgan (2010) 74 and 78, Jansen (2013) 338-9 and Futter (2014) 97-8.

the text to a mere philosophical con.²² To say the least, the forms, the epistemology, the criticisms of inquiry into nature and much besides are clearly serious and important. Nor need we reject that pillar of Platonism, the immortality of the soul.

Although Socrates takes for granted that no one with their wits about them will imbibe the myth as is, still he insists that its message is noble and that one should use it to charm oneself (καὶ χρὴ τὰ τοιαῦτα ὥσπερ ἐπάδειν ἑαυτῷ—114d1-7). It is essential for any would-be philosopher to clear away the fear of death and thus we find this theme hovering in the background throughout the dialogue. For example, Phaedo explicitly links his perception that Socrates was in high spirits as something that alleviated his (Phaedo's) reservations about the afterlife (58e1-59a2) and the reassuring effect of Socrates' demeanour is subsequently given due emphasis in the misology digression (89a1-7). Plato brings the philosophical discussion of the *Phaedo* into view by having Socrates casually mention that Evenus, if he is a true philosopher, should be *eager for death* (61b7-c9). This, in turn, leads to the apology speech, which attempts to defend Socrates' eagerness for death by arguing that *good things await the philosopher in the afterlife*—indeed, the philosopher's whole life is *preparation for death* (see

²² Some have argued (reasonably, I think) that Socrates does not really believe the arguments for immortality see e.g. Cobb (1977), Gadamer (1980) and Burger (1984) e.g. 50, 184-6. It is generally accepted that Socrates' arguments do not establish the immortality of the soul (see Bolotin, 1987, 46 for references). Hackforth (1972) 16-7 seems to be trading in common sense when he says, 'Important as Plato clearly conceives it that the human soul should be proved to be immortal, no careful reader of the dialogue can believe that such a proof is its main purpose. The need for it arises from the feeling of Socrates' friends....' Cf. Bolotin 39: 'Socrates' primary intention, it seems, on many or even most occasions was to impart opinions that would be salutary for his particular interlocutor, rather than to teach them what he regarded as the truth (cf. *Republic* 382a1-d4).' Thus Dorter (1982) 95-7, Jansen (2013) 339-40 and Gallop (2003) e.g. 317, 312.

63b9-c7 and 63e9-64a9). The Affinity Argument is immediately cashed in in terms of a mythical eschatology with all the Orphic trappings (81a4-82d7 and following). Namely, the happy soul is freed from fears and wild desires (καὶ φόβων καὶ ἀγρίων ἐρώτων) to spend its days in the company of gods like an initiate of the mysteries (81a3-9); meanwhile that torpid beast, the unphilosophical soul, wanders around hopelessly until it meets its just desserts in a new incarnation—or should we say ‘incarceration.’ Socrates assigns donkeys for the overindulgent, wolves for the avaricious and so on (81d6-82b9). And of course, at the end of the discussion, once Socrates has completed the Final Argument, he renders his conclusions in terms of eschatology and the ethical implications therein (from 107c1).

From start to finish the argumentation takes its orientation from the tenet that death is a blessing for those who shun the body. I argue that Socrates must appeal to these somatic bribes and threats in the manner of the ‘demotic music’ (τὴν δημώδη μουσικὴν—61a7) which appeals to the sub-rational *sōma*. Such a notion is neatly encapsulated in the epigraph that opened this chapter and it is justified for a least two reasons. In the first place it seems to be a necessary expedient to overcome somatic attachment, which, especially regarding the fear of death, seems very hard for us mortals to avoid.²³ And in the second place, although this *is* disingenuous of Socrates, it is the sort of lie that will ideally ‘self-destruct.’ If the companions imbibe the lesson, they will be led to a non-somatic life and, moreover, a life of inquiry and reflection. Ultimately, the influence of pleasure, fear and all the rest will fade away and they

²³ Cf. Moss (2006) on pleasure and illusion in the *Gorgias*: ‘One cannot easily correct someone who is under the illusion that a harmful but pleasant thing is good; one cannot easily redirect her desire for good toward its proper objects’ (513); ‘The [*Gorgias*] thus suggests that the belief that pleasure is good (and pain bad) is often immune to argument. Pleasure appears to be good, and for most people, appearances win out over reasoning’ (514); ‘Morally and intellectually, appetites are stuck in the realm of appearances’ (530).

will be perfectly poised to assess such tough questions about (say) the fate of the soul with philosophical equanimity. For by this stage they will not be worried about such bodily fears. In a word, the body contaminates and fetters the mind, not least through hopes and fears and in particular through the fear of death. To combat this Socrates repurposes somatic hopes and fears so as to encourage his companions to shun the body and to eagerly anticipate death.

Trading Pleasures and Pains

To round off our discussion of the *Phaedo*'s paragogic irony I would like to look at one final passage. At 68c5-69d6 Socrates discusses how the many trade fears for fears and pleasures for pleasures to end up with a ridiculous copy of true virtue. This passage is the final section of the apology speech and might be understood as a sort of *coup de grace* argument.

Up to this point in the defence speech Socrates has been concerned to show how ridiculous it is for the true philosopher to fear death (64a6-9, 67d12-68b6). Here Socrates shifts the discussion (a little abruptly) to bravery and *sōphrosunē*. Only the philosopher, he claims, is apt to possess these virtues, while the non-philosophers have no share in real bravery or *sōphrosunē*. For instance, they 'bravely' endure death in fear of an even greater evil (presumably shame). It is absurd (ἄλογον), Socrates says, to be brave through fear and cowardice (68d2-69a4). Yet again Plato betrays his keen eye for irony. More to our purpose, this ironic exchange should remind us of Simmias and Cebes who are (hopefully) led to spurn somatic attachment because of the somatic fear of punishment in the afterlife. Socrates goes on to explain that the many are self-controlled through intemperance: 'Because they fear being deprived of certain pleasures which they desire, they restrain themselves from some pleasures being mastered by others' (68e5-7). Here too we might espy a sly reference to Simmias and Cebes. Socrates presents the afterword in such fabulous colours so as to lead them towards the philosophical life by means of certain desires; and since the philosophical life involves the

rejection of pleasures, they are trading pleasures for pleasures. (Though this is not to suggest that they are pleasures seekers *per se*, but merely that they are afflicted by bodily desires, like the fear of death.)

At 69a6-c3 we come to the infamous coin metaphor: Socrates explains his meaning about trading fears for fears and so on through the analogy of buying and selling—but it proves to be rather cumbersome. The image obscures rather than clarifies his meaning and one wonders why he bothers with the analogy in the first place. Here is Burnet's text for most of the passage:

ὦ μακάριε Σιμμία, μὴ γὰρ οὐχ αὕτη ἢ ἡ ὀρθὴ πρὸς ἀρετὴν ἀλλαγὴ, ἡδονὰς πρὸς ἡδονὰς καὶ λύπας πρὸς λύπας καὶ φόβον πρὸς φόβον καταλλάττεσθαι, [καὶ] μείζω πρὸς ἐλάττω ὥσπερ νομίσματα, ἀλλ' ἢ ἐκεῖνο μόνον τὸ νόμισμα ὀρθόν, ἀντὶ οὗ δεῖ πάντα ταῦτα καταλλάττεσθαι, φρόνησις, [καὶ τούτου μὲν πάντα]²⁴ καὶ μετὰ τούτου [ὠνούμενά τε καὶ πιπρασκόμενα] τῷ ὄντι ἢ καὶ ἀνδρεία καὶ σωφροσύνη καὶ δικαιοσύνη καὶ συλλήβδην ἀληθοῦς ἀρετῇ, μετὰ φρονήσεως... (69a6-b3)

And here is a translation (that ignores some of Burnet's brackets):²⁵

My dear Simmias, perhaps this isn't the right exchange when it comes to virtue,

²⁴ Burnet bracketed καὶ τούτου μὲν πάντα...ὠνούμενά τε καὶ πιπρασκόμενα. This has generally been rejected by scholars, rightly as it seems to me. I have translated accordingly. See Luce (1944) 61, who is followed by Bluck (1952) 4, Verdenius (1958) 205 and modern translators (e.g., Gallop, Hackforth and Grube).

²⁵ See previous note. For discussion of the grammatical and translations issue in this passage see Luce (1944) 60-2, Bluck (1952) Verdenius (1958) 205 and Dorter (1982) 28-9.

trading pleasures for pleasures, pains for pains, fear for fears, the greater for the lesser like coins—but the only true coin that all these can be exchanged for is presumably *phronēsis*, buying and selling everything for this and with this; true bravery, *sōphrosunē*, justice and in a word, real virtue, with *phronēsis*...

Part of what is confusing here concerns how we use *phronēsis* to buy and sell pleasures and pains. Burnet tried to remove the offending part of the text, but this has not been well received. Instead, many scholars have simply asserted that the metaphor should not be pushed too far. For example W. D. Geddes (1863) 35 thought that, although the analogy was sound for the most part, it failed inasmuch as wisdom does not need to be ‘given away’ (35), R. S. Bluck (1952) 5 made a similar claim and R. D. Archer-Hind (1883) argued: ‘If we press the metaphor too hard, it breaks down; for money is of value only for the sake of what it can buy. Plato however merely means that φρόνησις is the only true currency’ (67).

Others, however, have sought to make sense of the text as it stands. These scholars usually expend a fair amount of effort to get their interpretations from the text.²⁶ One of the

²⁶ See e.g. Luce (1944), who posits an implicit contrast between bartering and buying: ‘bargaining and bartering is not the right way to purchase virtue. Trading by means of money is a more advanced form of trading, and this is what the philosopher does. He uses the one true currency, namely wisdom’ (62—but see Bluck, 1952, 5). Luce tends to gloss over the difficulties of ‘buying’ virtue with wisdom (see 63). Gooch (1974) argues against the claim that wisdom is identical to virtue (155, 158-9) and thus it cannot be identified as intrinsically valuable (155). Although he concurs that the metaphor should not be pushed too far (158). Nevertheless, he contrives an interpretation whereby wisdom is both of intrinsic and instrumental value (155-8). Beere (2010) 278-85 finds a similar dual role for wisdom. Responding to Beere, Bailly (2010) 296-7 is notably impatient with the imagery and roundly chastises scholars who push it too far.

most persuasive and least demanding is Kenneth Dorter (1982). He argues that wisdom and the other virtues are materially the same and that Socrates refers to exchanging different denominations of the same currency (like two five-dollar notes for a ten-dollar one) in which case nothing is lost. In this way, wisdom might be ‘cashed in’ for other forms of virtue (30-1). The problem with this is that it is merely consistent with the text rather than something the text positively encourages. So much is clear from the state of the scholarship. Thus it must be acknowledged that the text as it stands is not easy to interpret. Whether we simply have to ignore parts of the analogy or expend some ingenuity to wrest free a consistent reading, all of these readings tend to tell us what Socrates meant in spite of what he says, and they all turn on what we think Socrates is likely to have meant.

For me, on the other hand, the key to the metaphor comes right after the section I have just quoted: Socrates suggests that popular virtue, as distinct from *phronēsis*, is a sort of ‘shadow painting’ (σκιαγραφία τις), servile, unsound and false (69b5-8). These shadow paintings were painted in such a way to produce the illusion of depth and Socrates alludes to them to highlight the false appearance of popular virtue. More importantly these illusions only work from a distance, but once you get close enough they stop working.²⁷ As Socrates says in the *Theaetetus*: ‘But now, Theaetetus, since I’ve come closer to our account, like a shadow painting, I don’t understand anything; but from afar it seemed to make some sense (208e7-10; cf. *Prm.* 165c6-d2.) This, I would argue, is a pretty good description of Socrates’ coin metaphor. The image is easy enough to deal with providing we don’t look too closely. In fine, I think that Plato has carefully contrived a situation whereby Socrates pays his companions

²⁷ On shadow-painting see Petraki (2018) 2-5.

with counterfeit coins (to some extent).²⁸ At one level Socrates condemns these false ‘transactions’ that resemble shadow paintings. But over and above this his own account is a shadow painting of sorts. So far as I know this is the only interpretation of the imagery that accounts for its obvious limitations.

There are two key things to observe regarding Socrates’ counterfeit image. The first is that the transaction mirrors the way Socrates treats his companions. He trades one somatic fear for another; he appeals to their bodily attachment to overcome their bodily attachment. The second thing is that, counterfeit though it may be, it can still be an effective exchange. While it is unfortunate that Simmias and Cebes are beholden to the body and afraid of death—but who can blame them?—Socrates has found a cunning and ingenious technique to undermine this. As with Socratic Irony, this is not some flippant use of irony, or some malicious use of deception, it is a carefully considered response to the nature of the souls that Socrates needs to operate on. The counterfeit coin analogy, I would argue, is a nod to the savvy reader. Which takes us to the final issue of this chapter: the role of the reader.

Paragogic Irony and the Reader

As with Socratic Irony, Plato’s technique highlights the role of the teacher or the ‘doctor of the soul.’ Pedagogy is not a simple exchange of information; it requires the teacher to carefully and thoughtfully respond to the needs of the student (thus *Phdr.* 271c10-272a3). The *Phaedo* is as apt as any dialogue to illustrate this point. Simply paying lip service to the claim that death is a blessing does not mean that Crito, for example, has truly internalised it. If philosophy *were*

²⁸ Though this is not to suggest that all the arguments in the dialogue are ‘counterfeit.’ Rather, Socrates must resort to such measures to combat the somatic tendencies in his interlocutors. Certainly we can take seriously much of what he says about the forms as well as his explicit encouragements to tend the soul at the expense of the body.

the simple transfer of information, like pouring liquid from one vessel into another, then Plato might be content to offer his teachings up on a silver platter. Though we shall look at this more closely in the coming chapters, for now we can note that the paragogic irony of the *Phaedo* (to some extent) tries to trick Simmias and Cebes into turning away from the body. Socrates employs a two-pronged approach of direct argumentation coupled with paragogic irony. In this sense the less penetrating reader who simply accepts Socrates' claims about the rewards of the afterlife and the life is benefitted by the otherwise misleading information. Though this may seem an initially unsavoury idea, it actually makes good sense if we accept that Plato requires a fair amount of effort and engagement from readers. In this way, he has not only left a positive message for the uninitiated, but this message is designed to turn them towards Philosophy in the long run. As usual however, if my interpretation is correct, I have evidently revealed the secret mysteries to the uninitiated, namely that Socrates' treatment of the soul is (justifiably) disingenuous in places.

Let us take stock: in the previous chapter Socrates needed to combat the arrogance and attendant unwillingness of his interlocutors and he did so by appealing to and exploiting this very arrogance. He built it up only to cast it down all the more vigorously. Here too Socrates exploits the shortcomings of his interlocutors, whether their non-rational emotions or false conceptions (as in *Cratylus*). As mentioned the big difference between Socratic Irony and what I have called paragogic irony is that the former is negative, in that it attempts to quash the patient's intellectual arrogance, while paragogic irony has more of a positive aspect that tries to encourage its patients towards something. But in both cases Socrates starts from some failing or flaw in his interlocutor and tries to overcome it.

PART THREE

στερίφαις μὲν οὖν ἄρα [*sc.* ἡ Ἄρτεμις] οὐκ
 ἔδωκε μαιεύεσθαι, ὅτι ἡ ἀνθρωπίνη φύσις
 ἀσθενεστέρα ἢ λαβεῖν τέχνην ὧν ἂν ᾗ ἄπειρος.
 ([Artemis] didn't grant the barren to be
 midwives, for human nature is too weak to
 possess skill without experience.)

Tht. 149c

CHAPTER FOUR

IRONIC SYMBOLISM

τὸ ὄνειρώττειν ἄρα οὐ τόδε ἐστίν, ἐάντε ἐν
 ὕπνῳ τις ἐάντ' ἐγρηγορῶς τὸ ὅμοιον τῷ μὴ
 ὅμοιον ἀλλ' αὐτὸ ἡγῆται εἶναι ὃ ἔοικεν;

(Isn't this dreaming; when someone, whether
 asleep or awake, thinks that a likeness is not
like the thing it resembles, but the thing
 itself?)

R. 476c5-7

κινδυνεύει γὰρ ἡμῶν ἕκαστος οἷον ὄναρ εἰδὼς
 ἅπαντα πάντ' αὖ πάλιν ὥσπερ ὕπαρ ἀγνοεῖν.

(For it appears that each of us, knowing
 everything in a sort of dream, is then ignorant
 when awake.)

Plt. 277d2-4

In Part Two of this study (that is, the last two chapters) we looked at the ironies Socrates employs on his interlocutors. Here, in Part Three, we will focus more directly on the way Plato interacts with his readers. In the present chapter we are concerned with the way certain items are employed in an ambivalent way across various dialogues. The key example I examine is the treatment of *erōs* in the *Symposium*: while *erōs* is generally presented as the very antithesis of philosophy, in the *Symposium* it is all but equated with philosophy. I argue that this is ultimately unconvincing and far-fetched, but that this far-fetched appearance conceals a serious message, like wisdom dressed as folly. I ultimately interpret Plato's usage in the *Symposium*

as a paradigmatic (if not exaggerated) example of how the dialogues work in general. In other words, Plato uses irony here to reflect on his philosophical use of literature. This theme is carried over into the following chapter.

Students of Plato are no doubt well aware how easy it is for the unsympathetic reader to ferret out contradictions and errors of judgement on Plato's part. Given that Plato tends to receive an almost obligatory mention in introductory courses on political theory, law, aesthetics and so on, there is probably no shortage of commentators ready and willing to score points on Plato via some glib criticism. For the simple fact of the matter is that in many cases Plato all but invited such easy pot-shots. This present chapter is directly concerned with one particular way in which Plato may seem to invite these quibbles. All too often he characterises the same thing in two totally opposite ways. Consider the example of *images*. Plato sometimes characterises these as bad, sometimes as good. And this is not some accidental feature of his treatment of images. Rather he often appeals to images as paradigmatic. Images can be held up as prime examples of what it means to be ontologically derivative and flawed one moment, but then they seem to be indispensable pedagogical tools the next. This Janus-faced ambivalence is everywhere in the dialogues. I call it 'ironic symbolism' and in employing this phrase I especially wish to isolate those cases where Plato takes some particular type of thing, say *that which is visible*, and then use it as a paradigmatic example in a strikingly unexpected way, say, by employing visible things as an analogy for the *invisible* objects of knowledge. In this case the 'visible' *symbolises* the corporeal realm at one moment, only to take up an opposite role the next.¹

¹ That Plato can take up an established concept or tradition and repurposed it (usually towards philosophy) is not a novel observation. This is discussed, in some sense or other, by e.g. Gonzalez

I intend to pursue this topic, as usual, via a paradigmatic case study. For this chapter our chosen example comes from the treatment of *erōs* in the *Symposium*. In addition to this we will also glance over two examples of ironic symbolism that appear in the subterranean imagery of the *Phaedo* and the *Republic*. In the previous two chapters I have tried to balance the need to illustrate both the *range* and the *depth* of the ironies under discussion; that is, the extent to which a type of irony is relevant to the dialogues on the whole and how in particular Plato manages the finer details. This balancing act becomes a little hard to maintain in the present chapter. While I do scroll through a range of minor examples, I do not explain how or why Plato employs them. And again, when I turn to the subterranean imagery of the *Phaedo* and *Republic* my analysis is rather cursory inasmuch as it is preparatory rather than the main event.

I MINOR EXAMPLES OF IRONIC SYMBOLISM

To begin with I will glance over a range of examples of ironic symbolism to help impress upon the reader the extent of this studied ambivalence in Plato. We begin with particular or one-off examples and then move on to more generally applicable ones.

Eugenio Benitez (2000) has argued that in the *Laches* Plato turns the classic image of courage on its head by making ‘hoplitics’ or training in armour an emblem of cowardice (see

(2017), de Romilly (1975) 25-43, Belfiore (1980), Gellrich (1994), Pender (2007) and Morgan (2010). My treatment differs, however, in that I argue that Plato does not merely *reuse* old ideas, but rather that the new usage contains an ironic inversion which calls for interpretation. I discuss this explicitly in what follows and I try to show how the relevant irony is philosophically significant.

La. 182e5-184a7).² In the *Phaedo* Socrates ventures the theory that a *fulfilled life* is one that approximates *death* (e.g. *Phd.* 64a4-9); and again, by refusing to *escape from prison* Socrates *escapes the real prison* of being alive and trapped in a body. In the *Meno* it is possible to argue that one of Meno's main short-comings is that he simply repeats what he has heard from other people rather than thinking things through himself (cf. *Meno* 86b1-c2 and Klein, 1989, 103-7). That is to say, he is incapable of 'recollection' because he relies overmuch on his memory.³ Here the irony involves using *recollection* to typify independent self-reflection in contradistinction to *remembering* (sc. the opinions of others). Something similar to this seems to be implicit in the *Phaedrus* where Socrates distinguishes between writing which acts as a *reminder* and which is anathema to knowledge and *remembering* which aids in knowing.⁴

In the *Apology* Socrates explains how the most seemingly accomplished people can be the most incapable of learning (e.g. *Ap.* 22a); this, in turn, leads to that quintessential irony whereby *ignorance* represents *knowledge* in some sense. Here the general theme seems to be *less is more* inasmuch as *learning* proves to impede wisdom and *ignorance* is presented as a step towards wisdom. With this example we begin to see how these ironic symbols can inform general themes that apply across the dialogues. For instance, Socrates condemns images yet

² This, Benitez argues, furnishes us with an object lesson in separating accidental from essential attributes: 'The military conception of courage was tyrannized by accidentals, so much so that fighting in armor seemed to be the essence of courage' (86).

³ In this connection consider *Meno* 71c8-10 where Socrates laments that he cannot *remember* what he thought of Gorgias at their previous meeting as asking Meno to *remind him* what Gorgias' views are. In the very least, this anticipates the terminology what will later prove crucial. I own this observation to Harold Tarrant.

⁴ See *Phdr.* 257a5 where the inventor of writing is criticised thus: 'You have discovered a drug for reminding not remembering' (οὐκ οὖν μνήμης ἀλλὰ ὑπομνήσεως φάρμακον ἤϊρες).

has almost constant recourse to them: that the sensible world is a derivate copy of the true world and by that very fact *inferior* is a typical refrain in Plato (e.g. *Rep.* 514); yet at the same time Socrates and the other main speakers constantly employ images, often explicitly calling attention to the fact (e.g. *Rep.* 487e4-6, *Plt.* 297e8-13, *Laws* 897d8-e3).⁵

In keeping with this, Plato is apt to pour scorn on poetry and poets (e.g. *Phdr.* 248e1-2, *Rep.* 603a10-b2) and yet this would seem to be a gross hypocrisy since he is the consummate poet-philosopher. We can develop this point in two directions, both of which betray the same pattern: (a) the enchanting power of beautiful words is thoroughly condemned by Socrates, though he himself makes use of it; and (b) being possessed by the god (in the manner of a poet or prophet) is held up as a prime example of ignorance, only to be positively endorsed in other places.⁶ Regarding (a) the *charming* power of words, this idea is frequently associated with

⁵ Gonzalez (2017) admirably confronts Plato's ambivalence over images head on, but his conclusion—that images point beyond themselves *and* are delightful in and of themselves—is unconvincing. This obscures a central distinction between the philosophical use of images and its opposite. Thus Gonzalez tries to assimilate the *Republic's* 'lovers of sights and sounds' to the philosopher (48-9). In fact these are fundamentally different in terms of *metaphysics* (only the philosopher moves beyond sights and sounds), in terms of *epistemology* (the philosopher is not stuck in the sense world) and in *ethics* (the philosopher is not oriented towards the bodily delights). Similarly Gonzales approximates Agathon to Socrates in the *Symposium* (58) in spite of the fact that Agathon 'is satisfied with images because he fails to see the great gulf that separates the image from the original' (62).

⁶ This family of issues is explored by e.g. de Romilly (1975) 25-43, Belfiore (1980) and Gellrich (1994). Morgan (2010) 68-71 discusses divination and prophesy.

deceitful sophistic oratory and the like.⁷ But on the other hand, Socrates himself is readily presented as a sorcerer of sorts.⁸ Thus in the previous chapter Socrates was said to *charm* away the fear of death like a kind of poet in what was clearly a positive sense (*Phd.* 77e8-9, 114d6-7). We also encounter idealised statesmen as charmers (e.g. *Laws* 840b7-c3, *Plt.* 268b1-5). Turning to (b) *divine possession* or prophesy furnishes a glaring example of the *absence* of knowledge (e.g. *Meno* 99b11-c5, *Ap.* 22b8-c3, *Ion* 533c9-535a5), but can also be presented as a genuine means of knowing,⁹ not least with Socrates' divine sign (e.g. *Ap.* 31c7-d2, *Phdr.* 242b8-d1).

Just as the last few examples (from images to possession) can be linked together in various ways, there is also a cluster of ironies surrounding the body/soul distinction. For instance, Plato represents knowledge as *food* (e.g. *Rep.* 585a8-b10, *Prt.* 313c9-d1, *Phdr.* 248b5) when food is clearly more akin to the irrational part of a person (see e.g. *Rep.* 571c5-6, *Phd.* 64c10-d4). More significantly we find *incorporeal* forms presented as *sensible* objects, while the knowing faculty, the *mind*, is conflated with its opposite, *vision*. More strikingly still, philosophy is presented as a lusty irrational indulgence, namely *erōs*. These last two cases shall occupy us for the rest of this chapter.

If one conclusion can be drawn from the proceeding list, it is that Plato is certainly fond of the pattern I have identified. Beyond that however I am not prepared to generalise about how and why Plato employs ironic symbolism. There are, no doubt, some common details between this irony in general and the treatment of *erōs* which I will focus on, but I would not like to give the false impression that the preceding examples form a tight unity. If they do, I

⁷ E.g. *Rep.* 413c1-4 (and cf. *Phd.* 81b2-5), *Prt.* 315a8-b8 (with 328d4-6), *Laws* 933d7-e4 and 909b4-5.

⁸ E.g. *Rep.* 358b2-3, *Smp.* 215c1-d1, *Meno* 80a2-4 and cf. *Chrm* 155e6-157c6 and *Smp.* 203d7.

⁹ E.g. *Smp.* 202e3-203a7, *Cri.* 54d2-5, *Phd.* 60e1-61b1, *Laws* 719c1-d1.

have failed to discover it. Indeed, I presume there are a host of other examples of this pattern which I have not noticed.

II SEEING AS KNOWING

One of the most common metaphors in Plato is the analogy of *seeing* to explain *knowing*. Frequently Socrates talks about ‘seeing’ the objects of knowledge.¹⁰ Even the words for a Platonic form, εἶδος and ἰδέα, contain a visual connotation; they can be glossed as meaning *form* in the sense of ‘shape’ or ‘appearance,’ understood as the cognate nouns from verbs of seeing (*εἶδω, ἰδεῖν). And yet for Plato forms are quintessentially *invisible*. That is to say, Plato frequently uses *vision* to typify the senses and the manifest world, which thus can be called the

¹⁰ E.g.: Socrates asks Euthyphro to teach him the idea (τὴν ἰδέαν) of the holy so that he can look (ἀποβλέπων) to it and consult it as a paradigm (*Euthphr.* 6e3-6); Socrates discusses the difficulties of inquiring into justice via an extended metaphor in which the inquirers are said to be ‘dim-sighted’ and in need of ‘the same letters writ large’ and so on (*Rep.* 368c4-d7); knowledge, we are told, is not like putting sight into blind eyes, but more like turning the ‘eye’ to look at the right things (*Rep.* 518b8-d1); similarly, we encounter a reference to the ‘vision of the soul’ (τὴν τῆς ψυχῆς ὄψιν) at *Rep.* 519a1-d2 (see also 520c5); in a rather striking example in the *Phaedrus* Socrates is in the midst of explaining how the intelligible world is without colour, shape, and extension when he adds that it is only ‘visible’ (θεατή) to the mind (*Phdr.* 247c5-7); in a similar fashion in the *Palinode*, Socrates both rejects the bodily senses and praises the ‘sights’ of the heavens (*Phdr.* 250b1-c6); so too Diotima, while waxing lyrical about the climax of the Ladder of Love, employs vision terms for the mind’s apprehension of Beauty (*Smp.* e.g. 211d8-e4); and finally Socrates, in the *Phaedo*’s ‘Autobiography’ (99e2-4), warns against inquiry via the senses because using the eyes might make the soul ‘blind’!

‘visible word’ in contradistinction to the ‘invisible’ world of the forms.¹¹ Here *vision* is a metonymy for the senses in general. In this way *vision*—viewed from a certain point of view—is perfectly unsuited as an analogy for knowing; whatever else forms may be they are certainly not visible. Thus ‘visible’ is applied to both the forms and their opposites, and in neither case is it some accidental feature of Plato’s usage.

It is important to note at the outset that this is not merely a simple case of using the sensible as a metaphor to help explain the intelligible; rather, the imagery deliberately exploits an ironic tension between the ‘vehicle’ and the ‘tenor’ of the metaphor. This comes through forcibly in the subterranean caves we find in the *Phaedo* and especially the *Republic*. These caves allegorise the perceptible world while the surface of the earth allegorises the world of the forms. That means that *this* world with its visible couches and tables is to be used as an analogy for the invisible world of the forms, and that sensible objects stand in for intelligible ones. In this way the analogy confuses the an important distinction in Plato’s ontology, that between the sensible and the intelligible. To anticipate, I will argue that the subterranean imagery in the *Phaedo* and the *Republic* sends these mixed messages partly to emphasise its

¹¹ In the *Phaedo*’s Affinity Argument Socrates tends to couch his ontological distinction in terms of the visible and the invisible (τὸ μὲν ὁρατόν, τὸ δὲ ἀιδέξ—79a6-7); admittedly this is partly motivated by the similarity between the words ‘Hades’ and ‘invisible’ (Ἅιδης and ἀιδής), yet we find the *visible* (in contradistinction to πάντα ἀόρατα) carrying the same load at *Soph.* 247b1-5 and we find the locution ‘sight or any other sense’ at *Phd.* 65e8-9. Parmenides compliments a young Socrates for not allowing Zeno ‘to remain among the visible things’ (ὅτι οὐκ εἶας ἐν τοῖς ὁρωμένοις) as opposed to the intelligible (*Prm.* 135e1-2). While discussing the view that knowledge is perception, Socrates can lump together knowledge, perception and *vision* in one breath (ὅψις γὰρ καὶ αἴσθησις καὶ ἐπιστήμη ταυτὸν ὁμολόγηται—*Tht.* 164a6-7). And in the *Timaeus* the manifest world is often glossed as ‘visible’ (e.g. 30a3, 30d, 36e5-6, 49a1, 92c4-7).

own status as mere imagery so that we, unlike the cave dwellers, do not mistake the image for the original. The contradictory nature of the imagery requires the intellect to step in so that we can untangle the conflicting information. That is, it ‘summons the intellect’ as Socrates puts it.

The Caves in the Phaedo

First let us look at the *Phaedo*. At the end of this dialogue Socrates launches into a myth about the fate of the soul after death. Halfway through the myth, however, he makes a digression which seems less concerned with eschatology than with the here and now. In broad strokes, this digression places the manifest world (somehow) beneath the surface of the ‘true’ earth, while the intelligible world is situated on the surface of the true earth. The passage begins properly at 108e4 and looks to the shape and location of the Earth—*this* Earth upon which ‘we Greeks’ live—before discussing *our* place under the surface of the earth in caves of some sort. The caves are ultimately contrasted with the heavenly abode on the surface of the Earth, thus tying in an eschatological aspect (110b5-111c3). Socrates emphasises how large the Earth is and thus how small the Mediterranean is, its inhabitants like ants or frogs round a pond (109a9-b3). He then moves on to the all-important cave (or underground hollows). These litter the Earth in all shapes and sizes and into them are mixed air, mist and water (109b4-7). These substances are the medium in which we live. By contrast, above ground is marked by purity (109b7-c2): the pure earth lies in the pure heavens (τὴν γῆν καθαρὰν ἐν καθαρῷ κεῖσθαι τῷ οὐρανῷ) which people are wont to call aether. This is a sort of ‘original’ of which water, air and mist are the ‘sediment’ (ὑποστάθμη). Thus Socrates portrays the manifest world as a kind of subterranean realm beneath the pure world of knowledge which is depicted—ironically—as the surface of the (true) earth.

We, Socrates assures us, are dwelling in the hollows though we think we are above ground. To paraphrase the extended simile he employs, it’s as if someone deep within the sea

were to think he was on the surface, and when he looked through at the sun and the stars he would mistake the water for air (109c4-d5). This, Socrates claims, is precisely parallel to our case: we live in caves thinking they are the surface of the earth and we, in our underwater caves, are slow to move and feeble (see 109c7-d1 with 109d7-e2). Note that the ‘underwater’ extended metaphor is something like an analogy explaining an analogy; we are said to live in ‘hollows’ and this, in turn, is explained almost clumsily via another analogy of being underwater while thinking you are above ground. Socrates insists that we are in fact in these hollows, but of course this is nonsense. Rather what he wants to foreground is how we mistake the apparent for what is real. You think you are looking at what really *is* when you perceive the manifest world, but the real world is ‘hidden behind’ this world and is only available to the mind.¹² Or as he would have it, you think you are looking at directly at the sun and the stars, but you only see them through a dim and distorting medium. However, Socrates explains,

if someone could reach the top or fly up having grown wings, he would poke his head through and perceive such things—just like the fish *here* emerge from the water and look at *this* world. And if his nature could endure holding these things in his gaze, he would realise that this is the real heaven and the real light and the true earth. (109e2-110a1)

In a dialogue so utterly preoccupied with the mind/body distinction, this self-sabotaging imagery is astounding and if one actually stops and tries to digest the imagery, the experience can be quite disorienting. This, I think, is aimed beyond the purview of Simmias and Cebes; it

¹² See Benitez (2007) 232-3 for a comparable treatment of the imagery here. Most notably his claim that ‘the real world is not the “true earth” inside the myth, but rather one that lies beyond the myth, as reality lies beyond a picture. That world can only be apprehended by mind (*nous*).’

is scripted into the dialogue for *our* benefit. Socrates' account employs *looking* as a stand-in for *knowing* even though *vision* is the very antithesis of *knowledge*; and the *surface world* of the true earth stands in for the *invisible world of the forms* even though it is the very antithesis of this. To effect this relocation we are pushed underground so that the surface word can be 'elevated' to the intelligible world. Similarly, the faculty of vision is distorted so that *unimpeded vision* can refer to *knowing*. In this way Plato has designed his imagery so that *seeing visible things* now stands for *knowing invisible things*, the latter being understood—ironically—in sharp contradistinction to *seeing the visible*. Such imagery is not unique to this dialogue.¹³ The mention of growing wings in the indented quote might remind you of the *Phaedrus* where, in a broadly analogous way, Socrates applies a distinction between the heavens and the *hyperuranian* realm in the Palinode (see *Phdr.* 246d6-248c2).¹⁴ More interesting still is the image of the cave in the central digression of the *Republic*.

¹³ Benitez (2007) 231-2 collects passages which employ spatial images of above and below to convey an ontological distinction.

¹⁴ On this passage compare Griswold (1996) 105 on the mythology of the *Phaedrus*: 'The indirectness of the access the fallen souls have to the truth is captured by the nautical terminology used in this passage (247c7, e3, 248a5). This terminology suggests that the universe is like an ocean and the hyperuranian place like the air above the surface.'

The Cave in the Republic

The famous sun-line-cave complex (507a7-535a1) is possibly the most well-trodden passage in the Platonic corpus. While I would sooner not wade into the scholarly debates here, I believe I can shed an interesting light on the image of the cave understood as ironic symbolism.¹⁵

To begin with, this complex of images—especially the image of the line—comfortably ticks the relevant boxes as an ironic symbol. In fact I can think of no other passages that better illustrate the conflict between using *vision* to stand in for the senses in general and as an analogy for *knowing*. In the sun-line-cave passage Socrates constantly refers to *seeing* and *the visible realm* as a shorthand for the *senses* and *the manifest world*. I cite a number of examples in the footnote of which the most familiar instance is that the image of the line distinguishes between the ‘visible’ and the ‘intelligible’ realms.¹⁶ On the other hand, Plato’s imagery here is deeply invested in an analogy whereby *seeing* stands in for *knowing*. This comes across most forcibly

¹⁵ Useful treatments of the sun-line-cave image can be found in Smith (1996) and (1999) 131-40. I have not encountered any accounts that make any serious use of the ironic tension between seeing and knowing.

¹⁶ Socrates presents his metaphysical distinction thus: ‘Some things we say are visible and not intelligible, the forms on the other hand we say are intelligible and not visible (Καὶ τὰ μὲν δὴ ὁρᾶσθαι φάμεν, νοεῖσθαι δ’ οὐ, τὰς δ’ αὖ ἰδέας νοεῖσθαι μὲν, ὁρᾶσθαι δ’ οὐ—507b9-10). He compares the intelligible realm (αὐτὸ ἐν τῷ νοητῷ τόπῳ and τὰ νοούμενα) with the visible realm (τοῦτο ἐν τῷ ὁρατῷ and τὰ ὁρώμενα) at 508b12-c2 and again at 509d1-4 (τὸ μὲν νοητοῦ γένους τε καὶ τόπου, τὸ δ’ αὖ ὁρατοῦ...ἀλλ’ οὖν ἔχεις ταῦτα διττὰ εἶδη, ὁρατόν, νοητόν;). The image of the line is divided into two segments, the *visible* and the *intelligible* (τό τε τοῦ ὁρωμένου γένους καὶ τὸ τοῦ νοουμένου—509d8), and this terminology is maintained throughout (e.g. 616c1 and 517b2). In the image of the cave, although Socrates refers to the underground prisoners *hearing* various sounds, the image is dominated by references to *seeing* shadows, being dazzled by *light* and so on.

in the images of the sun and the line (see e.g. 50812-d9). That is, the sun is like the Good which ‘illuminates’ the forms for the mind just as the sun illuminates visible objects for the eyes. The role of vision dominates the imagery here and, in conjunction with the sun, is the key to the images of the sun and the line.

Turning to the image of the cave (514a1-517c5) we can see how Plato makes use of the ironic ambivalence of *vision* which typifies both the senses and the mind. Just as we found in the *Phaedo*, the human condition seems to involve a fundamental ontological misidentification. Here Socrates situates prisoners in the depths of a cave who can only see shadows on the wall before them, cast by a fire behind them. The misidentification is that the prisoners hold these shadows to be true (e.g. 515c1-2, 516d2-6). In one of the more cumbersome yet brilliant parts of this image a freed prisoner who escapes the visible realm is dazzled by the light of the sun once he clambers out of the cave and gains the surface (516a1-3). It is only our familiarity with this image that might dull the otherwise confusing and discombobulating effect. The sun, although *similar* to the Good, has been explicitly and unambiguously distinguished from it: the sun exists in the visible realm, the Good in the intelligible. But now it seems the sun *is* the Good: when the escaped prisoner is blinded by the sun it is not his *eyes* that are blinded but the mind’s eye, as it were. We can unpack this mismatch in two ways. (1) We can follow the sun, whereby Socrates switches from a simile to a metaphor. In the first two images (the sun and the line) the Good was said to be *like* the sun, but the two were kept apart by nothing less than a fundamental ontological distinction. In the image of the cave, by contrast, the actual sun is now represented metaphorically by the fire. The sun is not *like* the fire (in the manner of a simile) it is *directly represented* by the fire. Accordingly the Good is represented by the sun. In the previous two images the Good was ‘represented’ by the Good as well as being likened to the sun; but now the Good is directly represented by the sun. This is an astonishing sleight of hand in a series of analogies so fixated on the sun. Another way to unpack the mismatch is

(2) the image requires us to have two sets of eyes: the one to see with in the cave (namely, our real eyes) and another to see with outside on the surface world (namely, the mind's eye). This is the ambivalence of *vision* that we have been tracking. Thus, as with the role of the sun, a central part of the image turns back in on itself: *seeing* is both *the opposite of knowledge* and *knowledge*. Above all we are now expected to understand the visible things on the surface-world—the things you see and touch on a daily basis—as stand-ins for the forms. As with the *Phaedo*, Plato downgrades the actual sense world so as to present the world of the forms via the image of a figurative sense world. Clearly this is a careful and deliberate contrivance. The question, of course, is Why? To what end?

Images that 'Summon the Intellect'

The way I intend to account for the ambivalence of these subterranean images can be encapsulated as follows. It is something like trying to make an advertisement for three-dimensional television which will air on our normal two-dimensional TVs. The problem these advertisers face is that they simply cannot show you the product. The same issue must have occurred to those trying to assure us of the superior definition of DVDs while we were still stuck on VHS. The advertisers are limited by their medium. For Plato the problem is similarly one of leading the reader to a genuinely new experience. One solution he employs is to appeal to a familiar experience while at the same time going beyond that self-same familiar experience. For example, you already know the difference between dreaming and being awake; now apply that same distinction to being awake such that *this* (namely, being awake) is actually like dreaming and there is another 'wakefulness' higher than the one you know.

Turning to the cave imagery let's start with a pair of reasonably obvious observations about images in general. Firstly, they are intrinsically ambivalent. In a sense such images need to be both identified with what they represent and distinguished from it. Thus in the *Cratylus*

Socrates insists that images cannot actually *be* the things they image or they would not be images, but those very things themselves; an image of Cratylus cannot be identical to Cratylus or it would not be an image but a second Cratylus (see *Crat.* 432b2-d10 and see also *Soph.* 240a7-b13). For this reason Plato can refer to images as quintessentially derivative. But at the same time they must be capable of representing the things they image or they could not function as images. It is because of this ambivalence that they are useful educational tools. This is the second observation: namely, images can function as pedagogical instruments or analogies. Since they can resemble something without being that thing, we can use them to present simplified versions that nevertheless capture and isolate some relevant detail. Plato indicates the pedagogical role of images in many places. The most detailed is in the *Statesman* (277d1-278e10) where the Eleatic stranger, employing the *paradeigma* of learning one's letters, explains how we employ familiar *paradeigmata* to conquer unfamiliar problems. In the same dialogue (at 285d-286b) we read that images can make some things more accessible. Or again, in the *Phaedrus* Socrates turns to an *image* of the soul because the real thing would only be accessible to the mind of a god (*Phdr.* 246a4-6); and in the *Republic* the discussion shifts from the 'hard to see' soul to its more accessible analogue, the city (*R.* 358a).

The subterranean imagery in the *Phaedo* and the *Republic*, while clearly didactic, is also designed to contradict itself and thus to emphasise its own status as mere imagery. In fact, the idea that images be viewed and understood *as images* is emblematic of the crucial realisation that the manifest world itself should be considered as a derivative copy. This of course is an important part of the *content* of these images. It is the converse of the misidentification that we cave-dwellers are apt to make when we misidentify the physical as fundamental. In making this misidentification we are like people confusing an image for an original. But by contradicting itself the cave image ultimately encourages us not to misidentify it as the whole truth or a complete statement of doctrine, but a dumbed-down likeness or a

means to an end. And in this way we cannot rest content with these images but are forced to go beyond them.¹⁷ More exactly, the contradictory nature of the imagery forces us to engage with the imagery in an intellectually demanding and philosophical way. To unpack these suggestions, especially the latter, we turn to Socrates' subsequent account in the *Republic* of 'summoning the intellect' where he explains how visible stimuli can encourage us to go beyond the apparent and into the intelligible.

After elaborating the image of the cave and its account of philosophical education, Socrates ambles round to an account of how to actually effect this 'turning of the soul from a kind of night-like day to a true day' (ψυχῆς περιαγωγή ἐκ νυκτερινῆς τινος ἡμέρας εἰς ἀληθινήν) which he calls true philosophy (521c5-8).¹⁸ Socrates is looking for modes of inquiry that will draw the soul from its present abode in the cave up into the intelligible world of the forms (see 521d3-4). This will turn out to be those subjects that 'rouse' or 'summon the intellect,' τὴν νόησιν παρακαλεῖν (523a5-524d5), and the key examples of this just so happen to involve a special type of opposition: namely, things that 'send perception off in opposite directions' (ἐκβαίνει εἰς ἐναντίαν αἴσθησιν ἅμα—see 523c1).¹⁹ For instance, when a person's finger appears both taller than (one finger) and shorter than (another) it rouses the intellect. Or if, as in the *Phaedo* (102b2-c9), Simmias is taller than Socrates but shorter than Phaedo, we need to call in the mind, as it were, to isolate this Tallness and Shortness which cannot be intrinsic to Simmias. The senses are said to be inadequate inasmuch as they provide conflicting information so the mind must be called in, perhaps as a 'witness' (this being one of the senses

¹⁷ Cf. Miller (2004) 79-80.

¹⁸ This presumably looks back to 518c4-d7 where Socrates rounds off the image of the cave by saying that mind cannot be turned towards the light without first turning the whole body and that education is this very art of redirection.

¹⁹ On summoning the intellect cf. Moss (2008) 49 and Smith (1999) 131-7.

of παρακαλεῖν). Where perception sees the Tall and the Short as mixed up, the mind can untangle them by positing intelligible forms. Similarly, when the image of the cave gives us a sun that pulls in two directions, we are required to perform the same mental exercise. In this way the ironic symbolism of using the *surface-world* to typify the *intelligible world* or using *vision* to typify *knowledge* can summon the intellect. That is to say, this ironic symbolism engages the intellect because it requires abstract thought to extract the message. In addition to this and in keeping with it, the *content* of this image also directs us towards the intelligible since one of the key ideas in the image of the cave is that the truth is only found in the intelligible realm.

There are two related ideas here. Firstly, in the sense just described, this ‘summoning’ works via a *lack* of sorts. When we properly engage with these ironic images we detect a gap, a detail that doesn’t make sense, and are required to fill this gap by our own mental resources. *Simmias can’t be tall and short!* we are expected to exclaim. Similarly, the discombobulating effect of these cave images are supposed to make us do a double take: *The forms are visible!?* *The sun is the Good now!?* We are supposed to notice these irregularities and thus be enticed to go in for a closer look. Or to anticipate, Plato engenders in us a *desire* to know more. In this way we are encouraged to proceed via our own mental efforts. Secondly, and in the same vein, Plato is careful to undermine his account in terms of the overall import of the image so that we do not take it as gospel. This is not to suggest that Plato has no positive doctrines but only that what we are given (for we are surely given something) tends to fall short of a complete, fully worked-out account. We do not get the thing being advertised, but merely an image of it. Plato shows us a glimpse of the invisible and seduces us to go out and buy it for ourselves.

III *ERŌS* IN THE *SYMPOSIUM*

That *Love* does serious philosophical work in Plato is not an uncommon idea. Nevertheless, while I acknowledge that Plato's texts are often multi-faceted and that something like *erōs* may be employed in different ways in different contexts, one cannot ignore how strikingly unexpected it is to employ *passionate desire* in the way that Plato sometimes does. The idea that Platonic philosophy can be typified by *erōs* is surely supposed to be jarring, even more so than using the visible world to typify the invisible. *Erōs* in fact can be presented as the defining feature of the tyrant or the quintessential somatic desire. Moreover, it runs afoul of Plato's basic philosophical disposition and it is almost the last thing we should expect to find in the philosopher.

There is no shortage of evidence to supply us with the basic building blocks of the ironic symbolism here. On the one hand, *erōs* is clearly the very antithesis of philosophy; on the other hand, it is used to typify philosophy. To take the latter theme first, we occasionally encounter references to philosophers who *desire* wisdom or are 'boyfriends' of wisdom in the *Phaedo*.²⁰ In the *Republic* (490a9-b7) the philosopher is said to cling fast to his erotic love (οὐδ' ἀπολήγοι τοῦ ἔρωτος) and to have sex with reality (ᾧ πλησιάσας καὶ μιγεῖς τῷ ὄντι ὄντως), giving birth to truth. Beyond this there are the well-known examples in the *Symposium* (see e.g. 204b, 210) and the *Phaedrus* (e.g. 249e1-4, 251c).

Even more readily available, however, is the evidence for Plato's hostility towards *erōs*. This, we must recall, resonates with Plato's general ethical and even metaphysical disposition

²⁰ See *Phd.* 66b5-7, 'while we have a body...we cannot sufficiently possess what we desire (οὐ ἐπιθυμοῦμεν); 66e2-3, 'we will have what we desire and what we claim to be lovers of, namely wisdom (ἐπιθυμοῦμέν τε καὶ φάμεν ἐρασταὶ εἶναι, φρονήσεως); 68a2, 'they loved wisdom' (ἦρων δὲ φρονήσεως).

which is antithetical to carnal pleasures and attachment to the sensory world. In the *Republic* the aged Cephalus recalls a witticism of Sophocles that painted sex (ἄφροδίσια) as a tyrannical master he was glad to escape from (329c2-4). Sex is then subsequently held up as the prime example of an unhealthy indulgence with which Socrates rounds off his proscriptions of poetry in Book 3 (403a4-5, 559c6). Moreover, *erōs* proves to be the crucial ingredient in the making of a tyrant (572e4-573a2), hence the old saying that *Erōs* is a tyrant (τὸ πάλαι διὰ τὸ τοιοῦτον τύραννος ὃ Ἔρως λέγεται—573b6-7; cf. Euripides *Hippolytus* 538). While this is presumably a joke, the connection between tyranny and *erōs* is repeatedly and emphatically stressed in the *Republic*: the tyrant, properly so called, is like a drunk inflamed by desire (μεθυστικός τε καὶ ἐρωτικός καὶ μελαγχολικός γένηται—573c7-9; see also 578a10-13); and the various other desires goad the tyrant into a frenzy of avarice, with *Erōs* leading the other desires as though they were his body-guards (τοῦ Ἐρωτος, πάσαις ταῖς ἄλλαις ὥσπερ δορυφόροις ἡγουμένου). Amassing a personal army is, of course, what tyrants do²¹, thus here *Erōs* is presented as little ‘tyrant’ inside the tyrant spurring him on to his tyranny. Accordingly, *erōs* is presented as the very antithesis of philosophy (587a13-b1). Regarding the *Phaedo* we have already seen how physical pleasures and desires are given short shrift (see e.g. 66c2-4, 81a6-9) and this sentiment is borne out by the dialogues in general.²² It should be clear, given Plato’s general outlook, that *erōs* has all the wrong associations.

²¹ See 566b4-8 where the tyrant’s request for a bodyguard is called a ‘notorious’ or ‘famous request’ (αἴτημα τὸ πολυθρύλητον). This is a mainstay in Greek history. Thus Aristotle mentions as a throw-away example in the *Rhetoric* (1357b30-33) that *asking for a bodyguard* implies tyrannical designs.

²² A passage in the *Phaedrus* (*Phdr.* 238b7-c4), although from Socrates’ first speech, clearly registers some typical themes when it says that *erōs* is an unreasoning desire (λόγου δόξης), driven by pleasure which overpowers the impulse to do right. Similarly *Gorgias* 493b1-2 identifies the desiring

The Ironic Symbolism of Erōs

Inasmuch as my view goes against mainstream trends in the scholarship it is necessary to make a preliminary case for my claim that in using *erōs* to typify philosophy in the *Symposium* Plato is doing something striking and unexpected.²³ While there is an obvious superficial sense in which Plato appears to endorse erotic relationships, this gives way to a deeper meaning that has very little to do with *erōs* as it is traditionally understood. In fact it negates *erōs*.

Firstly, there surely must be a measure of truth to Alcibiades' claim that Socrates merely poses as a lover of beautiful boys. In reality he only cares for what's on the inside (e.g. *Smp.* 216c7-217a2).²⁴ For Plato leaves no doubt that Socrates *appears* overtly sexual: his 'usual haunts' are the gymnasia and wrestling schools (see *Euthphr.* 2a1-3, *Chrm.* 153a); he likes to ask if any boys have distinguished themselves for beauty (e.g. *Ly.* 204b1-2, *Chrm.* 153d3-5); and most obviously his apparent infatuation with Alcibiades is taken for granted by everyone,

part of the soul (τῆς ψυχῆς οὗ αἱ ἐπιθυμίας εἰσὶ) as a weak point, easily susceptible to persuasion and undisciplined; and Protarchus (at *Phlb.* 65c5-d2) decries pleasure, especially sexual pleasure (ταῖς περὶ τὰ φροδίσια, αἱ δὲ μέγιστα δοκοῦσιν εἶναι) for its antipathy to reason; in the *Timaeus* (42a6-b2) the difference between being just and unjust is couched in terms of whether one can master *erōs* or not. See further *Laws* 649d4-7 and 836d9-e3.

²³ Halperin (1986) 61 remarks that Plato has been used as a key source on sex in Ancient Greece since the start of the 20th Century, but from the 60s onwards scholars progressed far enough to abandon their exclusive reliance on Plato and thus to appreciate the originality of his contribution. Although most assume that the *Symposium* does offer a doctrine of love, many will implicitly acknowledge that Plato takes extreme liberties with the established notions of love. This might provide a point of contact between my view and more standard readings.

²⁴ Pace Blondell (2006) 164-8, who must labour an account in defence of physical beauty.

including himself (see *Smp.* 213c7-8, *Grg.* 481d3-4, *Prt.* 309a). Yet even the most naive reading must acknowledge that all these antics don't square up with his fabled self-mastery and rejection of worldly trappings. That Socrates spurns external things like physical beauty and cares only for the soul strikes me as an essential part of Plato's portrait. Thus Theaetetus' physical imperfections (see *Tht.* 143e6-9) hardly count against him, while Meno's beauty (see *Meno* 76b4-5) surely does not vindicate *him*.

To turn more directly to the issue at hand, Socrates' Diotima is very clearly talking about *philosophy* in her would-be encomium of *Erōs*. As this speech plays out, it becomes harder and harder to take the erotic side of her account seriously. The ultimate expression of this supposed 'love' is the relationship between *a thinker* and *the objects of knowledge* and this is quite different from an interpersonal relationship. A fellow human has feelings and can respond to you, the objects of knowledge are inanimate and unresponsive. Though benefits certainly accrue to the 'lover' of truth, it is not a two-way relationship like you have with another person. Or again, when a man loves a beautiful boy he *teaches* the boy, but when a philosopher 'loves' beauty, the philosopher is the *learner* not the teacher.²⁵ If Diotima were simply talking about traditional *erōs* this would register a significant difference between the philosophical and the carnal instances of *erōs*, and thus a significant issue in Diotima's account, but for my reading this detail is merely a quibbling point of disanalogy. Indeed, that Plato manages to employ the analogy of *erōs* so consistently is a profound testament to his literary prowess. But this can be hard to see when we focus instead on trying to extract a philosophy of love from the *Symposium*.

²⁵ Price (1989) 28 makes the incredible suggestion that the beautiful boy is, among other things, like a midwife.

It is convenient to begin with Gregory Vlastos (1981) who attributed to Plato a philosophy of love which thoroughly devalued individuals by treating them as a means to one's own philosophical enlightenment rather than intrinsically valuable. I would argue that this interpretation is, so far as it goes, quite right because Diotima is only pretending to talk about love of people but is actually talking about the objects of knowledge (and thus beautiful boys are understood *qua* visible instances of Beauty that can lead up to the forms). Vlastos even notes that Plato's account is not primarily about interpersonal relationships (see 26) but this leads Vlastos to conclude that Plato has a rather unsavoury view of love and the value of other individuals.²⁶ In response to this others have accordingly tried to vindicate Plato against such a self-centred philosophy; but always on the assumption that the *Symposium* does indeed give us a philosophy of love. As a result scholars have exerted themselves trying to fit Diotima's account into a coherent and agreeable view of interpersonal relationships.

Martha Nussbaum (2001) 165-84, for example, expends much of her considerable creativity on vindicating Plato against this charge. Similarly Alexander Nehamas (2007) develops a thoughtful and sensitive account of love, which he then attributes to Plato. But in both cases (even if we accept their speculative readings) we are still left with the bizarre view that beautiful boys are an important or paradigmatic step on the path to enlightenment (144).

²⁶ In fairness Vlastos (1981) does develop his view in reference to the *Lysis* and the *Republic* as well (6-19), but his use of the textual evidence is very selective. If we consider Socrates' *conduct* towards his friends, for example, a far more sympathetic view of 'Socratic love' emerges. Vlastos says at one point, 'Plato is scarcely aware of kindness, tenderness, compassion, concern for freedom, respect for the integrity of the beloved, as essential ingredients of the highest type of interpersonal love' (30). To my mind Socrates' conduct towards his friends in the *Phaedo*, for example, not only shows that Plato is aware of such things, but that he places great value upon them.

Leaving aside for a moment Plato's consistent antipathy to bodily pleasures, I find it very difficult to attribute such a view to Plato. A dialectical partner can be useful regardless of age or physical beauty. At best sex appeal would be irrelevant. In truth it would be a positive hindrance to anyone but a Socrates.²⁷

The more sober-minded Richard Kraut (2008) patiently deals with many of the considerable oddities in Plato's would-be philosophy of love. Although he claims that Plato's 'greatest contributions to the study of intimate human relationships' takes place in the *Symposium* and the *Phaedrus* (287) his essay is largely given over to damage control. Regarding the *Symposium* he carefully goes through a range of issues, pacifying each in turn. I have skimmed over some of the more eye-catching claims in the footnote²⁸ and while none

²⁷ Another attempt to save Plato from Vlastos' view is Price (1989) 44. First he says that, if the lover does repudiate his initial love of a boy on the path to wisdom, this is a series of 'deceptions and disillusionments.' Then he says this is 'clearly contrary to the text.' Regarding the first claim, if we ignore the loaded term 'deception,' the ascending lover will indeed discover untold new metaphysical realms. It is not wrong to call this 'disillusionment.' Regarding the second claim, I do not agree that this is contrary to the text.

²⁸ When Diotima says that all desires point to a lack, Kraut addresses the objection that she is incorrect (e.g. one might desire the needs of another to be fulfilled) by saying that Plato is only concerned with 'the distinctive psychological phenomenon that goes by the name of *erōs*' (289); he tries to explain the putative about-face whereby the object of *erōs* seems to shift from beauty to goodness by arguing that Plato wants to expand *erōs* to the desire for good in general (289-90); he explains, without batting an eyelid, that giving birth to offspring is essentially the same kind of activity as having philosophical discussion, both being forms of 'giving birth' and the object of *erōs* (293); regarding the Ladder of Love Kraut simply puts it down to a lack of detail that Diotima does not specify what sort of words the lover will apply to a beautiful boy, or how the transition from beautiful bodies

of these particular suggestions is foolish or unpersuasive, the whole taken together is highly suspect. Kraut does far too much work for far too little gain.²⁹

An exception to this trend in the scholarship is Frisbee Sheffield (2012), to whom I direct the reader for more on the secondary literature (117-122). She argues that *erōs* should not be understood as an interpersonal relationship, but rather as the desire for happiness that ultimately leads to the form of Beauty. However, Sheffield does not take *erōs* as a metaphor which Socrates playfully applies to philosophy; rather she tries to show that it can *literally* refer to the relationship between the knower and the object of knowledge.³⁰ This tends to ignore the

to beautiful souls is supposed to work (296); he notes that Diotima's conception is too narrow—in that it refers to a homosexual relationship between an older lover and a younger beloved, in which only one is 'pregnant with ideas' and the beauty of the beloved is somehow relevant—but argues that (a) homosexual pederasty provides a familiar 'template' of a conversation-based relationship that might be expanded to include woman and (b) that man-boy relations are chosen because of a desire to teach the future generation (299-300); given that Diotima neglects to discuss the bad form of *erōs*, her account is 'radically incomplete' because Plato clearly held such a view (303-4), but this short-coming is apparently remedied by the presence of Alcibiades who represents that tyrannical bad lover (304-6).

²⁹ A more protracted attempt to pacify all the irregularities and oddities of Diotima's account is Price (1989) 15-54.

³⁰ Sheffield (2012) argues extensively that *erōs* can be applied to a range of intense desires and that Socrates does nothing out of the ordinary by recasting *erōs* as the desire for the good. She argues that Plato does not stretch the term *erōs* beyond normal usage (122-3); she takes Socrates seriously in the suggestion that 'people are mistaken to suppose that *erōs* refers to sexual desire exclusively' (124); and she claims that not just Socrates but all the speakers 'place their accounts of *erōs* in the wider context of a discussion of good things and happiness.' Even if we accepted these general claims about the term *erōs* (which strike me as tendentious), Sheffield tends to ignore the whole drift of the text which is

obvious: Socrates clearly presents pederastic desire as paradigmatic for the relationship between knowledge and a knower; indeed, at one point Diotima will actually use ejaculation as a paradigm for philosophy (discussed below). Plato deliberately *chose* to focalise the ascent to philosophy via the paradigm of *erōs* understood as passionate love for sexy boys. The implication that this term speaks to some special item which Plato simply *had* to namecheck in his account of philosophy is highly unusual—delightfully so. Sex and desire are the very antithesis of Platonic philosophy. To be sure, Plato never drops the mask in this respect and the symposiasts are presumably supposed to swallow the idea that philosophy is indeed the completion of *erōs*, but if we peek beneath the dress of the dialogue it reveals some of Plato's most intriguing and cunning imagery.³¹

clearly centered on passionate desire for beautiful boys. Thus in her monograph (2006) 57 she writes 'If *x* is perceived to be beautiful, then Eros desires it; wisdom is perceived to be beautiful; therefore Eros desires wisdom,' blithely unaware that '*Erōs* desires beauty' now means the opposite of what it ought to mean; philosophical *erōs* is the activity of the mind *not* bodily appetite. On the other hand, her claim that Socrates reveals what we *really* want (i.e. happiness) via his treatment of *erōs* makes good sense.

³¹ Two scholars who are broadly consistent with my reading are Kahn and Pender. Kahn (1987) develops a view of desire in the *Republic* such that *reason* is a special desire for the good sharply demarcated from the lower desires (81-91). He finds this same view in Diotima's account of *erōs* (98-100) and argues that the Ladder of Love involves a fundamental shift in the nature of the objects being desired (100-101). Anticipating one of my overarching claims, Kahn suggests that the movement up the Ladder is similar to the subjects that 'summon the intellect' in the *Republic* (101). Pender (1992) 77-9, who is not averse to bringing out the points of disanalogy in Diotima's account of 'pregnancy', argues that the tendency to stress male 'pregnancy' (i.e. ejaculating semen) and sexual desire is geared to the interests and experiences of the symposiasts and Plato's intended audience; 'an attempt to wean

Perhaps the most obvious place where misguided sympathies have obfuscated our reading of the text is the famous ‘Ladder of Love,’ where Diotima sketches out the stages of development from the love of a particular beautiful body, to all beautiful bodies, to the beauty of the soul then the beauty of knowledge, all the way up to the vision of Beauty itself (210a4-211d1). I would argue (with Vlastos) that an uninterested assessment of this passage must conclude that the carnal delights of the flesh are left behind and with them the beautiful young boys. The lover is led to value beautiful souls over bodies (210b6-7), then to scorn³² physical beauty altogether (210c5-6) and eventually to apprehend Beauty itself, against which you cannot even compare the earthly beauties of clothes and boys (211d3-7). Throughout this account the emphasis is on the *logoi* one gives birth to in the presence of beautiful things (see 210a7-8, 210c1-3, 210d4-6). Are we to believe that Plato actually sees a necessary connection between sexual appetite and the ascent to philosophy? Or that sexy boys are required to loosen a beautiful *logos* from one’s lips? Socrates, for one, is hideous, but he is the quintessential ‘midwife.’ If anything, such external things like sex and beauty will be a distraction to

the lover from physical and unto spiritual delights’ (78). Note further, Rowe (1998b) 257-8 teases out two layers of meaning, an erotic one and a philosophical one and even notes that the erotic strand is all but undermined by the philosophical one in the end (259).

³² Here is the Greek: ἵνα τὸ περὶ τὸ σῶμα καλὸν σμικρόν τι ἡγήσεται εἶναι. Kraut (2008) 297 n. 5 argues against most translators that ‘*smikron ti*—“something small”—does not imply that the lover’s estimation of physical beauty sinks to zero. He never becomes completely indifferent to physical beauty.’ Kraut is surely right about the precise implications of the Greek locution, just as he is surely wrong about its interpretation. The whole drift of the passage speaks to an increasingly diminished view of the body—as one would expect from Plato.

philosophy, which is how they are usually presented.³³ Though the symposiasts crowd over their ‘noble’ love, we cannot be so naive to think sexual gratification slips out of the transaction. As Kenneth Dover (1989) 43 notes, *erōs* immediately connotes sexual pleasure for the *erastēs*.³⁴

³³ Sheffield (2006) e.g. 114-33 tries to make sense of the lovers’ ascent. She is forced to supply a great deal to get around the obvious fact that pursuing boys generally does not lead to philosophy and her account gets increasingly speculative. So far as I can tell she supplies no reason why *the love of beautiful boys* should be paradigmatic of the ascent from sensible particulars to forms. And she fails to address the obvious objection that sex is moreish and encourages all the wrong impulses. See further Patterson (1991), who works equally hard to make some sense of the passage, and Payne (2008). Although Payne attempts to counteract the oddity of Diotima’s proposed ascent (see 132-3), his suggestions ring hollow. Payne is mainly interested in a special type of teleology in the *Symposium* and he claims that, within this teleology, love of a boy could lead one to ascend the Ladder even if the lover doesn’t have the form of Beauty as his explicit goal to begin with. Though this may exemplify his special teleology, I struggle to see how such an account of *love* has a basis in reality either then or now. The claim that boy-love is actually incipient wisdom-love is comfortably refuted by what actually takes place in real life. Price (1989) 36-47 gives an extended, problem oriented, reconstruction of how the ascent works, registering various deficiencies in Plato’s account along the way (see 55-8). Ferrari (1992) gives a balanced treatment of Diotima’s account that acknowledges how Plato commandeers *love* to explain *philosophy* (253-62). Nevertheless, he claims that in the Ladder of Love Diotima ‘connects sexual passion to the life of true virtue (the pursuit of the good) by a series of plausible steps’ (260). But, again, it is hardly plausible that copious sexual exploits will lead anywhere but *down*, away from the soul and away from the forms. Although Price 36-42 raises the issue and provides a lengthy discussion, it seems to me that he never really addresses the problem (on 47 he simply sidesteps the issue). The view that sleeping with one, then *many* beautiful boys will awaken the intellect is not only absurd, it overtly clashes with Plato’s general attitude towards carnal pleasures. Indeed, even the pleasure-seeking Epicureans are more chaste than this.

In the *Symposium*, as in the *Phaedo*, Plato wishes to direct us towards the incorporeal world of ideas and away from the physical. And here too a similar trope of *servitude* to the physical is employed:

...and now [the ‘lover’] is turned to that great sea of Beauty no longer attached to some one-off beautiful thing, like a household slave [ὥσπερ οἰκέτης] attached to a young boy or a certain person or some particular act, a base and trifling servitude [δουλεύων φαῦλος ἢ καὶ σμικρολόγος]. (210c7-d4)

The reason we begin with sex and external beauty is that the Ladder of Love is actually an example of paragogic irony. The symposiasts are given an image of philosophy that makes it seem like the completion of pederasty. They are supposed to conclude that philosophy will scratch that erotic itch in ways they couldn’t even imagine. Indeed, this erotic philosophy is presented as a something akin to poetry that issues in immortal fame (209c7-e4), a suggestion which is bound to titillate those speechifying urbanites at Agathon’s party.³⁵ But in truth to ascend to those lofty philosophical heights is to leave these physical attachments behind; hence we have an example of paragogic irony since Socrates appeals to sex only to negate it.

That *erōs* has been co-opted comes to the fore when Diotima explains that passionate love is but one specific sense of the term ‘*erōs*.’ Not unlike the way *poiēsis* refers to ‘making’

³⁴ See further Burnyeat (1999) 232-5 on the cultural associations of the κλίνη. This ‘dining couch’ was a symbol of luxury and an essential ingredient in any half-decent symposium. Symposia were regularly associated with the enjoyment of food, drink and sex among other things (cf. *Prt.* 347c3-d6 and *Phdr.* 276d5-8).

³⁵ Rowe (1998b) 254-5 similarly argues that Socrates is appealing to the predilections and vainglories of the symposiasts with his references to fame and immortality.

in general and ‘poetry’ in particular, we are told that ‘*erōs*’ has the specific sense we are familiar with as well as a general sense that refers to the desire for happiness which drives all people (205d1-8). Inasmuch as Plato is trying to discuss philosophy in the guise of *erōs*, this is a nice move and I have no doubt that a little ingenuity could make some literal sense of this (thus Sheffield, discussed above). Nevertheless, to view Diotima’s usage as a natural outgrowth of the word’s regular semantic range does not strike me as the strongest interpretation here. Diotima is clearly taking liberties and transforming the meaning of the word ‘*erōs*.’³⁶ Suffice it to say that this term does *not* refer to that all-too-Platonic distillation, the pan-human drive for *eudaimonia*. Presumably this is why Socrates ends his speech by saying, ‘take this speech, Phaedrus, if you will, as my encomium of *Erōs*; or if not, use whatever name you want’ (ὅτι καὶ ὅπη χαίρεις ὀνομάζων, τοῦτο ὀνόμαζε—212c2-3).

Even still, it might be urged that the model of *erōs* advocated by the symposiasts is of a noble kind that does in fact somehow anticipate and accord with philosophy. That is, it may seem that this new-fangled philosophical *erōs* does not lead to a rejection of *erōs* traditionally understood. To my mind this ignores the obvious: namely, the sexual nature of traditional *erōs* and the non-somatic nature of Platonic philosophy. Although I do see the appeal of such a view, the clear *contrast* between love and philosophy cannot be ignored. Ultimately, however, my most persuasive argument is how well this contrast can be used to make sense of the text.

Erōs as Philosophy

Erōs, as Socrates presents it, takes on the meaning of *longing* in a specific sense which involves the recognition of a lack within oneself and a desire to fill this lack (see 200a5-e9). For

³⁶ Rowe (1998b) 251 acknowledges the presence of figurative language regarding the claim that human desire in general has the same structure as sexual desire.

example, Socrates explains to Agathon that anyone who desires something ‘desires what is not at hand or not present or what he does not have or what he himself is not or what he lacks’ (200e2-5).³⁷ Or again, Diotima explains the erotic nature of the philosopher in the following familiar terms: ‘whoever doesn’t think he is lacking surely doesn’t desire what he doesn’t think he lacks’ (οὐκ οὐν ἐπιθυμεῖ ὁ μὴ οἰόμενος ἐνδεής εἶναι οὗ ἂν μὴ οἴηται ἐπιδεῖσθαι—204a6-7). This of course should put us in mind of *aporia* and it is ultimately concerned with knowledge. As usual the crucial idea is that one needs to become aware that one does not know something—*this* is the lack that Plato is actually interested in. In this context *beauty*, τὸ καλόν, refers to that thing which inspires this special ‘longing.’ It is this type of ‘beauty’ that we found in the subterranean imagery of the *Phaedo* and the *Republic*. This imagery is superficially paradoxical—like a finger that seems both tall and short—such that the superficial incoherence summons the intellect or creates a *desire* to make sense of the apparent contradictions. In other words, these images are carefully designed to draw us in and make us dig a little deeper, and this effect is what we might call ‘erotic’ in the otherwise sexual context of the *Symposium*. Note that this ‘beauty’ directs us beyond superficial perceptions while normal beauty is purely superficial. That is, philosophical ‘beauty’ has the opposite effect of physical beauty since physical beauty leads towards the body and *away* from philosophy. Accordingly, we are aroused to figure out what Plato actually means by ‘beauty’ in the *Symposium* and thus Plato’s ironic use of ‘beauty’ is itself ‘beautiful.’

Socrates is presumably the definitive example of *Erōs* in the special sense as he is the prime example of a philosopher, someone who ‘longs’ for ‘beauty.’ Indeed, it is glaringly obvious that Diotima’s *Erōs*, with his mixture of cunning and lack, recalls that barefoot

³⁷ Καὶ οὗτος ἄρα καὶ ἄλλος πᾶς ὁ ἐπιθυμῶν τοῦ μὴ ἐτοίμου ἐπιθυμεῖ καὶ τοῦ μὴ παρόντος, καὶ ὁ μὴ ἔχει καὶ ὁ μὴ ἔστιν αὐτὸς καὶ οὗ ἐνδεής ἐστι, τοιαῦτ’ ἅττα ἐστὶν ὧν ἡ ἐπιθυμία τε καὶ ὁ ἔρως ἐστίν;

buffoon, Socrates (see 203c6-e5).³⁸ He too has no concern for finery and doesn't wear shoes, he cunningly pursues the beautiful and the good, he is courageous, daring, full of schemes, unrelenting in his passion for wisdom, a magician and a sophist. Above all, his odd combination of abundance and lack speaks to the very essence of Plato's Socrates. But Socrates is not just an *Erōs* striving after 'beautiful' wisdom, he is also a 'beauty' himself. That is, Socrates is the beautiful thing that awakens Alcibiades' *erōs*; he helps him realise his lack and stirs up longing in him. Socrates is both lover (in regard to wisdom) and beloved (in regard to Alcibiades). In this latter case, curiously enough, we have an inversion of the lover-beloved relationship in that Alcibiades ought to be the beloved (see 213c7-d4, 217c7-8, 219d8-e1, 222b3-4).³⁹ You may recall that I prefaced my treatment of the paragogic irony in the *Phaedo* with a catalogue of opposites. In the *Symposium* the same can be done with the related theme of *role reversals*.⁴⁰

³⁸ But see Blondell (2006) 161.

³⁹ Edmonds (2000) also looks to role reversals in the *Symposium*, but our interests and conclusions are quite different.

⁴⁰ On the theme of role reversal consider the following: the usually barefoot Socrates is all dolled up for Agathon's party (174a2-4); Socrates reverses Homer's proverb that good men go willingly to the lesser man's feast (174b4-c4); although Socrates is supposed to lead Aristodemus into the party (174ab1-d2), Aristodemus ends up in the vanguard (174e9-11); Agathon orders the slaves to behave as if they are the hosts (175b5-c2); Phaedrus claims that Alcestis is 'closer kin' to her husband than his own family (179c2-3); the gods, according to Phaedrus, are most impressed when a beloved is attached to his lover, which reverses the normal order (180b1-3); Pausanias claims that any action could be good or bad (181a1-6); he also explores the double standard whereby it is acceptable to pursue boys, but shameful for a boy to yield too easily (184a2-3); and he claims that the most abject behaviour suddenly becomes acceptable when a lover does it (182e1-183a3); Eryximachus argues that *unlike loves unlike* (186b6-7); and that doctors turn enemies (or hostile things) into friends (186d5-6); Agathon argues,

This resonates with my overall reading of the *Symposium* which turns sex into its opposite, philosophy, and swaps booze for *logoi*.

Turning to Alcibiades, he, as he relates it, was not a lover of wisdom to begin with and did not realise his lack. But Socrates drew him in posing as a lover of boys, not least because Alcibiades considers himself a rare beauty (217a2-6). Thus Alcibiades is misled in the manner of paragagic irony: Socrates advertised sex but turned out to be peddling philosophy. Alcibiades, once he's been pulled into Socrates' trap, realises his own shortcomings and lack (e.g. 216a1-c3) though he does not actually explain in any detail how Socrates humbled him beyond the suggestive imagery of Socrates as an enchanting satyr using his *logoi* to bewitch him (215c1-216c3). What he does explain is the sharp ironic contrast between Socrates' appearance and reality.

For you see that he loves the beautiful, he's always after them and is besotted, and again, he's always ignorant and knows nothing. Isn't this like the appearance of Silenus? Obviously! The man wears this on the outside, like the hollowed-out Silenus statues. But if we open him up, do you know, gentlemen, how incredibly sound of mind he is on the inside? Whether someone is beautiful means nothing to him and he's more contemptuous than you could imagine as to whether someone is rich or holds any other honour the masses esteem; he thinks all such possessions worthless and us as well. I tell you, he spends his whole life playing the *eirōn* and toying with

pace Phaedrus, that *Erōs* is not the oldest god, but the youngest (195b6c-2); Diotima gives Socrates a taste of his own elenchic medicine (201d-202d); in Diotima's myth of *Erōs* the crafty *Poros* is outplayed by the lowly *Penia* (203b7-c1); Alcibiades' speech, half serious half playful, flits between an encomium and an accusation of Socrates (see e.g. 214e1-3, 215a5-6, 215b7, 216c1-3, 219c5-6, 222a7-8); and Socrates is famously ugly, yet secretly beautiful (e.g. 215a6-b3).

people. I doubt anyone has seen the marvellous statues [ἁγάλματα] within him when he is opened up [ἀνοιχθέντος] and being serious, but *I* did once and they struck me as divine and golden and so astoundingly beautiful that, in a word, I had to do whatever Socrates told me. (216d2-217a2)

This inspiring contrast between Socrates' outside and inside strikes the keynote of the ironic symbolism of the *Symposium* and, although Alcibiades is an ultimately failed case, he reveals the crucial idea required to understand the nature of *erōs* in this dialogue. That is, his view of Socrates is an emblem of how the dialogue should appear to the reader.⁴¹

Firstly, note how Plato hints that Alcibiades' imagery can be stretched in this direction: Alcibiades connects the theme of 'wisdom dressed as folly' not only with Socrates' *person* but also with his *logoi* (221d7-222a6). His words have the 'skin' of some outrageous satyr (σατύρου δὴ τινα ὑβριστοῦ δορὰν—221e3-4) but conceal the greatest 'statues' of virtue within them (πλεῖστα ἀγάλματ' ἀρετῆς ἐν αὐτοῖς ἔχοντας—222a3-4).⁴² Words as well as people can exhibit this ironic structure. My contention is that the *Symposium* resembles Alcibiades' Socrates inasmuch as it presents philosophy disguised as sex. The dialogue is like a Silenus statue, lusty on the outside, divine on the inside (see 215a6-b3). It appears, at least initially, as

⁴¹ Ford (2017) does a fine job of developing this view. He focuses on Alcibiades' image of Socrates and discusses the historical background of this 'likeness game' (13-4); he emphasises the contrast between *outside* and *inside* in the Silenus-likeness (14), which he understands in terms of looking past the 'surface' of the text (15-7); this, he argues, is just how the dialogues work (18-20 and 24). He discusses the relevant scholarship on 14-5.

⁴² Regarding the statuettes of gods found inside a Silenus see Rowe (1998) 206.

obsessed with externals, like beautiful boys, but is in fact dismissive of such trivialities which distract from the part that really matters, the unseen truth within.

Perhaps in a sense Alcibiades' speech is an example of this special contrast between surface and interior since it appears to be a ridiculous drunk ramble but has a 'divine' kernel of truth to it.⁴³ A more important way the *Symposium* resembles Alcibiades' Socrates is in the role that rhetoric plays in the dialogue. Rhetoric is supposed to be 'smooth.' It is delightful and persuasive. It seeps into your brain almost undetected and carries you away to its conclusions.⁴⁴ Thus Socrates is apparently overcome by the beauty of Agathon's speech (τίς οὐκ ἂν ἐξεπλάγη ἀκούων;—198b3-5). The *Symposium* certainly seems to be the most oratorically gratifying work in Plato's corpus given the number and the quality of the speeches. But this superficial appearance is undermined in a crucial respect. Plato's dialogue certainly possesses the ability to delight and to appeal to the reader's appetite for rhetoric, but when viewed from closer up the text is not 'smooth' or easy, it is hard. It requires a great deal of mental labour to uncover

⁴³ Nightingale (1995) 114-27 emphasises the errors and misapprehensions in Alcibiades' speech. I am open to this approach, but the Silenus image with its inside/outside contrast resonates strongly with my view of Socrates here and throughout the corpus, and the fact that Alcibiades is inspired to realise his lack by what he sees in Socrates seems important. That said, I would agree with Nightingale (*pace* Alcibiades) that Socrates is not divine but somewhere in between the mortal and divine like *Erōs* (see 126-7). Blondell (2006) 158 sensibly rejects the 'purported insights into Socrates' inner nature,' but she thinks we can trust Alcibiades' reports of Socrates' behaviour. Rowe (1998) 206 suggests that Plato might like to 'have it both ways' with Alcibiades. Regarding the view that Alcibiades provides a positive model of sorts see Sheffield (2006) 184 for bibliography.

⁴⁴ The *locus classicus* of this idea is probably Gorgias' *Encomium of Helen* (esp. §§8-15). Accordingly one could peruse this topic under the rubric of *the enchanting power of logoi*. See Gellrich (1994) 278-81.

Plato's meaning. While the text may *seem* smooth and easy, it actually turns out to be hard and confusing. The *form* presents us with gorgeous oratory that turns out to be laborious philosophy, just as the *content* appears to focus on pederasty but turns out to be philosophy. Plato draws in his readership via their interest in fine speeches, only to turn them towards something deeper. Though we are neither as besotted with oratory as the classical Athenians nor native speakers of Greek, it should be abundantly clear that the *Symposium* is a veritable buffet of oratorical delights. The reason then that Plato makes such ample use of the pleasures afforded by oratory is not to endorse or encourage them but, on the contrary, because he ultimately wants to divert our baser urges away from such a source of 'external' gratification. In sum, the dialogue is a 'Socrates' because it exhibits an ironic structure whereby the exterior contrasts with the interior: Philosophy disguised as superficial oratory. Note that this contrast is employed for pedagogical reason; this is the way Socrates tried to turn Alcibiades.

Finally, however, the most important way the dialogue resembles Silenus-Socrates and exhibits this contrast between external appearance and internal truth is the use it makes of 'erōs.' Plato takes over the theme of erotic love and repurposes it to explore the ascent to philosophy. The philosophical ascent naturally involves an *epistemological* shift towards the metaphysical and away from the physical as well as with an *ethical* shift towards the cultivation of the soul and away from the external trappings of honour, sex and wealth. Without a doubt, Plato makes the image of Philosophy dressed as *erōs* work. There are several points of contact that make this a more than serviceable allegory. To give but one example, the structure of *desire* is similar to *aporia*. Thus, Alcibiades is only spurred on when Socrates ignores his advances, and this resembles the way that *aporia* leads you to pursue knowledge. In philosophy, as in love, one's awareness of an absence can have a tangible presence that spurs you on or tantalises you. The image of Philosophy dressed as *erōs* constitutes the main sense in which the text is a Socrates. The text tantalises us by concealing its teachings under the

surface and thus ‘arouses’ our interest. Just like the cave imagery which used corporeal things to symbolise the incorporeal, the use of *erōs* here is succinctly inappropriate. This new-fangled philosophical *erōs* draws attention to itself as an ironic symbol by being self-contradictory, if not to say ridiculous, because philosophy is very much the opposite of *erōs*. At the risk of being a little less than serious, perhaps we might side with Alcibiades when he says that we shouldn’t listen to Socrates, ‘Or didn’t you realise that everything is the complete opposite of what he says?’ (ἢ οἴσθα ὅτι τοῦναντίον ἐστὶ πᾶν ἢ ὃ ἔλεγεν; —214c8-d2)

Previously I explained the use of ironic symbolism via one of Socrates’ own metaphors: namely, it ‘summons’ the intellect. Here, then, is an even better one: this use of *erōs* is ‘erotic.’ To feel the strangeness or *atopia* of Plato’s usage here is to be seduced by the ‘beauty’ of the text, the distinct sense that something—surely something wonderful—is being withheld.

‘Progeny’

Diotima’s account of *erōs* includes a discussion of giving birth, (τόκος, τίκτειν) at 206c1-209e4. In so doing Plato shifts the imagery to impregnating women and fathering children. As E. E. Pender (1992) in her decisive treatment has shown, Diotima is mainly thinking of male pregnancy in accordance with ancient belief that the man’s semen contains the seed of the child.⁴⁵ To bring out but one detail of Pender’s argument, 206d3-7 explains that beauty is required for the pregnant person to give birth by describing what must be a man, aroused by beauty, becoming erect and ejaculating into a woman:

if ever what is pregnant approaches something beautiful, it becomes gracious, melts with joy, and gives birth and procreates; but when it approaches what is ugly, it

⁴⁵ See Pender (1992) 73-6.

contracts, frowning with pain, turns away, curls up and fails to procreate, retaining what it has conceived, and suffering because of it.⁴⁶ (Rowe's translation)

This passage can hardly refer to a woman giving birth to a child, for what does *beauty* have to do with that? Clearly we have an account of the sex act replete with phallic innuendo. Once again, Plato has chosen quite a vehicle with which to allegorise the philosophical process. Note that *pregnancy* is used in a figurative sense to understand pederasty *qua* pregnancy of the soul, which in turn is an allegory of philosophy: ejaculating is like wooing a young boy (that is, spiritual pregnancy) which is actually philosophy.⁴⁷ As a matter of fact, the philosopher is even said to have sex with the form of Beauty! As Pender notes (82-3), the constant talk of begetting should deter us from translating συνόντος αὐτῷ at 212a2 as merely 'being in the company of.'

Diotima's focus on 'progeny' or 'things produced' is certainly apt for the context of the *Symposium*. This dialogue concerns rhetoric and pedagogy and is, in my view, one of the key sources for Plato's account of philosophical literature (the other being the *Phaedrus*, where again sex and rhetoric are brought together). Here the Beautiful is virtually the form of the Good viewed in its ability to inspire longing and produce *logoi*.⁴⁸ This, I submit, is the Good

⁴⁶ ὅταν μὲν καλῷ προσπελάζῃ τὸ κυοῦν, ἰλεὼν τε γίγνεται καὶ εὐφραϊνόμενον διαχεῖται καὶ τίκτει τε καὶ γεννᾷ· ὅταν δὲ αἰσχροῦ, σκυθρωπὸν τε καὶ λυπούμενον συσπειρᾶται καὶ ἀποτρέπεται καὶ ἀνείλλεται καὶ οὐ γεννᾷ, ἀλλὰ ἴσχον τὸ κύημα χαλεπῶς φέρει. But see Edmonds (2000) 267.

⁴⁷ Cf. Pender (1992) 77-9.

⁴⁸ Earlier I emphasised the role of beauty in creating longing in the erotic man. Beyond this, beauty is presented as the ultimate object of human motivation (e.g. 205d1-8) as well as the highest high in what must be a metaphysical sense (211c7-d1). This matches up with the form of the Good (cf. 204e1-205a7). Though it later it transpires that beauty is only a means to 'giving birth,' which is our true goal (206e2-5). Issues accrue here regarding, for instance, a putative shift from *erōs* as the desire for the

qua artist's muse, the vision of the Good that the true poet consults. Aside from the literal progeny that both humans and animals produce and the 'progeny' that is revealed in action, like valorous deeds or being just (208c1-209b1), Diotima seems especially interested in the sense of 'progeny' as *logoi* (209b5-c2), law codes (209d5-e4) and poetic works (209d1-d5).⁴⁹ In fact it is a lot easier to think of these products as progeny than it is to think of actions as progeny. An emphasis on poetic 'products' is of course apt for the symposiasts. Beyond this, however, we can and should think of the *Symposium* and especially Diotima's speech as itself a 'beautiful' offspring in this manner; that is, 'beautiful' in the manner of a Silenus-Socrates who is ostensibly sexual but actually philosophical. We can apply the claims about progeny to

good to the desire for procreation (see e.g. Sheffield, 2006, 84-5); how to square immortality here with accounts in other dialogues (e.g. O'Brien, 1984, 186, 190-1, 199); or even whether immortality is treated consistently in this dialogue (e.g. Rowe, 1998b, 248-9). Consider the candid remarks of Price (1989) 25: 'in multiplying examples of quasi-immortality she [Diotima] at times loses sight of eros in any familiar sense, so that we are left with the impression of hearing a more or less persuasive account of we know not exactly what.' By and large, these issues do not accrue for my reading. If anything, Plato's usage is rather impressive in the economy of the *erōs*/Philosophy metaphor. 'Immortality' links *procreation* and *the vision of Beauty* (i.e. the Good) in that both lead to 'offspring' and some form of immortality. Earlier 'mortal' and 'immortal' represented ignorance and wisdom respectively with the philosopher occupying a space between them (see 204a); thus the accomplished philosopher who see true Beauty becomes 'immortal' in the sense of having knowledge (see 212a). Needless to say the imagery is rather dense. Although one must admire the efforts of (say) Sheffield (2006) 99-110 in trying to make sense of the text, she is severely hampered by the dogged attempt to take it all as an actual account of *erōs*.

⁴⁹ Price (1989) 27-8 problematises the 'descendances' of Solon and Homer (for what role does beauty play?) as well as Achilles (whose 'begetting' seems different from Homer) and seems to brush them aside in favour of the pedagogical aspect of pederasty.

the dialogue in the following way: the dialogue is (a) the ‘progeny’ of Plato’s *erōs* as well as (b) a beautiful thing that can engender its own progeny in us. To give a more concrete example of how this giving birth can play out let me speculate the following historical reconstruction. Plato meets the historical Socrates and is inspired by him. He then writes dialogues—the progeny of Socrates’ beauty—and these dialogues in turn inspire others to give birth. These others can then do the same with *their* beautiful progeny. Two further comments may be useful. First, note that one’s ‘offspring’ here does not refer to a ‘child’ who can *love* some beauty, but to a beautiful thing that is *loved*. That said, the process is still self-perpetuating. Secondly, writing dry academic essays may not be the best way to carry on the flame; not least because it requires the writer to simply expose the hidden secrets of the text which the readers ought to discover for themselves.

Presumably Diotima is cautioning us from thinking we can learn from a text when she says that only those who see Beauty itself can give birth to true virtue instead of images of virtue inasmuch as they are not in contact with the real thing and but mere images of Beauty (212a). Though such a remark seems to undermine the *Symposium* itself as a mere image of Beauty, I suggest we make some limited allowances. For the *Symposium* does not operate like most texts, just as Diotima’s speech is not like most speeches and Socrates does not teach like most teachers. For one thing the *Symposium* is designed to make you work, and for another it does not pretend to offer a fixed statement of doctrine. On the contrary, inasmuch as the message is mediated by the *erōs* metaphor, Plato is not revealing the ‘immortal truth’ but keeping us at one remove (in the very least). In keeping with these values, although Diotima does make some conspicuous remarks about beautiful *logoi*, the truly philosophical life—the so-called ‘higher mysteries’—clearly prioritises *knowing* above *making* and *doing* above *producing*. To my mind this recalls one of the most striking passages in Diotima’s speech, namely that the ‘mortal image of immortality’ provided by giving birth also applies to

knowledge such that one must constantly revise and resuscitate their knowledge to keep it ‘alive’ (207e5-208b5). In other words, a ‘rolling mind’ gathers no moss. This marvellous passage should not be coerced into some Frankenstein of a doctrine of Love; it is a statement that reflects on the nature of knowledge.⁵⁰ And in my experience, this is exactly how knowledge works. If we think about how such knowledge might be effectively communicated by a fixed text, the answer must surely be, ‘erotically.’

Conclusions

A central theme in this study is *turning burdens into boons*. We have seen how Socratic Irony co-opts the interlocutor’s arrogance and turns it against him. Paragogic irony provides an even more conspicuous example of this theme: for example, in the *Symposium* Socrates seduces the symposiasts (and the naive readers) towards philosophy via their penchant for *erōs* such that a thoroughly unphilosophical urge is co-opted towards a philosophical end. Both of these techniques concern the way *Socrates* interacts with his interlocutors, but at the same time we need to explain why *Plato* would leave all this implicit rather than explicitly spelling it out. My answer to this has generally been to claim that we benefit from doing the intellectual legwork.

The present chapter turns more directly to the way *Plato* interacts with the reader. I began by collating examples of ironic symbolism to demonstrate its general relevance to the dialogues. Then I argued in brief that the cave imagery in the *Phaedo* and especially in the *Republic* can be understood as an attempt to ‘summon the intellect’ of the reader. That is, by

⁵⁰ Sheffield (2006) 103 notes, rightly, that bodily and psychic replenishment cannot be examples of reproduction in the presence of beauty because there seems to be no pregnancy and no beauty. I would adduce this to show that we are firmly within the realm of metaphor not doctrine, but she suggests that reproduction is the general class of which *erōs* is a part. This is at best consistent with the text (and it may even be contradicted by e.g. 207a6-7).

allegorising the world of the forms with the surface world above the cave Plato creates an image that does not make sense unless we step in and tease out the incoherence with our minds. Further, although Plato clearly has a message to convey, the message itself is limited and undermined. The imagery tries to point to an unknown, perhaps ineffable experience. Accordingly, the imagery has a built-in ‘self-destruct mechanism’ which signals its derivative status as a mere image. This prevents us from taking the image as the final word. It *hints* but does not deliver.⁵¹

We have then two closely related techniques. Firstly, the imagery makes us aware of a lack and requires us to look beneath its ambivalent surface meaning to the hidden truth inside. The way philosophy is presented in the *Symposium* ‘summons the intellect’ to make sense of the text; it ‘erotically’ draws us in to do the necessary thinking. At this level there is a particular answer that Plato wants us to figure out. Secondly, inasmuch as we are given mere images and not the real McCoy, Plato only takes us so far along the road to enlightenment. He does, however, give us some very concrete advice. In sum, both the imagery and the content of the imagery ‘point beyond themselves.’ The imagery requires us to look beneath its ambivalent surface meaning to the hidden truth inside; and this ‘hidden truth,’ in turn, directs us to look beneath the physical but does not attempt to take us all the way. These twin techniques conform to the theme of *turning burdens to boons* in that they repurpose the *fixity* of the written word and give it ‘movement’ so to speak.

In the *Symposium* the ironic symbolism of *erōs* fundamentally informs the dialogue. I suggest that this be taken as an account of the dialogues in general. That is not to say that all of the dialogues exhibit the sharp contrast between surface and interior which is symbolised by

⁵¹ Benitez (2007) 233-4 treats Plato’s myths as emblematic of the dialogues on the whole in that they present likely, but not literal, accounts of reality.

Alcibiades' Socrates.⁵² Rather, this is an exaggerated and playful *caricature* which emphasises a key feature of the dialogues, namely that we are required to think things through ourselves and look beneath their surface. In other words, Plato is saying that the dialogues are 'erotic.'

⁵² That said, the sharp ironic contrast of the *Symposium* almost has a correlate in the paragoric ironies we met in the last chapter. For example, the *Cratylus* conceals an antipathy to etymologies beneath a 'surface' that appears decidedly in favour of etymologies. And regarding the *Phaedo* it could be argued that while the 'surface' speaks of personal immortality and mysticism, the hidden 'inside' is dismissive of the fears and desires that motivate such ideas in the first place.

CHAPTER FIVE

IRONY AND EPISTEMOLOGY

πάντες τοῖς λόγοις ἀναπεροῦνται.

(By words all men are winged.)

—Aristophanes, *Birds*

Plato's irony fosters a healthy distrust of the superficial meaning of the text and this, in turn, resonates with an important feature of his epistemology. Though it *appears* that the senses are reliable, if left unchecked they can actually be a hindrance to knowledge because they encourage us to mistake the sense world for true reality, the image for the original.¹ This is comparable to the way Socrates *appears* as a lusty Silenus but is actually a paragon of self-control. In essence Plato's irony encourages us to see through the superficial layer of the text to the true meaning hidden within. And this exegetical move, I argue, is training for 'seeing through' the world of perception to the hidden reality behind it. This 'seeing through' is not book learning but an applied skill that needs to be developed and practiced. For this reason it is essential for the reader to work through the irony by their own intellectual efforts. You need to develop the skills and train your mind. If, for instance, you were given a mathematics exercise book with all the answers filled out, you would be a lot less likely to develop the

¹ By this, however, I do not wish to endorse an overly esoteric approach to the dialogues. It is not that there is some secret knowledge that will unlock these texts like a key; but rather that they can speak to both a more sophisticated and less sophisticated readership at the same time. Though such an idea may rankle with our modern egalitarian values, it is clear from the *Republic* and the *Laws* (for example) that Plato is not this way inclined.

relevant skills. As Plato sees it, you may even come to think that you are a maths whizz and even neglect to try to develop the necessary skills. Plato's dialogues resemble an exercise book in that they provide a controlled environment to help us develop the necessary intellectual abilities which lie at the heart of his epistemological enterprise.

To explore this idea we will look to the fabulous Palinode of the *Phaedrus*. In brief my main contention is as follows. The divine experience of *growing wings* or *recollecting* or *falling under the spell of love*—these all describe what is essentially the same thing, namely moving from the sensible into the intelligible realm, and this very experience is what the Palinode affords the reader. To engage the text in the right way requires us to 'recollect' a general, intelligible idea. In this case we are given a host of examples of 'recollection' itself, glossed as falling in love or flying, and our job is to see the single methodology being alluded to in each case. The speech tries to train us in the *technē* of divining the 'one' behind the 'many.' And this of course is a *skill* rather than a simple piece of information—indeed, in what follows it will come to light as an especially painful and maddening skill to acquire.

I THE PALINODE IN THE *PHAEDRUS*

I argue that in the *Phaedrus*, just as in the *Symposium*, Plato explores the theme of rhetoric and philosophical writing via the ridiculous surrogate of erotic arousal. And here too I am swimming against the current of the scholarship. Harvey Yunis, for example, notices the paradoxical position that Socrates takes up in the Palinode—namely, that *erōs*, understood as a type of madness, can be a good thing—and he makes the following remark: 'This position is a paradox, which S[ocrates] embraces not for epideictic purposes in the Lysianic manner but

because it reflects reality.’² I agree that Socrates is not ‘doing a Lysias,’ but the supposition that philosophy is really erotic madness is questionable. While Socrates does make these claims about ‘erotic madness’ he almost completely transforms the meaning of these terms in the process.³ Socrates’ usage is similar to, say, a pacifist who claims that she will *punch you in the face* with her passive resistance—it is absurd or in the very least *atopos*. The vehicle and the tenor of the metaphor tend in opposite directions. As I will argue, the ironic tension between the vehicle and the tenor of Socrates’ Palinode is precisely what makes it ‘erotic’ in the special Platonic sense of the term.

² Yunis (2011) 126; see also Plass (1967) 344. On the other hand Yunis (2005) 112 makes the following astute remarks: ‘The Great Speech [*sc.* the Palinode], a memesis in prose, portrays the pursuit of knowledge as an intense erotic experience, triggered and driven by the sight of beauty—the sight of being itself and the parallel sight of the beauty of the beloved (251a-252b). The portrayal is so vivid and the narrative tension so intense that the auditor himself acquires a desire for the very experience that is portrayed. Eros, vividly portrayed, arouses eros.’ But see 113: ‘the transcendent eros that seeks knowledge of being always retains its innate affinity with sexual eros.’

³ So far as I know no one explicitly takes erotic madness as an *ironic* vehicle for philosophy. Cf. Moss (2012), who does not reject the role of sex as I do, but nevertheless acknowledges that ‘although frenzied love of sensual beauty tends to lead towards the empty pursuit of pleasure, it can perhaps be exploited to lead people towards the love of truth’ (12). Moreover she espies various limitations on the philosophical use of beautiful boys which render ‘interpersonal love an inadequate tool for soul-leading in many cases—including, notably, the case at hand in the dialogue: Socrates’ attempt to seduce Phaedrus away from rhetoric and towards philosophy’ (13). See also Carson (1998) 155 who remarks an enormous difference between Socrates’ ‘erotic attitude’ and traditional views.

Ironic Symbolism

While I appreciate that I am going against the scholarship on this issue, I think there is much to recommend my approach. For it is hard to take Socrates at his word when he suggests that the sight of a sexy boy will lead to philosophical enlightenment, or that it will lead us *up* into the intelligible rather than *down* into the corporeal?⁴ And again, it is suspicious, that the paradigmatic philosopher, having lusted after a boy, then denies the consummation of that love. Though sexual abstinence is no doubt a good thing, this is neither here nor there. Socrates is suggesting that somehow in the process of this self-denial we emerge as, not just true lovers, but philosophers. Whether as a theory of love or a theory of philosophy these are rather odd claims.

G. R. F. Ferrari (1987) gives a sensitive and intelligent account of how a sexually attractive person inspires philosophical reflection whereby ‘a person’s beauty prompts you to care, not just about their beauty, but about them-as-beautiful’ (146-7; see 142-8). And yet, the textual evidence for this crucial element is slight. In fact, as we shall see, Plato conflates bestial and philosophical responses to beauty. Although Ferrari emphasises how the philosopher seeks out boys of a particular *character*, for example Zeus-like (169-73), this only reveals the inconsistency of Plato’s account: the beautiful boy is at one moment a surrogate for the form of Beauty and at the next a surrogate for Zeus. To be sure, particular details of Plato’s ‘theory of love’ make sense taken in isolation: beauty *can* inspire, intellectual wonder *can* be

⁴ To be clear, beauty *is* an important value for the Greeks. Winkler (1990) 77, remarking the frequent request for beauty in ancient spells, says: ‘To get the edge on competitors often means charming or outfoxing them rather than fighting or insulting them outright, so generalized prayers for success frequently include what may seem to us a rather peacock-like pride in looking good and being seen as sexually appealing.’ I would urge that Plato *rejects* these values at both an ethical level and at an epistemological level. The surface is ultimately not what matters for him.

maddening, the urge to improve another *may well* lead to self-discovery. But the cocktail produced by their combination, not to mention the speech's elaborate presentation, make for a rather odd account. It is scarcely possible for a 'straight' reading of the speech to make sense of its wild eccentricity. We might neutralise it to some extent, but we can hardly embrace it.

My reading, although atypical, receives support from the fact that *erōs* is glossed as a type of *madness*. *Mania*, of course, is generally not at all a positive term in Plato. While philosophy involves being in control of oneself and being in firm possession of one's reason, madness is the exact opposite. The term *μανία* frequently carries a strongly negative and irrational association.⁵ It can refer to being driven out of one's mind (as we say) and being bereft of one's senses.⁶ And of course it can allude to the depraved desire for sex and food.⁷ The tyrant, for instance, is painted as a maniac (*Rep.* 573a8-b4). Thus it seems fair to assume that Plato is up to something when he characterises philosophy as a type of madness in the *Phaedrus*. As we saw in the last chapter, he is more inclined to *distinguish* philosophy from, say, divine possession than to approximate the two.⁸ I acknowledge that Socrates never lifts

⁵ For a negative and irrational association see, *Rep.* 382c8, 400b2, *Laws* 783a2, *Tht.* 157e3, *Euthd.* 306d7, *Meno* 91c3, *Prt.* 323b5. The view of Nussbaum (2001) e.g. 202 and 223-33 that Plato has changed his mind to embrace madness and poetry is *ad hoc* and untenable. There is hardly a trace of this brave new Plato in the 'subsequent' dialogues no matter how late we date the *Phaedrus*.

⁶ For 'being bereft of one's senses' see *Laws* 869a3 (cf. 881b4).

⁷ For depraved bodily desires see *Laws* 839a7, *Phlb.* 45e3, *Smp.* 213d6, *Ti.* 86b4.

⁸ I wrote that divine possession or prophesy tends to furnish a glaring example of the *absence* of knowledge (e.g. *Meno* 99b11-c5, *Ap.* 22b8-c3, *Ion* 533c9-535a5). Hackforth (1972b), commenting on *Phdr.* 244d2-5, explains away Plato's negative views on *mantics* in other dialogues with the incredible claim that those criticisms are actually directed at οἰωνιστική, reading omens (58). Regarding Plato's contradictory views on inspired poets Hackforth claims that Plato is a 'compound of rationalist and

the mask and that he goes through the motions of dividing off good madness from bad—but this hardly mitigates the striking attempt to present philosophy as erotic madness.

Beautiful Boys and Beautiful Logoi

The *Phaedrus* has tended to baffle scholars because of its apparent lack of unity.⁹ The two halves of the dialogue don't seem to go together and the prominence of the Palinode is almost inexplicable. I believe that the solution to these puzzles lies in the following direction. The Palinode, like the rest of the dialogue, is about *logoi* and in particular it is about the philosophical, psychagogic, use of *logoi*.¹⁰ The intoxicating imagery regarding sex and

poet' and that 'in the *Phaedrus* the poet definitely gets the upper hand' (61). Gonzalez (2011) similarly posits a *tertium quid* between inspiration and *technē* to explain away the incongruity, though with more subtlety and ingenuity. He argues that, since Socrates lacks true *technē* but rejects inspiration, there must be another way, which is then revealed in the *Phaedrus*. Gonzalez' aims are understandable but misguided. See further Janaway (1995) 168 for a middling position: 'Though philosophy legitimately embraces poetic methods, it can never abandon itself to them.' These attempts to make sense of Plato tend to be *ad hoc* and apologetic. My interpretation, by contrast, easily accommodates Plato's usage.

⁹ See Werner (2007) for bibliography, especially 91-109 and 125-7 (though his own attempts to address the issue strike me as perfunctory).

¹⁰ For a treatment of the love speeches in terms of rhetoric see the excellent discussion of Moss (2012) 8-12, who argues that the 'non-lover' and 'lover' of Lysias and Socrates (respectively) are used to explore issues of rhetoric. See also Yunis (1996) 189-93, who discusses Plato's views on the relation of the speaker to his audience, especially in terms of self-interest verses the interest of the audience; and Rowe (1986) and (1989). Few fail to remark that Lysias' arguments are based on self-interest and expediency: e.g. Thompson (1868) 149, Griswold (1996) 47, Yunis (1996) 190 and Moss (2012) 9. Rutherford (1995) 265 notes the use of probability (*eikos*) in this speech (citing, 231c7, 232c2, 233a2

madness is used to illustrate the type of rhetoric being recommended. There are other dialogues where Plato discusses rhetoric (like the *Protagoras*, the *Gorgias* and the *Menexenus*), but in the *Phaedrus* and the *Symposium* he turns to the issue of his own rhetorical usages via the lens of *erōs*. Indeed, while the connection between *erōs* and *logos* is left largely implicit in the *Symposium*, it comes more readily to the fore in the *Phaedrus* and is crucial to an understanding of the Palinode. It allows us to see the *love of boys* as a surrogate for the *love of speeches* and thus to appreciate the ‘erotic’ attraction of this love speech itself. An obvious point of contact between the love of boys and the love of speeches is that both can exhibit beauty.¹¹ Another connection between *logoi* and *erōmenoi* is evident in Lysias’ speech. Here the speaker takes the role of an (‘unloving’) lover, while the addressee of the speech is cast as the beloved. The connection basically revolves around the identification of the lover/speaker as the *pursuer* and the beloved/audience as the *pursued*. In general terms then, winning over a beloved requires rhetoric and persuasion. This point is made by Pausanias in the *Symposium* at 182b5-6. However, we also can invert this connection in that the audience loves the speech. Phaedrus for example—who is clearly the beloved to Lysias’ *faux* courtship—can also be described as his lover: he is the *erastēs* of Lysias (257b4-6) and Lysias is his *paidika* or ‘darling’ (236b5). In this way the audience resembles the lover of the beautiful speech and the speech is the beloved (and thus by proxy the speechwriter). In other words, Lysias is pursuing Phaedrus but at the same time, paradoxically, Phaedrus is also smitten by the speech.¹²

with 267a and 272e). On the importance of Isocrates for Socrates’ first speech see Asmis (1986) 160-2 and 167-70.

¹¹ On the connection between *logoi* and beautiful boys cf. Moss (2012) 7 who says that ‘the love of *logoi* is a species of erotic love’ but (happily) goes on to note how Plato uses love of people as a metaphor for love of *logoi* (8, see further 9-12).

¹² On erotic role reversals see Griswold (1996) 26-33.

This, in turn, leads us to the most important and interesting connection between *logoi* and *erōmenoi* in the *Phaedrus*: both induce *mania*. Beauty, whether in words or people, has the power to drive you out of your senses. The *mania* inspired by the *erōmenos* is discussed (negatively) in the first two speeches and (positively) in the Palinode and it clearly forms part of the popular tropes surrounding the *erastēs*, who is driven out of his mind by *erōs*. *Mania*, however, is not merely occasioned by beautiful boys but also by *logoi*, from the enchanting power of poetry to the persuasive magic of rhetoric. Thus Agathon calls *Erōs* a singer who enchants men and gods (ἄδει θέλγων πάντων θεῶν τε καὶ ἀνθρώπων νόημα—*Smp.* 197e4-5).¹³ In a nutshell, Plato intertwines *mania*, *erōs* and *logoi* such that madness describes both the response to boys and to *logoi* so that *erōs* can be transferred from the lover's gaze to the speech-lover to the philosophical reader. Consider for instance how *Phaedrus* is overtly and consistently characterised as a lover of speeches.¹⁴ This also applies to Socrates who is clearly imitating and pandering to *Phaedrus*: Socrates is *sick* for speeches (228b6); he is an *erastēs* of speeches (228c1-2); *Phaedrus* could apparently lead Socrates *anywhere* just by dangling a speech in front of him (230d5-e3, cf. 227d2-5); he is cowed by the threat that *Phaedrus* will never give him another speech again (236e); and both are characterised as being in a Bacchic frenzy because of *logoi* (228b7, 234d5, cf. 245a).¹⁵ In light of this broad connection between *erōmenoi* and *logoi* I hope to show that the 'theory of love' in the Palinode is more interesting and philosophically rewarding when it is read as a covert account of how we interact with *logoi* like Plato's texts than an account of how we should act towards beautiful boys.

¹³ Calame (1992) 46-8 discusses the connection between the effects of love and the effects of poetry. Gellrich (1994) 279-80, reflecting on the *Phaedrus* and Gorgias' *Encomium of Helen*, remarks that to be seduced by speech is to undergo the psychic equivalent of rape.

¹⁴ See e.g. 228a5-c5, 234d1-6, 242a7-b2, 258e1-2.

¹⁵ On the irony of reading see Ferrari (1987) 49.

II OVERVIEW OF THE PALINODE

The Palinode has it all: myth, narrative, close argumentation; cosmology, physiology psychology; it recalls the poets, the Presocratics, the medical writers, the mystics; it is equal parts profound and perverse—but above all it is *detailed*, baroque even. As such it is imperative to read it slowly and carefully.¹⁶ The speech works to develop the readers' philosophical capabilities or to help us 'grow wings.' Yet it does not make for easy reading. Just like growing wings, it is maddening and painful. With this in mind I have found it easier and more useful to begin by going over the speech, blow by blow, drawing out the relevant details *in situ* as it were. Although such a summary may seem banal to begin with, part of the magic of the Palinode is the way the details surreptitiously build up right under your nose.

¹⁶ Lebeck (1972) and Griswold (1996) 74-137, for example, are patient and careful with the Palinode. In contrast to this consider Price (1989). Although his treatment of the *Phaedrus* is rigorous and sophisticated, his weapon of choice, rational reconstruction, proves to be a rudderless ship. The jumble of half-cooked ideas that Price finds in the text make for a vapid interpretation of this otherwise masterful piece of writing. E.g. Price criticises Plato's scanty attempt to explain the transition from beautiful boy to Beauty itself (77); he thinks the good and bad horses are presented with a degree of carelessness which sacrifices substance to 'bold strokes of presentation' (79-80); Plato, torn between traditional pederasty and a reciprocal model of love, was 'driven to construe a loving response on the boy's part in a charming but overingenious way that seems not fully interpretable' (87); and in sum: 'Socrates has construed his task as a justification of love of a kind, not as a definition of love; the result is less than systematic and exhaustive.... As it is, his first speech remains less edifying but more rigorous' (94)

1 - *Introduction* (243e8-244a8): Socrates introduces the speech and foregrounds the central issue, that lovers can be good. He signals that he will proceed by rejecting the view that love *qua* madness is bad; indeed, some of the ‘greatest goods’ come to men through god-sent *mania*. Socrates plans to invert the view of his previous speech, which praised the *sōphrosunē* of non-lovers and criticised the *mania* of the lover. This foreshadows a treatment of *sōphrosunē* that will prove to be highly suspect.

2 - *Types of Madness*. Socrates presents *erōs* as one among four types of *mania*. The first is *inspired prophesy* (244a8-244d5), which Socrates lauds at the expense of *sōphrosunē*: ‘Prophets accomplish many fine things when they’re mad [μανεῖσαι], but little or nothing when they are in their right mind [σωφρονοῦσαι]’ (244a8-b3). Moreover, those who use augury are said to be ‘in possession of their senses’ (ἔμφορες) and accordingly valued beneath the inspired prophets. Socrates then buttress this with an etymological argument to the same effect and concludes that ‘to just the extent that mantic prophesy is more perfect and honourable than augury, both in name and deed, the ancients testify that god-sent *mania* is finer than human *sōphrosunē*’ (244d2-5). As I argued earlier this is decidedly off-brand since Socrates usually looks down on such ‘knowledge’ as incomplete or unphilosophical. Grace Ledbetter (2003) 90 puts it well: ‘The poet does not speak his verse any more than a radio speaks the voice it broadcasts.’

The second type of madness is a sort of god-sent *healing* (244d5-245a1) and the third is *poetry* (245a1-8). Socrates compares composing verse to Bacchic intoxication, a highly irrational state, and rather strikingly approves the educational value of the poetic tradition. As before, there is a contrast between *mania* and *sōphrosunē*: ‘He who comes to the threshold of the Muses without *mania*...will be himself ineffectual and the poetry of the *sōphrōn* poet will be eclipsed by that of the maniacs’ (245a5-8). If nothing else the idea that intoxication trumps

technē (skill) should set alarm bells ringing; it is of course contradicted at 265c8-266b2 where the very distinction between the types of madness is praised for its ‘technical’ nature.

At 245b1-c4 Socrates rounds off this section and links it to his theme, that the gods do in fact send beneficial *mania*. We should not, he continues, ‘let any account bewilder us and scare us into believing that one must favour a lover who is *sōphrōn* over one who is possessed’ (245b3-4). The next phase of the speech is then signalled and its first topic, the soul, is introduced.

3 - Immortality of the Soul (245c5-246a2): Here Socrates shows that the soul is immortal because it is a self-mover. The style recalls Anaxagoras and is rather highfalutin (see Yunis 2011, 136). The emphasis on *movement* is also evident in the chariot image (Yunis, 129) and this might be linked to the role of desire in motivating us, as it were, from the inside.¹⁷ In the economy of the speech this proof (such as it is) lays a foundation for the related ideas of a disembodied soul and recollection.

4 - The Soul Is Like a Winged Chariot (246a3-d5): Here we begin to feel something more typical of Plato come to the fore, namely a paradigmatic image of the soul as a two-horsed winged chariot. Socrates begins by undermining the veracity of his image as a merely human likeness (246a4-6). Man is defined in contradistinction to god, the latter being all good, man being of mixed stock. The race of man is then divided into embodied and disembodied souls, such that disembodied souls roam the heavens with their wings intact, but a soul that loses its wings falls until it hits solid earth and takes on bodily form. Thus we have a three-tiered psychic

¹⁷ On movement see Griswold (1986) 86-7 and Lebeck (1972) 269 and 284-5; cf. Burger (1980) 52.

ontology of embodied mortals, disembodied mortals and gods. Note that ‘mortals’ are in fact immortal—such shifting nomenclature is indicative of what will follow.

Socrates then signals the next topic: how we shed our wings (τὴν δὲ αἰτίαν τῆς τῶν πτερῶν ἀποβολῆς, δι’ ἣν ψυχῆς ἀπορρεῖ, λάβωμεν—246d3-5). From here on the speech really gets going. I should note that it becomes less clear how to divvy up the text and my divisions are certainly not intended to be canonical. Excluding the introductory and closing segments of the speech, the whole Palinode can be divided into two main sections: *how we lose our wings* and *how we re-gain them*. First comes an account of ‘the fall’ including details of our prenatal life. Then comes the account of how we regain our former state. That said, inasmuch as the second half is considerably longer, I have found it easier to further sub-divide it into two parts. Thus there are three main sections in what follows: (5) Shedding Wings, (6) Growing Wings and (7) The Love Story.¹⁸

5 - Shedding Wings

Having introduced the chariot of the soul with its three parts, Socrates will make only limited use of the image until much later in the speech. The image of *wings*, however, reoccurs often. Indeed, this imagery almost seems to do too much work in the economy of Socrates’ account of the soul.

¹⁸ Griswold (1996) 74 divides the speech into three, with the middle part divide again into three and the middle part of *this* similarly divided into three: e.g. (1 (2a (2bi 2bii 2biii) 2c) 3). Lebeck (1972) 268 divides the myth into two halves at 249d, the first focusing on the disembodied philosopher, the second on the lover trying to regain his former state; ‘thus one might call the one metaphysical, the other physical.’ For detailed outlines of the speech see Yunis (2011) 128, who also divides the myth in two, and Sinaiko (1965) 40-1, who divides the myth into three at 249d and 253c (51).

5A - Wings and the Hyperuranian Beings. Here Socrates introduces the image of wings and discusses the life of the disembodied—both gods and men. At 246d6-e4 we read that wings lift us up towards the heavens and link us to the divine. Though the gods presumably have wings it is quite clear that we are not talking about *their* wings (cf. 246c6-d2); our wings are the most divine part of ‘that which is concerned with the body [τὸν περὶ τὸ σῶμα]’ (246d7-8). Accordingly wings are nurtured or nourished (τρέφεταιί) by seeing the truth.

At 246e4-c2 comes the procession of the gods: in the heavens the gods live a blessed existence while we have a hard time of it. It is noteworthy that Zeus’ wings are attached to his *chariot* (πτηνὸν ἄρμα). Moreover, it is curious that even in our *disembodied* existence we seem to be weighed down compared to the gods. This oddity is also evident in Socrates’ account of the formless and colourless hyperuranian realm (246c3-247e6): the ineffable home of all knowledge is said to be only accessible to the gods and the *charioteer* of mortal souls (ψυχῆς κυβερνήτῃ μόνῳ θεατῇ νῶ—246c7-8). Thus only *part* of the disembodied soul can access pure truth. This, as I say, seems to invest something bodily into the otherwise disembodied soul. Only three of the hyperuranian beings are singled out and mentioned in this section: Justice, Knowledge and *Sōphrosunē* (247d6-7). Increasingly we will encounter mention of *sōphrosunē*—the very thing that the mad lover is by definition said to lack.

At 248a1-c2 Socrates turns from gods to men. While the best ‘mortal’ souls can raise their heads out of the heavens and get a glimpse of the truth, others see less and less of it; and in the melee to reach the top they get maimed and trampled, losing their wings and falling to earth.

5B - Life Cycles of the Fallen Souls (248c2-248e3): Socrates now turns to focus on the fate of embodied souls, a topic he is clearly preoccupied with. Little is said to explain why we fall. Rather, ‘meeting with some misfortune’ the soul is weighed down by ignorance and falls to

earth (248c5-7).¹⁹ Having fallen, the ‘law ofAdrastea’—an Orphic *Anagkē* (Necessity)—stipulates which souls fall into which bodies. Since these souls are reasonably fresh from the heavens they fall into human bodies. The main thrust of the law is a hierarchy of types of soul based on ‘amount of truth seen.’ We are interested with three of the grades of soul, the first as well as the fifth and sixth. The first-grade souls find their way into philosophers, lovers of beauty, men of the muses and erotic men (248d3-4). Obviously the philosopher is the best; but reference to lovers of boys and beauty is at least suspicious since beauty is clearly signalled as ambivalent even in this dialogue (see 250e1-251a2, 254a1-7 and cf. 263c7-12). Worse still, the fifth and sixth classes include prophets, mystery-cult initiates and mimetic poets (248d7-e2).²⁰ These people are only better than manual labourers, demagogues and tyrants. Whom are we to trust then? The Socrates who began the speech praising the inspired or this one?

From 248e3 to 249d3 we hone in on the movement *between* the various mortal lives as souls are reincarnated from one to the next. Socrates posits a ten-thousand-year cycle before a winged return to the heavens is possible, although the true philosopher and the philosophical lover of boys can jump the queue and regain their wings in a mere three thousand years. Regarding the reincarnation into human form Socrates says that ‘a human must be able to comprehend speech through forms [κατ’ εἶδος] that bring together many sensible things into a unit via the intellect’ (249b6-249c1). That is, loosely, speech implies some basic ability to organise the manifest world, which ability we acquired in our heavenly, winged existence. This

¹⁹ There are interesting questions here and in other passages regarding the interplay of fate and choice; see Griswold (1996) e.g. 100-1 and Ferrari (1987) 133-7, who makes the compelling argument that Plato’s picture gives us both an excuse for past failures and a desire for future success.

²⁰ The issue of how or why Plato ranks the poets sixth here has received a lot of attention. Janaway (1995) 161-5 has an extended discussion, including scholarly references. The response of Price (1989) 65-7 seems particularly speculative; see also Ferrari (1987) 118-9.

is glossed as recollection of those hyperuranian beings and then identified, vaguely, with having wings: ‘For this reason it is just for the mind of the philosopher [ἡ τοῦ φιλοσόφου διάνοια] alone to grow wings’ (249c4-5). This makes good sense of the wings imagery, but it seems to disrupt the mythical timeline. Earlier it seemed that the difference between being embodied and disembodied was precisely a difference in terms of whether one is winged or not. Moreover Socrates is not entirely clear as to *where* exactly the wings are located. Is the chariot winged? Is it the horses? Horses seem like a natural choice. Or is it the mind of some figurative charioteer? Later on (in sections 6C and 6D) Socrates will recount the growth of wings in excruciating detail, unmistakably referring to an *embodied* lover.²¹ The excessive use of metaphor is distracting if not disconcerting. It *is*, I’m sure, possible to overlook these eccentricities. But as I will argue the speech is designed to make us feel confused and perplexed: this is the stirrings of *erōs* or the emergence of wings. It is—as advertised—maddening. Here then is as good as any place to call up Socrates’ claim at 262a2-3 that when

²¹ Questions regarding the location of the wings date back to antiquity. See Hermias’ commentary 126.30-127.27, which tends to complicate matters. Beare (1931) 327-9 tries to smooth things over. Griswold (1996) 63 having just remarked that ‘the horses too are winged,’ claims ‘any ambiguity about the wings belonging to every part of the soul is resolved by 251b7; cf. 248c1-2.’ Yet, although this passage, 251b7, seems to say that all soul once had wings (πᾶσα γὰρ ἦν τὸ πάσαι περωτή) the context is explicitly concerned with one pair of wings re-growing on an embodied man (with no reference to the chariot). In fact Ferrari (1987) 265 n. 20 is surely right to render the Greek as saying that the whole soul was *feathered* (rather than *winged*). Further, 249c4-5 limits wings to the *dianoia* (μόνη περοῦται ἡ τοῦ φιλοσόφου διάνοια). It seems like the soul is both a chariot team, on the one hand, and winged on the other hand, with the two images falling in and out of step with one another in various places. For a discussion of wings with a different focus see Carson (1998) 154 -64 and also Pender (2007) 20-2.

a cunning speaker wants to turn one thing to its opposite, he does well to move in small steps (Ἐλλά γε δὴ κατὰ σμικρὸν μεταβαίνων μᾶλλον λήσεις ἐλθὼν ἐπὶ τὸ ἐναντίον ἢ κατὰ μέγα). We can connect this up with the way the twin themes of *mania* and *erōs* finally come creeping into view. The philosopher is described in a manner reminiscent of the lover: he ignores earthly concerns and is reproached by the masses who can't see that he is possessed (249d1-3).

6 - Growing Wings

Now we come to what must be the *raison d'être* of the speech: the account of how we regain our wings. Socrates will spend a great deal of time on this topic and once he is done he will simply go at it again, but from a different point of view, namely in terms of a love story between an *erastēs* and his *erōmenos*. In both cases we are concerned with the way beauty inspires the lover to reclaim some of his former knowledge. We should recall that *logoi* no less than young boys can be beautiful. Indeed, this must be one of the most beautiful speeches in Plato's corpus.

6A - Recollection of Beauty (249d3-250b1): Here two important points from the preceding section are given due emphasis. (1) Socrates identifies recollection with wings and (2) he ties this whole strange complex to love. Thus we come to the fourth and best type of madness:

whenever someone who sees beauty down here and recollects true beauty, spreads his wings and tries to flap up and away but can't, he peers upward like a bird and, neglecting the things below [τῶν κάτω δὲ ἀμελῶν], is accused of being mad. (249d5-e1)

Although Socrates goes through the motions of distinguishing philosophical madness from normal erotic madness, it is clear that the aloofness of the philosopher is being conflated with

the distracting infatuation of the lover, the latter being a well-established trope (see e.g. τὴν τῶν οἰκείων ἀμέλειαν in 231b2). But Socrates' claim is more specific and more ingenious than a simple sleight of hand: the beauty of a boy can 'remind' the philosophers of true beauty, which leads to *mania* (249e23-4) and astounds them (ἐκπλήττονται) because they cannot grasp what is going on (250a5-b1). This is an interesting account of the supposed *mania* of the philosopher, not least in the connection with recognising one's ignorance. Indeed, I would not be averse to the use of such a metaphor to explain the sudden epiphany of insight. But when all is said and done the philosopher must be the complete master of himself and his rational faculties—the very opposite of an abject lover. Plato is up to something and it clearly involves ironic symbolism. As will become increasingly obvious, Socrates has a tendency to conflate the good and bad lovers. Both of them 'love' beauty in a sense, but the differences outweigh the similarities. They are in fact fundamentally antithetical in the context of Platonic philosophy. Consider for instance the mention of 'neglecting worldly affairs.' In reference to the lover this refers to debasing oneself for the object of one's desire. In reference to the philosopher this means the metaphysical rejection of the visible in favour of the intelligible.

6B - Beauty (250b1-e1): Socrates begins to hymn the form of Beauty. The other forms, he says, are hard to see here on earth due to our dim senses. He only mentions two of them, Justice and—yet again—*Sōphrosunē* (250b1-2). The language here slips easily into the language of mystery cults. We were 'initiated' (ἐτελοῦντο) into the vision of beauty in the manner of a religious revelation (see 250b8-c4).²² He continues his praise of beauty by shifting to earthly beauty. This provokes a very conspicuous apostrophe from Socrates: 'Let these things, then, be a tribute to memory. For my speech was so long because of her, in my longing for those

²² On the allusions to mystery cults see Lebeck (1972) 271-2.

things' (250c5-6). His longing for the forms seems to issue into a beautiful speech. At any rate, here we learn that the other forms lack images here on earth while beauty shines forth to *vision*, the clearest of the senses. He also adds that an image of *Phronēsis*, were it possible, would engender a terribly powerful love. While this may not be *sōphrosunē* it certainly includes the basic idea of self-possession and clearly clashes with erotic madness.

6C - Good Lovers and Bad Lovers (250e1-251c5): Socrates now pauses to mention the *bad* response to beauty before starting on the all-important account of growing wings. This is one of the few places where the good and bad lover are distinguished. Those who do not readily call to mind divine beauty when they see a beautiful boy give themselves over to sexual pleasure like animals (250e1-251a1). It is of course not uncommon to separate a more noble boy-love from a baser sort, but Socrates would ideally want to keep sexual gratification out of it all together. This leads to the rather striking idea of *erōs* without sex, an oxymoron akin to the 'philosopher' who is out of his mind. Here then we have a non-lover posing as a lover, just as Lysias proved to be a lover posing as a non-lover.²³ Where the sophists use paradoxical arguments to vaunt their skills and titillate their audience, Socrates' Palinode is like an inverted imitation of these paradoxical display speeches.

Socrates then returns to the good lover and begins to detail an account of growing wings. Here, having just rejected the sexual approach of the bad lover, we get one of the most visceral and sexual passages of the whole speech: in recounting the re-emergence of wings Socrates seems to be describing nothing so much as the flush of sexual arousal in its most bestial form. The good lover sees the boy and is reminded of true Beauty. Socrates is quite explicit in referring to *physical* beauty as the lover is aroused by the face or body of the boy

²³ Cf. Rutherford (1995) 244. On paradoxical encomia in general see Pease (1926).

(ὅταν θεοειδὲς πρόσωπον ἴδῃ κάλλος εὖ μεμιμημένον ἢ τινα σώματος ιδέαν—251a2-3). Then we veer into the typical trope of being over-awed by a beloved: the lover trembles (ἔφριξε) and reveres (σέβεται) the boy (251a4-5). Again Socrates fudges the experience of the philosopher with a common lover trope, but this time he really goes to town. ‘Seeing him, he is gripped by a sweaty, hot flush’ (μεταβολή τε καὶ ἰδρῶς καὶ θερμότης ἀήθης λαμβάνει—251a7-b2) like a character in one of Sappho’s poems.²⁴ The lover runs hot (ἐθερμάνθη) as the vision of beauty makes his plumage force its way through his skin (251b2-3), the shaft throbbing and driving itself forward (ὥδησέ τε καὶ ὥρμησε—251b5-6). The sexual inuendo is palpable.²⁵ Somehow Socrates has found a way to describe the onset of philosophy as though it were the swell of an erection. Such detail is difficult to overlook, not least in a speech that explicitly rejects the carnal side of love.

²⁴ Pender (2007) has a thorough discussion of Plato’s use of lyric motifs in the *Phaedrus*. For instance, she shows how the lush setting of dialogue recalls those idyllic meadows that foreshadow a seduction (3-8); how the connection between horses and erotic scenes is common in lyric poetry (23-4); and the various ways love poems make use of wings (30). The pleasure and pain of growing wings is discussed in reference to Sappho 31 and other poets on 38-42. Pender considers the passage under discussion ‘the strongest verbal allusion to Sappho’ in the dialogue.

²⁵ For ‘shaft’ (καυλός,) meaning ‘penis’ see LSJ (AIII). Note also that the language of bodily fluids melting through the eye is associated with sexual arousal as noted by Burger (1980) 60-1, citing Onians (1951) 202-3. Socrates had said that the lover receives the ‘effluence’ of beauty through the eye (δεξάμενος...διὰ τῶν ὀμμάτων) and turning hot melts the wing-openings (θερμανθέντος δὲ ἐτάκη τὰ περὶ τὴν ἑκφυσιν). In the Homeric Hymn *To Pan* (19.33) the god is afflicted with ‘liquid longing’ (πόθος ὑγρὸς). In Euripides’ *Hippolytus* at 525-33 *Erōs* is said to assault those he afflicts by pouring sweet desire through the eyes (Ἔρως, ὁ κατ’ ὀμμάτων στάζων πόθον). See Pender (2007) 39 for further references to lyric poets.

6D - *Pleasure and Pain* (251c5-252c2): In this section Socrates gets to work on the distracted lover theme: through some confused and confusing mixture of pleasure and pain the lover is driven crazy. It appears that seeing the beautiful boy recalls true Beauty, which in turns causes the wings to grow. This causes pain, as the previous section explained, but paradoxically the pain is also subdued by the vision of the boy. Now it is the *absence* of the boy that causes pain as the feathers are impeded and painfully try to emerge. The all-important recollection of Beauty drops out of the discussion: the lover is now obsessed with the boy *per se*; he thinks about and recalls, not the form of Beauty, but *the beauty of the boy* to ease the pain of being absent from him (251d6-7). From here it is easy for Socrates to tap into the besotted lover theme. Our philosopher is a contorted mess of pleasure and pain who cares only for the beautiful boy; he doesn't eat, he doesn't sleep and so on (e.g. 251d7-251e3). All of this is apparently to be sharply contrasted with the sexual desire of the bad lover. And yet the sharpest twist of the knife is still to come. Socrates claims that this is 'what men call *erōs*' and he even brandishes some lines of verse which prove that the gods call it Πτέρως (Winged-eros), as if his strange doctrine of philosophical love is part of traditional lore. It is said to be quite outrageous (ὑβριστικὸν πάνυ) and liable to make the youngsters laugh that the gods call *Erōs Pterōs* in light of his need for wings (διὰ πτεροφύτον' ἀνάγκην). As William Arrowsmith argues, this must be trading off a slang usage whereby 'winged' referred to an *erect* penis, or one that had 'risen' so to speak. Though this connection is lacking in textual corroboration (as we might expect from a colloquial term), there is sufficient visual evidence in the form of

winged penises.²⁶ Thus the lofty ascent into the ethereal realm of beatific wisdom is apparently like getting an erection.

One thing that can be taken away from all this confusion is that the text itself seems to possess the power to confuse even while (one assumes) it is the only thing that could redress our confusion. It is just like the beautiful boy, the presence of whom first awakens our painful longing but whose subsequent absence is also a cause of pain. Socrates linked such *intellectual confusion* with maddening pain at 250a5-b1 (my 6A above) and I suggest that we understand this along the usual lines of *aporia* or realising one's ignorance. To anticipate, it is a special sort of 'beauty' that induces knowledge, one that makes you aware of some deeper reality you are ignorant of. The nonsensical claim that beautiful boys induce wisdom has the power to produce this effect and more generally the Palinode is the prime example of this 'beauty.'

6E - Various Types of Lovers (252c3-253c6): I have grouped together a long stretch of text here. The present section is much less sexual and tends to link up more closely with the mythical account of the heavens, especially the procession of the gods. The lover appears much more dignified here and Socrates reasonably (or inevitably) draws on the pedagogical aspects of *erōs*. Various types of lovers are distinguished based on which god they followed in their

²⁶ For discussion see Arrowsmith (1973) 136 and 164-7; he has pictures on 132, 153. See further Scully (2003) 32-3 nn. 77 and 79, who also has some pictures on 106. The winged phallus is part of a more general Greek (and Roman) phallic symbolism; on which see Johns (1982) 68-70. Though these need not always be sexual in nature they certainly can be, not least in association with supposedly sexual animals like birds. Note further the slang use of 'sparrow' (στρουθός, *passer*) to mean *penis*. Others have remarked that the sexual and especially phallic nature of the language here: Lebeck (1972) 273 n.15; Burger (1980) 61-2, who also notes the tension between carnal sex and psychic wings. Griswold (1996) 268 n. 59 remarks the eroticism and cautiously endorses Arrowsmith.

prenatal life with emphasis given to the philosophical ones, the followers of Zeus. This raises the awkward question of how a non-philosophical lover fits into the picture.

7 - *The Love Story*

Here we enter the final phase of the speech (notwithstanding the closing prayer). Socrates returns to the chariot image and starts putting it to serious use. Hitherto he has made limited use of the tripartite nature of the soul to explain the fall from heaven; now he will avail himself of the difference between the three parts of the soul. In one sense this tends to repeat much of the preceding; we are still dealing with the ascent to philosophy via images of beauty. But in another sense, it is totally different.

7A - The Chariot (253c7-e5): This passage re-introduces the image and explains the difference between the two horses. The white horse is of course marked by self-control, paradoxically, as a *lover* of modesty (τιμῆς ἐραστής μετὰ σωφροσύνης τε καὶ αἰδοῦς—253d6). It is responsive and obedient while the black horse is difficult and deaf.

7B - The First Encounter (253e-254b3): As we expect the first encounter involves seeing the beauty of the boy and wanting to have sex with him. It is the charioteer who sets the process off by his desire. He sees the boy (ὁ ἡνίοχος ἰδὼν τὸ ἐρωτικὸν ὄμμα) and the whole soul is heated and tickled with the goad of desire (πόθου κέντρων); the good horse is ashamed (αἰδοῖ βιαζόμενος) and holds his desire in check; the bad horse is not so inclined and struggles against the charioteer. Sexual desire is unambiguously the impetus of this soon-to-be philosophical dalliance.

7C - *The Courtship* (254b3-255a): Bizarrely it is by yielding to the black horse that the soul consents to approach the boy and only *then* does the boy's beauty cause the charioteer to recollect true Beauty as it appeared in the heavens—next to *sōphrosunē* (254b3-7). The rest of the passage is given over to the violent clash between the black horse and the other two parts of the soul. Ultimately, the black horse is beaten into submission so that the soul can finally enjoy the beauty of the boy in peace. The desire for sex starts us on the path to philosophy, but *sōphrosunē* plays an essential role in the 'consummation' of this endeavour. The sensitive reader, like the white horse, should find it quite disquieting if not shameful that seeing an object of sexual desire evokes the recollection of Beauty.²⁷

7D - *The Beloved* (255a1-d6): Here Socrates turns to the beloved and the various benefits that will accrue to him. This is directly related to the professed aim of the speech, to celebrate the lover. The big surprise here is that the *erōmenos* also catches some of the lover's love: that is, he somehow sees his own beauty reflected in the lover and is moved by a so-called 'counter-love,' ἀντίρωσ (255c4-d3).²⁸ The boy's desire is sexual in nature, but he struggles to identify it (255e1-3). The general pattern of *like engendering like* seems thematic: in direct contrast to the traditional relationship between lover and beloved, we have a relationship whereby the one engenders another just like himself. We also see this where Lysias wowed Phaedrus with his

²⁷ Some examples of feeling shame at *logoi* can be found at 243b3-6 and 245c5-e4.

²⁸ On the 'counter-lover' of the beloved see Calame (1992) 189-90 and Halperin (1986) 60-8 who discusses how this differs from existing social *mores*. He also remarks that Socrates tends to produce this effect on other people: 'For Socrates arouses in the beautiful youths whom he pursues a measure of desire equal to his own; as Alcibiades ruefully testifies (*Symposium* 217c, 222b), Socrates awakens in them an erotic response so powerful that they pursue him as if he were a boy' (68).

speech on the non-lover, only for Phaedrus to take this speech and try to use it on Socrates. That is, Lysias turned Phaedrus into another ‘Lysias.’ And again, Socrates’ longing for beauty issued in a beautiful speech (250c5-6; cf. *Smp.* 206c). Thus beauty begets beauty. In a similar way, then, the philosophical lover turns his beloved into yet another lover (255c4-d3).²⁹ And let me propose another instance: Plato or his Socrates can turn us into philosophers like them inasmuch as the Palinode can turn us into philosophical lovers.

7E - The Ending (255e4-256e2): Here Socrates brings his love story to a close. There are two potential outcomes for the couple, a better and a worse one. In the worse one they yield to sexual desire and accordingly lose some of the benefits that might otherwise accrue to them.³⁰ Throughout, the theme of self-control is prominent: when the boy resists sexual urges, he is said to do so with modesty and reason (μετ’ αἰδοῦς καὶ λόγου ἀντιτείνει—256a5-6) and the happy couple are masters of themselves (ἐγκρατεῖς αὐτῶν καὶ κόσμιοι ὄντες—256b1-2). At one point Socrates even has the chutzpah to say that when the good couple regain their wings in death, ‘there is no greater good that either human *sōphrosunē* or divine *mania* can offer a man’

²⁹ Phaedrus himself is like the beloved who catches the lover’s *erōs* in that both are vicariously catching the ‘sickness’ that is inspired by their own beauty: the lover, seeing beauty, is filled with love and the beautiful boy, seeing this love which he has inspired, gets a share of it; Socrates, inspired by Phaedrus, gives him a speech that (presumably) engenders love in *him*. Cf. Burger (1980) 63, ‘The same circularity which the lover actively performs in choosing a god after his own nature and then imitating that god in his behaviour, is applied passively to the beloved, who is chosen for his likeness to the god and then led to develop as far as possible into that “practice and form” (235b).’

³⁰ On the sticky questions of how much or little carnal pleasure the philosophical lover may enjoy and whether one can only love young boys see Price (1989) 89-92. These issues do not arise for my interpretation; they are part of the ridiculous exterior of the speech.

(256b3-7).³¹ There can be no question then that ‘*mania*’ has a drastically changed meaning. We might compare this with the start of the speech where it was said that ‘god-sent *mania* is finer than human *sōphrosunē*’ (244d4-5). Note also that Socrates has reverted to the original idea that wings only come in the afterlife (see also 256d4).

8 - *The Epilogue* (256e3-257a2): Socrates rounds off the love story by driving home the point that, clearly, the love of a lover is a true blessing. Conversely the love of the non-lover is ‘diluted with human *sōphrosunē*’ (σωφροσύνη θνητῇ κεκραμένη—256e5). Self-control has switched back to being a bad thing. Any yet in the prayer that closes the speech Socrates urges *Erōs* to turn Lysias towards philosophy so that he may devote himself to love through philosophical discussion (ἀλλ’ ἀπλῶς πρὸς Ἑρώτα μετὰ φιλοσόφων λόγων τὸν βίον ποιῆται—257b5-6).

III GOOD AND BAD LOVERS

My main concern in this chapter is to elucidate how the *Palinode* functions as a paradigmatic example of philosophical literature which trains the mind of the reader. Before coming directly to this, I shall take a moment to explain how the speech accounts for and responds to two different type of readers: on the one hand we can see how Socrates attempts to turn Phaedrus, and Phaedrus-like readers, towards philosophy via their love of superficial beauty; on the other hand there is a deeper meaning reserved for the more philosophical reading audience. The

³¹ Griswold (1996) 75 understandably appeals to an implied concept of ‘divine *sōphrosunē*’ (see further 132-6). Pender (2007) speaks of a ‘new understanding of’ and a ‘redefinition of self-control’ (46) that requires *mania* (52). For my part I would emphasise that the ‘madness’ or ‘*erōs*’ that informs this new *sōphrosunē* has been radically revised.

philosophical lover in the speech can be understood not just as an ideal for Phaedrus to follow, but in a way he also gives *us* an image of how one should react to the speech itself.

The Paragogic Irony of the Palinode

Consider for a moment how the bad desire of the black horse leads the chariot towards the boy and thus functions as an antecedent cause of the soul's recollection. The important role assigned to the black horse is something like our paragogic irony. A bad habit is co-opted and turned against itself. For the simple truth is that the desire for sex is really not a suitable antecedent for philosophy on Plato's view. It is a hinderance. The philosopher needs to transcend such animalistic urges and obviously yielding to a desire will only strengthen it. The image of the chariot reflects a soul that is already afflicted by base desires (like Phaedrus') but somehow transitions to a state of self-control through its baser urges. We should be quite familiar with this sort of thing by now. Socrates' ability to move 'with the grain' of base urges even while he overturns them has been a key theme of this study.

It should be obvious that the Palinode is tailor-made for Phaedrus.³² He has an interest in *erōs* and he knows how to appreciate a beautiful boy, but above all else he loves *speeches*. He's mad for them. And the Palinode is nothing if not a magnificent piece of oratory, as Phaedrus well knows (see 257c1-3, 265c4). Socrates makes the ascent towards philosophy seem like falling in love. This is something that Phaedrus can relate to, something he thinks is good and, inasmuch as it induces intoxicating *mania*, is remarkably similar to the way he

³² Many have noticed that Socrates adapts the speech to Phaedrus' predilections. E.g.: Thompson (1868) 163; Yunis (1996) 193, who claims 'Phaedrus is transformed from a connoisseur of rhetorical pleasure into a student of philosophy' (see also 6-7); and especially Moss (2012) 9-12, who argues that Socrates poses as a 'Lysias' to win Phaedrus over to philosophy and (on 19-23) that Socrates appeals to Phaedrus' penchant for beautiful rhetoric in the manner of *psychagōgē*.

already feels about speeches. In this way the *Palinode* makes philosophy appeal to him all the more and this should effectively lead him away from the superficial beauty of *rhetoric* in search of true, internal beauty. We can also trace an analogous treatment of *sexual love*. True love is distinguished from the bad love which only aims at sex, and even then the good lover comes in better and worse varieties depending on whether they have no sex or maybe just a little. By this mechanism the account of love appeals to the erotically inclined only to seduce them away from their carnal preoccupation.

Later in the dialogue Socrates will end up putting a great deal of emphasis on *psychagōgia*.³³ As he explains, the art of rhetoric is a kind of *soul leading* through *logoi* (ψυχαγωγία τις διὰ λόγων—261a7-8), one that knows how to affect different types of people so as to produce conviction in their respective souls (271a1-272b2). In the context of the *Palinode* this can be connected with a passage I mentioned earlier: Socrates says that the artful orator will exploit similarities to persuade his audience. More exactly, the artful speaker will be able to make something seem like its *opposite* (262b5-8) without the audience noticing the sleight of hand (262a5-5-7). This idea conveniently accommodates the way erotic madness is made to resemble its opposite, chaste philosophy. A conspicuous example of this is the sensual description of feathers thrusting their way forth from the soul. Philosophy, Socrates seems to say, is just like sex, but even sexier.

³³ On *psychagōgia* Asmis (1986) 155 says that term suggests beguilement. She notes that it could refer to calling souls up from death and that in the *Timaeus* (at 71a) it refers to ‘beguiling the desiring part of the soul via images’ (156); but ultimately she argues that Plato veers away from deception in developing an art of genuine rhetoric. I do not think that deception (of some sort) and pedagogy are mutually exclusive for Plato. It is also worth recalling that ἀγωγή can refer to a love spell (see LSJ I 8b).

To make this transaction work, Phaedrus is put in the position of the lover/philosopher gazing over a beautiful boy. He and readers like him identify themselves with the philosophical lover. However, the speech also works in the other direction. Phaedrus is constantly (if ambiguously) hailed as a 'beautiful boy' to whom all three speeches are addressed, like a beloved being wooed by the speaker³⁴ and he is said to be the *cause* of the speeches (238d5). Indeed, few could match his divine ability to inspire speeches in others (242a7-b5, cf. 243d8-e2).³⁵ But not only does Socrates produce the speech for Phaedrus' pleasure, not only does he attribute the speech to Phaedrus' inspiration, but in the context of the speech Phaedrus will hear of the all-important role that beautiful boys play in inspiring the lover-cum-philosopher. In both the occasion and the context of the Palinode Phaedrus *qua* beautiful boy comes off as some sort of font of beauty. In sum, then, the Palinode offers a two-pronged attack: one for the lover in Phaedrus and one for the beautiful beloved in him. As a lover his love is channelled towards a more productive and philosophical end; as a beloved he is encouraged to attach himself to a philosophical lover. One, we may assume, more like Socrates than like Lysias.

In this connection we might recall the strange 'counter-lover' (discussed above in 7D) by which the beloved himself becomes a lover. This implies a degree of fluidity between the roles of beloved and lover. At the level of the more sophisticated reader we can see how this

³⁴ See 243e4-8, 252b2 and 256e3. 237b in Socrates' first speech is probably the most explicit and informative, and it also signals that Phaedrus was the 'beloved' to Lysias' speech.

³⁵ Some claim Phaedrus cannot be a beloved because he is too young: see Asmis (1986) 166 n. 15 for a bibliography and more recently see Yunis (2005) 123 n. 14. This misses the point. That Phaedrus can be understood as the lover to either Socrates or Lysis is clearly signalled by the text and need not be taken literally. Nor does it preclude him playing other roles as well. Indeed, role reversals of this sort seem to be *de rigueur* in Plato. The obvious example concerns the way Socrates and Phaedrus take it in turns to play the coquet (see 228 and 236b5-e8; cf. Lebeck 1972, 280-3).

‘counter-love’ applies to Phaedrus. Although he is consistently signalled as the beloved to whom the speeches are addressed, at the same time the Palinode is clearly meant to engender in him a new sense of ‘erotic’ longing.

Philosophical Readers

As I have stressed, we can connect love of beautiful boys with love of beautiful *logoi*. A correlate of this is that the superficial love for the pleasure afforded by speeches matches the superficial desire of the bad lover. Thus we may say that the ‘black-horse response’ to *logoi* is exhibited by Phaedrus, who is beside himself with ecstasy over Lysias’ speech. This, in turn, recalls one of Socrates’ criticisms of the written word, namely writing does not help us cultivate knowledge from ‘inside’ but only gives the illusion of knowledge (275a2-b2). A clear example of this superficial love, then, is how Phaedrus, enamoured with Lysias’ speech, tries to memorise the thing word for word, with no real interest in whether it says the truth.³⁶ For consider the terms of Socrates’ critique as he presents them (via Thamus) in the Egyptian story (275a6-b2): writing gives students ‘the appearance of wisdom, not the truth.’ These students ‘learn much without being taught.’ Although these remarks have a context of their own, it is easy enough to match them up with Phaedrus aping the beautiful ‘wisdom’ of Lysias by simply imbibing his speech, word for word. Socrates appeals to this desire for beautiful speeches and co-opts it towards philosophy and inner beauty. He does this, as I argued in the chapter on paragogic irony, by persuading Phaedrus that one must pursue philosophical study to become a good orator. On the other hand, the deeper message of the Palinode (namely, the one that

³⁶ Nightingale (1995) 136 notes that ‘Phaedrus has a penchant for repeating what people say.’ She lists a number of examples and discusses them in the context of ‘Phaedrus’ reliance on the opinions and statements of others’ (137).

realises that beautiful boys are only a surrogate for philosophical *logoi*) will not be readily apparent to such superficial readers. This leads us to the philosophical reader who does not fawn over appearances. This sort of reader is willing to acknowledge their ignorance and do the intellectual leg work.³⁷

We have seen time and again how Plato avails himself of the seductive power of irony to tantalise us and draw us in, to make us think things through ourselves. The charioteer of the soul must come of his own accord, he must be ‘moved from within’ as it were. In point of fact, the ability of words to instil a sense of longing is the basic sense of the Aristophanic line in the epigraph. Clearly there is some ambivalence here as to whether we are motivated by something *internal* or something *external*. It is probably better to think of *erōs* as an external force that (violently) infiltrates the soul without your consent; at the same time, we can detect a sense in which the self-moving soul, by seeing something as desirable, is motivated from within. This latter sense is particularly relevant to the soul-leading art of rhetoric. As I will argue the Palinode not only attempts to do this to the charioteer of our soul, the intellect, but also thematises the technique itself.

We are told that the lover has a memory of Beauty and that this is awakened by seeing the likeness of Beauty in a boy. This, I submit, parallels our interaction with the Palinode, which is to say the Palinode is a ‘beautiful reminder.’ To hear philosophy praised as erotic and sexual or as a kind of irrational madness—a sexless eroticism and a self-controlled madness—should probably *not* induce sexual arousal so much as it evokes your curiosity and creates *aporia*. From the account of beautiful boys we ‘recollect’ an account of beautiful *logoi*. From

³⁷ It is possible to connect this up with the account of ‘misology’ in *Phaedo* 88c1-91c5 inasmuch as this highlights the detrimental effects that philosophy can have on certain people. Namely, those who are ‘unskilled in argument’ can be led to think that the truth does not exist by overexposure to philosophy.

the discussion of love we ‘recollect’ an account of philosophy. The ‘beauty’ that can effect this is a new kind of beauty. It may well be that beauty is ‘more visible’ than justice or self-control or the others, but it is hard to believe that the mere sight of a beauty can whisk one away to the intelligible realm. On my view Plato means something quite different by ‘beauty’ here. Indeed, the gap between normal beauty and philosophical ‘beauty’ is itself an example of philosophical beauty. While normal beauty, if anything, chains one to the physical world, Platonic beauty forces you to reject the surface meaning and makes you seek out a hidden reality behind it. I submit that the word ‘beauty’ in this context does not what it usually means, so we have to dig deeper. Similarly, Socrates’ beautiful speech is designed so that the thoughtful reader simply cannot take it at face value. The speech forces us to dig a little deeper and tantalises us because its superficial meaning is inadequate and one cannot resist the suspicion that there is more to it than meets the eye. Those who respond to the speech in this way are philosophical ‘lovers’ as opposed to superficial lovers.

In what remains of this chapter I shall try to lead the reader through one way the speech makes us recollect. Here is an overview of how the technique works. By presenting philosophy as erotic madness Plato can (a) appeal to and respond to superficial readers in a cunning and constructive way while also (b) writing for philosophical readers in a correspondingly appropriate way. For the philosophical readers it becomes particularly noteworthy that Plato discusses philosophy *at one remove*. By leaving the message latent he not only conceals it from the superficial reader, but he requires the philosophical reader to dig through and find it by their own lights. The superficial meaning is hard to take seriously, so we are aroused to uncover the real meaning we sense beneath the surface. That is, it makes us actively engage with the text. A second reason why Plato presents his account at one remove is that it engages the *intellect*. Having to unpack the imagery and move from one level of meaning to another can

only be achieved by the mind, the faculty that trades in *logoi*. We have already encountered this idea in reference to ‘summoning the intellect’ in the *Republic* where the intellect was required to overcome contradictory sense perceptions. Where a finger seems both tall and short, we deploy the mind to separate out tallness or shortness (*Rep.* 523e3-524d5). In addition to this, there is the Eleatic Stranger’s account of *paradeigmata* in the *Statesman* (277d1-278e10) where he explains how analogies use familiar ideas to explain more difficult ones. Say, for example, how the city might be considered a ‘more visible’ analogue of the soul. The Stranger is careful to stress that this procedure involves the recognition that the familiar and the difficult share a *single nature* (see 278a8-c6). As Elizabeth Pender (2000) 53-6 notes, this common element is intelligible, not sensible.³⁸

IV GROWING WINGS AND RECOLLECTING

Unlike its sexual counterpart, philosophical *erōs* is good. This good *erōs* might also be glossed as *growing wings*. Or again, we might unpack philosophical *erōs* or growing wings as *recollecting true Beauty* after seeing a beautiful boy. If we stop to digest this, it becomes apparent that Socrates’ presentation is more than a little convoluted, yet this erotic-madness-cum-winged-recollection is central to the *Palinode*. It describes how we ascend to philosophy, and this is what Plato’s dialogues fundamentally endeavour to facilitate. It is rather striking then how little Socrates has to say about it in clear, concrete terms. As he would have it, when

³⁸ Another, rather intriguing, connection is explored by Moss (2008) who argues that the non-rational parts of the soul in the *Republic* are apt to confuse images with reality while only the rational part understands images as images. For example in Book 10’s critique of poetry we read that the thoughtless part of the soul ‘doesn’t distinguish greater things from lesser, but thinks that the same things are at one time large and another time small,’ as Moss translates 605b-c (45; see further *Ti.* 70d-71b).

the right sort of soul encounters a beautiful boy, if it has the *sōphrosunē* to resist the powerful urge to fornicate, then it somehow comes into a vision of the Beautiful. Worse still, the keystone metaphor of growing wings seems to be confusingly applied to both prenatal life and embodied life (not to mention its application, now to the whole soul, now the charioteer, now the memory of the charioteer). This should make us stop and think. And in so doing, I argue, we begin to form *our* winged recollection. Socrates' imagery is deliberately confusing and conflicted. Its purpose is to evoke our *desire* to know and understand. That is to say, the discombobulating effects of Socrates' imagery leads us to our own special example of philosophical *erōs*. To illustrate the type of mental activity I believe the Palinode is supposed to encourage I will go through five passages which elaborate the theme of *knowing* in various guises. As I hope to show by (somewhat artificially) isolating these passages, the Palinode furnishes us with an object lesson in epistemology. I hasten to add, however, that 'recollection' in the pregnant sense I am here proposing is more than just careful analysis. It involves, among other things, an ontological shift from the corporeal to the incorporeal.

Passage 1: 246d5-e4

Passage 1 opens the mythical account of our prenatal existence by addressing the nature of our wings.

By their nature the purpose of wings is to carry heavy things aloft, rising to where the race of gods dwell; of all things concerning the body they somehow take the greatest share of the divine—the divine being beautiful, wise, good and everything of that sort. The wings of the soul are nourished and fortified by just such things, but by the ugly and the evil and the opposite of the former they are diminished and destroyed.

The basic idea here is that wings represent the most divine part of a mortal. If *down* is mortal and *up* is divine, wings raise heavy things upward (πέφυκεν ἡ πτεροῦ δύναμις τὸ ἐμβριθεὶς ἄγειν ἄνω). Three pairs of antonyms are grouped together: *up* versus *down* (that is, the heavens versus the lower regions); *gods* versus *men*; and the *beautiful*, *wise* and *good* versus the *ugly* or *base*. For while good things nourish the wings, ugly things make them shrink. Wings are then broadly associated with our divine side, by which we are granted access to knowledge. Beauty, *kalon*, is rather cunningly included in this context more in its moral aspect meaning *noble*. Yet the sense of superficial *beauty* cannot be cast off even though Socrates is quite plainly denouncing the body.

Passage 2: 249b1-249d3

Passage 2 drives the mythical account to its crescendo, namely the fourth type of madness. Socrates has just explained (at 248e5-249b1) that most embodied souls don't regrow wings for 10,000 years, but that philosophers can do it in 3,000. Now he turns to the requirements needed for a soul to come into a *human* life.

[1] Both the better and the worse souls come to the choosing and allotment of their second life when a thousand years have elapsed and each chooses as they wish. From here a human soul goes into the life of a beast or someone who once was human comes from a beast back into a human. [2] But a soul that's never seen the truth cannot come into this shape here on earth. The reason for this is that a human must be able to comprehend speech through forms [κατ' εἶδος] that bring together many sensible things into a unit via the intellect. This is the recollection of those things the soul saw while accompanying the gods, disdaining those things we now call real and peering up at what truly is. [3] And that is why only the philosopher's mind is apt to grow

wings; through his memory he always remains as close as possible to those very things that make even the gods godly.³⁹ [4] Thus only the man who uses such reminders correctly, constantly in consummate consummation of his mystic initiation, is truly complete [τέλειος]; aloof from human labours, drawing close to the divine, the masses harass him for being out of his mind but fail to see that he is inspired by god.

To take human form any soul must have seen the forms and be able to ‘recollect’ them. As we read in sentence 2, one must be able to abstract away from the many particulars to an intelligible idea of some sort.⁴⁰ In this way we can understand how recollection involves moving from the things that *seem* real, and shifting the mind to what is truly real (as per sentence 4).⁴¹ Socrates

³⁹ A hard line to translate: πρὸς γὰρ ἐκείνοις ἀεὶ ἔστιν μνήμη κατὰ δύναμιν, πρὸς οἷσπερ θεὸς ὢν θεϊὸς ἔστιν.

⁴⁰ Here is the Greek: δεῖ γὰρ ἄνθρωπον συνιέναι κατ’ εἶδος λεγόμενον, ἐκ πολλῶν ἰὼν αἰσθήσεων εἰς ἓν λογισμῷ συναιρούμενον. I think the general sense of the syntax is sufficiently clear (which is not to say its interpretation is straightforward), though there are difficulties involved. See Yunis (2011) 146 and Thompson (1868) 55. Yunis takes ἰὼν with λεγόμενον (‘...discourse [which is] *going* from the many...’) while Thompson changes it to ἰόντα to match ἄνθρωπον (‘...for a man *going* from...’).

⁴¹ On recollection see Kahn (2003) who builds on and corrects Scott (1995) 73-80. Scott is certainly not wrong to stress that recollection is an achievement particular to philosophers, but Kahn’s view accommodates this as well as the fact that ‘all human conceptual understanding’ implies some acquaintance with forms (306). The difference being that ‘only philosophers reflect upon the similarity between Form and sensibles, and hence only they explicitly recognize that the latter “fall short”’ (309). Ebert (1973) rejects a literal reading of recollection in the *Meno* and argues that it is employed figuratively because it has the same structure as *aporia*: ‘recollection consists of two cognitive acts: first, one has to realize that one has forgotten something, and then one can recollect what one has

continues by linking memory up with *growing wings*: it is the mind of the philosopher that grows wings (μόνη πτεροῦται ἢ τοῦ φιλοσόφου διάνοια) since his memory is always *up* among the gods; for the philosopher is the one who ‘uses reminders’ of those divine things correctly. The crucial idea here concerns an ontological leap from the physical to the intelligible. Since we are mere mortals, we must approach epistemology from ‘in the cave’ as it were, and thus we start in the sensible world and try to move beyond it (whereas the gods by contrast are already up there). This basic mental transition is like being reminded of our prenatal experience of the truth; or again, it is like growing wings and ascending to the heavenly realm of the forms.

Note that, since knowledge is located in a *place*, moving towards knowledge can be described as some sort of *movement*, and since we used to live there it can also be described as *recollecting* a past experience. In one sense, wings are associated with our prenatal existence where we were close to knowledge; in another sense, recollection is the process by which we come in contact with knowledge. Putting these two together we can see that to re-grow wings in our embodied existences is much like recollecting the prior experience of our prenatal disembodied existence. It becomes relevant here that, as mentioned previously, the role of wings has been transformed. A few lines earlier wings only applied to our disembodied state, now they (also) apply to our embodied state inasmuch as we begin to reclaim our former ‘loftiness.’ Further, as Passage 2 rounds off Socrates links recollection to the distracted lover trope. In sentence 4 the possessed individual forgets worldly concerns and is rebuked by his fellows. Thus philosophy is assimilated to erotic madness. Socrates’ account of philosophy is getting richer and denser but rather than adding clarity, the new details tend simply to add a new layer of metaphor—which is not to suggest that the layers can be easily separated. Plato’s

forgotten’ (167-8). To my mind recollection makes far better sense as an interpretative model than a fixed doctrine. This explains Plato’s selective deployment of the ‘theory’ as well as its absences in, say, the *Republic*.

uncanny ability to combine and link these themes together is breathtaking. Indeed, an extra layer of imagery which Socrates adds in this passage involves *initiation*: the mortal who recollects is *perfect*, ‘constantly in consummate consummation of his mystic initiation’ (τελέους ἀεὶ τελετὰς τελούμενος).

The account itself inspires ‘recollection’ in the reader by encouraging us to look past the various scattered references to recollection and growing wings and to seek out the ‘reasoned unity’ lurking behind them inasmuch as they all ultimately refer to a particular mode of thought (which is the very thing the Palinode tries to encourage in its readers).⁴² For none of Socrates’ claims are simple statements of fact: they are figurative and simplified if not to say whimsical. So let us take stock of our recollection so far: Socrates describes a mental act that crosses the ontological divide and moves from the sensible to the intelligible. Above all, in sentence 2 we learn the useful information that knowing involves forms which gather many sensibles beneath them and that we must come to these primary entities from the wrong direction, via their sensible reminders (as per sentence 4).

⁴² Regarding the idea that the Palinode itself is supposed to occasion recollection I have found views comparable to my own in the scholarship, but I believe my treatment to be largely original, especially my attempts to show how the literary effects of the text are cashed in for philosophical benefit. Lebeck (1972) 289-90 says the Palinode itself is supposed to occasion recollection, though she doesn’t seem to develop the idea; Yunis (2005) 112 argues that the Palinode recreates the feeling of erotic desire (for knowledge) in the auditor; Griswold (1996) 116-7 sees a movement throughout the *Phaedrus* toward unity in the manner of recollection and almost connects the beauty of the text with the role of beauty in the Palinode (117-8).

Passage 3: 249d4-250b1

Passage 3 follows on immediately from the last and drives home the connection with the distracted lover trope.

[1] Here then we come to the heart of the fourth kind of madness, which,⁴³ whenever someone who sees beauty down here and recollects true Beauty, spreads his wings and tries to flap up and away⁴⁴ but can't, he peers upward like a bird and, neglecting the things below, is accused of being mad—of all divine inspiration this one is the best (*aristos*) and comes from the best both for the one who has it and the one involved with it, and one whose *erōs* for beautiful boys is *aristos*, partaking of this madness, is called an *erastēs*.⁴⁵ [2] As mentioned, any human soul has by its nature already seen the true beings or it wouldn't have come into this life form; but it isn't easy for all to recollect those from the things here; not for the souls who saw those things too briefly, nor those cursed to fall among bad company so they are turned towards injustice, forgetting the sacred objects they once beheld. [3] However, a few remain whose memory is sufficiently strong; and whenever they see some likeness of those things, they are struck out of their senses and lose their minds, yet they don't recognise the experience because they lack the ability to discern it.

⁴³ I try to capture the anacoluthon here.

⁴⁴ ὅταν...πτεῶται τε καὶ ἀναπτερούμενος προθυμούμενος ἀναπτέσθαι. This is tough Greek to translate. The wing-related terms tend to be ambiguous between 'flapping' and 'growing wings,' and they can also carry the sense of 'being excited.' Moreover, the texture of the language is quite remarkable.

⁴⁵ *Erōs* + *aristos* = *erastēs*. Yunis (2011) 148 perceptively picks up on the etymological word play; I have accordingly taken liberties with the translation: ταύτης μετέχων τῆς μανίας ὁ ἐρῶν τῶν καλῶν ἐραστὴς καλεῖται ('partaking of this madness the lover of beautiful [boys] is called an *erastēs*').

When someone sees some earthly beauty and recollects the truth, he tries to ‘take wing’ but can’t quite manage it and thus, held down by his mortal nature, he looks *upward* like a bird and neglects the world below (ὄρνιθος δίκην βλέπων ἄνω, τῶν κάτω δὲ ἀμελῶν). One might reply that lovers don’t characteristically *look up*, but this is neither here nor there. With *mania* as a fulcrum Plato manages to bring together *erōs*, recollection and wings. The philosopher sees the beauty of a boy—here is love, lust and arousal. This earthly beauty reminds him of true Beauty—this is recollection. Using his wings—*Erōs*’ trademark accessory—he tries to ‘ascend to’ and recall the state of his prenatal life, but can’t. Although he *has* wings, they are not fully formed. And all this drives him out of his mind according to the usual erotic trope. Thus he ignores worldly concerns like a lover because he recollects true Beauty but can’t quite gain the object of his affection. As Socrates explains, those lucky few who are capable of recollection find it so disorienting and incomprehensible they are driven out of their minds (ἐκπλήττονται καὶ οὐκέτ’ ἐν αὐτῶν γίνονται). Naturally, we are dumbstruck with *ignorance* as we come into *knowledge*, which is of course a variation on a typical Socratic theme. This heady mix of funny and familiar, of commonplace and curious is impressive. But at the same time, it is, and is supposed to be, confusing and confused. Socrates is moving further away from an objective account of knowledge and focusing more on the subjective feeling of falling into, not love, but knowledge. The disorienting effects described in sentence 3 should match the way the reader feels. This is basically *aporia*, for which reason Socrates foregrounds the *ignorance* of the lover (ὁ δ’ ἔστι τὸ πάθος ἀγνοοῦσι, διὰ τὸ μὴ ἰκανῶς διαισθάνεσθαι).

Passage 4: 251a1-b7

There are two sections of the Palinode where Socrates dwells on falling in love. The first I called ‘Growing Wings,’ the second is ‘The Love Story.’ Passage 4 opens the account of Growing Wings.

[1] But when a recent initiate who saw much *up there* sees a godlike face or figure that well exemplifies Beauty, at first he shivers [ἔφριξε]⁴⁶ and is overcome by the dread and awe he felt *before*, then he reveres [σέβεται] the face like a god, and if he didn’t fear being thought a complete maniac he would make sacrifices to the boy like an idol or a god. [2] He looks at the boy and shivers and this naturally turns to a wave of sweat and abnormal fever that grabs hold of him; and taking in through the eyes the effluence of beauty he turns hot⁴⁷ where the feathers naturally grow, and the heat melts the joints that had closed over and held back any growth. As nourishment flows, the shaft of the feathers swells and starts to grow from the roots beneath the surface of the soul; for once the whole soul was feathered.

The good lover is called a ‘recent initiate’ (ἄρτιτελής). This distinguishes him from the bad lover who was initiated a long time ago and who is not moved to recollect true beauty but loves the boy himself and succumbs to his lust (see 250e). In spite of that we are almost assaulted with an account of being dumbstruck by beauty. No less interesting, Socrates seems to forget

⁴⁶ Socrates switches to the aorist (ἔφριξε...ὀπιλήθην) to give these details a vivid, sharp quality. The tendency is to gloss such things as gnomic (i.e. expressing general truths) which is fine so long as we recall, with Goodwin’s *Moods and Tenses* (third revised edition) §30 that these ‘give a more vivid statement of general truths.’

⁴⁷ As per the previous note we are back to the aorist (ἐθερμάνθη, ἐτάκη, ὥδησέ, ὥρμησε).

all about recollection in what follows. Beyond the passing mention of ‘initiation’ the key themes here are *growing wings* and *love* in that the sight of a beautiful face or body leads to the growth of wings. Mixed in with this is the extreme and violent process of growing wings, which connects up with erotic madness. A number of details can be brought out. Firstly, we are comfortably within the realm of traditional treatments of Love, that bittersweet, violent delight. It is typical to cite parallels in Sappho and Anacreon and the like,⁴⁸ so instead let me mention the love spells that John Winkler (1990) astutely foregrounds. These detail the way a *lover* wants the intended victim to be afflicted by love for himself. Yet the traumatic experience directed at the beloved recalls the turbulent throes of the lover himself. Thus Winkler infers that this is the externalisation of the lover’s experience. Here is an excerpt from 87:

The person to be affected by an *agôgê* [a love spell] is usually sleeping in her own bed and what the agent wishes for her is an increasingly powerful feeling of restlessness and inner torment so that she cannot sleep... ‘If she wants to sleep, put thorn-filled leather whips underneath her and impale her temples with wooden spikes’ (XXXVI 142, 147–52⁴⁹). The anxiety wished upon her is variously elaborated in terms of physical and mental symptoms such as burning (‘burn her psyche with a sleepless fire,’ IV 2767), disorientation (‘make her dizzy, let her not know where she is,’ LXI 15–6), and frenzy (‘let her be terrified, seeing phantoms, sleepless with lust and affection for me,’ VII 888–9).

⁴⁸ E.g. Ferrari (1987) 154 and Nightingale (1995) 158. As mentioned in a previous note, Pender is the authority here (2007) 37–46. She makes a strong case regarding Plato’s sympathy for poetry by registering the extensive use of lyric themes in the dialogue (e.g. 10–14). See also Carson (1998) 148 for a spirited discussion.

⁴⁹ These references are to the *Papyri Graecae Magicae*.

This violent physiology of love fits readily with what we find in passage 4.

A second detail to remark concerns the way Socrates twists into the description the emergence of wings. This is rather elegant insofar as it builds on yet adapts traditional motifs. It is essentially a fanciful aetiological story that accounts for the pain and turmoil of love. And at the same time it serves to connect the whole contorted mess up to the philosophical experience of flying into knowledge.

Finally we can observe how rich and dense the language is.⁵⁰ It nods to the medical writers yet maintains a deeply poetic aesthetic. As we read in the excellent essay of Anne Lebeck (1972) 273:

The description of the growing wings (251a7-252) is in itself an aggregate of images. Many of the words have multiple associations and some of them are onomatopoeic. As a result they tease both mind and ear, and the passage produces that tickling irritation which it so well describes.

I would add the perverse use of erotic imagery to the passage's titillating effect. Aptly, the language and the text become *beautiful* (after a fashion) just as Socrates really hones in on the effects of seeing beauty. As I have stressed, seeing beauty really does not encourage the ascent into philosophy; an object of sexual lust will not turn you away from the sensible world. This only applies to certain beauties, in particular Plato's dialogue.

⁵⁰ Here is the Greek for sentence 2: δεξάμενος γὰρ τοῦ κάλλους τὴν ἀπορροὴν διὰ τῶν ὀμμάτων ἐθερμάνθη ἢ ἢ τοῦ πτεροῦ φύσις ἄρδεται, θερμανθέντος δὲ ἐτάκη τὰ περὶ τὴν ἑκφυσιν, ἃ πάλαι ὑπὸ σκληρότητος συμμεμυκότα εἶργε μὴ βλαστάνειν, ἐπιρρυείσης δὲ τῆς τροφῆς ὥδησέ τε καὶ ὥρμησε φύεσθαι ἀπὸ τῆς ρίζης ὁ τοῦ πτεροῦ καυλὸς ὑπὸ πᾶν τὸ τῆς ψυχῆς εἶδος· πᾶσα γὰρ ἦν τὸ πάλαι πτερωτή.

Passage 5: 253e5-254c3

Passage 5, our final passage, is from the Love Story where Socrates goes over the experience of seeing beauty yet one more time. Here it becomes almost self-evident that we are required to compare and contrast the competing accounts of what is essentially the same transaction. Though I shall not pause to dwell on it, a whole host of terms from the previous section reappear in this one; in both cases the lover runs hot with sweat and so on.⁵¹

[1] So when the charioteer who sees a lovely face [τὸ ἐρωτικὸν ὄμμα] and inflames the whole soul with the vision, is filled with the pricking goad of longing, the horse obedient to him, compelled by shame as always, checks itself from jumping on the beloved; but the other horse now has no regard for the goad or whip of the driver and violently charges forward. It makes all sorts of trouble for its yokemate and driver, compelling them to go and approach the boy and evoking the pleasures of sex. [2] To

⁵¹ Many of the ‘linking’ terms between (a) the Love Story and (b) Growing Wings are not included in my Passages, but here are some of the obvious ones. In (a) the soul is *heated* as it grows wings: ἐθερμάνθη, θερμανθέντος (251b1-3); just as in (b) the sight of the boy *heats* the soul: πᾶσαν αἰσθήσει διαθερμύνας τὴν ψυχὴν (253e5-6). The lover *reverses* (σέβεται—251a5) the boy’s face in (a) much as he does in (b): ἰδοῦσα δὲ ἔδεισέ τε καὶ σεφθεῖσα (245b7-8). And finally, in (a) the lover is gripped by *sweat* and *fever*: ἰδρῶς καὶ θερμότης ἀήθης λαμβάνει (251b1); just as in (b) he is drench in *sweat*: ἰδρῶτι πᾶσαν ἔβρεξε τὴν ψυχὴν (245c4-5). Lebeck (1972) 277 says of the Love Story: ‘A particular kind of interweaving connects this passage with that which it recalls, 251b-d7. The images of heat and tickling which echo here were fully developed there (θερμότης, ἐθερμάνθη, θερμανθέντος, γαργαλίζεται). The image of the goad, on the other hand, which is fully developed here, was anticipated there [see 251d5-6, 251e4-5].’

begin with they resist the black horse, vexed at being coerced into something terrible and lawless, but eventually, seeing no end to this evil, they are all but dragged forward submitting in defeat to the demand. So they approach⁵² him and see the vision of the darling boy shine forth. [3] And as the charioteer looks on, his memory is led back to pure beauty and he sees it yet again set beside *sōphrosunē* on its holy pedestal. He looks on terrified and stumbles backwards in awe, only to pull back on the reins so aggressively that both horses are set on their haunches; one willingly and without resistance, the other violently and totally against its will.

The last three passages begin with a lover seeing beauty.⁵³ Although the last two passages easily link up with the myth at the start, this passage makes a more direct link by returning to

⁵² As with Passage 4 Plato shifts into the aorist here. Once the lover actually decides to approach the boy, the tense shifts and makes the important part of the narrative more vivid: ἐγένοντο καὶ εἶδον, ἠνέχθη, εἶδεν, ἔδρυσεν τε καὶ σεφθεῖσα and ἠναγκάσθη. Thompson (1868) compares *Phd.* 73d5-8: ‘For don’t you know that when lovers see the lyre or cloak or anything else their beloved is accustomed to use, they experience this, they recognise [ἐγνώσαν] the lyre and mentally grasp [ἔλαβον] the form of the boy whom the lyre belongs to?’

⁵³ *Seeing beauty* plays a key role throughout, especially in the present section. Here are some examples that bring the intratextual resonance to the fore: Passage 3 says ὅταν τὸ τῆδέ τις ὁρῶν κάλλος, τοῦ ἀληθοῦς ἀναμνησκόμενος (‘whenever someone who sees beauty down here and recollects true beauty’); Passage 4 says ὅταν θεοειδὲς πρόσωπον ἴδῃ κάλλος εὖ μεμνημένον ἢ τινα σώματος ιδέαν (‘when he sees a godlike face or figure that well exemplifies beauty’); Passage 5 says, ὅταν δ’ οὖν ὁ ἠνίοχος ἰδὼν τὸ ἐρωτικὸν ὄμμα, πᾶσαν αἰσθήσει διαθερμύνας τὴν ψυχὴν (‘when the charioteer who sees a lovely face and inflames the whole soul with the vision’). On *erōs* and eyes see Pender (2007) 37. She notes an established tradition in lyric love poetry whereby ‘the eyes are the most significant points of contact,’ which Plato subsequently reshapes.

the chariot of the soul. The main function of the chariot image is to describe the internal strife that comes with our somatic taint (see 246b4, 247b3-6). The present passage clearly recalls Passage 4 in its *physiological* detail—the charioteer *heats* the soul (διαθερμύνας) and is beset by the ‘goads of passion’ (πόθου κέντρων ὑποπλησθῆ)—but here we are more concerned with *psychology*.

On the other hand, Socrates does not talk about wings in the present passage. Keeping in mind that wings really make more sense on chariots than on a soul (thus 246a7) the absence is noteworthy. Socrates is also much more explicit about the role of recollection here. When the charioteer sees the boy his memory is carried to the form of Beauty (ιδόντος δὲ τοῦ ἡνιόχου ἢ μνήμη πρὸς τὴν τοῦ κάλλους φύσιν ἡνέχθη) and this memory, itself ‘seeing’ Beauty, is forced back in shock (ἀνέπεσεν ὑπτία). Oddly enough it seems the *memory* of the charioteer is a little winged chariot unto itself. This is a kind of fractal-like imagery that reproduces itself at a micro level: by remembering the previous winged existence the soul grows (different?) wings. More generally the focus of the whole passage is like a ‘zoomed in’ version of the previous account in that it gives the internal machinations of the lover. And again, where the previous account distinguished good from bad lovers, here we focus narrowly on the good lover only to find the good/bad dichotomy reproduced within him. In both accounts the descriptive details tend to supplant any explicit account of recollection or philosophy.

This ‘zooming in’ movement from the general to the specific, or towards a more internal point of view, is broadly borne out by the whole series of passages we have examined.⁵⁴ First the philosophical lover is but one among many types of soul, then (in Passage

⁵⁴ Cf. Griswold (1996) 88 and Sinaiko (1965) 50 who claims, ‘Every subject discussed [in the myth] is an aspect or subdivision of some previous topic, and thus each part of the myth is essentially an elaboration of a portion or a previous part which has not been fully developed....The result is that at

4) there are only good and bad lovers, and in Passage 5 everything but the good lover falls out of the frame. Passages 1 and 2 operate at the most topical and philosophically informative level. They give a general account of the nature of wings and recollection (respectively). Passage 3 forms a link between these passages and the detailed narratives we find in Passages 4 and 5. That is, in Passage 3 Socrates discussed madness and internal turmoil on the one hand, and on the other, he still had much to say about the necessary conditions for a soul to properly recollect. And *this*, as we have seen, is progressively supplanted, first by a physiological account of growing wings, and then a psychological account of what takes place in the lover's soul.

Recollecting from the Palinode

There is a strong sense in which the Palinode can be disorienting and maddening, it plays coy and eggs you on, yet by doing much of the explaining myself I have significantly reduced its potency for the reader. That said, you should still have been privy to some of the maddening effects inasmuch as my exposition required me to let the details emerge gradually. Indeed, the reason I have felt it necessary to rely so heavily on guided summaries of the text is that the experience produced by the speech is difficult to convey in any other way. Plato is masterful in his ability to run together the various ideas in the Palinode and our main task involves carefully untangling them and seeing how he has combined them.

The mental movement of *divining an intelligible unity behind a disparate many* is important for an understanding of the Palinode because this is both the thing being described alternately as flying or growing wings, recollecting or going mad from *erōs* or being initiated into mystery rites—this is both the thing being described *and* it is the tool required to uncover

every point the reader feels (though he may not consciously understand why) that the particular subject under discussion is intimately concerned with what has already been said.'

that very thing. As we saw in Passage 2 that movement from the many to the one is tied to recollection, which in turn is tied to growing wings. This should make sense. Both recollection and growing wings involve the transition from a beautiful boy to Beauty itself, that is the ontological leap from a particular sensible to a general intelligible, from a token to a type. And if we keep in mind that love of boys can recall love of *logoi* we start to see how the Palinode, for the right reader, can slip into the role of a particular beauty that makes us recollect an intelligible one.⁵⁵

In Passage 1 wings are associated with *knowing* via the prenatal myth: earlier when we were disembodied we flew in the proximity of knowledge. Passage 2 takes place *later* and *lower down* (because *earlier* and *higher* are closer to the truth). Here the wings are transferred to an embodied soul and thus *knowing* can be either the recollection of our previous life/knowledge or growing wings; and since we are recollecting our previous winged existence it is not clear that the two are all that different. But this carnival of ideas is not enough for Plato. Passage 3 brings to the fore the theme of erotic madness. This is the *coup de grâce*. The two most obvious points of contact in Passage 3 are the role of beauty and the attendant pain and turmoil. These are respectively the cause and the effect of *erōs*: beauty is what causes and sets off recollection; the resultant turmoil is maddening. In sum, Passage 3 links (a) beauty with recollection as well as (b) recollection with *mania*, and (c) both of these connections slipstream in behind the established trope of going mad for beautiful boys. *And yet he is not really talking about love*. The text cannot be taken at face value, so the truth must be somewhere behind the superficial beauty of the *logoi*.

⁵⁵ Regarding the ‘soul guiding’ effect of the Palinode, Yunis (2005) 112-7 emphasises the way the speech uses *erōs* to lead the soul and produce desire in the audience. Cf. Moss (2012) and Rutherford (1995) 257.

Passage 4 turns deeper into depravity with a physiology of love. Visible beauty causes wings to force their way out of the soul and the maddening effects of this are rendered in excruciating detail. Passage 5 supplants or overlays the physiology with a psychology of love and in its own way discloses the two responses to beauty, lust and recollection. These, in turn, recall the two types of reader, the pleasure-seeking superficial reader (who are actually drawn to beautiful boys and display speeches) and the philosophical reader.⁵⁶ Here it becomes clear that Socrates is describing the self-same process but in radically different ways. And this of the utmost importance.

All of the five passages basically describe under many guises the mental movement from the visible to the invisible. But Plato's presentation is anything but clear. We go from one crazy idea to the next. At one moment knowledge is erotic madness, at another sexual desire proves to be self-control. His exposition is elusive, alluring and enticing. It goads you on and slips through your fingers. But one can always sense that there is something there lurking behind the beautiful cacophony. The attempt to figure it all out involves (a) the *aporia* of recognising that there is more than meets the eye and (b) sifting through the *varia* to find the 'one' that stands behind the 'many.' Plato plays a complex game where one thing simply *refers* to another; each item points us to a different item, not unlike recollection. While reading the *Palinode* we are moved between flying, recollecting and madness and from painfully growing wings to the internal struggle with the black horse. This act of *referring*—of alluding to something else—exemplifies the true message of the speech. It may seem a hollow message at first glance, but this methodological technique is all-important. It is not a piece of information to be imbibed but is something we need to practice time and time again. Basically, it is the skill

⁵⁶ The pleasure seeking reader will take Socrates' account of beautiful boys seriously while the philosophical reader will not.

of divining the one behind the many and it lies at the heart of Plato's epistemology.⁵⁷ In a word, if the mind were an engine it would run hot unpacking the imagery of the Palinode—that's what's so 'maddening' about it—and this brain-work is not only the intended effect of the imagery it is also the thing being described. By digging beneath the nonsensical exterior of the Palinode we ascend into the intelligible and as such the text is an object lesson in epistemology.

The Palinode essentially provides an account of philosophical literature and as such it also *exhibits* the quality it describes. Plato presents his paradigmatic account of philosophical literature *at one remove* in that he discusses philosophy via the lens of erotic madness. This allows him to encourage willing participation and to keep out the unwilling: since the true meaning is not on the surface, only those who go looking can find the true message. Further, the message is put in a place that one can only access with the *mind*. As I have tried to show the space between the two levels is handsomely exploited by ironic symbolism: self-control is sexual lust; the harmful superficial beauty that strikes the eye and the ear is conflated with the true uplifting beauty that takes you away from the sense world; the sweaty flush of an erection is the rise of philosophical insight; and *Erōs*—who steals away your wits and forces you to act against your will—now describes the way *logoi* moves you 'from within' by acting not on the loins but on the mind.⁵⁸

⁵⁷ This is not the place to pursue the issue here but *diving an intelligible unity* might be involved in any or all of the following: illustrative analogies, arguments from analogy (like the Socratic *epagōgē*), positing forms, the method of collection, ascending the Ladder of Love, moving up the chain of forms to the form of the Good and interpreting a Platonic dialogue.

⁵⁸ Even though the reader needs to participate willingly and of their own accord, this willingness is nevertheless encouraged from without by a beautiful *logos* which instils a sense of longing in you. On

If the foregoing is correct, we can begin to see how reading a dialogue is analogous to what philosophers need to do in the real world. The ‘surface layer’ of the manifest world is not the true reality and we must penetrate to the intelligible forms behind it. The *Palinode* provides mental exercises to train us in this fundamental philosophical skill. We are then, by this hypothesis, to look on the world as we would a Platonic text: bring out the paradoxes and contradictions of the surface layer and find the ‘elements’ lurking in the background. The text is like the world, but it has been curated to encourage us in the right direction with so many hints and clues. This is philosophy with training wheels.

the interplay of the passive and the active, being afflicted and actively pursuing your quarry, cf. Pender (2007) 47-8, Ferrari (1987) 155-6 and Nightingale (1995) throughout Chapter 4. I suspect that the desires of the intellect can be presented in both an active or passive way depending on whether one emphasises the *desire* or the *intellect*. In the context of *aporia* and learning, it is important to stress the *active* role of good students in contradistinction to the unwillingness of bad students.

CONCLUSION

There is a crack—a crack—in everything

That's how the light gets in

—Leonard Cohen

The scope of this study. Beyond the particular readings I have offered, beyond the ‘types’ of irony I have carved out, I am anxious to impress upon the reader the prevalence and importance of irony in general as a literary and pedagogical technique in Plato. While it goes without saying that I have left many ironical stones unturned, my hope is that I have made a substantial contribution to both the basic issue of how to approach Plato’s irony and to some of the ironies that Plato wields. In its broad strokes I believe this study is the first of its kind. This need not be a boast. On the contrary. Although it is quite liberating to treat an issue in Plato not buried under mountains of scholarship, there are significant hazards surrounding a virgin topic. Without the safety net afforded by one’s peers it is all too easy to overlook the obvious or to overplay one’s hand. That said, I do not think I could have remedied these problems by narrowing the scope and concentrating all my efforts on particular passages or some particular ‘type’ of irony in Plato. Not only do my particular interpretations draw much of their strength through the cumulative force of their neighbours, but in fact the bigger picture is arguably the more important idea here. Had I been more fastidious and slow-moving, I risked obscuring the bigger picture; but if I had lingered at the level of generalities, my conclusions would have rung hollow.

Burdens and Boons. Plato and Socrates, as I have mentioned, confront the obstacles before them and turn them to their advantage. Faced with the arrogant unwillingness of people like

Euthyphro, Socrates applies his trademark irony which feeds off their *alazoneia* even while it pacifies it. Simmias and Cebes, though willing participants, are still attached to bodily existence; so for them Socrates prescribes an antidote that exploits this very somatic attachment and explodes it from the inside. The ultimate obstacle however concerns the ‘dumb’ written word which always says the same thing. This is an affront to Plato’s view of education. And yet, the Palinode uses just this repeatability to create a text that can respond to the reader in a philosophically efficacious way. No doubt it is better to teach people in person, but there are clearly advantages to the written word. Most notably, it can carry its message far and wide, to a whole different world thousands of years away.

Mental Exercise. The dialogues make you work. I have had repeated recourse to this idea to account for *why* Plato leaves so much implicit. Yet I have also cautioned against excessive use of the ‘think for yourself’ principle. With this in mind I have tried to be as explicit as possible about why Plato would want to employ this technique in the ways I claim. I have always sought for a sufficient reason. Thus in depicting Socratic Irony, Plato’s usage guards against arrogant unwillingness on the part of the reader and this, in turn, is central to what Socrates is doing with his interlocutor. Or again, the account of philosophy as erotic madness is both an account of and an example of philosophical rhetoric. This interpretation of the Palinode can and should be extended to the dialogues in general. While other dialogues might not be quite so dastardly in their execution, they all attempt to do essentially the same thing: to arouse your *aporia*, to draw you in and to exercise your intellect. In a word, a Platonic dialogue is a corporeal thing that puts you in mind of an incorporeal one. This requires at a minimum that the reader actively engage, and that the substance of the text is somehow distinct from the ‘visible reminder’ we encounter on the page. And this in turn is training for the real world, where one also needs to look past the surface.

It is true that Plato doesn't give us all the answers, but his voice is not absent, it's just hidden—seductively so. By concealing his wisdom—by presenting his philosophy through the lens of *sex*, for example—he can speak to the right reader without the bad readers overhearing. Moreover, the willing reader is aroused and goaded forward to seek out a destination that only the mind can enter. This then points to an etymology of the term εἰρων, 'ironist.' This term finds its purest expression in Socrates' love of boys. That is, they call him an εἰρων because of his ἔρωσ τῶν νέων.

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