

PLATO'S CONCEPTION OF DIVINATION

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Abstract

One of the goals of Plato's dialogues is to stake out a territory for philosophy. In order to do this, Plato evaluates and critiques other, more established, disciplines like rhetoric, the sophistic movement, poetry, and finally, divination. The last, in particular, has been neglected even though it arises in nearly all stages of Plato's writing. Accordingly, in this dissertation, I interrogate Plato's concept of divination. First, I analyze his account of mantic authenticity, together with his curtailment of mantic authority. I specify the ways in which Plato both embodies and transforms divination. One significant component of this account is the relationship between divination and craft. Plato often uses uncontentious crafts like medicine and divination in order to illuminate the features of other more contentious crafts, such as moral knowledge. In the second part of my dissertation, I examine the relationship between divination and madness. In the *Phaedrus*, the best things we have come from madness, but this claim beguiles the reader of the *Phaedo* and *Republic*. Has Plato changed his mind about the role and value of madness? Finally, I interrogate the *Symposium*, specifically Socrates' conversation with Diotima. I argue that Diotima represents an intuitive seer, someone that Plato elsewhere claims to be impossible. To this end, clarifying Diotima's function in the dialogue is crucially important and I sketch an explanation that underscores Plato's fundamental religiosity. In my final chapter, I examine the relationship between divination and philosophy as depicted in Socrates, Plato's most celebrated character.

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“O Baby, what Hell to be Greek in this country –
without wings, but burning anyway”

-Gwendolyn MacEwen, ‘Poem
Improvised Around A First Line’

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Introduction

At *Phaedrus* 244a8-d5, Socrates distinguishes between two sorts of divination. First, there are seers who undergo divine possession by a god or spirit, so-called possession divination. For the duration of the experience, the seer loses him or herself. The canonical example of this is what occurs to the Pythia at Delphi. Second, there are seers who access divine will through an intermediary, so-called technical divination. There are myriad kinds of this type of divination. One might, for instance, divine through material objects (e.g., bird movements, animal entrails) or natural phenomena (e.g., a bolt of lightning). Various textual sources, including the cited passage from the *Phaedrus*, demonstrate that Plato privileges possession divination over its material counterpart, but his justification is not entirely clear. The impetus for this dissertation is that Plato, on occasion, seems to ignore his own distinction. In particular, a seer like Diotima in the *Symposium* cannot be easily categorized according to the dichotomy developed in the *Phaedrus*.

Despite sustained treatments in contexts like the evaluation of knowledge and the formation of the ideal state, there has been a disproportionate lack of attention paid to divination in comparison to, for instance, Plato's concept of poetry and the poet.¹ In fact, there has been no systematic treatment of Plato's concept of divination. There are several ways in which this dissertation intends to contribute to current Plato scholarship. First, it challenges the thesis that Plato's concept of divination is "too schematic and elides Greek

¹ In terms of Greek divination generally, the most comprehensive is Bouché-Leclercq (1879-82), specifically volume 1. Other studies include: Pritchett (1979) 47-90; Roth 1982 (PhD Thesis); Bremmer (1993) 150-183 and (1996) 97-109; and Flower (2008). Flower, in particular, is responsible for the first "book-length study of Greek seers in any language" (3) and has accordingly, proved invaluable to the present analysis. One caveat to Flower is his unwillingness to use Plato in his investigation. This is so because Plato, in seeking to legitimize philosophy, cannot help but distort divination. Flower's most trusted source is Xenophon.

experience” (Flower 87). Second, it explores the connection between *technē* and divination and the adjoining implications for Platonic epistemology. For Plato, the inspired arts are uncontroversial forms of knowledge and he often appeals to them in order to investigate knowledge claims of a more contentious sort (e.g., moral knowledge).² Finally, in a more general sense, this dissertation further substantiates the increasingly accepted contention of Plato’s pervasive religiosity.

Part I – Methodology

Something must be said about the methodological approach to Plato adopted in this dissertation. One distinction often employed in the history of Platonic scholarship is between doctrinal and skeptical approaches to the dialogues.³ Whereas the former affirms the thesis that there are positive philosophical theses explicit or latent in the dialogues, the latter emphasizes their aporetic and inconclusive features.

My argument does not rise or fall depending on the result of this debate. Divination does not receive an exhaustive treatment like rhapsody in the *Ion* or rhetoric in the *Gorgias*. Instead, it emerges at the joints of other arguments – the notion of divine inspiration, humankind’s relationship to the gods, and the craft analogy. In fact, there is a sense in which divination occupies both sides of the debate. When it comes to the doctrinal methodology, the status of divination is radically altered by, for example, the epistemological theses Plato develops in the *Meno*.⁴

² For instance, in the *Laches*, the search is for an adequate definition of courage, and attempts are made to define it in terms of a *technē*, at least initially (182c). Roochnik (1996) offers an in-depth analysis of this approach, especially chapter 1.

³ Press (1996) 508.

⁴ At the conclusion of the *Meno*, Socrates develops a disjunction between knowledge and right opinion. Since statesmen cannot give an account of their expertise, they are only able to govern according to right opinion. In this way, “they are no different from soothsayers and prophets” (*οὐδὲν διαπηρεροντὸς ἐκηοντες προσ το πηρονειν ἔηοι κηρῆσμῶδοι τε και ηοι τηρομαντεισ*) (*Meno* 99c2-3).

At the same time, divination, particularly when it gets deployed in the context of divine inspiration, checks the rationalist presumptions of the philosophy. For instance, in the *Phaedrus*, Socrates notoriously says that the best things we have come from madness. In order to specify the meaning of this statement, he goes on to give an account of three kinds of madness – prophetic, telistic, and poetic. Unlike in dialogues such as the *Republic* and the *Symposium*, philosophy now encompasses a degree of madness. In this way, divination destabilizes what has been a popular interpretation of philosophy in Plato’s dialogues.

Following the majority of Anglophone Platonic scholarship, I affirm a cautiously doctrinal methodology. In other words, I subscribe to the thesis that within the dialogues, there are positive doctrines that one can reasonably subscribe to Plato.⁵ This does not preclude a strong role for aporetic elements.

Another consideration is the distinction between developmental and unitarian approaches to the dialogues.⁶ The developmental methodology uses a medley of evidence, principally stylometry, to classify the dialogues chronologically. The most widespread classification separates the dialogues into early, middle, and late groupings. Although attempts have been made, further chronological classification, specifically within each group, is exceptionally difficult.⁷

Part of the motivation for the developmental methodology is the recognition that not all the dialogues were written at once. If this is so, which seems probable, it is

⁵ Wolfdorf (2008) states, “In the last decades of the twentieth century, Anglophone Platonic scholarship was principally conducted within a developmentalist and relatively doctrinal framework” (6). He goes on to point out that in the first decade of the twenty-first century, unitarianism has enjoyed a resurgence.

⁶ As Wolfdorf (2008) notes, doctrinal and skeptical methodologies can be applied to either developmental or unitarian methodologies.

⁷As Kahn (1996) points out, “The attempt to establish a complete linear ordering of the dialogues on stylometric grounds has produced no reliable results, no agreement after a century of work” (45).

reasonable to think that Plato developed and refined his philosophical ideas as time went on. To take a well-known example, whereas knowledge of the Forms grounds the philosopher-kings' expertise in the *Republic*, they go without mention in his late political work – the *Laws*.

One version of developmentalism characterizes the transition from the early dialogues to those of the middle-late as a transition from Socratic to Platonic thought. According to this line of reasoning, in the early dialogues, Plato is still 'under the sway' of his teacher, Socrates, and working through a distinctly Socratic paradigm. With the middle dialogues – *Phaedo*, *Symposium*, and most importantly, the *Republic* – Plato sheds his Socratic skin and develops his own distinctive philosophical positions. The foremost modern proponent of this is Vlastos who distinguishes ten theses, which distinguish the early 'Socratic' dialogues from the middle 'Platonic' ones.⁸ One of the most important sources of evidence for this line of thought is Aristotle, who is the first developmentalist.

By contrast, the unitarian methodology emphasizes the unity, or continuity, of Plato's thought. Like developmentalism, it can take many forms. For instance, one might interpret the 'early' dialogues as working through that which will culminate in the *Republic*.⁹ To the extent that these 'early' dialogues prepare the reader for the positive doctrines of the *Republic*, they enjoy a fundamental continuity. One can also adopt a unitarian methodology and yet reject the thesis that one dialogue deserves special status.¹⁰ Other unitarian methodologies exist, such as 'fictive chronology'. This consists

⁸ Vlastos (1991) 46- 49. For more information on the history of developmentalism, and its current proponents, see Brickhouse and Smith (1989) 9 and McPherran (1996) 14-16.

⁹ Kahn (1996) 39-41.

¹⁰ Griswold (2000) 195.

of exploring the fictional life of Socrates as he manifests in Plato's dialogues. According to fictive chronology, the *Parmenides* is the earliest dialogue and the *Phaedo* is the last.¹¹

One problem for unitarianism is coping with inconsistencies between dialogues. One canonical developmental strategy is to claim that Plato has changed his mind about something. There are at least two other strategies that the unitarian can appeal to in order to explain inconsistencies between the dialogues.¹² First, one can appeal to dramaturgical, or literary, elements in order to remedy an apparent inconsistency. In the current generation of Platonic scholarship, there is greater sensitivity to this element.

A good example of this is Wolfsdorf's concept of a-structure, which he defines as "a linear sequence or progression of beliefs and values" (15).¹³ In the case of Plato, this literary technique is employed in order to transition from conventional Athenian views to Platonic positions. In different terms, Plato might have Socrates purposefully ape an Athenian view at one stage of a dialogue that is inconsistent with what he says in other places.¹⁴ A second strategy is to appeal to irony. If Socrates claims something that is altogether anti-Socratic or anti-Platonic, a reasonable explanation is to think that he is being disingenuous.¹⁵ Of course, to distinguish between 'anti-Socratic' and 'anti-

¹¹ To give some idea of the consequences entailed by taking the concept of 'fictive chronology' seriously, consider that the *Parmenides* is the earliest dialogue. Its engagement with the theory of forms is antithetical to the 'early' dialogues' relative silence on the intelligible world. It grates against the developmental school of thought, which situates the *Parmenides* in Plato's late period. Griswold (1999) 387-393. For Kahn's criticism of 'fictive chronology' see Kahn (2000) 192-193.

¹² Note that these strategies are at the disposal of the developmentalist as well.

¹³ Wolfsdorf (2008) 14-16.

¹⁴ For Wolfsdorf, a-structure explains most inter-textual inconsistencies (e.g., in the same dialogue) and intra-textual inconsistencies between dialogues.

¹⁵ Note that my account of these methodological strategies – increased sensitivity to dramaturgical elements and appeals to irony – is heavily influenced by Wolfsdorf's discussion. (2008) 20-21.

Platonic’ is to presuppose a difference between the two. To be clear, the ‘Socrates’ of Plato’s dialogues I regard as a literary construction.¹⁶

It is beyond the scope of the present dissertation to exhaustively investigate the current state of this debate, but a few methodological remarks are necessary. As mentioned previously, this dissertation works through a doctrinal framework.¹⁷ In terms of the debate between developmentalism and unitarianism, I subscribe to a weak form of developmentalism. By weak, I mean that robust arguments have been made against developmentalism, which do not necessarily refute it, but certainly check its supremacy.¹⁸ In fact, as will become clear at various stages throughout this dissertation, two of my main reference points are the role of dramaturgical elements, together with purported instances of irony. In this way, I give some credit to the unitarian methodology. Nevertheless, I remain fundamentally developmentalist and indeed confine most of my analysis to what is normally characterized as the early-middle dialogues.¹⁹

Part I – A Brief Survey of the Dissertation Chapters

This dissertation contains seven chapters:

- I – What Does Euthyphro Know?
- II – *Mantikē Technē*

¹⁶ This is not to say that there are continuities between the historical Socrates and the Platonic Socrates. Such an investigation, while no doubt fruitful and interesting, is beyond the scope of the present analysis.

¹⁷ It is also important to note one particular version of the doctrinal methodology, the so-called esoteric school of Platonic scholarship. This draws evidence from Aristotle and others, including statements made about writing in the *Phaedrus*, in order to claim that Plato’s dialogues do not contain Plato’s genuine philosophical convictions. Rather, the dialogues are intended to introduce people to philosophy. Only members of Plato’s Academy were privy to his actual system, which is thought to be thoroughly mathematical and metaphysical. This methodology has been popular in Germany, and to a lesser degree, the rest of the European continent.

¹⁸ For instance, Kahn (1996) notes that there is “no reason to exclude the possibility that he [Plato] was working on several dialogues at the same time” (45). Furthermore, there is no reason why Plato is required to present all of his doctrines in every dialogue. This can help explain the absence of, for instance, the Forms in certain dialogues.

¹⁹ In response to the recent unitarian arguments of Kahn and Griswold, among others, Brickhouse and Smith (2003) 112–31 have outlined reasons to think that such argument are unconvincing.

- III – Between Inspiration and *Technē*
- IV – Inspiration and *Eros*: The *Phaedrus*' First Speeches
- V – The Four Forms of Madness in the *Phaedrus*
- VI – The Puzzle of Diotima
- VII – Socrates, Divination, and the *Daimonion*

In chapter one, I demonstrate that from the earliest extant sources in Ancient Greece, there was doubt surrounding the validity of divination. Doubt, of course, does not mean complete denunciation. Rather, it consists of rejecting certain forms of divination like augury or certain individual seers. It was self-evident in Archaic and Classical Greece that (1) the gods existed and (2) sought to communicate with humankind in various ways.

I argue that Plato is no exception, both in the sense that he remains wary of certain divinatory practices and that he recognizes the essential validity of divination. In this sense, Plato embodies rather than defies Greek norms. He is not, as one might suspect, rejecting the entirety of divination on philosophical or epistemic grounds. Rather, he is amenable to it, and no more doubtful about it than anybody else. I claim that this general thesis of mantic authenticity best manifests itself in the figure of Euthyphro. Accordingly, in this chapter, I develop an account of Euthyphro – his occupation, claims to knowledge, and dramatic role – in order to defend the idea that Plato accepts the legitimacy of divination, even though it is philosophically impoverished.

Chapter two analyzes the relationship between divination and Plato's concept of *technē*. There are two related aims. First, I analyze the relationship between the general and the seer. In particular, I interrogate claims made in the *Laches* in order to determine the degree to which Plato diverges from the authority of seers we see in history. Second, and more substantially, I analyze the *technē* of divination in the context of a *technē*'s

subject matter. For Plato, each *technē* has its own unique subject matter, but claims made in the *Laches* seem to counteract the notion that the subject matter of divination is the future. This is so for epistemological reasons that collapse past, present and future.

The *Ion* is the subject of chapter three. In this small dialogue, poetic inspiration functions in contradistinction to *technē*. Since Ion's expertise does not stand up to Socrates' critique, his Homeric performances cannot stem from knowledge, but from elsewhere, from divine inspiration. The two are presented as a strict disjunction. Yet, there is a puzzle here because as each gets explained, there is an appeal to divination. If rhapsody, and poetry by extension, cannot synthesize the two, why does Socrates seem to think that divination can? This puzzle suggests that Plato is being ironic. I interrogate this bipartite account in order to show how these two seemingly disparate features can be accommodated.

In so doing, I reject the thesis that Socrates is ironic when he characterizes divination as the result of inspiration, and later, possession divination as constitutive of a *technē*. What I hope to contribute is that Socrates' appeal to Theoclymenus at 539a demonstrates that Plato has a more multifarious concept of divination than is ordinarily ascribed to him.

In the fourth chapter, I investigate the *Phaedrus*, which occupies a central role in Plato's concept of divination. Not only does it formulate the distinction between possession divination and technical divination, as outlined earlier, but it also presents several interpretive puzzles. One such puzzle centers on the exchange between Socrates and Phaedrus at the beginning of the dialogue. Specifically, it is unclear to what degree the exchange deserves an ironic interpretation. While this puzzle does not deal directly

with divination, it is relevant in that irony is often held in contradistinction to inspiration. Socrates' reputation as the exemplar of rationality precedes him. Rather than take him at his word, it is thought that Socrates only appeals to the divine in jest.

What is so fascinating about the *Phaedrus* is that *both* of Socrates' speeches are the result of inspiration. Yet, strangely, both express radically disparate positions on the nature of love. It seems reasonable to conclude that the palinode (244a-257b) embodies Plato's genuine view; it contains important Platonic tenets that the first speech lacks. What, then, is the status of Socrates' first speech? Is it merely strategic in the sense of engaging with Phaedrus on his own terms? This is a familiar Socratic approach. My aim in this chapter is to demonstrate that Socrates' first speech is not as antithetical to Plato as it might seem at first. A consequence of this is that Socrates' appeal to inspiration in the first speech, I argue, is genuine.

In chapter five, I continue my investigation of the *Phaedrus*, this time focusing directly on the cases of divination in the *Phaedrus*. I argue that the role and function of divination in the *Phaedrus* is a rich one, not only because it provides a model for philosophy, but also on its own terms. In particular, the tension between its divine associations and its inability to justify its pronouncements makes for an interesting epistemological contrast.

At first glance, Plato is ambivalent about the nature of divination. Consider the apparent inconsistency between the two latter principal references. On the one hand, Socrates states that the best things we have come from madness (244b-d). In other words, divination serves a paradigmatic example of its value. Yet, when the hierarchy of souls is

presented, divination, together with mystery rites and poetry, is ranked comparatively low, beneath the financier, the doctor, and the physical trainer (248-e).

In chapter six, the distinction between possession and technical divination is critically re-assessed in light of Diotima, a figure who flouts Socrates' distinction. I argue that Diotima's knowledge is the result of her being a seer, and that this helps us better understand her account of *eros*. I also argue that Diotima is an exemplary seer, capable not only of divining superlative truths, but also of defending them with rational argument. In fact, my guiding thesis is that exemplary seers like Diotima, I claim, are functionally no different than philosophers. Although the recalled conversation between Socrates and Diotima will garner the majority of my attention, it is necessary to recapitulate the earlier instances of divination, inspiration, and *mania* in the dialogue. This is so because the earlier speeches give definition to Socrates' speech.

In the final chapter, I turn to philosophy generally, and Socrates specifically, in order to determine the extent to which divination enjoys affinity with both. One beguiling feature of Socrates, as Plato depicts him, is his *daimonion*, or divine sign. In a superficial sense, the *daimonion* is akin to what occurs to a possessed seer. Still, there seems to be important differences, such as the fact that Socrates can interpret this sign. I aim to clarify Socrates' *daimonion* with special attention to divination. Insofar as the thesis of chapter six is persuasive, namely that Diotima is an exemplary seer that can interpret her own divinations, I hope to conclude that Socrates' *daimonion* is not altogether unique from what occurs to an exemplary seer like Diotima.²⁰

Part III – A Brief Survey of Divination in Ancient Greece

²⁰ Throughout this dissertation, the translations are from Cooper (1997) unless otherwise noted.

In this section, I sketch divination in Archaic and Classical Greece, roughly from the time of Homer (8th century B.C.E.) to the 4th century. The seer (*mantis*), etymologically, derives from the Indo-European root **men*, which means someone in a ‘special mental state’ and this was overwhelmingly understood to be religious in nature.²¹ Other terms were employed as well however. In addition to *mantis*, Homer also uses *theopropos* and *thuoskoos*.²² Aeschylus characterizes Amphiaraus as a *prophētēs* and a *mantis* (*Seven against Thebes* 609-11), and this is identical to Pindar’s description of Teiresias (*Nemean Odes* 1.61-62). Nevertheless, *mantis* and its variants are the dominant Greek terms. Scholars agree that Plato was probably etymologically correct when he connected *mantis* to *mania* at *Phaedrus* 244b-c.²³ The expertise of the seer was quite broad and:

...encompass[ed] all of the various forms of divination that are found in our literary sources. These methods include the interpretation of the movements, behavior, and cries of birds (augury) and the interpretation of dreams and of portents (such as lightning, thunder, earthquakes, eclipses, and any unusual occurrences).²⁴ The seer also examined the entrails of a sacrificial animal for marks and abnormalities of various kinds (extispicy), as well as interpreting the results of burning the entrails (empyromancy). (Flower 24)

In contrast to technical divination, there was also possession divination, which occurs when a seer serves as a mouthpiece for a god.²⁵

²¹ Roth (1982) 9-18. A related term is *enthusiasmos* (*en-theos* – ‘a god within’). Its cognates, as evidenced in Homer, were originally connected to the seer (*mantis* or *theopropos*). Naddaf (2009) 56-67.

²² For *theopropos* *Iliad* 12.195, 13.59. *Odyssey* 1.365. For *thuoskoos* *Iliad* 21.200, *Odyssey* 21.118, 22.292.

²³ Flower (2008) 23.

²⁴ Another interesting example is dream interpretation. Dodds (1959) identifies three sorts of dreams in Ancient Greece. First, there are symbolic dreams, which need to be interpreted. Second, there are visions, which unambiguously display future events to come. Finally, there are oracles; these occur when an authority figure – priest, parent, king, or a god – actually reveals him or herself to the dreamer and states clearly what will be or what is to be done. 104-108

²⁵ Flower distinguishes between two kinds of possession divination. In the first kind, the diviner’s self-identity completely evaporates. The Pythia, the priestess at Delphi and the most well-known female seer, constitutes an example of this sort. Consider the opening of Aeschylus’ *The Furies*; we have the Pythia state that she can “only prophesize what the god directs” (98). In the second sort of possession divination,

It is helpful to contrast the poet with the seer who underwent possession, particularly as it concerns the preservation and expression of their respective works. Whereas each recitation of the poet or rhapsode permitted a degree of variance, the seer's pronouncements were preserved verbatim. The seer's speech is synonymous with the speech of a deity. Any alteration then can only be a human alteration. Thus, even the metrical imperfections of a particular divination were preserved rather than corrected.²⁶ Such was not the case in the context of poetry. This recognition has more implications for poetry than it does for divination for the simple reason that it reveals the potential for poetry to be interpreted non-literally.²⁷ If the language of inspired poetry can be justifiably altered, the easiest way to do justice to its divine origins is to interpret it allegorically.

Furthermore, it is worth meditating on the craft (*technē*) of the seer. One might expect such an ascription be confined to those forms of divination concerned with the interpretation of material signs. In fact, even possession divination was considered a *technē*!²⁸ That each type of seer claimed a *technē* is further confirmed by the recognition

the diviner retains some semblance of self-identity. Cassandra in Aeschylus' *Agamemnon* is an example of the second sort. Even though she prophesizes, she is aware of the content of her prophecy, which in this case is her own death. Although it may sound strange to us, even this sort of divination was considered a *technē*. For instance, Cassandra is characterized as being seized by the "*technai entheoi*" (1209), namely the inspired arts.

²⁶ For the precise reasons of *divine* possession, Flower writes "A Delphic oracle in hexameter verse does not have the same ontological status as epic poetry" (219).

²⁷ One must distinguish between two features of divination. First, the conviction that the seer's pronouncements were the literal voice of a god, and second, that seers often communicated in puzzling language. The two are not incompatible; clearly, if the seer is speaking cryptically, this means that the god is speaking cryptically the oracular utterance is actually divine.

²⁸ Roochnik (1999) provides a useful survey of *technē*'s scope from Homer and Hesiod onward. He argues that despite the unambiguous 'productive' conception of *technē* – one whose predominant applications are to woodworking and smithing – there is already in Homer embryonic potential for the word to be expanded to bodies of knowledge with no "tangible product" (Roochnik 25). Such is the case in the *Homeric Hymn to Hermes* where lyre-playing is characterized as a *technē*. Such is probably the case with divination as evidenced by Cassandra's *technai entheoi*. A connection between the two thus goes back at least to 458 B.C.; the year of the first performance of Aeschylus' *Oresteia*. 22-26.

that they were open to critical evaluation. If a seer prophesizes x, and x does not come about, then some explanation is required. Although there always remained some interpretive freedom, the seer only had marginal ability to change the future by appeal to the gods. Moreover, the seer's pronouncements could not be taken deterministically. In other words, a seer could not make guarantees. The signs were 'favorable' or 'unfavorable' but if, say, a general were to blunder, a different event than a seer's prediction might occur.²⁹ This is one way, among others, that seers were able to retain legitimacy despite making a false prediction.

There were other ways of maintaining legitimacy in the face of prophetic failure. Perhaps the seer was fake; perhaps one seer was more talented than another, thereby explaining differences in a specific oracle. Still further, one might even disbelieve in the authenticity of certain methods of prophecy (e.g., augury, or the examination of entrails). Granted, it is important to note that some seers were not conscious while they divined (e.g., the Pythia), and therefore did not have to defend their divinations like a military seer. In such cases, of course, the onus fell to the interpreters of the seer. After all, one of the legitimizing tropes of divination was the gods communicated in cryptic language. Human error was always a decisive possibility.

Does the evidence confirm Plato's distinction between technical and possession divination? As in so many distinctions, exceptions slip through the cracks. In the case of divination, there is evidence of a seer who coalesces elements of both kinds. In this case, a seer has a special ability to spontaneously see reality, or the future, but does not do so by becoming possessed. In other words, the seer need not divine through an intermediary

²⁹ The important point to take from this is that mistakes could "be accommodated within the system (of divination) itself" (Flower 117).

– lightning bolt, livers, etc. But at the same time, the seer is not possessed. Consider Calchas in the *Agamemnon*. He prophesizes from seeing the two eagles that Troy will fall, but that Artemis will be unhappy and kill the winds. Thus, a sacrifice is needed. Calchas is not possessed but he does intuit, or see, things to come. This visionary sort of divination has been dubbed ‘intuitive divination’.³⁰

This typology is flexible. There is overlap, both between the sort of divination discussed, particularly between technical and intuitive divination, and between seers and other professions.³¹ Seers also possessed other more marginal areas of competence – healing, purification, and the enacting of ritual. Properly speaking, this was first and foremost the domain of the priest, but if a priest was unavailable, such duties fell to the seer. Several more qualifications are necessary. For one, Greek seers did not require expertise in all areas of divination. Regarding divine possession, for instance, it seems this was confined to those who were anchored in one place, such as the Pythia at Delphi. Many seers, by contrast, were migrant, much like the sophists, and traveled from city to city.³²

Finally, it is instructive to appreciate that one did not even have to be a seer in order to practice divination. There is evidence from Xenophon that many people had a “working knowledge of extispicy (inspection of entrails)” (Flower 55) to judge whether

³⁰ Flower (2008) 86-88.

³¹ Other relevant professions included the priest, poet, *exegetai*, and *chresmologos*. These latter figures served as “professional collectors, chanters, and interpreters of oracles” (Flower 60) neither enjoyed the same prestige as seers nor engaged in technical and possession divination.

³² Johnston (2008) rejects the prospects of distinguishing divination between technical and natural. Rather, she favors a distinction between ‘institutional oracles’ and ‘independent diviners’. See 27-29. For my purposes, Flower’s typology has the advantage of distinguishing divination in epistemic and psychological terms, which better capture the motivation behind Plato notion of divination.

‘x’ or ‘y’ was favorable. This did not negate that in situations of particular gravity, one consulted an acknowledged expert.³³

With all the evidence, it is plain that divination played a central rather than a peripheral role in Archaic and Classical Greece.³⁴ This has not always been a conviction of scholars, particularly those who subscribe to the thesis that Classical Greece was the apex of rationalism. But it is against this intricate backdrop that Plato emerges with his own ideas.

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³³ I engage with divination, together with the specialization befitting a craftsman, in chapters 2 and 4.

³⁴ Johnston (2008) 29.

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Chapter 1 – What Does Euthyphro Know?

Abstract:

I argue that too little attention has been paid to Euthyphro's occupation as a seer. I further argue that his occupation provides a better account of the *Euthyphro* as a whole. This depends upon a close analysis of the dialogue, together with the *Cratylus*, since Euthyphro makes an appearance in that dialogue as well. I hope to show that what prompts the dialogical exchange between Socrates and Euthyphro – the charge of pollution (*miasma*) against Euthyphro's father – is the result of divination. In other words, Euthyphro holds a true belief about the impartiality of justice. Nevertheless, I maintain that his engagement with Socrates reveals the limits of divination, specifically that seers are unable to adequately interpret their divinations.

Introduction

It was axiomatic in Classical Greece that (1) the gods existed and (2) communicated with humankind.³⁵ Divination was one of the paradigmatic means of communication. Although Plato is wary of certain divinatory practices, he recognizes the essential validity of divination.³⁶ In fact, seers populate several of his dialogues, usually to underscore an epistemological point, or to puzzle over the nature of divine inspiration.³⁷

In this chapter, I argue that too little attention has been paid to Euthyphro's occupation as a seer. I further argue that his occupation provides a better account of the *Euthyphro* as a whole. This depends upon a close analysis of the dialogue, together with the *Cratylus*, since Euthyphro makes an appearance in the latter as well. I aim to show that what prompts the dialogical exchange between Socrates and Euthyphro – the charge of pollution (*miasma*) against Euthyphro's father – is the result of divination. In other

³⁵ Flower (2006) 132-152 notes that although its influence waxed and waned throughout antiquity, most people “had a belief in the validity and importance of divination” (152). One example of skepticism is Xenophanes (Cicero’ *On Divination* I 3.5) who is noteworthy for his radical theology.

³⁶ cf. *Charmides* 164e; 173c; *Euthyphro* 3e; *Republic* 364b; *Theaetetus* 179a; *Timaeus* 71a-72; *Laws* 694c; 908c-d.

³⁷ E.g., The Delphic Oracle in the *Apology*; Diotima in the *Symposium*; Euthyphro in the *Euthyphro*; Theoclymenus in the *Ion*.

words, Euthyphro holds a true belief about the impartiality of justice. Nevertheless, I maintain that his engagement with Socrates reveals the limits of divination, specifically that seers are unable to adequately interpret their divinations.

Part I – Euthyphro in the *Euthyphro*

The *Euthyphro* is concerned with defining piety (*to hosion*), and so consists of explicating the relationship between humans and the gods. Euthyphro provides five definitions of piety, but each is critiqued and ultimately rejected by Socrates.³⁸ Whether or not there is a Socratic conception of piety tacitly expressed in the dialogue is still hotly debated.³⁹ For the moment, I avoid this topic, but I develop an account later on. The five definitions are:

1. Piety is prosecuting the wrongdoer (5d).
2. Piety is “what is dear to the gods” (*esti toinun to men tois theois prosphiles hosion*) (7a1).⁴⁰
3. Piety is what is dear to all of the gods (9e).
4. Piety is that part of justice that concerns itself “with the care of the gods” (*to peri tēn tōn theōn therapeian*) (12e6)
5. Piety is the knowledge of how to sacrifice and pray (14c).

The first definition is false because it is too narrow in scope; it does not provide the necessary and sufficient conditions for all cases.⁴¹ This is a familiar pitfall of many Socratic interlocutors.⁴²

³⁸ McPherran (2002) 105-106 discusses the notion of treating Euthyphro as a Platonic construction versus an historical person.

³⁹ McPherran (1985) 283-284 offers a survey of what he calls the constructivist camp, which holds that there is indeed a positive conception of piety, and the anticonstructivist camp, which rejects any positive claims about piety and emphasizes the aporetic nature of the dialogue. More recently, Dimas (2006) argues for the constructivist position and Rabbas (2005) argues the opposite.

⁴⁰ All translations by Grube in Cooper (1997).

⁴¹ The question that has most often concerned scholars is whether or not this definition is merely an instance of piety (as opposed to a universal claim), or whether it is a universal claim, albeit too narrow to accept. The popular position nowadays is with the latter option. Nehamas (1975) 287-294; Versenyi (1982) 45-46; Burns (1985) 314-325; Rabbas (2005) 293-309.

⁴² cf. *Laches* 190c; *Republic* 331b-c.

The second definition is rejected due to the lack of consensus among the gods, thereby giving way to the third definitional candidate.⁴³ Although the gods might disagree about who is guilty of impiety, they all agree that whoever commits impiety deserves punishment (8d). The Euthyphro dilemma is the harbinger in this case. Although Euthyphro has improved the definition by eliminating disagreement, he now faces the independent problem of explaining why the gods love what they do. The property of ‘being-dear-to-gods’ depends upon the gods holding something dear; they do not hold something dear because it has the property of ‘being-dear-to-gods’. Rather, there must be some other reason that gives independent support for being held dear. Euthyphro submits to this line of reasoning and the discussion proceeds to the fourth definition.

Now piety is defined by appeal to domain, namely as that part of justice that concerns itself ‘with the care of the gods’ (12e6). But what does ‘care’ (*therapeia*) mean in this context? Socrates considers two possibilities. First, to care is to “aim at the good of the object cared for” (*ep’ agathō tini esti kai ōphelia tou therapeuomenou*) (13b) such as in the case in horse-breeding. This is rejected because the gods do not improve through the care of humankind.⁴⁴ Both Euthyphro and Socrates agree that humankind has a negligible effect on the Gods. The second meaning of care is akin to the relationship between master and slave. This encapsulates the asymmetrical relationship between humankind and the gods. Humans serve the gods as slaves serve their masters.

One consequence of the shift is a move away from the epistemological component of caring for the gods. In the first sense of care, pious individuals possess technical

⁴³ It was certainly within the realm of Greek popular religion that there could be discord amongst the gods. At the same time, by the 4th century B.C., there was a healthy intellectual discourse that challenged the conceptual consistency the thesis that the gods could be at odds with one another. McPherran (1996) writes, “The stories of the gods’ quarrels may well have been doubted by other Athenians” (70).

⁴⁴ Lannstrom (2011) 266-268 notes this as she seeks to dismantle the *do ut des* principle of sacrifice.

knowledge, as demonstrated when Socrates states, “not everyone has knowledge of tending horses, but rather the one skilled with horses” (*hoion phamen hippous ou pas epistatai therapeuein alla ho hippikos*) (13a4-5). By contrast, when the pious person is conceptualized as a slave, it is the god who is the knower.⁴⁵

This point segues to the fifth definition, namely that piety is the art of sacrificing and praying to the gods. In other words, people seek to secure something from the gods. Consequently, piety rewards people. What about the gods? What do they receive from piety? According to Euthyphro, the gods receive pleasure, which gets specified as whatever is dear to them. A familiar problem immediately arises. Whatever is pleasing to the gods is god-loved (15c). This returns Socrates and Euthyphro to the third definition of piety, which was already rejected because of the Euthyphro dilemma.

The dramatic context of the *Euthyphro* is instructive, both in the way that piety is contextualized into a concrete example, and in drawing out the continuities between the two characters. Socrates meets Euthyphro on the way to his trial; Euthyphro, incidentally, is on his way to prosecute his father for manslaughter (4a), which he claims is an instance of piety. Prior to the argumentative engagement – where Socrates challenges Euthyphro to provide an adequate definition – Socrates blithely compliments Euthyphro about his wisdom and laments the unfortunate skepticism of the Athenian Assembly. Indeed, taking for granted Euthyphro’s wisdom, Socrates desires to be his student, thereby foreshadowing a Socratic tenet that will never be denied, namely that knowing piety improves one’s life (16a). This is so despite the ironic undercurrent; as is so often the case, Socrates is nobody’s student.

⁴⁵ I am indebted to Weiss (1994) 268-269 for this point.

Consider Socrates' motivation to be Euthyphro's student in the context of the dialogue. In the opening exchange, Euthyphro compares himself to Socrates (3c). For Socrates, it is a familiar story that is related to us in the *Apology*. Meletus has accused him of corrupting the young by creating new gods, and disbelieving in the old gods (3b). In Euthyphro's vernacular, Meletus is condemning Socrates' divine sign (*daimonion*) as well as the more general notion of religious innovation. Such accusations, according to Euthyphro, are easily persuadable, and so Meletus has a good chance of smearing Socrates' reputation in front of the Assembly.

Euthyphro states that he has suffered through similar experiences; he has often been ridiculed in the assembly when speaking on divine matters:

Whenever I speak of divine matters (*peri tōn theiōn*) in the assembly and foretell the future, they laugh me down as if I were crazy; and yet I have foretold nothing that did not happen. Nevertheless they envy all of us who do this (3c1-4).

hotan ti legō en tē ekklēsia peri tōn theiōn, prolegōn autois ta mellonta, katagelōsin hōs mainomenou: kaitoi ouden hoti ouk alēthes eirēka hōn proeipon, all' homōs phthonousin hēmin pasi tois toioutois.

This draws out the resemblance between Socrates and Euthyphro; a resemblance dismantled in the argumentative section. Indeed, it might seem that the most obvious parallel is between Socrates and Euthyphro's father. Socrates is being tried for corrupting the young and believing in false gods and Euthyphro's father is being tried for manslaughter, but both constitute gross impiety. Nevertheless, the opening frame shows that the more nuanced relationship is between Socrates and Euthyphro himself.

There are a number of superficial similarities. Socrates has his *daimonion*; Euthyphro claims wisdom in divine matters. Both have a tense relationship with the rest

of the Athenians. Both are willing to apply their moral convictions rather than capitulate. Socrates' philosophical convictions lead to his demise; Euthyphro, as well, is ready and willing to sacrifice his filial relationship for the sake of what he takes to be true. Yet despite these similarities, one function of the *Euthyphro* is to demarcate Socrates from figures like Euthyphro.⁴⁶

Even though Euthyphro foretells the future and gets lambasted by the assembly, his actual similarity to Socrates is minimal. First, Socrates is being brought to trial. Euthyphro has never been charged. Second, Euthyphro experiences ridicule, but it is not altogether clear whether Socrates will undergo a similar experience. Indeed, Socrates picks up on this immediately (3e); he expresses ignorance about the outcome of his trial, especially if he confronts an earnest assembly. Under these circumstances, which are not akin to those experienced by Euthyphro, "...the outcome is not clear except to you [Euthyphro] prophets (*tois mantesin*)" (3e4).

Of crucial importance, both quotations – first where Euthyphro claims expertise on divine matters (3c) and second when Socrates characterizes Euthyphro (3e) – demonstrate that Euthyphro is a seer. His name stems from *euthyphron*, which means 'right-minded'. Euthyphro believes that he has divined the presence of pollution where others have not perceived it (4c).⁴⁷ He is in Athens because of the pollution, which consists of his proximity to a killer – his father. He seeks to avoid pollution for himself in the Athenian law courts.⁴⁸ In fact, it is doubtful that Athenian legal practice linked

⁴⁶ McPherran (2002) 120-121 refers to Euthyphro as the "dark *Doppelgänger* of Socrates" (112) and formulates an analogy between Euthyphro's focus on pollution and Socrates' focus on corruption.

⁴⁷ McPherran (2002) 113-114 provides a cursory look at the fifth century Greek notion of *miasma*. It was an "impersonal, invisible material taint that polluted individuals transmit to others" (114). Thus, even the innocent could incur it. If one was polluted, purification, in a broad sense, was the cure.

⁴⁸ Furley (1985) writes that Euthyphro "was doubtless counting on the acquittal of his father in courts; he had done his duty, both to his father and himself, by placing the responsibility for cleansing any possible

pollution to homicide.⁴⁹ Nevertheless, it is still fair to ask whether Euthyphro's inability to provide Socrates with an adequate definition of piety bankrupts his case.⁵⁰ Socrates, for one, would like to commit Euthyphro to such a consequence (15d). Whether or not Euthyphro's father could be prosecuted on the grounds of secular justice is an open question; what is important for my purposes is that Euthyphro believes in the presence of pollution, which the law courts can assuage.

That Euthyphro is a seer does not yet tell us whether he embodies the mores of Greek popular religion⁵¹ or whether he is a religious eccentric, perhaps a representative of an orphic cult. Scholarly opinion has been sharply divided.⁵² A determination of this concern doubtlessly entails a certain interpretation of the dialogue. If Euthyphro represents religious orthodoxy, then the dialogue could be interpreted as exhibiting the fundamental incoherence of the Athenian conception of piety, thereby foreshadowing the injustice Socrates will experience in the *Apology*. Just as Meletus is incapable of defending himself against Socrates, so too does Euthyphro fail to defend his assertions.

The situation is more complicated if Euthyphro represents a religious sect. The dialogue could then be seen as a contest between philosophy and mystic religion. On this account, the Euthyphro dilemma demonstrates that piety must be subordinate to a secular version of justice. More concretely, we might take the connections between Socrates and

blood-guilt in the hands of the court" (206). It may have been that it was up to the victims' family, often a male relative, to prosecute. This makes Euthyphro's status uncertain. There is a great deal of material on the status of the case: Burnet (1924) 102, 104; Dover (1974) 273-274; MacDowell (1978) 59, 111; Brouer (2002) 52-53; Al-Maini (2011) 1 for a survey.

⁴⁹ Bendlin (2007) 185-186 states that the evidence for such a claim is "meager" (185) and notes that there is no mention of pollution in Draco's law of homicide, which was republished in 409/08 B.C.E.

⁵⁰ Burnet (1924) 83.

⁵¹ Mikkalson (1983) 3-12.

⁵² Those who believe Euthyphro represents Athenian mores include Grote (1865) 322, Heideil (1902) 165, and Cornford (1912) 311. Those who believe he is more non-traditionally religious include Taylor (1950) 147; Burnet (1924) 85-87; Hoerber (1958) 95-98; McPherran (1996) 34-35.

Euthyphro to heart. Although Euthyphro seems to be Socratic, he is actually in desperate need of the Socratic elenchus.⁵³

There are good reasons on both sides. The strongest evidence that Euthyphro belongs to a peripheral sect is found in his first definition of piety, namely that it is simply the prosecution of a wrongdoer (5e).⁵⁴ His justification is Olympian in nature; Zeus bound Cronus for acting unjustly, and Cronus himself castrated his father Uranus. Euthyphro's conception of piety, then, is one that is derived from Homer and Hesiod.⁵⁵ This is problematic because in the context of late 5th century Athens, the prestige of the epic poets had waned. This does not mean that they were any less visible to the Athenians.⁵⁶ In fact, it has been argued that with the birth of philosophy the epic poets began to be interpreted allegorically as opposed to literally.⁵⁷ Many Greeks were incensed by the immorality of the Gods, which in part explains Plato's own reformation of the traditional deities at *Republic* III. Euthyphro not only appeals to the Homeric gods, but explicitly cites their gross immorality in justifying himself to Socrates!⁵⁸

⁵³ McPherran (1996) 35

⁵⁴ Allen (1970) 20-21 argues that Euthyphro's entire case is a baseless. We know Socrates' trial occurred in 399 B.C. But in 404 B.C., Naxos was not under Athenian jurisdiction. If the killing had occurred recently, it could be prosecuted in Athens. If the killing occurred 5 years earlier, a statute of limitations would take effect. Heidel (1902) points out that this may be why Euthyphro so emphasizes the polluting effect of having his father go unprosecuted (4b-c).

⁵⁵ Allen writes, "The bloody history of Zeus, Cronos, and Uranus was generally treated as allegory, or frankly dismissed as false" (25). Also Hoerber (1958) 96

⁵⁶ Furley (1985) 202-203 offers plenty of examples that demonstrate the pervasiveness of the Homeric Gods.

⁵⁷ Naddaf (2009), especially 111-112, provides an extended analysis of this complex development. Naddaf, *pace* Long (1992), distinguishes between strong and weak allegory by appeal to the intentions of the author. In the strong sense, the author composes the text so that it ought to be interpreted allegorically. The weak sense, by contrast, merely allows allegorical interpretation irrespective of the author's intention, and it is in this latter sense that the works of the epic poets can be interpreted allegorically. Indeed, the focus on intention to distinguish the two sorts encompasses consciousness as well. To intentionally allegorize is to consciously allegorize, and one can do this either as an author or as an interpreter.

⁵⁸ Naddaf (2009) 104 cites Euthyphro as evidence for the thesis that traditional Athenian religion held a literal interpretation of the works of Homer and Hesiod.

Nevertheless, there are reasons to resist the thesis that Euthyphro embodies an eccentric religiosity. First, even though his appeal to Homer and Hesiod is questionable, it would be well to keep in mind that both poets still enjoyed Pan-Hellenic influence. Second, it is a feature of the definitional dialogues that the initial attempts at definition parrot conventional views. This serves to clear space for a transition from conventional views to the Platonic (or Socratic) view.⁵⁹ In the *Laches*, for instance, the first attempt at defining courage focuses on the proper conduct of the hoplite, the canonical occupation of the courageous person (190e). Amongst other considerations, Socrates is able to persuade his interlocutors that courage, properly defined, may require the hoplite to abandon his post and flee. This serves to make way for the Platonic conception of courage, which amounts to a kind of knowledge.

Finally, the entire exchange is predicated on the idea that Euthyphro's divine wisdom will enable Socrates to rebuke Meletus' charges in court. In other words, Euthyphro is initially depicted as an authority on divine matters. As the dialogical engagement progresses, his authority is undermined. This is another motif of the early dialogues, namely that Socratic interlocutors are initially presented as experts only to wind up barren of expertise at the conclusion of the dialogue.⁶⁰

One problem with this is that we are told that Euthyphro has been laughed out of the assembly. This hardly lends itself to the image of an authority figure. That said, Plato often incorporates elements of comedy in his dialogues, and that one recurrent motif of

⁵⁹ Wolfsdorf (2008) 15.

⁶⁰ Consider Protagoras of the *Protagoras*; Hippias of the *Hippias Major*; Dionysodorus and Euthydemus of the *Euthydemus*; Nicias and Laches of the *Laches*.

Ancient Comedy is for the divinations of a seer to be lampooned.⁶¹ The irony is that Socrates is not content to rest with the Assembly; rather, he seeks to engage with Euthyphro, challenging him to defend his convictions.

Indeed, this last point contributes to the “apologetic tendency” (Burley 204) of the dialogue. Euthyphro claims that by harming Socrates, the core of the city is wronged. If there is in fact a connection between the *Euthyphro* and Socrates’ trial, then it makes little sense to think that Euthyphro represents an unconventional point of view. Rather, it adds to the overall *pathos* of the dialogue that Euthyphro embodies a degree of religious orthodoxy. His inability to articulate a satisfactory definition of piety confirms Socrates’ intellectual superiority.⁶² In this way, Socrates and Euthyphro are two quite different people.

A satisfactory portrait of Euthyphro, then, amounts to synthesizing the two positions. While there is strong evidence for Euthyphro’s sectarianism, it is worthwhile to remember that sectarianism, in Ancient Greece, was far more happenstance than in other, more determinately religious cultures. I submit then that Euthyphro is a religiously orthodox seer, but someone whose orthodoxy is distinctly revolutionary. In this way, he neither embodies the religious beliefs of the ordinary Athenian nor represents a doctrinaire orientation that prohibits religious innovation. Euthyphro is not afraid to flout

⁶¹ Aristophanes’ *The Birds* 950-990; *The Knights* 60, 110. Flower (2008) notes that seers (*manteis*) in Old Comedy were often characterized, even lampooned as, oracle-speakers or collectors (*chresmologoi*). 62-63

⁶² Of course, intellectual superiority does not necessarily mean that Socrates has a positive account of piety. This could easily be contextualized by appeal to Socratic ignorance. My argument does not depend on the degree of Socrates’ wisdom, only that he registers higher than everyone else.

public opinion – he unabashedly presents his divinations to the assembly but he has yet to suffer any significant consequences for his beliefs.⁶³

It is worthwhile to note that it was a common occurrence to present oracles to the assembly. Munn (2000) writes:

Diopieithes and Lampon, both famous expounders of oracles mentioned by Aristophanes in the *Birds* of 414 and in numerous other passages, are both attested as proposers of decrees in the Athenian Assembly in the 420s. Their advice typically concerned matters of religion, but the oracles that they and others expounded for the edification of all Athenians touched on all aspects of Athenian policy (86).

Even Thucydides, noteworthy for his ambivalence about divination, alludes to its ubiquity.⁶⁴ It is clear, then, that it was not unique for oracles to be presented to the Athenian assembly.

But we must still speculate on the precise nature of Euthyphro's mantic abilities. If Euthyphro does in fact present oracles to the assembly, then he is able to interpret his own divinations. This means that he is some sort of technical seer, someone with a set of specialized skills. Euthyphro does not lose his mind when he divines. Nevertheless, there is other evidence, specifically in the *Cratylus*, that counters this characterization. As I turn now to that dialogue, I aim to underscore Euthyphro's affinity to inspiration specified as the temporary loss of self-awareness. This prepares us for the final section where I integrate Euthyphro's occupation with his claim to divine knowledge.

Part II – Euthyphro in the *Cratylus*

⁶³ As McPherran (2002) writes, citing Tulin (81), “Oddly, though, it is this seemingly conventional notion of miasma that Euthyphro uses to explicate what appears to be a quite forward-looking, cosmopolitan principle of impartial justice” (112).

⁶⁴ Instead of raging against Nicias' devotion to divination, he is content to write that the Greek general seemed to give divination too much importance (*History of the Peloponnesian War* 7.50.4). This would seem to carve out space where divination would have qualified value. Nevertheless, 5.26.3 is more straightforwardly skeptical.

The *Cratylus* also contains evidence that Euthyphro is a seer, specifically in Socrates' references to his mantic properties. First, something must be said about the content of the dialogue. It deals with the 'correctness of names' thesis, which holds that the essence of each noun (including proper nouns like the names of Gods) is contained within its etymology. For example, Agamemnon contains two words that encapsulate the meaning of the man. He is admirable (*agastos*) because he holds his ground (*epimone*) (395a). This is in contrast to the opposite position, argued by Hermogenes, which holds that names are purely conventional.

It has been argued that the Euthyphro of the *Cratylus* should not be taken to be the protagonist of the *Euthyphro*, but the case for their identity is quite strong.⁶⁵ For one, he is introduced when Socrates is in the midst of investigating a series of divine etymologies.⁶⁶ It is doubtful a mere coincidence that immediately preceding Socrates' allusion to Euthyphro he is investigating the etymology of Zeus, Cronus, and Uranus. These are the same three deities whom Euthyphro explicitly cites in defense of his first definition of piety in the eponymous dialogue.⁶⁷

Impressed with Socrates' performance to date, Hermogenes declares: "Indeed, Socrates, you do seem to me to be exactly like a prophet who has suddenly been inspired to deliver oracles" (*kai men dē, ō Sōkrates, atekhnōs ge moi dokeis hōsper hoi enthousiōntes exaiphnēs khrēsmōdein*) (396d2-3). Socrates assents to this characterization and explains:

⁶⁵ Taylor (1926) 146-147 expresses doubt that the two figures are meant to embody one person. More contemporary scholars, however, see no reason to reject the thesis that they represent the same man. Consult Sedley (2003) 40; Baxter (1992) 108; Barney (2001) 57.

⁶⁶ The etymological section can be ably divided into three sections – the divine names, the physical names, and the names of virtues and vices.

⁶⁷ Nails (2002) 153 notes that it is unlikely for two individuals with the same name to have such similarity.

I was with him [Euthyphro] at dawn, lending an ear to his lengthy discussion. He must have been inspired (*enthousiōn*), because it looks as though he has not only filled my ears with his superhuman wisdom (*tēs daimonias sophias*) but taken possession of my soul as well (396d5-7).

kai aitiōmai ge, ō Hermogenes, malista autēn apo Euthuphronos tou Prospaltiou prospeptōkenai moi: heōthen gar polla autō sunē kai pareikhon ta ōta. kinduneuei oun enthousiōn ou monon ta ōta mou emplēsai tēs daimonias sophias, alla kai tēs psukhēs epeilēphthai.

Socrates embraces this inspiration for the sake of the investigation, but will seek purification the next day from someone with relevant expertise – a priest or a wise man.

On the one hand, the exchange is banal. Socrates' interlocutors often characterize him idiosyncratically.⁶⁸ Nevertheless, a number of puzzles emerge. What is the purpose of Socrates' etymological investigation? Why appeal to the inspiration of Euthyphro, a seer, in the first place? It is not an isolated incident; Socrates goes on to appeal to Euthyphro's mantic properties throughout the etymological section.⁶⁹ Is this meant to entrench the conviction that Euthyphro is responsible for the entirety of the etymological proceedings? Finally, why does Socrates require purification, and from whom will he receive it? To a degree, these questions are all related, but as much as is possible, I try to keep them separate.

The etymological section has not always been held in good standing. As is often the case with eccentric Platonic passages, scholars are more comfortable looking through the lens of irony than in confronting the possibility of philosophical content.⁷⁰ In recent

⁶⁸ Euthyphro refers to Socrates as a Daedalus (*Euthyphro* 11b); Meno compares Socrates to an electric ray (*Meno* 80a); Socrates variously characterizes himself as a seer (*Cratylus* 396d), a gadfly (*Apology* 31c), and a midwife (*Theaetetus* 149a).

⁶⁹ cf. 399a; 400a; 407d; 409d; 428c.

⁷⁰ Baxter (1992) 94-99, for instance, argues that the etymological section is best interpreted as an extended satire on Greek popular attitudes about the interrelationship between language and the world.

years, however, there has been something of a resurgence. There are at least two strong reasons not to dismiss it. First, etymology was a prevalent intellectual enterprise in Classical Greece.⁷¹ Indeed, even Plato utilizes etymology in dialogues other than the *Cratylus*.⁷²

What, then, is its function in this particular context? I argue that the key is in the opening stages of the dialogue when Hermogenes implores Socrates to help him interpret Cratylus' bewildering position concerning the correctness of names. If Socrates would interpret Cratylus' "oracular utterances" (*manteian*) (384a4) Hermogenes would happily listen. Hermogenes would furthermore like to hear about Socrates' own reflections on the subject.

Socrates, predictably, disavows such knowledge.⁷³ He does, however, assent to an investigation. After critiquing Hermogenes' conventionalism, the discussion proceeds to a study of etymologies. What is significant about this early exchange is that Socrates is adopting Cratylus' viewpoint. The evidence for this is twofold. First, their connection is substantiated by the allusions to the oracular – just as Cratylus makes "oracular utterances" (384a4), so too does Socrates cite inspiration. Second, the etymology section can be fruitfully characterized as an *agon* between Socrates and Cratylus, and more generally, between philosophy and etymology.⁷⁴

⁷¹ Goldschmidt (1940) 109-142; Baxter (1992) ch. 4-5. Barney (2001) 53 cites the *Derveny Papyrus*, composed circa late 5th century, as an example of early etymologizing. That etymology was widespread does not mean that it enjoyed uncritical admiration. Like all intellectual disciplines, it was often ridiculed. Indeed, it is lambasted by Euripides (*Bacchae* 292-7) and Aristophanes (*The Clouds* 394).

⁷² cf. *Phaedrus* 244c-d; *Laws* 654a, 714a, 957c. The *Laws* is an incontestably late dialogue, which means that Plato did not change his mind about the value of etymology, however qualified. Sedley (2003) 25-26 notes the importance of etymology in Socrates' discussion of musical expertise at *Philebus* 17c11-e6.

⁷³ Socrates has not taken Prodicus' fifty drachma course, which exhausts the topic. Rather, he has only taken the one drachma course, thereby making him seem unqualified (384b-c).

⁷⁴ Barney (2001) 60-73.

The *agon* is a contest between two parties. In this case, it is not internal to a specific domain. Instead, it is a competition between two disciplines on the subject of method. Such generality makes it ineffective for Socrates to simply assert the importance of dialectic (philosophy) because it will fall upon deaf ears. Cratylus will simply assert his own position and the two combatants will talk past one another. A more promising strategy is to adopt the viewpoint of your opponent and defeat him by his own tactics. Socrates often employs this strategy.⁷⁵

Even if we accept that the etymology section is best interpreted agonistically, there is still the puzzle of Euthyphro and the oracular imagery. If Socrates is seeking to triumph over Cratylus by outperforming him at his own expertise, why dilute the victory by appeal to divination? This means that Socrates cannot defeat Cratylus on his own terms. He needs divine help.

In a general sense, the appeal to Euthyphro, and by extension the gods, is a claim to authoritative knowledge. Not only does it empirically explain how Socrates, a man who is relatively uneducated in the field of etymology, is able to demonstrate such ability, but it also stamps the proceedings with divine authority. Consider that Socrates submits to the Homeric thesis that humans use different names than the gods. This is so because the latter know a thing's correct name *tout court* (391d).

This only amounts to a short sojourn, however, because Socrates proceeds to digress to something more manageable and within the scope of human ability (392b2), namely the way two names can refer to the same thing. The Gods are too transcendent for humans to directly access – “we know nothing about the gods themselves or about the

⁷⁵ Barney (2001) 63-64 refers to the Simonides exchange in the *Protagoras*. Two other examples are Socrates' first speech in the *Phaedrus* where he characterizes the nature of *eros* and the early exchange in the *Euthydemus*.

names they call themselves – although it is clear that they call themselves true names” (*hoti peri theōn ouden ismen, oute peri autōn oute peri tōn onomatōn, hatta pote heautous kalousin*) (400d6-8). This forces a transition to the second best option, namely those humans who originally gave the gods their names (401a).

There is a sense in which ancient peoples occupy a middle ground between contemporary Athenians and the gods.⁷⁶ Both Socrates (397c) and Cratylus (438c) agree on this. If Socrates can tap into the original mindset of the ancients, he will discover the forgotten meanings of words, thereby pleasing the gods (400d).⁷⁷ In this way, the discussion takes a secular turn, and focuses on human knowledge and ignorance. The turn is ambivalent, however, for accessing the gods, if possible, seems altogether preferable given their veridical nature. This may explain why Socrates appeals to the power of inspiration amidst his etymological excavations.

Another explanation for Socrates’ appeal to Euthyphro is that it distinguishes Socrates the philosopher from Socrates the etymologist. In other words, divination enables Socrates to both superlatively etymologize, thereby trumping the ability of Cratylus, and yet remain uncommitted to the thesis that it is a practice worth cultivating and pursuing. It makes sense, according to this line of thought, that Socrates insists that they seek purification after their discussion.

⁷⁶ cf. *Philebus* 16c.

⁷⁷ Plato has an intricate position. On a fundamental level, he rejects the ancients on the grounds that if we can come up with an adequate explanation that is to be wholly preferred (*Phaedrus* 274c). More generally, he seems content to “follow custom” (*tō nomō pisteuteon*) (*Timaeus* 40e2) and believe the ancient account of the Gods. This is desultory, however, since we have plenty of examples of Plato re-designing the cosmos. The benevolent demiurge is a case in point.

But who is qualified to purify Socrates? The likely candidate is the dialectician referenced at 390c.⁷⁸ The dialectician is introduced at the conclusion of Socrates' polemic against conventionalism. Hermogenes has asserted a theory of language such that names get their meaning based on the conventions of a community or an individual.⁷⁹ A problem emerges when Hermogenes acquiesces to a distinction between *technai* of making and those of using. Examples are cited aplenty – the lyre-player will supervise the maker of lyres (390b) – but who will, then, supervise the maker of linguistic rules? It is “someone who knows how to ask and answer questions” (*ton de erōtan kai apokrinesthai epistamenon*) (390c8-9).

Not just anyone can determine linguistic conventions. Only an acknowledged expert can do so; this is the dialectician, a person able to name things in such a way that the name reflects their nature. Hermogenes' conventionalism is thereby refuted on the grounds that (1) there are individuals who possess more wisdom in naming things and (2) the ability to name wisely depends upon capturing the nature of the thing in the selected name. The connection between this argument and the subsequent etymological section is clear.

In the *Cratylus*, Socrates appeals to Euthyphro's ability to inspire him. In fact, Euthyphro is inspired and actually transmits this to Socrates.⁸⁰ What is the purpose of citing Euthyphro's inspiration? I outlined several reasons. For one, it is a claim to authoritative knowledge. Inspiration is the result of divine contact. Furthermore, and paradoxically, inspiration enables Socrates to distance himself from the content of his

⁷⁸ Both Baxter (1992) 109 and Gaiser (1972) 50 argue that the individual best qualified to purify Socrates will be the dialectician.

⁷⁹ Hermogenes does not recognize that anchoring meaning in the community is systematically different than anchoring it in the individual.

⁸⁰ cf. *Ion* 533e.

etymological investigations. This makes sense if we keep in mind that Socrates is in the midst of an *agon* with Hermogenes, and furthermore fundamentally remains a philosopher, not an etymologist.

Something must be said about the seer's relationship to knowledge. As I turn to the final section, I develop an analogy between Socrates the etymologist and Euthyphro the seer. In particular, I argue that just as Socrates holds true beliefs about etymology, so too does Euthyphro hold at least one true belief about piety. Both sets of true beliefs are the result of divine inspiration, and ultimately originate in Euthyphro's access to the gods through divination. Although each definition of piety is deficient, they constitute reifications of the original divination that informed Euthyphro about his father's pollution. In this way, the seer's inability to adequately interpret his divination comes to the fore. Incidentally, this also explains why Euthyphro gets laughed out of the assembly for speaking on divine matters. He is unqualified to speak on his divinations.

Part III – In Consideration of Euthyphro

My intention has been to focus on the notion of mantic authenticity. In the *Euthyphro*, Euthyphro's reputation is established. It has modest credentials. Socrates evaluates and ultimately rejects his mantic knowledge. I argued that Euthyphro is best interpreted as representing a religious orthodoxy of a distinctly revolutionary flavor. Since Euthyphro's mantic knowledge of the will of the gods does not stand up to Socrates' questioning, he is not an authentic seer.⁸¹

I think this is too strong. For what Euthyphro's ineptitude really signifies is the *limits* of divination. In other words, his inability to justify himself does not mean that he

⁸¹ This is complicated because at *Laws* 871b, it is asserted that the prerequisite to avenging a murder is having been ritualistically purified. As a seer, Euthyphro divines true beliefs but cannot give an account, which is a condition of knowledge. The Athenian Stranger is not bound in this way.

is any less of a seer. Rather, it means that he cannot philosophically defend his expertise. He does not possess knowledge in the Socratic sense of the term. But neither do any of Socrates' interlocutors, let alone Socrates himself. The two old generals, Nicias and Laches, of the *Laches* do not possess such knowledge, but Plato nowhere claims that either of them are any less of a general for not being able to define courage (*andreia*).

In the *Cratylus*, Euthyphro legitimizes Socrates' investigations. Of course, Socrates retains the ability to rationally evaluate the wisdom that has been implanted in him (396c4). But Euthyphro nevertheless confers a degree of divine authority. Given Euthyphro's erroneous reasoning in the eponymous dialogue, it might be thought that he is given too much of a role in the *Cratylus*. Nevertheless, I think the contexts are coalescent in that they reveal the power of divination together with its adjacent deficiencies.

First, the function of each dialogue must be kept in mind. The *Euthyphro*'s investigation of piety amounts to the claim that adequate definitions are beyond the reach of humankind. This is consistent with the other definitional dialogues.⁸² Those people who purportedly know are shown to have, at the very least, an inflated view of their expertise. On the other hand, the *Cratylus*, especially in the early stages, depends upon the thesis that there are names that accord with nature, and those that do not. Since the gods know what the names are, Plato has tendentious reason to cite them via a seer.

Second, it is instructive to consider the status of the etymologies. On the one hand, they are shown to be philosophically untenable. They imply a Heraclitean worldview predicated on flux; this is antithetical to Plato's own view about at least one

⁸² cf. *Laches*, *Charmides*, *Republic* I.

collection of objects – the Forms.⁸³ That said, it ought to be noted that Cratylus, together with his avowal of Heraclitus' doctrine of flux, was an early influence on Plato.⁸⁴

Granted, Heraclitean flux is not a central part of Cratylus' account in the *Cratylus*. It only emerges during his dialogical engagement with Socrates. This is problematic for Aristotle's account of Cratylus, but an attractive explanation is that Plato has dramatized Cratylus' coming to believe in Heraclitean flux.⁸⁵ It has been supposed that Cratylus' conviction in Heraclitean flux has logically led to his doctrine of names, but in fact, it is the opposite. A consequence of his naturalism is Heraclitean flux.

However, Heraclitean flux does accurately account for the perceptible world. The failure of the ancients, evidently, was their erroneous belief that the world only consisted of what was perceptible.⁸⁶ In this sense, although the etymologies might not constitute philosophical knowledge, they are sound in a narrower sense.⁸⁷

Consider what triggers the discussion in the *Euthyphro*. It is to determine whether or not Euthyphro's legal action constitutes an instance of piety or not. It has been argued that the legitimacy of this action is never actually denied by Socrates.⁸⁸ What Socrates

⁸³ Sedley (2003) 5-6.

⁸⁴ cf. Aristotle's *Metaphysics* A 6 987a32-b7.

⁸⁵ Kirk (1951) 236; Sedley (2003) 17-18.

⁸⁶ By the ancients, Socrates does not mean the Pre-Socratics. Rather, it is clear that he is referring to those who created original language. There is not much more one can say about such a group, and Socrates remains silent on who they are, only that we should not straightforwardly accept the veracity of their claims. Once the original meanings have been discovered, they need to be evaluated on their merits, hence the rejection of the ever-changing worldview on the basis of Platonic arguments about stability and the forms.

⁸⁷ Sedley (2003) 28 distinguishes between the philosophically correct and the exegetically correct in articulating this general thesis. He goes on to characterize the etymologies as a series of true beliefs.

⁸⁸ McPherran (2002) 112 cites *Euthyphro* 8d-e, *Crito* 49b, *Apology* 28b, and *Gorgias* 480a-d as textual support of Socrates' conviction that considerations of justice must be conducted impartially, even and especially in cases that involve one's friends and family. Al-Maini (2011) 2, 16 criticizes this view and cites myriad instances of Socrates' filial piety (*Crito* 50e-51a, *Menexenus* 147a-c, *Republic* 463a-e, 574b-d, *Phaedo* 113e-114a, *Gorgias* 456d-457a, *Alcibiades* 115b-c, *Laws* 717b718b, 740a, 930e-932d). In the *Gorgias* section that McPherran cites, Al-Maini points out that the wrongdoing is plain and unambiguous. By contrast, in the *Euthyphro*, the wrongdoing of the father is still up for grabs. The legal proceedings will determine whether or not Euthyphro's father is guilty, hence it is highly doubtful that Euthyphro's act is

does object to is whether or not Euthyphro can philosophically justify his case. In fact, Euthyphro seems to recognize the need for such justification. One scholar has emphasized just this point:

Not only does Euthyphro himself immediately acknowledge them [conditions for a proper definition] as legitimate (cf. 6e7-8), but his own argumentative practice in the dialogue is testimony to his implicit commitment to this condition as a requirement for normative discourse (Rabbas 300).

Rabbas provides four reasons. First, Euthyphro justifies his action by appeal to a criterion (4b-e, 5d-6a). Second, he emphasizes the need for rational justification, even if the topic under consideration is difficult (7b-d). Third, he modifies his second definition by appeal to a norm that all the gods subscribe to (8b7-9). Finally, he repeatedly insists to Socrates that he is able to provide a satisfactory answer to the topic at hand (9b4-5, b9-10, e1-9).⁸⁹

Of course, these considerations must be tempered by the fact that Euthyphro, as the conversation progresses, emphasizes the difficulty of the subject matter. Indeed, this parallels the *Apology* wherein Socrates formulates a deep systematic division between the human knowledge, which is inherently fallible, and divine knowledge, which is superlative and certain (*Apology* 23a-c). Euthyphro's dialogical engagement with Socrates forces us to reflect on its relationship to Euthyphro's expertise.

In my discussion of the *Euthyphro*, I emphasized that Euthyphro is a syncretic figure who combines elements of Greek popular religion with more ancillary religious beliefs. The case against his father flouts common opinion. How did Euthyphro come to

pious. But what I take to be instructive is Al-Maini's comment that although "Euthyphro might claim he is sure of his father's wrongdoing...the fact that both the father and family disagree gives room for pause" (16). This pause, I think, gestures toward Euthyphro's mantic abilities. Divining his father's pollution would both (1) generate strength of conviction, and (2) alienate his family.

⁸⁹ In Rabbas' (2005) argument, the criterion must be "universal, practically applicable, and essence-revealing" (300).

think that his father committed an evil? More strongly, how did he develop such strength in the veracity of his conviction? The answer, I think, is his occupation as a seer. This is so for three reasons. First, consider the content of what Euthyphro knows – that his father has committed a heinous act and is therefore polluted. It is religious in nature; one gleans religious truths by means of religious experiences, or through recognized authorities like priests.

Euthyphro probably developed his account of his father's action by accessing the will of the gods. This works together with the fact that he seems to be solitary in his thinking. Both Euthyphro's family and Socrates are flabbergasted by his willingness to prosecute his own father. Finally, Euthyphro's strength of conviction also provides cursory evidence that he divined his belief.⁹⁰ Since Euthyphro is a seer, he must have developed his expertise to the point that he is confident in his ability to adequately interpret his divinations. Thus, I think there are good grounds for thinking that Euthyphro's conviction about his father is a result of his mantic expertise.

Now I also argued that the etymological section in the *Cratylus* ought to be read as containing a degree of truth. I submit that the definitions in the *Euthyphro* amount to the same thing. That is, despite the fact that none of the definitions prove philosophically adequate, there is sense in which each definition encapsulates something true. For example, the first definition of piety – prosecuting the wrongdoer – is a paradigmatic instance of piety. The problem, as I discussed earlier, is that it is too narrow to serve as a criterion for all cases of piety.

⁹⁰ Weiss (1994) 265 argues that Euthyphro's motivation for prosecuting his father is actually selfish. That is, although he is concerned with ameliorating the pollution, he is only concerned with ameliorating it because it might infect him. More charitably, however, McPherran (2002) 113 points out that even for Socrates, what is in the interest of the self is identical with the interest of being moral.

The second and third definitions are similar in that they incorporate the gods. The problem with the second definition is that there is a lack of consensus among the gods. This segues to the third definition, which states that piety is what all of the gods love. Much has been made about the third definition.⁹¹ What I take to be crucial, however, is that an adequate definition of piety will doubtlessly include the pleasure of the gods. In other words, what the Euthyphro dilemma draws out is that the ‘holding-dear-by-the-gods’ is a true but inessential property of piety.

This might not be sufficient, however, if we stop to consider Euthyphro’s conception of the gods. Although the third definition turns on the notion of consensus, Euthyphro never characterizes them as laudable moral agents.⁹² In other words, although the gods agree, they still might be deplorable. This is particularly vexing given that Euthyphro is so confident in his convictions about the gods that he justifies himself by appeal to their behavior. In particular, he justifies the prosecution of his father by appeal to another son – Zeus – who castrated his guilty father.

Consider the fourth definition, which defines piety as a part of justice. Given the absence of piety from the list of virtues in the *Republic*, we might reasonably think that Plato considers piety a secondary virtue, capable of being subsumed. The conceptual domain of justice is between humans; piety is that part of justice whose conceptual domain encompasses the relationship between gods and humans. Indeed, Socrates himself seems to endorse Euthyphro this time – “You seem to me to put that very well, but I still need a bit of information” (*kai kalōs ge moi... phainēlegein, alla smikrou tinos*

⁹¹ Rabbas (2005) 291 refers to the third definition, specifically the formulation of the Euthyphro problem, as the fulcrum of the entire dialogue.

⁹² Weiss (1994) states, “nowhere in the dialogue do Euthyphro’s gods attain the status of being perfectly just and wise” (263).

eti endeēs eimi) (12e9-13a1).⁹³ This, then, marks the true element of the fourth definition.

Finally, the fifth definition, which is the knowledge of how to properly sacrifice and pray, is really only a specified version of the fourth definition. Each horn of the definition constitutes one direction in the relationship. Pious individuals pray to the gods in order to ask for something; they sacrifice to them in order to give the gods pleasure. This latter horn proves indistinguishable from the Euthyphro problem. By offering sacrifice, humans do not give a god something he or she needs. Rather, all a sacrifice can do is give pleasure, but then piety becomes none other than “what is dear to the gods” (15c6). Socrates and Euthyphro have returned to the third definition.

The unique features of this definition are the practices of praying and sacrificing. Socrates characterizes such practices as *do ut des* (‘I give that you might give’) – a sense of reciprocity characterized by trade. It is noteworthy that Euthyphro initially characterizes such practices as the result of *charis*, or gift, which is a richer concept, more in line with mutual esteem.⁹⁴ Although there is definite overlap between the two concepts, there are also significant differences. For one, *charis* cultivates social relations between the two parties. This is not an essential feature of a relationship based on trade.⁹⁵

Socrates’ equivocation is what enables him to critique Euthyphro’s final definition. Indeed, in other dialogues as well, the notion that the gods receive something from sacrifices is rejected, together with the related idea that the gods can be persuaded

⁹³ McPherran (1985) 221-222 argues this point, and more pointedly argues that this marks Socrates’ actual conception of piety. This, then, contrasts my position in that I merely want to maintain the minimal point that the definition contains some truth. Coming from the opposite direction, Rabbas (2005) 306 argues that Socrates is only ironically endorsing Euthyphro’s definition.

⁹⁴ Mikalson (2010) 14-15.

⁹⁵ Lannstrom (2011) 267 points out that although Euthyphro acquiesces to Socrates’ equivocation, his response betrays a sense of doubt: “Trading yes, if you prefer to call it that” (*emporikē, ei houtōs hēdion soi onomazein.*) (14e5).

by human actions.⁹⁶ But this does not negate sacrifice as a practice that would have a role in the ideal state.⁹⁷ Thus, by conceptualizing prayer and sacrifice as products of *charis*, Euthyphro has hit upon something true. Appropriate for the seer who is unable to justify such a belief, he is persuaded away from this idea by Socrates.

Conclusion

For Plato, seers can, and do, hit at the truth. In the *Euthyphro*, and in the *Cratylus*, we see several instances of Euthyphro's mantic abilities. We see it in his conviction that his father has committed an injustice. We also see it in when Socrates refers to him in the etymological section of the *Cratylus*. Finally, I argue that each definition in the *Euthyphro*, develops out of an original conviction in the wrongfulness of his father's action, and that this reflects a kernel of truth.

What the *Euthyphro* shows us is that divination cannot be the final word. If a seer is left to interpret his divinations, he proves inept. Still, that seers require philosophy to buttress their claims is trivial in the sense that Plato thinks that every other branch of learning requires philosophical grounding.

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⁹⁶ cf. *Republic* 364b-c; *Laws* 910d.

⁹⁷ cf. *Laws* 716d, 771d, 791b, 799b, 804a, 828b, 935b, 949d.

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Chapter 2 – Mantikē Technē

Abstract

I argue that Plato curtails mantic authority as a consequence of his concept of craft (*technē*), which best emerges in his discussion of courage and generalship in the *Laches*. By drawing together remarks made about *technē* in the *Laches*, *Charmides*, and *Gorgias*, I investigate the puzzle that knowledge of *technē* encompasses all that is past, present, and future. The consequences of this are spelled out in terms of the subject matter appropriate to divination.

Introduction

The prestige of seers in Ancient Greece is of particular importance given Plato's valorization of philosophers. How much authority did seers actually enjoy? Did military seers, for instance, simply serve as lackeys to political and military leaders? In this chapter, I interrogate divination from two related angles. First, in the *Laches*, Socrates claims that generals always have authority over their seers (198e-199a). Is this historically true? If not, and I argue as such, then how do we understand the relationship between two *technai* – a superior *technē* like generalship and a subordinate *technē* like divination. The second aim of this chapter focuses on the subject matter of divination. According to Plato, each *technē* has a definite subject matter.⁹⁸ However, an epistemological puzzle arises in the *Laches* that seems to undercut the most obvious candidate for divination's subject matter – the future.

In the *Laches*, Plato attempts to define courage (*andreia*). A central, yet highly ambivalent, feature of the argument centers on the craft (*technē*) analogy. This is the proposal that virtue is a *technē*. It is plausible for several reasons. It solves the problem of teaching virtue to people. It also identifies virtue with a kind of knowledge.⁹⁹

⁹⁸ cf. *Ion* 537d.

⁹⁹ In Plato's early dialogues, *technē* and *epistēmē* are used interchangeably as evidenced by *Ion* 532c5-8. Benson (2000) 158-159.

Nevertheless, the analogy is problematic and ultimately untenable. Its shortcomings are explored throughout the early dialogues and the *Laches* is no exception.¹⁰⁰

In part I, I rehearse the historical context of the *Laches*, paying particular attention to Nicias, whom it is said put undeserved authority in the advice of seers. In part II, I briefly rehearse Laches' and Nicias' definitions of courage. This prepares part III, which analyzes the relationship between generalship and divination, particularly in the way the former governs the latter. I outline reasons why Plato conceptualizes such a relationship given that it conflicts with historical reality. Part of this analysis draws on the notion of the master art, which emerges in several dialogues, including the *Charmides*, which is closely linked to the *Laches*. Finally, in Part IV, I analyze the epistemological puzzle developed at *Laches* 198d. If the knowledge associated with a *technē* encompasses past, present, and future, then how does this relate to the subject matter of divination? Note, furthermore, that this is not a merely conceptual problem, since divination arises at several points throughout the dialogue.

Part I – The Historical Context of the *Laches*

In the *Laches*, Socrates and his interlocutors, Nicias and Laches, attempt to define courage. The investigation is triggered by a practical concern; Lysimachus and Melesias want to educate their sons well, that is, make them courageous. Indeed, all three individuals – Socrates, Nicias, and Laches – seem to be qualified to discuss the nature of courage. The latter two men are generals and Socrates has extensive military

¹⁰⁰ I thereby agree with Roochnik (2006) and Madigan (1985) 379-380 who argue that Plato, from the very beginning, is well aware that virtue does not constitute a *technē*. In other words, one function of the early dialogues, notably the *Charmides* and the *Laches*, is to dialogically explore the shortcomings of the analogy. For Madigan, the *technē* analogy fails the superlative intellectual constraints that Socrates imposes on virtue. The opposite view is best articulated by Irwin (1977).

experience.¹⁰¹ This pedagogical concern transitions to a search for an adequate definition of courage. Once they know the necessary and sufficient conditions for courage they can determine whether or not it is teachable. But who are these characters? Unlike Diotima in the *Symposium*, both Laches and Nicias are historical figures and can help enrich our understanding of the dialogue.¹⁰²

Laches was an Athenian General during the Peloponnesian War; our historical knowledge of him is primarily dependent on Thucydides and Aristophanes. Initially, he was sent to Sicily in order to help Athenian allies against Syracuse. Laches eventually took over full command of the 20 ships and in 426 B.C. he secured victory over Mylae and Messana. This first Sicilian expedition, however, did not end well. He was later tried by Cleon, but acquitted. Laches and Nicias subsequently secured amity with the Peace of Nicias (423 B.C.). In 418 B.C., however, hostilities renewed and after being appointed general once again, Laches was killed during the overwhelming defeat of Athenian forces at the Battle of Mantinea.¹⁰³

Nicias was also an Athenian General during the Peloponnesian War and our knowledge of his affairs comes from Thucydides, Aristophanes, and Plutarch. An aristocrat, Nicias began taking a more prominent place in Athenian politics after the death of Pericles in 429 B.C. Prudence is one notable feature of his early terms as general; Nicias avoided long and hazardous campaigns. Once Cleon, a pro-war General, died at

¹⁰¹ Socrates' qualification is cited at 181b. Laches insists on Socrates' prowess, indicating that had everyone behaved at the Battle of Delium as Socrates had, they would not have suffered the disaster that ensued. Indeed, it is worth noting that Socrates had extensive military training and experience. He was trained as a hoplite, which means that his family was sufficiently affluent to afford such training. In fact, Socrates was involved in at least three battles: Potidaea (432–429 B.C.E.), Delium (424 B.C.E.), and Amphipolis (422 B.C.E.).

¹⁰² As Altman (2010) writes, "... [the] *Laches* cannot be understood without Thucydides (who narrates the end of Nicias) (9)."

¹⁰³ Nails (2002) 180-181.

the Battle of Amphipolis, Nicias was able to secure the Peace of Nicias. This agreement consisted of a return to the *status quo* in the pre-war era. Conquered lands were returned. The Delphic oracle regained her neutrality.¹⁰⁴ Peace proved short-lived, however, for once Alcibiades became general he sought to re-awaken aggression, culminating in the Athenian defeat at the Battle of Mantinea.

The Sicilian Expedition is the site of Nicias' infamy. Having denounced its prospects, Nicias was nevertheless made General of the expedition, along with Alcibiades and Lamachus. Alcibiades was subsequently charged and ordered to return to Athens; Lamachus died in battle. This left Nicias in complete control. Following a series of misfortunes and setbacks, it became clear that the Athenian forces had to withdraw from the siege (413 B.C.). The Athenians were prepared to depart, but there appeared an eclipse of the moon, which was considered a dangerous omen. Most of the Athenian force thought it best to delay departure. Nicias, a pious and devout general, consulted the seers and was told to delay for thrice nine days. It was in this intervening time that the remaining forces were decimated (Nicias included) and enslaved, thereby leading Thucydides to conclude that in the realm of divination, Nicias gave too much credit (*ēn gar ti kai agan theiasmō*) (7.50.4).¹⁰⁵

There are two points to keep in mind. First, despite the credentials of the two generals, both of them died leading Athenian forces to gross defeat. Second, with respect to Nicias, his esteem for divination colluded with other factors in one of the greatest defeats of Athenian forces. Plato enlists the ambiguous relationship between the general and the seer as he works toward defining courage in the *Laches*.

¹⁰⁴ cf. Thucydides 5.118.

¹⁰⁵ Nails (2002) 212-215.

Part II – The Definitions of Courage

Although the definitions of Laches are not directly relevant to divination, they do contextualize the discussion, so I rehearse them briefly. Laches' offers three definitions of courage. All three have a strong military connotation. They are:

1. Courage is when “a man is willing to remain at his post and to defend himself against the enemy without running away” (*ei gar tis etheloi en tē taxei menōn amunesthai tous polemiou kai mē pheugoi, eu isthi hoti andreios an eiē*) (190e5-6).
2. Courage is “a sort of endurance of the soul” (*karteria tis einai tēs psukhēs*) (192c1).
3. Courage is “wise endurance” (*hē phronimos ara karteria*) (192d9).¹⁰⁶

Nicias, by contrast, begins by citing a Socratic tenet – virtue is knowledge. He has heard Socrates speak of this thesis on other occasions. Courage is then some kind of wisdom. He provides two definitions of courage:

4. Courage is “the knowledge of the fearful and the hopeful in war and in every other situation” (*tēn tōn deinōn kai tharraleōn epistēmēn kai en polemō kai en tois allois hapasin*) (195a1-2).
5. Courage is the knowledge of all goods and evils (199d).

Neither Laches nor Socrates agree with the fourth definition. Laches provides counter-examples. The doctor knows what to fear in cases of illness, but it is absurd to conclude that to be a doctor is to be courageous. The same goes for farmers and all of the other craftspeople; according to Laches, they know what to fear relative to their particular expertise.¹⁰⁷ The consequences of Nicias' definition are outlandish.

Nicias parries this charge by claiming that Laches thinks the *technē* of medicine encompasses more than knowledge of health and disease (195c). For Nicias, doctors do not know when it is best for a patient to regain his or her health. He secures Laches'

¹⁰⁶ Note that Socrates makes this claim, but that Laches heartily agrees.

¹⁰⁷ This is the first instance of what will later be a definitive, though contentious, feature of courage, namely its relationship to the future. Schmid (1992) draws out the presumptions inherent to Socratic foresight/forethought. 150 cf. *Laches* 185b; *Protagoras* 313a-314b, 361b; *Gorgias* 501b.

agreement that sometimes the death of a patient is preferable. In both cases, whether it is best for a patient to recover or die, different things are to be feared. According to Nicias, the doctor does not know which is best, and so does not know what is to be feared.

Is there another *technē* that specializes in knowing what is to be feared *tout court*? Laches intimates that Nicias “is calling the seers the courageous” (*hoti ge tous manteis kalei tous andreious*) (195e1) since seers know whether it is best for a person to live or die. If this is correct, to be courageous is to be a seer. But this is not what Nicias means either:

...the seer needs to know only the signs of what is to be, whether a man will experience death or illness or loss of property, or will experience victory or defeat, in battle or in any other sort of contest (195e5-196a2).

...mantin ge ta sēmeia monon dei gignōskein tōn esomenōn, eite tō thanatos eite nosos eite apobolē khrēmatōn estai, eite nikē eite hētta ē polemou ē kai allēs tinos agōnias

The seer has predictive knowledge but lacks moral knowledge. Akin to the doctor, the seer does not know whether ‘x’ or ‘y’ is best. This implies that courage consists of a different sort of knowledge than that of a *technē* like divination.¹⁰⁸ For Laches, if it is not the doctor or the seer who is courageous, it must be ‘some god’ (*theon tina*) to whom Nicias refers.

The fundamental problem with the fourth definition is when Socrates re-introduces the unity of the virtues. Recall that this point was already agreed upon (190c-d). Socrates first secures the agreement of both interlocutors that fear is properly defined

¹⁰⁸ This idea, for the moment, is left unexplored Madigan (1985) 382 but it is taken up by Socrates in his refutation. Roochnik (1996) 101.

as the aversion of future evils (198b).¹⁰⁹ Nicias further subscribes to the thesis that courage is defined as the knowledge of fearful and hopeful things. Socrates extrapolates a conception of knowledge such that it necessarily encompasses past, present, and future. In other words, if something is true in the past, it will necessarily also pertain to the present, and onward to the future.

His evidence is the *technē* analogy. Medicine, for instance, encompasses knowledge of health and disease in all temporal categories. The same procedure is used to remedy hemorrhoids. Finally, it is the art of generalship that is best able to foresee the future. This is in sharp divergence from what might be ordinarily regarded as the expertise of the seer. Indeed, Socrates proceeds to assert that generalship does not “consider it necessary to be ruled by the art of the seer, but to rule it [the seer], as being better acquainted with both present and future in the affairs of war” (*oude tē mantikē oietai dein hupēretein alla arkhein, hōs eiduia kallion ta peri ton polemon kai gignomena kai genēsomena*) (198e4-199a2). In other words, Plato thinks that the general’s expertise always trumps that of the seer’s, and not *vice-versa*. This is precisely what the “law decrees” (*ho nomos houtō tattei*) (199a3).¹¹⁰

Socrates secures the easy agreement of Laches and the grudging agreement of Nicias about the nature of knowledge. This forces a modification of the fourth definition. If what is feared is evil, and what is hoped for is good, and knowledge includes past, present and future, then courage transforms into the fifth definition, namely knowledge of

¹⁰⁹ Fear, then, is conceptually temporal in the sense that it is tied to the future. Those individuals (seers, generals) who are able to predict or judge the future are equipped to know what is to be feared and vice-versa. In the *Laws*, fear is defined as the “anticipation of pain” (*elpis, idion de, phobos men hē pro lupēs*) (644c8) whereas the anticipation of the opposite – pleasure – is called confidence.

¹¹⁰ Schmid (1992) writes that the law “had a dignity and solemnity in the ancient city that “science” or “wisdom” did not possess” (204).

good and evil. Yet it is problematic because now courage is synonymous with virtue (199e). In this sense, Nicias has not actually provided a definition of courage *simpliciter*.

Part III – Generalship and Divination

All three people agree that the *technē* of the general ranks higher than that of the seer. This is what I characterize as the hierarchy thesis. The general's *technē* is ranked higher because it is more comprehensive. It includes the ability to fight in armor as well as the art of tactics.¹¹¹ The notion of a hierarchy of *technai* emerges many times in Plato's dialogues. Recall, for instance, the opening stages of the *Laches* when Nicias rehearses the evolution from fighting with armor to the entire art of the general (182c). It is worthwhile to investigate the hierarchy thesis in more general times. One recurrent instance is when Socrates considers the possibility of a master *technē*, which will rule or order all of the subordinate *technai*.¹¹²

In the *Charmides*, for instance, one proposal for temperance (*sōphrosunē*) is that it should be defined in terms of science (*technē*).¹¹³ The conclusion is aporetic because *sōphrosunē* ends up defined as the knowledge of good and evil *tout court*. The whole of virtue has been defined rather than *sōphrosunē*. But for a good part of the dialogue, *sōphrosunē* is conceptualized as the science of science. If such a conception is correct, then all of the other sciences will be subordinate to the temperate individual. He or she

¹¹¹ Another reason why a *technē* might be ranked higher is that its subject matter is particularly valuable. The health of the soul, which is the subject matter of *arête*, is more valuable than the health of the body, which is the subject matter of medicine. I will focus on the puzzle of the exact subject matter particular to divination in the next section.

¹¹² This notion also arises in Book I of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*.

¹¹³ In my dissertation introduction, I surveyed the fictive chronology methodology, which separates the *Laches* from the *Charmides*. According to Altman (2010), the "*Charmides* must not be read in isolation from *Laches* on the basis of fictive chronology" (1). He goes on to claim that he will use "the reading order hypothesis to show that *Laches* actually precedes *Charmides* on pedagogical grounds *despite* fictive chronology" (1).

will glean comprehensive benefits, such as living life free from error, improving the lives of those whom one rules (family and state), and being happy (*eudaimonas*) (171e-172a).

Science arises after Charmides has defined *sōphrosunē* as “the doing of good things” (*tēn gar tōn agathōn praxin sōphrosunēn einai saphōs soi diorizomai*) (163e9); the problem is that this admits of scenarios wherein someone performs good actions ignorantly. Critias revises his definition and ties *sōphrosunē* inextricably to knowledge. This triggers Socrates to comment that insofar as temperance is knowledge, it must be some sort of science, and therefore a science of something (165c5-6). What is the object of this science? It is science itself, thereby giving us the definition that *sōphrosunē* is the “only science that is both a science of itself and of the other sciences” (*hoti monē tōn allōn epistēmōn autē te hautēs estin kai tōn allōn epistēmōn epistēmē*) (166e5-6). The discussion proceeds in two ways. First, Socrates and Critias investigate whether such a science is possible (167b10-169d2), and second, they investigate whether such a science is desirable (169d2-175a8).¹¹⁴ That Socrates and Critias never identify the appropriate scope of this conception is one of the decisive reasons why modeling virtue on *technē* ends up being unsustainable.

Is a science of science possible? Socrates deploys a series of analogies in order to show the dubious nature of Critias’ definition. Does seeing apply to itself (167d)? In order for that to be the case, vision itself would have to have some color, since seeing only sees color.¹¹⁵ Socrates’ point is that it is difficult, almost impossible, to see how such

¹¹⁴ It has been argued that Socrates’ rehabilitation of the science of the science at 172b is evidence that there are actually *two* conceptions of the science of science at play in the exchange from 169d to 171c – One Critian and one Socratic. Whereas the Critian version is unsustainably robust, Socrates’ proposal is refined and attentive to human finitude. The presence of two accounts does not affect my own conclusion, which is that *sōphrosunē*, defined as the science of science, will have comprehensive benefits. Schmid (1998) 105-123

¹¹⁵ Similar arguments are deploys for other powers – desire, love, fear, and opinion.

things apply to themselves. He remains characteristically agnostic, however, and this allows him to provisionally grant the possibility that such a science exists. But the question remains as to whether a science of science is beneficial or not.

Socrates claims, and Critias assents, that the science of science amounts to nothing more than the ability to distinguish between what is genuinely a science and what is not (170a). In this way, *sōphrosunē* is analogous to both medicine and politics in that both latter sciences are able to distinguish between their subject matter (i.e., health and justice) and its absence. The problem arises when one considers that the temperate individual knows that he has a science but is incapable of specifying the nature of the particular science.

In other words, the temperate person knows they have a science but does not know whether it is the science of medicine, or shipbuilding, or whatever else. This is because the substantive knowledge of shipbuilding is only available to the person with the concrete (but subordinate) science of shipbuilding. Via *sōphrosunē* exclusively, Socrates concludes that an individual will not be able to distinguish the knowledge of health from the knowledge of shipbuilding. Thus, paradoxically, this person “won’t know *what* he knows, but only *that* he knows” (*ouk ara eisetai ho oiden ho touto agnoōn, all’ hoti oiden monon.*) (170c9-10). Two consequences emerge: first, the temperate person is unable to evaluate someone’s claim to substantive knowledge; and second, he or she is unable to distinguish the genuine knower (i.e., a doctor) from the impersonator (170e).¹¹⁶

The definition is unsatisfactory.

¹¹⁶ The inverse is true as well. The doctor will only know health and disease, but will not know anything about science qua science. This has been exclusively allocated to the temperate person. Schmid notes Socrates’ “absolute separation between knowledge of a subject matter and knowledge of what constitutes knowledge in relation to a subject matter” (Schmid 110).

Socrates and Critias make a second attempt at outlining the benefits of *sōphrosunē* defined as the science of science (171d2-175a8).¹¹⁷ This attempt makes a weaker claim as to the science of science's benefits. It has two parts. In the first part, instead of living life free of error, Socrates asserts that *sōphrosunē* might enable someone to learn quicker and to better evaluate his other subordinate sciences (172b).¹¹⁸ The question becomes whether scientific living enables a person to be happy. It is not obvious, for as Socrates demonstrates, it is not by any run of the mill science that enables one to be happy. In fact, as Socrates has pointed out many times, the vast majority of sciences are non-ethical in nature. It is the ethical *technē*, namely the science of good and evil, which gives happiness (174c). Properly speaking, this is virtue, not *sōphrosunē*.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁷ For Schmid, this is the Socratic conception of *sōphrosunē*.

¹¹⁸ One of the central clues that there are two positions at play is the admission that the science of science can have minor benefits after all (172b). Whereas Critian *sōphrosunē* allows us to live lives “free from error” (*anamartētoi*) (171d7), Socratic *sōphrosunē* only permits us to learn more easily and to discern things more effectively, both in ourselves and in others. These latter benefits, however marginal, depend upon the ability to have *sōphrosunē* in addition to other sciences, thereby alluding to the second Socratic argument. According to Schmid, the first argument, particularly its distinction between *that* one knows and *what* one knows, cannot explain how knowing that one knows will have any marginal effect like learning more easily (172b). Thus, the notion of nominal benefits “makes no sense” (Schmid 119) if we collapse the two supposed positions into the Critian option. As well, Politis (2008) distinguishes the two arguments according to the use of the word “only”. He convincingly argues that whether as Critias defines *sōphrosunē* as “only” the science of science and lack of science, Socrates is not so exclusive. This means that there is conceptual space such that *sōphrosunē* could encompass concrete sciences like medicine, that is, it could evaluate them better and learn them more easily. 20-23

¹¹⁹ Another example of a search for the master *technē* is the *Euthydemus*. Dionysodorus claims that his *technē* enables him to know everything (294b). More dramatically, he claims that if anyone knows anything, they must necessarily know everything. This dialogical engagement is meant to demonstrate the sheer force of the sophistic ability to argue, whether or not the content specific to a body of knowledge (e.g., medicine) is actually known or not. Also see *Protagoras* 312e and the subsequent discussion of Protagoras' political *technē*, which enables people to become excellent citizens. The problem, now familiar to us, is that the subject matter of such a *technē* is unclear. The *Protagoras*, characteristic of the early dialogues and their concern with the *technē* analogy, exhibits a slide from political *technē* to justice/shame to political *arête* (322e2-3) to simply *arête* (323a3). If justice and shame as *arête* are the outcome of a *technē*, then their objectivity in the robust sense depends upon how one conceives of *technē*. Roochnik (1996) interprets this slide as Protagoras' attempt to both justify his role as teacher by indirectly claiming a *technē* and yet simultaneously resisting the Socratic version of *technē* which consists of determinate knowledge. After all, it is important to recall that Protagoras earlier denies possessing mathematical *technai* like arithmetic, astronomy, geometry, music, and poetry (318e3-4); these are the prototypical examples of determinate knowledge. The search for a master *technē* is a common theme throughout the Platonic dialogues; it presupposes a hierarchy. One wonders, then, whether or not Plato's view of divination and generalship embodies Greek mores.

The search for a master *technē* in the *Charmides* fails, but what importantly emerges from the discussion is that Plato classifies *technai* according to a hierarchy.

As previously discussed, generalship is more comprehensive than divination, and therefore rules it. Does this agree with historical reality? What one sees, in fact, is that the general and seer often formed a symbiotic partnership.¹²⁰ In part, this means that the seer had influence in the decision-making process.¹²¹ It also means that the seer could offer a prophecy altogether antithetical to the desires of the general. Granted, there was a large degree of leeway in mantic interpretation – this is banal in the sense that many other *technai*, such as medicine, consisted of a broad interpretive spectrum. But there were also some phenomena that generated a specific interpretation. For instance, if birds were seen fighting, there was no other available interpretation than immanent catastrophe.¹²²

Indeed, the seer did not guarantee victory or defeat. Instead, they were confined to merely reporting on whether the signs were favorable or not. There was always the possibility that the general might make a tactical blunder. This is one way that divination negotiated a failed prophecy. In this way, the final decision was left up to the general, but it is important to realize that this was only a conceptual possibility. Given the morale-boosting effect of the seer, along with the ubiquitous conviction that divination was authentic, it would be startling for a general to explicitly disregard the prophecy of the seer. Nevertheless, we do have concrete examples of the seer's recommendation being flouted. What results is often disastrous. Granted, this makes dramatic sense in some

¹²⁰ Parker (2004) 144; Flower (2008) 153.

¹²¹ There are several examples of seers acting as the primary initiators of action. Thucydides relates that the seer Theaenetus and the general Eupompidas organized an escape during the siege of Plataea by the Peloponnesians and Boeotians in 428 B.C. (*History of the Peloponnesian War* 3.20). Generals often retained the services of a seer during times of war. These seers performed campground sacrifices (*hiera*) and battle-line sacrifices (*sphagia*) in order to determine the favorableness of, for instance, waging battle on a particular day.

¹²² cf. *Odyssey* 2.146-76; Aeschylus' *PV* 488-92; Sophocles' *Antigone* 998-1004.

genres like tragedy, but it also exists in history.¹²³ There are several instances of a seer instigating action.¹²⁴ More relevant to my purposes, there are myriad cases of a general, despite his wishes, acquiescing to the prophecy of the seer.¹²⁵ What I conclude from this evidence is that the relationship between the general and his seer was not as highly systematized as Plato makes it sound in the *Laches*.

There can be little doubt that Socrates' claim in the *Laches* is an allusion to Nicias at Syracuse. As discussed in Part I of this chapter, Nicias' campaign at Syracuse went horribly wrong. Yet there was still time to evacuate the Athenian forces. Conventionally, it was Nicias' 'over-estimation' of divination that led to his downfall; in the 27 days that Nicias delayed the evacuation, the Athenian forces were decimated.

According to the line of argument in the *Laches*, Plato condemns such action on the grounds that the general should have priority over the seer. This means that in cases of disagreement, the general ought to disregard the advice of the seer and act on his own best judgment.¹²⁶ After all, he is the one with the expertise in military matters. Of course,

¹²³ In Xenophon's *Hellenica*, for instance, there are two cases where Spartan leaders ignore unfavorable sacrifices and end up defeated (3.1.17-19; 4.8.35-39). In the former case, it is not the commander who ignores the sacrifice, but a derisive subordinate officer who cannot accept the delay. This goes toward underscoring the widely held conviction that to defy the advice of a seer was tantamount to securing defeat.

¹²⁴ cf. Herodotus 6.83 and 8.27; Thucydides 3.20.1. In terms of open and hostile disagreement, the ones that do exist come from tragedy and epic, which are literary forms that depend upon conflict and confrontation. For instance, in the *Iliad*, Calchas is undercut by Agamemnon when the king does not like his council (1.1-120). Also, Sophocles' *OT* 316-462 and *Antigone* 988-1090; Euripides' *Bacchae* 215-369.

¹²⁵ Xenophon, for instance, relates how the Ten Thousand, barren of adequate provisions, were nevertheless forced to stay at Calpe for three days because of unfavorable omens (*Anabasis* 6.4.13-27). As well, at *Anabasis* 5.51-4, in lieu of plundering, the generals accept gifts from the Tibarenians because the seers have divined that the gods did not consent to war.

¹²⁶ For Schmid (2002 156-7), the general trumps the seer on the grounds that the former is responsible for the future in a way that the seer is not. This comes across when Socrates' insists that knowledge encompasses everything that is past, present and "how what has not yet happened *might best come to be* in the future" (*allē de hopē an kallista genoito kai genēsetai to mēpō gegonos, all' hē autē*) (198d4-5, italics added). In other words, the recognition that the future is open to the will of people. That Nicias believed he could access the future reveals his fallacious conviction that a *technē* (here divination) can make the future wholly predictable. According to Schmid, it is this conviction that is refuted at Syracuse. As should be clear, however, my position rejects the thesis that the seer divines blindly, that is, without a notion of what is hoped for.

this ignores the fact that like a general, the seer divines within a context. In other words, the seer always divines according to the needs of the situation. The seers at Syracuse would have been aware whether or not Nicias was ambivalent about the prospects of evacuation. Thucydides relates that Nicias was reluctant to depart Syracuse because he might face prosecution if he were to return to Athens without having succeeded militarily (7.48). That Nicias had reservations about abandoning the campaign would undoubtedly influence the seers in their particular interpretation of the eclipse.¹²⁷ Given that the relationship between seers and generals is multi-faceted, along with the recognition that seers sometimes spearheaded action, it is clear that Plato's ascription of a strict hierarchy is normative rather than descriptive.

Part IV – The Subject Matter of a *Technē*

Insofar as generalship consists of military strategy and decision-making, the question arises as to the subject matter appropriate to the seer. Medicine is concerned with the health of the human body; architecture with construction and maintenance of buildings, but it is not at all clear when it comes to divination. Plato thinks each genuine *technē* has a determinate subject matter. I call this the subject matter thesis.

The issue of a subject matter arises in the discussion of the hierarchy thesis discussed in the previous section. One of the major problems of defining the master *technē* is the inability to specify its subject matter. The problem also emerges in dialogues that evaluate whether a particular *technē* is genuine or not. For instance, the *Gorgias* evaluates the epistemic status of rhetoric. From the very beginning of the

¹²⁷ This goes to explain the purported “tension” (Schmidt 135) Nicias exhibits. On the one hand, he embodies progressive Athenian mores, insisting on the value of *technē* as well as the love of honor (181-182d). On the other, his submission to divination is conservative and pious. Yet as I have attempted to draw out, to think that divination was conservative in Classical Greece fails to appreciate the highly integrated role it enjoyed.

discussion, Socrates questions Gorgias about the subject matter of rhetoric (449c-453a). Gorgias' first attempt, namely that the distinct feature of rhetoric is its concern with speeches, is unsustainable. It is not distinct enough; all other *technai* enable speeches on their specific topics. So the question becomes – what sort of speeches does rhetoric enable you to perform well (451d)? Finally, Gorgias provides Socrates with an adequate definition (for the time being). Rhetoric “is a producer of persuasion” (*peithous dēmiourgos estin*) (453a3).

Yet as the discussion develops, this definition proves unsatisfactory, partly because it does not specify a distinct conceptual space. Rather, as Gorgias characterizes it, rhetoric “encompasses and subordinates to itself just about everything that can be accomplished” (*hoti hōs epos eipein hapasas tas dunameis sullabousa huph' hautē ekhei*) (456b1-2). Accordingly, Socrates finally concludes that rhetoric amounts to more of a knack than a *technē*. This is so because “it has no account of the nature of whatever things it applies by which it applies them, so that it's unable to state the cause of each thing” (*hoti ouk ekhei logon oudena hō prospHEREI ha prospHEREI hopoi' atta tēn phusin estin, hōste tēn aitian hekastou mē ekhein eipein*) (465a4-5). This is the logical conclusion of the inability to define the conceptual parameters of rhetoric. A genuine *technē* ought to be able to give such an account.¹²⁸

¹²⁸ cf. *Laches* 190a; *Ion* 538b. Interestingly, even the four knacks that Socrates specifies – pastry making, rhetoric, cosmetics, sophistry (*Gorgias* 263b) – are distinct according to their being aimed at four different objects (263c). A very similar argument develops in the *Ion* concerning rhapsody. Ion is unable to identify the nature of his expertise at least to the standards Socrates has him acquiesce to. Ion knows how to perform Homer, but no one else. For Socrates, a genuine *technē* must encompass all the relevant content. For rhapsody, this would include both Homer and Hesiod. In the end, similar to rhetoric in the *Gorgias*, rhapsody is characterized not as knowledge but as the result of something else. In the case of the *Ion*, it is inspiration. I turn to the *Ion* in the next chapter in order to tease out the remaining features of divination understood as a *technē* or as the result of inspiration.

It is useful to note that a determinate subject matter is not the same thing as saying that each *technē* has a *unique* subject matter. Although this might seem intuitively plausible, textual evidence reveals this to be an exaggeration. Both calculation and numeration produce speeches on the same object, namely the odd and even (*Gorgias* 451b-c). Thus, it is clear that two distinct *technē* can share the same object. Where they differ, that is, why they are not one *technē*, is due to the differences in their relationship to the object in question.¹²⁹ In the case of calculation and numeration, for instance, the latter concerns itself with the magnitude of a single quantity (*Gorgias* 451c). So, each *technē* has a subject matter, usually but not always unique, but the way in which it relates to its subject matter is sufficiently unique so as to grant its status as an independent *technē*.¹³⁰

The puzzle of divination's subject matter centers on the repudiation of Nicias' fourth definition, namely that courage is the knowledge of the fearful and hopeful. Socrates re-characterizes this definition to mean 'future evils and goods'.¹³¹ With this emphasis on future, there is an ineliminable temporality. The expertise constitutive of a

¹²⁹ A point well made by Wolfsdorf (2008) 94-95, and later, "...we may suppose that some *technai* may share *relata* [Wolfsdorf's word for subject matter], but nonetheless be distinguishable by the nature of the relation to the *relata*" (104-105).

¹³⁰ Recall that the subject matter of medicine is the health of the human body. However, Socrates states that although care of the body is a single craft, it nevertheless has two parts – gymnastics and medicine (*Gorgias* 464b). The standard idea is that both constitute individual *technai*, but Socrates seems to be claiming that they are united by the fact that they share the same subject matter.

¹³¹ Yonezawa (2012) states that "In order to drive Nicias into aporia, Socrates needs to replace 'the fearful' and 'the hopeful' in Nicias's definition with 'future evils' and 'future nonevils or future goods'" (649) and offers a good reconstruction of the argument. In so doing, he contrasts himself with Vlastos (1994) 120 who claims that the transition from 'expected evils/goods' to 'future evils/goods' is a truism. Yonezawa urges that one needs to "distinguish between future evils themselves and those which produce the expectation of a future evil; the former are those evils which definitely exist in the future while the latter are those which cause the expectation that an evil will likely happen" (649). Likewise, Schmid (1992) claims that "fear would appear to be a kind of knowledge, namely the knowledge of the terrible" (154). Yonezawa replies that "fear is said to be 'the expectation' (*prosdokian*, 198b9) of a future evil and *prosdokia* belongs to *dokos* or *doxa*, not 'knowledge'" (649).

technē cannot consistently hold a distinction between past, present, and future. As

Socrates states:

It seems to me and my friend here that of the various things with which knowledge is concerned, there is not one kind of knowledge by which we know how things have happened in the past, and another by which we know how they are happening at the present time, and still another by which we know how what has not yet happened might best come to be in the future, but that the knowledge is the same in each case (198d1-d7).

dokei gar dē emoi te kai tōde, peri hosōn estin epistēmē, ouk allē men einai peri gegonotos eidenai hopē gegonen, allē de peri gignomenōn hopē gignetai, allē de hopē an kallista genoito kai genēsetai to mēpō gegonos, all' hē autē.

To be concrete, if a doctor knows health for a human being, he does not know it relative to a particular time period. The technique to dress a laceration, for instance, remains the same in all contexts. Incidentally, it is in this argumentative section that Socrates deploys the seer-general relationship, insisting, as we have seen, on the priority of the general over the seer. The argument is of decisive importance in the argumentative development of the dialogue because Socrates uses it to transition from ‘future evil and goods’ to ‘all evils and goods’. The latter conception is not courage, but virtue *tout court*.¹³²

But unlike the doctor or the general, the seer’s expertise seems to crucially depend upon on a temporal distinction between past, present, and future.¹³³ If technical knowledge transcends time, this bankrupts the seer of a distinct subject matter. This is so

¹³² Note that many find this argument unpersuasive. Bonitz (1871) 435-36; Guthrie (1998) 132-33; Kahn (1996) 167-68.

¹³³ Accordingly, it is puzzling that Yonezawa (2012) can claim that he is “not prepared to put forth an alternative case in which different sorts of knowledge treat the past, present and future of the same objective and since the basis of a moral proposition is the same regardless of time, this argument seems to be acceptable” (650). He seems to totally disregard the problem this creates for divination.

because it is constitutive of divination that the seer has special access to the future.¹³⁴

What is the subject matter of divination? There are at least four possibilities:

1. The subject matter of divination is the future.
2. Divination is a subordinate *technē* and so does not have a subject matter.
3. Divination is not a *technē* at all.
4. The subject matter of divination is the will of the gods.

The first option is the most intuitive but is untenable given the puzzle developed in the *Laches* about the nature of knowledge. This is so despite the fact that it captures the generic intuition that the seer has access to what will be. Indeed, Plato often deploys divination in this sense. For instance, in the *Charmides*, as Critias outlines the temperate person, Socrates asks whether this is the seer, because he knows what will be in the future (174a). This demonstrates that divination is tied closely to the future.¹³⁵

The second possibility is that divination be defined as a subordinate *technē*. In other words, it does not have a distinct subject matter.¹³⁶ This is unconvincing. Socrates' search for the master *technē*, which encompasses both means and ends, does not entail that subordinate *technai* like medicine and farming lack a distinct subject matter.

¹³⁴ Flower (2008) states: "The distinction thus made between 'present' and 'future' is somewhat slippery... (78).

¹³⁵ Another example of the link between divination and the future occurs in the *Theaetetus*. Socrates claims that Protagoras charged so much money because he was able to persuade students that he was better at predicting the future than seers (179a2-4).

¹³⁶ Sprague (1992) distinguishes between first and second order *technai*. Whereas the former emerges during the articulation and evaluation of the third definition in the *Laches*, the latter emerges whilst discussing the final definition and constitutes a richer, more synoptic, version of a *technē*. Specifically, it is constitutive of both means and ends, that is, it encompasses knowledge of what is to be feared. 38, 42, 77-79. Madigan (1985) 385 asserts that insofar as it encompasses knowledge of appropriate ends, the second order *technē* should not be considered a *technē* at all. Madigan, for his own part, thinks that the *Laches* does imply that courage is knowledge of means and ends, but that this should not be characterized as a *technē* (since *technē* only encompass means).

Moreover, subordinate *technai* presuppose a superior one, but Socrates has repeatedly failed to specify this latter *technē*.¹³⁷

Another related possibility is that seer has no distinct subject matter whatsoever, and this implies that divination is not a genuine *technē*. However, this too is unsustainable. In the *Ion*, Socrates clearly thinks that divination has a distinct matter and so constitutes a legitimate *technē*. He deploys it several times in his dialogical engagement with Ion.¹³⁸ Moreover, in the latter example, both possession divination and technical divination appear. Thus, the entirety of divination constitutes a *technē* and it is canonical enough that it can be deployed in support of the thesis that rhapsody does *not* constitute a *technē*.¹³⁹

The final possibility, which defines divination's subject matter as the will of the Gods, is more attractive. It has the advantage of avoiding the problem of temporal knowledge. This is so because the gods, from time immemorial, have access to all that is past, present, and future. In the *Theogony*, Hesiod is urged to “celebrate things of the future and things that were aforetime” (*hina kleioimi ta t' essomena pro t' eonta*) (4). Shortly thereafter, Hesiod relates how the Muses communicate “what is and what shall be and what was aforetime, voices in unison” (*eireusai ta t' eonta ta t' essomena pro t' eonta, phōnē homēreusai*) (4). A similar fragment exists in the *Iliad*. In book I, line 70, Homer writes that Calchas knows “what is, and what will be, and what was before” (*hos ēdē ta t' eonta ta t' essomena pro t' eonta*).¹⁴⁰ Although the vast majority of evidence

¹³⁷ This was the outcome of our rehearsal of the master *technē* in my previous discussion on the hierarchy of *technai* where the proposal that *sōphrosunē* is the science of science, in the *Charmides*, proves to be wrong.

¹³⁸ cf. 531b; 538e-539d.

¹³⁹ Granted, contrary evidence also exists in the *Ion* (534d), with which I engage in the next chapter.

¹⁴⁰ That the claim is made both by a poet (Hesiod) and by a seer (Calchas) suggests that, if taken at face value, inspiration *qua* inspiration functions identically for both professions. Naddaf (2009), for instance,

demonstrates that on the level of performativity, the seer has exclusive access to the future, there are some examples that flout this thesis.¹⁴¹ Consider Socrates' discovery that he is the wisest man in Greece (*Apology* 21a). This has nothing to do with the future. It has to do with what is unknown. Oftentimes, what is unknown is simply the future, but sometimes it can manifest in the past or present, as that piece of knowledge that people currently simply do not know.¹⁴²

One problem with the idea that the subject matter of divination is the will of the gods is that it may not be distinct enough. In military contexts like the case of Nicias at Syracuse, the seer's subject matter impinges on that of the general. But the relationship between generalship and divination might be akin to that of gymnastics and medicine, namely as two *technai* with the same subject matter. Unlike gymnastics and medicine, however, which demonstrate clear continuity according to their shared concern for the body, the general is not directly or exclusively concerned with the gods *per se*.

Generalship encompasses a wide range of expertise, such as subordinate *technai* like

writes that "when Homer and Hesiod are exercising their poetic function, they are both poet and *mantis* or seer, and as such, like Zeus, they have access to knowledge of all things past, present, and future" (2). Naddaf utilizes this textual evidence at several further points in his argument (i.e., 10, 15). Nagy (1989), as well, claims that the poet and the prophet were "preceded by an earlier stage when poet and prophet were as yet undifferentiated" (23). Nagy cites Hesiod an example of someone who "presents himself as *mantis* and *kerux* as well as *aoidos*" (23). His evidence is twofold: first that the Muses inspire Hesiod about the past, present and future; and second, the Muses give Hesiod a scepter, which symbolizes the possession of context-transcending truth.

¹⁴¹ By the same token it is naïve to think that the poets only have access to the past. Granted, consider the Homeric and Hesiodic claims that the inspired poet has access to Zeus, and therefore to all that is past, present, and future. Havelock, for one, seems to interpret said passages in this way. His focus is primarily on the moral instruction provided by the poet. In the same way that our ancestors were checked by certain *nomoi* and *ethe*, so to should contemporary and future society. In other words, the poet is pedagogical and justifies him or herself by appeal to the past. In reference to the passages under consideration, Havelock proceeds to state, "the future is added as a further extension of the present, not to prophesy change but to affirm continuity" (105). In other words, the future is added in order to ground the constancy of divine power. Of course, such divine power can have myriad applications. One can never know the whims of the gods with complete certitude. Moreover, there is evidence that the Greeks believed deities, even Zeus, were constrained by forces like necessity.

¹⁴² This ought to be distinguished from knowing how to interpret an oracle or divinatory event. Such know-how is a feature of the past, based on cumulative experiences.

armed combat (*Laches* 182b-c). One feature of this expertise is strategic planning, which has to do with decision making and predicting future scenarios. Such planning no doubt includes considerations of the past and present states of affairs as when Socrates states that the general's *technē* is "that which best foresees the future and the other times" (*promētheitai ta te alla kai peri to mellon esesthai*) (198e4).

Part V – Descriptive versus Normative

As should be clear, the seer's expertise dovetails the gods. If the gods have access to all that is past, present, and future, then the seer has the same access. In the previous section, I argued that the best candidate for the subject matter of divination is the will of the gods. Despite this access, Nicias' claim that although the seer will know the signs of the future, he will not be able to determine whether his divination is positive or negative (*Laches* 195e-196a). In other words, the seer, and presumably the gods, only have access to what is descriptively, as opposed to normatively, true.¹⁴³ The seer does not know whether it is good to die, for instance, but only that death is foretold.¹⁴⁴ We cannot simply reject this point on the grounds that it is Nicias who articulates them.

In fact, what triggers Nicias to make such an assertion is Laches' claim that Nicias thinks that the seers are the courageous because "who else will know for whom it is better to live than to die?" (*hoti ge tous manteis kalei tous andreious: tis gar dē allos eisetai hotō ameinon zēn ē tethnanai;*) (195e1-2). But neither Laches nor Socrates challenge Nicias' characterization of the seer. Laches pleads ignorance and the discussion

¹⁴³ One problem with this is at the conclusion of the *Apology* where Socrates states, concerning his upcoming death and the assembly's continued existence, only the gods know which is better (42a3-5). In fact, this is underscored throughout the *Apology*. Whereas the gods know what is good and evil, humankind does not.

¹⁴⁴ This is true of all *technai* save the master *technē* (which is never satisfactorily outlined). So, similarly, the doctor will not know whether or not he ought to save a person's life. For instance, it may be better to let a sick tyrant die than to offer one's services. I draw this excellent example from Wolfsdorf (2008) 107.

proceeds in a different direction. That Laches specifically makes such a claim is significant because one is immediately reminded of his valorized conception of divination.

Indeed, independent of Laches, the evidence from other sources demonstrates that Nicias' distinction was simply not made in the case of divination. Rather, evaluative considerations pervaded the principal formulation of mantic queries. In a military context, for instance, seers divined whether the gods looked favorably on a particular battle at a particular time in a particular location. There was also even a sense that the gods could be persuaded.

The notion that the gods could be persuaded arises repeatedly in Plato's dialogues, and not at all in a positive light. Since seers enjoyed such influence, lavish gifts were often bestowed upon them by political and military leaders. The expectation was that gift-giving won divine favor. Both Herodotus and Xenophon offer plenty of examples.¹⁴⁵ Rather than acquiescing to this action, Plato condemns it as a form of bribery.

In the *Republic*, for instance, Socrates heartily rejects the notion that people have the ability to bribe the gods to "harm just and unjust alike" (*dikaion adikō blapsei*) (364c4). This is echoed again in Book X of the *Laws* where the Athenian states that seers, together with priests and poets, often claim that the gods can be "seduced by gifts into turning a blind eye to injustice" (*kai hoti beltious ē para to dikaion hupo tinōn dōrōn paratrepesthai kēloumenoi*) (885d3-4). That the gods could be bribed is absurd to the Athenian; he later recommends imprisonment for seers who mislead people into thinking they can influence the gods through the "alleged magic powers of sacrifices and prayers

¹⁴⁵ cf. *Histories* I. 14; 25; 50-51; *Anabasis* III. 1; V. 3

and charms” (*hōs thusiais te kai eukhais kai epōdais goēteuontes*) (909b3). The textual evidence, however, is full of individuals conferring gifts in an attempt to win divine favor.

If we move beyond the political critique of divination, there is still something to be said about the ethico-ontological implications of Plato’s claim. In the previous chapter, I rehearsed the Euthyphro dilemma (*Euthyphro* 10a). It demonstrates quite clearly Plato’s rationale for separating off seers from evaluative discourse. Initially, Euthyphro’s justification for piety (and morality more generally) is simply whatever the gods’ love. In other words, morality is empty until given content by a supreme being. Once Socrates has Euthyphro accept the distinction between piety proper and what the gods’ love, one consequence is that divination is separate from considerations of value (in this case, ethical value).¹⁴⁶

Conclusion

What I attempted to accomplish in this chapter is to flesh out the complex relationship between divination and *technē*, paying particular attention to the *Laches* and *Charmides*, together with considerations of *technē* drawn from the *Gorgias*. I argued that the relationship between the general and the seer was never as highly systematized as Plato supposes. Second, I extrapolated Plato’s conviction that each *technē* has a subject matter, and the consequences for divination. The textual evidence suggests that the seer’s subject matter is best conceptualized as access to the gods. Nevertheless, Plato is at pains to bracket normative considerations from divination. One consequence is the radical curtailment of mantic authority.

¹⁴⁶ This is part of Plato’s overall project, best expressed at *Republic* 382e, which re-conceptualizes the gods such that they become 1) intrinsically moral and 2) changeless.

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Chapter 3 – Between Inspiration and *Technē* : Divination in Plato’s *Ion*

Abstract

In Plato’s *Ion*, inspiration functions in contradistinction to *technē*. Yet, paradoxically, in both cases, there is an appeal to divination. I interrogate this bipartite account in order to show how these two disparate accounts are accommodated in the text. Specifically, I argue that Socrates’ appeal to Theoclymenus at *Ion* 539a-b demonstrates that Plato recognizes the existence of superlative seers who defy his own distinction between possession and technical divination.

Introduction

In Plato’s *Ion*, inspiration functions in contradistinction to *technē*.¹⁴⁷ Since Ion’s expertise does not stand up to Socrates’ critique, his Homeric performances cannot stem from knowledge, but from elsewhere, from divine inspiration. The two are presented as a strict disjunction. Yet, there is a puzzle here because as each gets explained, there is an appeal to divination. If rhapsody, and poetry by extension, cannot synthesize the two, why does Socrates seem to think that divination can?¹⁴⁸

This puzzle has given reason for some to conclude that Plato is being ironic.¹⁴⁹ Such an interpretive move can go in multiple directions. For instance, perhaps divination is not the result of genuine inspiration, but rather a self-interested ruse. On the other hand, it is also possible that Plato rejects the notion that divination, specifically possession divination, constitutes a *technē*.¹⁵⁰ This is so due to the epistemological

¹⁴⁷ Harris (2004) 189-198 argues that Socrates distorts the relationship between *technē* and inspiration for the express purpose of subverting poetry’s prestige.

¹⁴⁸ Bloom (1970) states, “By reflecting on divining we can penetrate what Socrates wishes to teach us about rhapsody and poetry” (57).

¹⁴⁹ Tigerstedt (1969) 26-29; Bloom (1970) 55-56; Murray (1996) 10-12; Liebert (2008) 202-25.

¹⁵⁰ At *Phaedrus* 244a8-d5, Socrates distinguishes between possession divination, which occurs when a seer serves as a medium for a god, and technical divination where a seer interprets divine will through some material (e.g., the entrails of a sacrificed animal) or event (e.g., a bolt of lightning). This distinction is

features of divine possession. A person cannot be said to have technical knowledge while they serve as a medium for a god. More generally, Plato's discussion of poetic inspiration is still seen as a contentious issue. Certainly, it is a change from previous conceptions of poetic composition/performance.¹⁵¹

My aim is to interrogate this bipartite account in order to show how they can be accommodated in the case of divination. In so doing, I reject the thesis that Socrates is ironic when he characterizes divination as the result of inspiration, and later, possession divination as constitutive of a *technē*. In fact, this latter puzzle – synthesizing possession with *technē* – has already been scrutinized.¹⁵² What I hope to contribute is that Socrates' appeal to Theoclymenus at 539a-demonstrates that Plato recognizes the existence of superlative seers who defy Plato's own distinction between possession and technical divination.

Divination makes three appearances in the *Ion*. I first rehearse the textual evidence that initially characterizes divination as a *technē*. Next I examine the thesis that divination is the result of inspiration. In the final section, I examine the case of Theoclymenus, which emerges in Socrates' re-examination of *technē*. Although at first glance, Theoclymenus seems to embody Plato's distinction between possession and technical divination, a careful reading of the *Odyssey* shows that he is far more sophisticated a seer than an individual like the Pythia who undergoes possession.

Part I: Divination is a *technē* (531b)

normally considered paradigmatic of Plato's concept of divination, but my present argument attempts to draw out its limitations.

¹⁵¹ Tigersbedt (1970) 163-178.

¹⁵² Brickhouse and Smith (1993) 37-51 argue that the *technē* of the possessed seer consists of knowing how to enter into the inspirational state. Once in this state, however, the god who possesses the seer takes over and the seer can no longer be thought of as in control of his or her thoughts, utterances, and actions.

The most explicit characterizations of divination in the *Ion* depict it as a genuine *technē*. As with the other early dialogues, Socrates' interlocutor is presented as an authority in his field. Ion has just won first place at a contest during the festival of Asclepius.¹⁵³ His specialty is Homer; this triggers Socrates to ask whether he is qualified to perform the works of any other poet (531a). Given that Homer and Hesiod often engage with the same subjects, Socrates reasons that he who can recite the former can also recite the latter. Ion accepts the notion that poets often deal with the same subject. Nevertheless, he insists that his specialty is confined to Homer, although this is not made entirely explicit until later (532b-c).

One direction the discussion might take is between genuine and incompetent practitioners of rhapsody. But Ion's reputation as an exemplary rhapsode has already been established, so Socrates adopts a different strategy. He urges Ion to consider those subjects like the seer's art (*mantikēs*), upon which Homer and Hesiod disagree (531b). Which person would be able to speak more beautifully and explain their disagreement over divination? Socrates asks whether it would be Ion or a seer. Ion replies that it would be the seer. He or she would be able to explain the similarities as well as the differences.¹⁵⁴ Even stronger, since Ion thinks that Homer is a great poet he certainly ought to be able to explain the works of lesser poets as well. Socrates proceeds to make the same point about arithmetic and medicine.

The decision to use divination here is peculiar. It is a mainstay of Plato's concept of divination that possessed seers like the Pythia are unable to evaluate their own

¹⁵³ This has not prevented scholars from characterizing Ion as being "an easier target" (Liebert 180) than most of Socrates' interlocutors.

¹⁵⁴ A similar argument arises at *Phaedo* 97d5 wherein it is claimed that knowledge of opposites comes *tout court*, or not at all. In other words, if someone knows something, they necessarily know the opposite as well. Benson (2003) 36-37; Kahn (1996) 193.

divinations.¹⁵⁵ This is in contrast to technical seers who divine by some external means, such as the movement of an eagle, or a meteorological event like lightning. At this point in the discussion, the distinction between possession and technical divination has not been made. All Socrates has claimed is that Ion, *qua* rhapsode, ought to be able to judge every instance of poetry. This looks forward to Socrates' later question – who can best judge poetic representations of *technai*, the craftsman or the poet?¹⁵⁶ In that discussion, divination emerges again, and receives more attention than any of the other *technai*.

One can draw two details from this initial case of divination. It is the first *technē* introduced in the *Ion*, and so should be given careful attention.¹⁵⁷ Second, Socrates appeals to Hesiod and Homer (Ion's specialty), thereby prompting us to consider the status of divination in the Epic poets. This focus on literary representations of *technai* is crucial to Socrates' argument.

Part II. Divination is the result of inspiration, not *technē*

As Ion's expertise is undermined, it is left to Socrates to sketch the precise nature of Ion's ability. He claims that Homer is an exemplary poet (531d); this makes him especially qualified to evaluate other poets. He states:

...when a number of people speak on the same subject, it's always the same person who will know how to pick out good speakers and bad speakers. If he doesn't know how to pick out a bad speaker, he certainly won't know a good speaker – on the same subject, anyway (*Ion* 531e8-532a4).

...oukoun en kephalaiō legomen hōs ho autos gnōsetai aei, peri tōn autōn pollōn legontōn, hostis te eu legei kai hostis kakōs: ē ei mē gnōsetai ton kakōs legonta, dēlon hoti oude ton eu, peri ge tou autou.

¹⁵⁵ cf. *Apology* 22c; *Meno* 99c-d; *Timaeus* 71a-72.

¹⁵⁶ Liebert (2010) 187-188.

¹⁵⁷ Roochnik (1996) notes, “the *Ion* has the second highest frequency” (259) of the word *technē* and its relatives.

A genuine *technē* enables a person to evaluate it across the whole spectrum of its subject matter. In other words, it allows someone to identify the exemplary practitioners, those who are merely competent, and the impersonators.¹⁵⁸ Akin to Homer, Ion's exceptional ability commits him to the thesis that he can speak well about all of the other inferior poets. But Ion does not have this ability. Given that he does not satisfy this condition of what it means to possess a *technē*, namely that one be capable of speaking on the entirety of the subject matter, Ion does not actually have a *technē*.¹⁵⁹

Ion is exasperated (532c). He cannot explain his particular expertise without including things he does not know. Socrates, thus, introduces the idea that Ion does not perform Homer according to "knowledge or mastery" (*technē kai epistēmē*) (532c6-7). He does so through a series of analogies. He begins with the idea that each *technē* is mastered holistically (532e). For instance, a painter cannot only judge the work of one painter, but of every painter. No one claims the ability to judge only one painter. The same is true with judging sculpture (533b).¹⁶⁰

Although Ion acquiesces to Socrates' argument, he remains puzzled by his particular ability. Socrates introduces a new concept – a divine power (*theia de dunamis*)

¹⁵⁸ cf. *Charmides* 170e.

¹⁵⁹ In the *Laches*, Socrates makes a similar assertion when he asks, "And what we know, we must, I suppose, be able to state?" (190c5). If someone possesses a *technē*, he or she must demonstrate such expertise. Otherwise, it is functionally equivalent to not having the *technē* at all. As well, Roochnik (1996) states that "because *technē* grants its possessor total mastery of his field and thus should enable him to evaluate anyone venturing into it, Ion has been shown to be *atechnos*, without a *technē*" (260). This emerges as well at the end of the *Symposium* (223d) where it is agreed that the person who can compose tragedies must necessarily be able to compose comedies, since both constitute poetry. This notion of one *technē*, one subject-matter is discussed in Kahn (1996) 108-110.

¹⁶⁰ The choices of painting and sculpture are artistic and are therefore close to rhapsody. As well, Socrates uses similar language in each case. Ion complains that when another poet is discussed, he is lost and simply dozes off (532c). By contrast, Socrates has never known anyone who can judge one painting or piece of sculpture well, yet loses this ability and dozes off when another piece of art is presented (533a; 533b).

– which is to be understood in strong contrast to *technē*.¹⁶¹ Like the power of the magnet, Ion, together with the epic poets (533e), is possessed by the divine. Not only does the magnet attract the iron ring, it implants power into the ring itself, thereby enabling the ring to pull other rings. Similarly, the Muse pulls Homer along, who in turn inspires Ion, who finally is able to enchant his audience with his performance.¹⁶² Although it is Socrates who introduces the concept of inspiration, specified as the rhapsode’s complete lack of *nous* (*ho nous mēketi en autō enē*) (534b4-5), Ion heartily subscribes to it. Does he think Socrates is correct? Ion replies, “Lord yes, I certainly do” (*nai ma to Dia, emoige*) (535a2). Does Ion not notice the inconsistency between inspiration and audience awareness?

Socrates underscores the divide between *technē* and inspiration by stating that as long “as a human being has his intellect in his possession he will always lack the power to make poetry or sing prophecy” (*heōs d’ an touti ekhē to ktēma, adunatos pas poiein anthrōpos estin kai khrēsmōdein.*) (534b6-8). This explains Ion’s ability to only perform Homer. In fact, the particularity of Ion’s expertise is the best evidence that he is inspired by the Muse. According to Socrates, what happens to Ion is analogous to “prophets and godly seers” (*tois khrēsmōdois kai tois mantesi tois theiois*) (534d2) in the sense that no one thinks it is the seers themselves who divine. Rather, it is the gods who use the seer as

¹⁶¹ On the cleavage between inspiration and *technē* in the *Ion*, see Harris (2004) and Havelock (1963), the latter who seems to accept the Platonic division rather uncontroversially. Moreover, Murray (1996) and Halliwell (1999) both note how Plato distinguishes between inspiration and *mimesis* as it figures into the operational mode of the poets. They “pull the understanding of poetry in opposite directions” (Halliwell 272). Whereas *mimesis* depends crucially on the theory of forms, which is absent from the early dialogues like the *Ion*, inspiration depends upon the activity of the gods. I am not at all certain that such a strong division can be maintained, however, especially once we turn our attention to the *Symposium*. For in Diotima’s ascent passage we have both the language of inspiration and the form of beauty as the end goal.

¹⁶² “...through those who are inspired a chain of other enthusiasts is suspended” (533e5-6).

a medium.¹⁶³ Note, furthermore, that Socrates here connects seers with prophets (*chrēsmōdois*), which etymologically means ‘singer of oracles’. This pairing is unique to Plato.¹⁶⁴

In what remains, Socrates continues to emphasize the divine possession of the poet, particularly the idea that the poet is completely *passive* in the relationship:

...poets are nothing but representatives of the gods, possessed by whoever possesses them. To show that, the god deliberately sang the most beautiful lyric poem through the most worthless poet. (534e4-535a2)¹⁶⁵

*...hoi de poiētai ouden all' ē hermēnēs eisin tōn theōn,
katekhomenoi ex hotou an hekastos katekhētai. tauta
endeiknumenos ho theos exepitēdes dia tou phaulotatou poiētou to
kalliston melos ēsen.*

Note the authenticating trope that the gods inspire someone who is ignorant, which was broadly employed in Ancient Greece, one significant proponent being the Pythia.¹⁶⁶ Still, Socrates’ appeal to inspiration bankrupts divination of its status as a *technē*. Yet paradoxically, as we saw in the previous section, divination was already characterized as a *technē* (531b) and it will be so again (538e-539e).

¹⁶³ In the *Republic*, Socrates characterizes the Pythia as the ‘Delphic Apollo’ and as the god who sits at the center of the earth (427c). Legislation is the topic under consideration and Socrates asserts that since he and his interlocutors have no knowledge of how best to serve the divine (i.e., what sorts of temples need to be constructed, what sacrifices to be made, etc.), it is prudent that they follow Apollo as he manifests himself in the Pythia. Note, then, the co-extensiveness between the Pythia and Apollo; when the seer is possessed, she is literally Apollo. Her words are actually Apollo’s words.

¹⁶⁴ Mikalson (2010) 125-126, following Parker (2005) 111-112, speculates that the *chresmodoi* might refer back to the 5th century *chresmologoi*, who were collectors or interpreters of oracles. Importantly for Plato, the former are inspired while the latter are never depicted as such.

¹⁶⁵ Roochnik (1996) 267-268 notes the appearance of the word *atechnos* in the following: “Tynnaichus from Chalcis, who never made a poem anyone would think worth mentioning, except for the praise-song everyone sings, almost the most beautiful lyric poem there is, and simply (*atechnos*) as he says himself, “an invention of the Muses”” (534d6-e1). In this context, *atechnos* means ‘literally, simply, utterly’ but in the context of the dialogue, which concerns itself with whether or not rhapsody constitutes a legitimate *technē*, Plato is certainly punning *atechnos* to additionally mean ‘without *technē*’.

¹⁶⁶ Flower (2008) 231.

Such a puzzle forces us to consider whether Socrates is earnest or not. First off, it is worthwhile to acknowledge the optimistic facet of Socrates' claim. Even though rhapsody is not the result of knowledge, it is the result of some divine source, and therefore deserves considerable prestige.¹⁶⁷ In the present context, there is a blanket rejection of the thesis that those who claim inspiration have a *technē*. Importantly, this does not deny the existence of inspiration, but only that such a phenomenon must be conceptualized as distinct from knowledge.

It is unclear how far one can take this line of thought. Is Ion the only target? Or does Ion represent rhapsody? Even more comprehensive, is the target anyone who claims inspiration, so that the poet, seer, and priest all fall by the wayside?¹⁶⁸ This last option is checked by the fact that in later dialogues Plato holds inspiration in great esteem.¹⁶⁹ In the next section, I turn to the final, and most complex, instance of divination in the *Ion*. Although divination is again characterized as a *technē*, it ought to give us pause, and reconsider, I urge, some of our basic convictions about Plato's understanding of divination. In particular, I argue that Socrates' appeal to Theoclymenus has a deeper purpose than simply constituting another instance of *technē* outdoing rhapsody.

Part III. Divination is a paradigmatic *technē*

In the later stages of the *Ion* Socrates makes the uncontroversial claim that Homer speaks about many different subjects (536d-542b). Does Ion claim to be able to speak well on all of them? Socrates secures Ion's assent. But given the range of subjects, it

¹⁶⁷ Priests and seers "win a fine reputation because of the magnitude of their undertakings" (*kai doxan semnēn lambanei dia to megethos tōn egkheirēmatōn*) (*Statesman* 290d).

¹⁶⁸ I borrow this list from *Phaedrus* 244b-d.

¹⁶⁹ cf. *Meno* 99d; *Phaedrus* 244b-d

would be miraculous if Ion (and by extension, Homer) could speak well on so much. Socrates offers multiple examples.

First, he considers chariot driving. Socrates argues that the charioteer rather than the rhapsode would best be able to evaluate the relevant passages. The subject matter one learns via navigation, one will not learn via medicine. So, the charioteer will know how best to evaluate Homer's passages, and insofar as the charioteer is different than the rhapsode, his or her "knowledge is of different subjects also" (*peri heterōn kai epistēmē pragmatōn estin*) (538b7). Socrates proceeds to make the same point with the examples of medicine and fishing.

His final example is divination. First, in the *Odyssey*, he quotes Theoclymenus, who is a prophet of Melampus' sons:

Are you mad? What evil is this that's upon you? Night has enshrouded your hands, your faces, and down to your knees. Wailing spreads like fire, tears wash your cheeks. Ghosts fill the dooryard, ghosts fill the hall, they rush to the black gate of hell, they drop below darkness. Sunlight has died from a sky run over with evil mist (537b1-8) (*Odyssey* 20.351-57; Plato omits line 354).

*daimonioi, ti kakon tode paskhete; nukti men humeōn eiluatai
kephalai te prosōpa te nerthe te guia, oimōgē de dedēe,
dedakruntai de pareiai: eidōlōn te pleon prothuron, pleiē de kai
aulē hiemenōn erebosde hupo zophon: ēelios de ouranou
exapolōle, kakē d' epidedromen akhlus*

The language is poetic and ambiguous and is noteworthy for being the only purported example of possession divination in all of Homer.¹⁷⁰ Second, he quotes from the *Iliad* during the battle of the wall. The Iliadic poet states:

There came to them a bird as they hungered to cross over an eagle,
a high-flier, circled the army's left with a blood-red serpent carried
in its talons, a monster, Alive, still breathing, it has not yet

¹⁷⁰ Liebert (2010) 191; Murray (1981) 94; Lowenstam (1993) 26-27.

forgotten its warlust, for it struck its captor on the breast, by the neck; it was writhing back but the eagle shot it groundwards in agony of pain, and dropped it in the midst of the throng, then itself, with a scream, soared on a breath of the wind (7.200-207).

ornis gar sphin epēlthe perēsemenai memaōsin, aietos hupsipetēs, ep' aristera laon eergōn, phoinēenta drakonta pherōn onukhessi pelōron, zōon, et' aspaironta: kai oupō lētheto kharmēs. kopse gar auton ekhonta kata stēthos para deirēn idnōtheis opisō, ho d' apo hethen hēke khamaze algēsas odunēsi, mesō d' eni kabbal' homilō

This is an instance of technical divination, specifically augury, which is characteristic of archaic literature.¹⁷¹ Socrates' point is that it is for the seer to “examine and judge”

(*skopein kai krinein*) (539d2). What is presupposed in both examples is that Plato thinks

that divination constitutes a legitimate *technē*. Although the technical/possession

distinction is never explicitly made in the *Ion*, these two Homeric quotes come closest.¹⁷²

Indeed, it is sometimes overlooked that both possession and technical divination are

treated by Plato, together with the Greek tradition, as genuine *technai*.¹⁷³ The glaring

question is how can divination constitute a *technē*, on the one hand, and be a result of a

divine power on the other, when Socrates repeatedly emphasizes that the two are

fundamentally incompatible?

In what follows, I examine two accounts that seek to answer this puzzle. One position, and perhaps the most intuitive, is that Plato ironically depicts divination as a paradigmatic *technē* in order to tacitly undercut the veracity of his account.¹⁷⁴ In

¹⁷¹ Flower (2008) 24-25 surmises that this is due to the dramatic features of augury, and contrasts this with the dominant form of divination in Classical Greece – extispicy, or divination by the inspection of animal entrails – which is less theatrical.

¹⁷² Liebert (2010) notes how Socrates “chooses two literary examples of the same craft which illustrate the paradoxical aspects of that craft” (190).

¹⁷³ Murray (1996) 105-106 dispels the paradox of divination's dual function in the *Ion* by appeal to the *Phaedrus*.

¹⁷⁴ Liebert (2010) 194.

actuality, the seer is not the best qualified to interpret literary instances of divination. It is the poet. I outline reasons to reject this account.

Second, I analyze another account that seeks to understand the notion of *possession* divination as an instance of *technē*. Smith and Brickhouse argue that the technical component of possession consists in knowing how to trigger possession. I aim to show that while this argument has merit in the context of possession divination, Theoclymenus flouts Plato's characterization of possession divination. Theoclymenus, in Homer, represents a superlative seer, and I argue that Plato recognizes the existence of such individuals.

Part IV. The Homeric Quotations

One of the recurring ideas concerning possession divination is the inability of its practitioners to adequately judge their own divinatory experiences. If someone has temporarily lost their self-awareness, then they cannot be justifiably held accountable for their assertions.¹⁷⁵ Socrates often pivots on the idea of possession as he extrapolates poetic inspiration. As late as the *Laws*, for instance, the Athenian relates:

...when a poet takes his seat on the tripod of the Muse, he cannot control his thoughts. He's like a fountain where the water is allowed to gush forth unchecked... (719c).

...hoti poiētēs, hopotan en tō tripodī tēs Mousēs kathizētai, tote ouk emphrōn estin, hoion de krēnē tis to epion rhein hetoimōs ea...

One might think that the notion that seers served as mediums to gods was fairly ubiquitous in Ancient Greece. In fact, some focus on the relationship between possession

¹⁷⁵ Woodruff (1982) 138; Stern-Gillet (2004) 180; Murray (1981) 88-89 challenges the notion that inspiration entirely bankrupts responsibility, for if inspiration is situated along a spectrum according to the impact of that which inspires, then one not necessarily lose all autonomy. Granted, this claim seems more historical than Platonic, for it seems to be Plato's express purpose to characterize possessed seers as lacking any autonomy/choice/responsibility over their divinations.

and *poetic* inspiration in Archaic Greece, and the degree to which mantic possession can be applied to poetry.¹⁷⁶

Still, in the context of the *Ion*, it is puzzling that the seer, especially the possessed seer, is deployed as someone qualified to interpret literary instances of divination in the Homeric Epics. As Liebert argues:

Unlike depictions of medicine or charioteering, which can be isolated from their literary context and judged according to general principles, a visionary prophecy cannot be meaningfully assessed once it has been extracted from its fictional world (191).

In other words, a divination implanted in a literary context is functionally indistinguishable from a concept like foreshadowing. But the seer does not specialize in literary concepts and so does not constitute an expert in this case.

This claim necessitates a close examination of how the quotations function in the Homeric texts. Consider the example of possession divination again:

Are you mad? What evil is this that's upon you? Night has enshrouded your hands, your faces, and down to your knees. Wailing spreads like fire, tears wash your cheeks. Ghosts fill the dooryard, ghosts fill the hall, they rush to the black gate of hell, they drop below darkness. Sunlight has died from a sky run over with evil mist (537b1-8) (20.351-57; Plato omits line 354).

The divination foretells the future ruin and death of Penelope's suitors; such an interpretation is accessible to anyone paying minimal attention to the plot.¹⁷⁷ In fact, given the Homeric poet's own account of the scene, which occurs just prior to the

¹⁷⁶ Tigersted (1970) 165-173; Murray (1981) 87-88, 94-95. What is generally accepted is divination's association with possession and passivity. Tigersted states that the Greeks, "from time immemorial, believed in mantic inspiration as a state of divine madness or possession" (165). It is this notion of possession that Plato transfers from divination to poetry. Naddaf (2009), contra Tigersted and Murray, argues that even the early poets like Homer and Hesiod experienced ecstatic possession, specified as being "overpowered by the Muses and Apollo" (12).

¹⁷⁷ Accordingly, "the prophecy functions rather as a narrative device, an instance of foreshadowing and dramatic irony, and not an instance of divination per se" (Liebert 192).

Theoclymenus' divination, the poet and seer actually co-exist. The preceding description to the divination section:

...but among the suitors Pallas Athena roused unquenchable laughter, and struck away their wits. And now they laughed with jaws that were not their own, and they ate flesh that was defiled with blood, and their eyes were filled with tears, and their spirits wanted to cry out (*Odyssey* 20.345-49).

... hōs phato Tēlemakhos: mnēstērsi de Pallas Athēnē asbeston gelō ōrse, pareplagxen de noēma. hoi d' ēdē gnathmoisi geloiōn allotrioisin, haimophorukta de dē krea ēsthion: osse d' ara spheōn dakruophin pimplanto, goon d' ōieto thumos.

The passages are remarkably similar in tone and language. What gives the divination legitimacy, then, is not something external to the text, but rather confirmed by the literary context, both in terms of when it appears, and in the consequences to the suitors.

The same goes for the example of technical divination. Augury is one of the most transparent divinatory archetypes and is easily accessible. Polydamas, a soldier, interprets the event, and he is furthermore characterized as a seer (2.215-229). In other words, he is a non-specialist and yet correctly interprets the divinatory event. This contradicts Socrates' claim that the omen can only be adequately judged by a specialist, the seer.

Thus, Polydamas' ability to explain the event:

...is also a narrative device, a case of foreshadowing in the guise of a character's foreknowledge. Theoclymenus' prophecy and the Trojan bird omen are thus inversely related literary devices; the prophecy provides a metatextual interpretation of the poem's own signs... while the omen is one such sign whose demand for interpretation is met by a character within the poem (Liebert 194).

According to Liebert, Ion should never have accepted the thesis that the seer is the best person to judge literary instances of divination. Rather, he should have insisted on the expertise of the poet/rhapsode. For Liebert, Socrates' appeal to Homeric quotations on

divination undermines his own argument that those with a *technē* are best qualified to interpret literary representations of their particular expertise.

Although divination is most representative of this thought, it is worthwhile to note that divination only arises after a long exhaustive list of uncontentious *technai* – charioteering, medicine, and fishing. The last two are especially important given that Socrates quotes Homeric passages, which are meant to display each *technē* at work. Consider medicine first wherein Socrates quotes the formulation of a medicinal drink:

...over wine of Pramnos she [Hecamede] grated goat's milk cheese with a brazen grater...and onion relish for the drink (*Iliad* 11.639-40 with 630, qtd at 538c4-5).

*...oinō pramneiō, phēsin, epi d' aigeion knē turon knēsti khalkeiē:
para de kromuon potō opson:*

Nestor has rescued Machaon out of the fighting. The two men return to Nestor's tent and are served this medicinal drink by Hecamede. It is quite instructive to note that nowhere is Hecamede characterized either as a healer, or as a doctor. It is the language of medicine, after all, that Socrates uses. Rather, the only extrapolations of her character seem to be that she is Nestor's servant, beautiful as a goddess (11.637-38), and knowledgeable about making a medicinal drink.

Does knowing how to make a medicinal drink qualify one as knowing medicine? Or is such knowledge disseminated in the broader public realm? This passage is particularly striking, in fact, because it is Machaon who is elsewhere characterized as a healer (*Iliad* 2.29-33). In this context, however, he is the wounded party.

The penultimate example of a *technē* is fishing. Socrates asks Ion whether a fisherman or a rhapsode would best be able to interpret the following passage to be beautiful or not:

Leaden she plunged to the floor of the sea like a weight that is fixed to a field cow' horn. Given to the hunt it goes among ravenous fish, carrying death (*Iliad* 24.80-82, qtd. at 538d1-3).

*hē de molubdainē ikelē es busson hikanen, hē te kat' agrauloio
boos keras emmemauia erkhetai omēstēsi met' ikhthusi pēma
pherousa:*

Again, the literary context is awkward. It is not a fisherman who delivers this passage; it is Homer, the speaker of the poem. In the context, it presupposes knowledge of fishing rather than claiming knowledge of fishing. It is, in fact, a literary trope – a simile to be exact – about Iris, the divine messenger, seeking out Thetis at the bottom of the ocean.

Granted, in both cases, namely that medicine and fishing, Socrates' express purpose is to ask who is best qualified to judge such passages. In that sense, he does not need the passages to demonstrate a doctor, or a fisherman, at work. All he needs Ion to accept is that it would be the appropriate specialist who would be best qualified to interpret the passages. But independent of Socrates' purpose, there is the underlying problem of squaring the literary context with Socrates' philosophical argument. For one, Hecamede is not obviously a doctor; her wisdom might easily be folk wisdom. As well, it would do well to recognize the conceptual implications of a simile, which is by nature a comparative use of language.

In order to make a successful simile, one needs to know both sides of the comparative. Accordingly, given that the simile is deployed in a divine context – Iris seeking out Thetis at the bottom of the ocean – one wonders how a fisherman could be expected to adequately interpret this use of language if his expertise *qua* expertise is only fishing. He does not know anything about the divine. Indeed, this triggers Socrates to

transition to divination.¹⁷⁸ So, each *technai* exhibits a paradox between the expertise of the craftsperson and the literary representation of said craft.

Despite the continuities with the other *technai*, I submit that there is something peculiar about divination, which ought to give pause. Consider again the claim that the first quotation of Theoclymenus' constitutes the only instance of possession divination in the Homeric texts. There is certainly something unnerving about it.¹⁷⁹ Consider, furthermore, that it is Erymachus, Polybus' son, who accuses Theoclymenus of being "out of his mind" (*aphrainai*) (20.360). This implies that Theoclymenus' is indeed possessed, but it is a suitor who makes the claim, and the suitors reject the divination as laughable. In this sense, the claim that Theoclymenus is out of his mind is a claim that he is mad, as opposed to genuinely inspired. Shortly thereafter, Theoclymenus retorts that he has a "mind in his breast" (*noos en stēthessi*) (20.366) to make his own exit. In fact, he subsequently interprets his divine episode:

I see advancing on you all a catastrophe which you cannot hope to survive or shun, no, not a single one of you with your brutal acts and reckless plots here in the home of godlike Odysseus (20.367-370).

tois exeimi thuraze, epei noeō kakon ummin erkhomenon, to ken ou tis hupekphugoi oud' aleaito mnēstērōn, hoi dōma kat' antitheou Odusēos aneras hubrizontes atasthala mēkhanaasthe.

This contradicts the notion that the possessed seer cannot interpret their divination.

There are at least two directions, then, to head in consideration of this statement.

On the one hand, one could claim that possessed seers can in fact interpret their

¹⁷⁸ Charioteering, the first example, is also problematic. In Homer, Nestor is advising his son to use gamesmanship, which strictly speaking, does not fall within the realm of the charioteer's competence. Bloom (1970) 55.

¹⁷⁹ Liebert quotes several scholars who characterize it as "the most eerie passage in Homer," (Russo and Heubeck 124) and part of "a very remarkable and macabre scene." (Stanford 353).

divinations. Plato repeatedly denies this possibility.¹⁸⁰ On the other, Theoclymenus might be an altogether different sort of seer.¹⁸¹ There is a genuine sense in which Theoclymenus flouts the usual sense of a possessed seer. Theoclymenus appears to have a visionary expertise minus the mediumistic possession of seers like the Pythia.

Flower introduces the concept of intuitive divination, which he situates in-between technical and possession divination.¹⁸² He defines intuitive divination as a special ability wherein the seer spontaneously ‘sees’ reality or the future but does not depend on being possessed during the event of divination. For example, consider Calchas in the Aeschylus’ *Agamemnon*. From witnessing two eagles, he prophesizes that Troy will fall. A sacrifice is needed. Calchas is not possessed but he does intuit, or see, things to come. This concept can be fruitfully applied to Theoclymenus; he uses the same ocular imagery that Calchas uses (20.367).

Socrates cites two examples of divination because they constitute distinct types, and it has been thought that this must mean Socrates’ first Homeric quote is possession divination.¹⁸³ But paying careful attention to the Homeric epics shows that the situation is more complicated. The difference between the two Homeric quotations is not one of possession and technical, but technical and visionary. This solves the problem of interpreting literary instances of a *technē*. If it is the case that Theoclymenus is a

¹⁸⁰ cf. *Phaedrus* 244d-e; *Timaeus* 71a-72.

¹⁸¹ Theoclymenus mirrors the abilities of real seers. He is a unique figure, capable of interpreting his divinations. This is precisely what one ought to expect in a mythical context populated by heroes and gods. Yet I want to resist such a stark division between the real world and foundational texts of Classical Greece, since they undoubtedly formed a symbiotic relationship. Flower (2008) 94.

¹⁸² Flower (2008) 87-91 also characterizes this type of divination as ‘second sight’ or an “innate faculty of divination (*emphutikos mantikē*)” (87). Dodds (1963) 70-71 also makes reference to this, drawing together Theoclymenus, Cassandra of the *Agamemnon*, and the Argive seer of Apollo, all for whom prophetic madness was “spontaneous and incalculable” (70). Dodds distinguishes between the visionary divinations of these figures and the enthusiasm, or strong possession, of the Pythia.

¹⁸³ Murray (1981) notes: “It has long been recognised, however, that, with the exception of Theoclymenus at *Ody.* XX. 351-7, prophecy of this visionary nature is absent from Homer” (94).

visionary seer, not a possessed one, then he can interpret his own prophetic vision. The visionary prophet retains his self-consciousness and can interpret his own vision.¹⁸⁴ Nevertheless, it is true that Plato characterizes possession divination as a *technē*. In the next section, I investigate this claim, and conclude that while the possessed seer does have a *technē*, it cannot account for either Theoclymenus, or a seer like him who is required to interpret a divination.

Part V. Possession Divination is a *Technē*

Early in the *Ion*, divination is characterized as a *technē*. Then it is characterized as the complete opposite of a *technē*, namely as a result of a divine power. At first glance, the third instance of divination seems to combine the two, that is, as characterizing possession divination as a *technē*. How are we to make sense of this claim? In this section, I examine Smith and Brickhouse's answer to this question. To begin, it is useful to rehearse Vlastos' account of divination, which emerges in his discussion of Socrates.

Vlastos argues that Socrates follows the precepts of reason wherever it leads him; one of his challenges then is to square Socratic reason with Socratic religiosity. In particular, Vlastos needs to provide an account of Socrates' *daimonion*. Does Socrates receive knowledge from his *daimonion*? If not propositional knowledge, might it be some more auxiliary type, such as know-how? Vlastos baldly rejects the idea that Socrates might gain knowledge from something other than reason. He cites the *Crito* as evidence:

¹⁸⁴ Flower (2008) 88-89 also distinguishes between two sorts of possession. The first is the familiar sort where the seer's self temporarily departs, such that the god literally occupies the body of the seer. The seer's self-consciousness is absent. In the second sort, by contrast, the seer retains some semblance of self-identity. Cassandra in Aeschylus' *Agamemnon* is an example. Even though she prophesizes, she is aware of the content of her prophecy, which in this case is her own death. In fact, I disagree with Flower (2008) 78-79 who seems to think that Theoclymenus does not interpret his vision, since he is an "altered state of consciousness" (79), but leaves the interpretation to the audience. The text clearly shows that Theoclymenus interprets his vision to mean the future ruin of Penelope's suitors.

Not now for the first time, but always, I am the sort of man who is persuaded by nothing in me except the proposition which appears to me to be the best when I reason about it (46b4-6)

hōs egō ou nun prōton alla kai aei toioutos hoios tōn emōn mēdeni allō peithesthai ē tō logō hos an moi logizomenō beltistos phainētai.

Still, Vlastos must provide some explanation for Socrates' *daimonion* as well as his various appeals to divination (*Apology* 33c5-7). In the *Apology*, Socrates states:

Regarding the poets, I soon realized that it is not by wisdom that poets do what they do, but by some natural talent and by inspiration, like the diviners and oracle givers, who also say many fine things but know nothing of what they say (22b8-c4).

egnōn oun au kai peri tōn poiētōn en oligō touto, hoti ou sophia poiouien ha poiouien, alla phusei tini kai enthousiazontes hōsper hoi theomanteis kai hoi khrēsmōdoi kai gar houtoi legousi men polla kai kala, isasin de ouden hōn legousi.

Vlastos emphasizes the ignorance of those who experience divine inspiration. Although they might speak well, they cannot be said to have knowledge. In other words, “For Socrates diviners, seers, oracle-givers, poets are all in the same boat. All of them in his view are know-nothings” (Vlastos 170). Instead, it is left to Socrates to critically interpret the assertions of those who undergo inspiration. Recall, after all, that those who are inspired, notably seers, speak in a beguiling fashion, and therefore must be carefully interpreted.¹⁸⁵

In their own analysis of divination in Plato's dialogues, Smith and Brickhouse rightly point to various passages in the dialogues (*Ion* 538e; *Laches* 198e-199a; *Phaedrus* 244c) where divination is characterized as a *technē*. If it is a *technē*, then divination must constitute some form of knowledge. They conclude that the seer possesses “a genuine – though relatively paltry – craft, and thus a... certain – though relatively paltry – form of

¹⁸⁵ Vlastos (1991) 170-171 goes to say that Socrates cannot hold the traditional notion of divine inspiration, since the traditional view holds that seers and poets have *knowledge*.

knowledge” (37). What buttresses their analysis are two sections in the *Statesman* (260e1, 290c4-6) that distinguish between two sorts of *technai*. The first initiates commands; the kingly *technē* is the paradigmatic example. The second, by contrast, merely apes the commands of the first. Such *technai* include: “the interpreter, the person who gives the time to the rowers, the seer, the herald, and many other sorts of expertise related to these” (*eis tauton meixomen basilikēn hermēneutikē, keleustikē, mantikē, kērukikē, kai pollais heterais toutōn tekhnais suggenesin, hai sumpasai to g' epitattein ekhousin*) (*Statesman* 260d11-e2).

But according to the *Apology*, seers “know nothing of what they say” (*isasin de ouden hōn legousi*) (22c1-4). How can a seer be ignorant yet still possess a *technē*? More to the point, the reason seers do not know what they say is because they are mad and out of their minds.¹⁸⁶ In response to this, Smith and Brickhouse state:

What needs to be explained then is the relationship between the diviner’s craft and the knowledge which constitutes it and the truths or commands they divine when they are “mad” and “out of their minds” (42).

According to Socrates, poets are akin to seers in that they function not according to knowledge, but to “a sort of natural talent and by inspiration” (*alla phusei tini kai enthousiazontes*) (*Apology* 22b8-c2). When a seer divines, they are not self-aware, and so can hardly be thought of as utilizing a *technē*. Consequently, they are not qualified to offer an interpretation of the divination.¹⁸⁷

¹⁸⁶ cf. *Phaedrus* 244a6-d5; *Ion* 534b5.

¹⁸⁷ Instructive here is *Timaeus* 71e-72b wherein Plato introduces the need to appoint official interpreters of seer. For Plato, “as long as the fit remains on him [the seer], the man is incompetent to render judgment on his own visions and voices” (*tou de manentos eti te en toutō menontos ouk ergon ta phanenta kai phōnēthenta huph' heautou krinein*) (72a3-4). This might mean that the seer is permitted to interpret their own divinations once they have regained their cognitive faculties. Instead, Plato asserts the need to appoint official interpreters and further states that these individuals should not be misinterpreted as seers themselves (72b). These interpreters would have a degree of interpretive skill and therefore possess a

The only thing the seer might reasonably know is that they have had a genuine divinatory episode.¹⁸⁸ How then can Socrates claim that divination is a *technē*?

According to Smith and Brickhouse, the answer lies in the ability of the seer to enter into a state of madness or frenzy:

...even if this *technē* only enables the diviners to enter into the state of receptivity to the god – a state in which they are *ekphrones* – the knowledge that constitutes their *technē* is hardly trivial (45).

It is in this qualified sense that Smith and Brickhouse disagree with Vlastos. Seers do possess a *technē*; it consists of the ability to enter into a state of frenzy. The Pythia knows the necessary conditions to enter into a state of possession. Like Vlastos, Smith and Brickhouse maintain that the seer can access superlative moral truths. The problem, of course, is these moral truths remain something of a mystery. We cannot know what motivates the gods to state them, or even whether or not we accurately interpret them.¹⁸⁹

Smith and Brickhouse's argument has a pleasing synthesis. They combine both horns of divination in such a way that preserves (1) the mediumistic nature of possession together with (2) the features of a *technē*. I agree with their account for possessed seers like the Pythia, but their argument glosses over a seer like Theoclymenus. In particular, their account is unable to account for a seer who has a divine gift, experiences visions,

technē. Such interpreters are needed because they are in their 'right mind' and can 'recollect and ponder' what was said or described while the seer was asleep or in a visionary state. One might think it obvious that one could remember the content of a prophetic dream, but important here is Plato's claim is words "spoken [out loud] in dream".

¹⁸⁸ Smith and Brickhouse (1993) 45.

¹⁸⁹ McPherran (1996), like Smith and Brickhouse, interrogates Vlastos' connection between Socrates' *daimonion* and divination. Vlastos, recall, develops an analogy between these two in order to show that the *daimonion*, like the madness that the seer experiences, can do nothing but cause Socrates to re-consider something. Several considerations, including the adjectival character of the *daimonion*, give credence to the idea that Socrates does not experience an all-consuming possession of the sort experienced by seers. Rather, what seems to occur is "the other sort of psychological disassociation recognized by late – and so possibly early – antiquity, where 'subjects' consciousness persists side by side" (McPherran 196). Nevertheless, McPherran agrees with Smith and Brickhouse that Socrates grants seers "a certain kind of menial craft knowledge; namely, the knowledge of how to put themselves into a position to receive a god's revelations (196-197).

and furthermore is the person most qualified to “examine and judge” (*skopein kai krinein*) (539d2) relevant passages in Homer. Seers who undergo possession cannot examine and judge their divinations.¹⁹⁰ Moreover, such a seer cannot be characterized merely as a technical seer, an augur for instance, because their expertise includes a visionary element.

When Socrates introduces the two examples of Homeric divination, he does so in order to show Ion that rhapsody does not have its own distinct subject matter. Since a genuine *technē* requires its own subject matter, rhapsody is not a *technē*. More specifically, he shows Ion that the relevant craftsman, not the rhapsode, is best able to interpret literary instances of their *technē*. Clearly, for epistemological reasons already outlined, it is terribly difficult to see how a possessed seer could ‘examine and judge’ what occurs to Theoclymenus.

One difficulty with this argument is that the focus is too much on Theoclymenus as he is depicted in Homer. In the context of Plato’s *Ion*, together with evidence drawn from dialogues like the *Phaedrus*, it is much easier to think that Plato rejects the possibility of a seer like Theoclymenus, as I characterize him.

This would be persuasive if there was no evidence of seers like Theoclymenus in Plato’s dialogues. But one paradigmatic example of a superlative seer is Diotima in the *Symposium*. She is depicted as a seer, she hails from Mantinea (*mantis* – seer), and is

¹⁹⁰ Important here is to distinguish between the official interpreters that can be trained to interpret divinations (*Timaeus* 71a-72) and seers themselves. The former does not jive with Socrates’ argument in the *Ion*, which stipulates that only practitioners of a *technē* can judge (literary) depictions of that *technē*. Since one could train an official interpreter, could Theoclymenus’ divination, then, be an instance of possession divination? I do not think so because Socrates’ argument exclusively deals with experts judging (literary) depictions of their own *technē*. The problem with treating Theoclymenus’ vision as an instance of possession divination is that a possessed seer cannot formulate such judgments. This should trigger serious reflection on the part of the reader as to what Socrates is thinking by deploying divination as his final, and indeed most sustained, example.

responsible for delaying a plague for ten years by recommending the appropriate sacrifices (*Symposium* 201d).

Although a thorough investigation of Diotima is beyond the scope of the present chapter, it suffices that she is both (1) a seer, and (2) depicted in an argumentative exchange with Socrates. She is not a philosopher but she knows the nature of *Eros* as well as the form of Beauty. From where else could she have gleaned such information except by the practice of her expertise? The crucial point is not necessarily what she knows, but that she is able to conceptualize and articulate it in a discursive exchange.

Her particular knowledge befits a philosopher like Socrates. She twice sketches the different stages in the ascent toward the form of Beauty, which only a philosopher can ever know. She first gives a more detailed account (210a-212a), but within this she also provides a short synopsis (211b-d) not altogether identical with what we see in the longer account. Diotima's ability to 'examine and judge' her divinations demonstrates that Theoclymenus is not as antithetical to Plato as it might first seem. Since Diotima can argue for her position, she is not a seer of the usual Platonic sort. In fact, in her ability to argue and extrapolate a position, she seems to act much more like Socrates, say in the *Apology*, despite the fact that she is not a philosopher

Smith and Brickhouse's argument answers the puzzle of how one could claim that the possessed seer has a *technē*. What I have outlined, by contrast, is how such an account fails in the context of Theoclymenus, due to Socrates' claim that such a seer is best able to interpret his divinations. This is the strongest evidence why Socrates' first appeal to Theoclymenus is not an appeal to Theoclymenus the possessed seer, but to Theoclymenus the intuitive seer, someone who specializes in prophetic visions. As I have

argued, the ability to have prophetic visions is different than divine possession in the sense that the former does not eliminate self-awareness. A consequence of such self-awareness is that the seer can interpret their own divination.

What is the reason for undermining the distinction between inspiration and *technē*? I submit that this undermining serves to tacitly offer Ion a way out of the epistemological labyrinth erected by Socrates. Recall that Socrates commits Ion to a straightjacket: either he is possessed by a god, and therefore does not have *technē*, or he does have a *technē* and can therefore (1) apply it to the whole subject matter, and (2) interpret literary depictions of it. Ion can do neither and therefore must be possessed by a god when he performs Homer.

Yet consider Ion's self-assessment, which occurs directly after Socrates' articulation of the inspiration thesis. This self-assessment strongly suggests that he is consciously calculative as to the effect he has on his audience (535e). Socrates queries Ion: Does he lose himself to the stories he performs? Does he weep during woeful episodes? Is he frightened when he tells a horror story? To all of these, Ion answers in the affirmative, thereby cementing Socrates' thesis that Ion is not in his right mind while he is performing.

Yet Ion is ever the performer in that he remains attuned to the ebb and flow of the audience. He states:

You see I must keep my wits and play close attention to them [the audience]: if I start them crying, I will laugh as I take their money, but if they laugh, I shall cry at having lost money (535e3-5).

dei gar me kai sphodr' autois ton noun prosekhein: hōs ean men klaontas autous kathisō, autos gelasomai argurion lambanōn, ean de gelōntas, autos klausomai argurion apollus.

This seems to contradict Socrates' account of divine inspiration, which is supposed to eliminate the rhapsode's self-awareness.¹⁹¹ Not only does it show that Ion is aware of his effect on the audience, but it also shows that he is acutely concerned with making money. Of course, monetary concerns are not incompatible with divine inspiration, but what is beguiling is Ion's self-awareness during the duration of his performance.¹⁹² He is supposed to be possessed by a god.

On the usual reading, Ion is not divinely inspired at all. Plato is hinting that divine inspiration is ersatz and self-serving. Far from being out of his mind, Ion is intimately aware of his abilities and his effect on audiences. He admits to catering his performance to the audience. Plato, however, has Socrates ignore Ion's duplicity. Not only does Ion's self-assessment counter Socrates' inspiration account, but it does so tacitly, and has the further consequence of making Ion look like a fool. Instead of challenging Ion for contradicting himself, Socrates simply re-iterates the disjunction between inspiration and *technē*.

I submit that the characterization of divination in the dialogue offers Ion a means of navigating out Socrates' straightjacket. A seer like Theoclymenus, or even Diotima, can simultaneously claim inspiration together with an epistemological awareness that allows the inspired party to critically reflect on their divinations. Ion does not perceive this means of accommodating Socrates' questioning, and for good reason, as he is not inspired like a seer such as Theoclymenus or Diotima.

Conclusion

¹⁹¹ Tigerstedt (1969) 21.

¹⁹² Tigerstedt (1969) 21; Trivigno (2006) 294.

My starting point was the paradoxical function of divination in the *Ion*. On the one hand, it is deployed as a *technē*, but on the other, it serves as a paradigmatic example of possession, such that Socrates deploys it in extrapolating the nature of Ion's expertise. By emphasizing the full destabilizing potential of Theoclymenus, both in Homer, and how Socrates specifies him in the *Ion*, I have attempted to stake out a ground that cannot be grafted onto the distinction between technical and possession divination. In other words, Theoclymenus' visions, which are certainly the result of divine inspiration, nevertheless occur while he remains self-aware. This is what enables him to interpret his divinations, which is prohibited for the possessed seer.

The purpose of this move is to provide Ion with a way of accommodating the paradoxical features of his expertise. That Ion fails to seize this opportunity shows that he is not an expert in the mold of Theoclymenus or Diotima. Rather, like most seers, rhapsodists, and poets, Ion is ignorant of his abilities.

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Chapter 4 – Irony and Inspiration in the *Phaedrus*

Abstract

I interrogate Plato's concept of irony, which I claim receives too much attention in interpretations of the dialogue. In the present chapter, I pay particular attention to the opening speeches, particularly Socrates', of the *Phaedrus*. I characterize four standard reasons why one might think that Socrates' first speech is ironic, and proceed to outline reasons to reject each argument. This investigation enables a better understanding of Chapter 5, which investigates the nature of divination in Socrates' palinode.

Introduction

Divination occupies a central role in the *Phaedrus*. Not only does it formulate a distinction between possession divination and technical divination (244b-c), but it also presents several interpretive puzzles. One such puzzle centers on the first two speeches, specifically to what degree either deserves an ironic interpretation. While this puzzle does not deal directly with divination, it is relevant in that irony is often held in contradistinction to inspiration.¹⁹³ Although Socrates claims to be divinely inspired, the fact that he later renounces the speech, together with the antithetical content of the speech itself, is good evidence to think that he is not serious. He appeals to the divine in jest; his reputation as the exemplar of rationality precedes him.

Yet notice that *both* of Socrates' speeches are the result of inspiration; both nevertheless express radically disparate positions on the nature of love (*eros*). It seems reasonable to conclude that the palinode (244a-257b) embodies Plato's genuine view; it contains important Platonic tenets that the first speech lacks. What, then, is the status of Socrates' first speech? Is it principally strategic in the sense of engaging with Phaedrus on his own terms? This is a familiar Socratic approach.¹⁹⁴ In this chapter, I argue that

¹⁹³ The best example is the *Ion* as discussed in chapter 3.

¹⁹⁴ For instance, in the *Cratylus*, Socrates engages in the art of etymology. Another example is the *Protagoras* where Socrates demonstrates his aptitude for delivering a long speech.

Socrates is genuinely inspired when he delivers the first speech. One consequence of this argument is that Socrates' first speech is not as antithetical to Plato as it might first appear.

My thesis does not preclude several instances of irony in the *Phaedrus*. What I want to resist is the claim that the *entirety* of Socrates' first speech is an exercise in irony such that one cannot take any of his claims seriously. Such a deconstructive move has the unconvincing consequence of flattening out the difference between clear cases of, say, mock praise (*Phaedrus* 234d-e) and authentic philosophical content. In fact, this seems to set up a false dichotomy. What is the relationship between philosophy and irony?

In the first section, I interrogate the status and import of irony in Plato's dialogues. I then rehearse the frame of the *Phaedrus* together with Phaedrus' performance of Lysias' speech. It is important to see the continuity and discontinuity between the speeches of Socrates and Lysias. After rehearsing Socrates' speech I critically evaluate the case for the ironic interpretation.

Part I – Plato, Socrates, and Irony

Irony is the greatest hermeneutic problem in the early-middle dialogues.¹⁹⁵ On one hand, there is no doubt that Socrates, on occasion, deploys irony. But to what degree and in what sense is controversial. The puzzle is further complicated by the fact that irony is the most effective tool at clearing up textual inconsistencies. If a particular passage appears contrary to a certain interpretation, it is tempting to characterize said interpretation delusively. Accordingly, appeals to irony must be made with great care;

¹⁹⁵ Strauss (1964) writes, "Very much, not to say everything, seems to depend on what Socratic irony is" (51).

they can easily expand their compass beyond what is called for. In this short section, I rehearse three accounts of irony.

Throughout the early-middle dialogues, Socrates repeatedly makes claims of a paradoxical nature, often by denying theses that he seems to discursively or performatively contradict. For instance, one of the most famous is Socrates' denial of knowledge (*Apology* 21d; 23b; 31d). There are myriad instances where Socrates appears to avow some sort of knowledge.¹⁹⁶ One attractive means of explaining this incongruity is irony. Socrates *states* that he does not know anything, but he *means* something different, often the opposite, than what is said.¹⁹⁷ Meaning something different, often the opposite, than what is said serves as a generic concept of irony.¹⁹⁸ Now it is certainly possible to strongly distinguish between irony and proper philosophical content. This creates a pleasing chiaroscuro between the literary and the philosophical.¹⁹⁹ However, Plato has enjoyed a reputation as an expert with irony since antiquity.²⁰⁰ A more appropriate starting point is to consider to what degree and in what sense does Plato deploy irony in his dialogues.

One attractive idea is to conceptualize irony along pedagogical lines. This can be taken in several directions. Consider Vlastos' concept of complex irony, which he develops in his account of Plato's Socrates.²⁰¹ Whereas simple irony is meaning something the opposite of what is said, complex irony diverges from ordinary meaning

¹⁹⁶ Vlastos (1985) 7-10 identifies eight instances – *Gorgias* 472e, 486e, 505e, 512b; *Apology* 29b; *Protagoras* 357d; *Republic* 350c, 351a; *Crito* 48a.

¹⁹⁷ Nehamas (1999) ably argues, against a tradition leading back to Quintilian, that what is meant in an ironic act or utterance does *not* always need to be the opposite of what is said. Rather, it is sufficient to mean something very different. 105-106

¹⁹⁸ Vlastos (1991) 21 notes that this definition goes back to Quintilian.

¹⁹⁹ Taylor (1959) 23.

²⁰⁰ Griswold (2002) 87.

²⁰¹ Vlastos (1991) 21-44.

and takes on a new, innovative sense. For Vlastos, Socrates most often utilizes this latter sense. Characteristic of his pedagogical convictions, Socrates refuses to disclose this new meaning; rather, his interlocutors are left to their own devices. If this is true, then Vlastos has circumvented Socratic denials of knowledge and pedagogy. Concretely, Vlastos states:

In the conventional sense, where to “teach” is simply to transfer knowledge from a teacher’s to a learner’s mind, Socrates means what he says: that sort of teaching he does not do. But in the sense which he would give to “teaching” – engaging would-be learners in elenctic argument to make them aware of their own ignorance and enable them to discover for themselves the truth they teach had held back – in that sense of “teaching” Socrates would want to say that he is a teacher, the only true teacher (32).

I quote this passage at length because it reveals the scope of the pedagogical model. Irony functions as a means to achieve some educational end. Importantly, this shows how “Socrates could have deceived without intending to deceive” (Vlastos 44). In other words, since Socrates lets his interlocutors discover the truth for themselves, their error is their own, and cannot be helped. Along this line, then, Socratic irony is fundamentally protreptic.²⁰²

Another strain of this protreptic conception is Straussian, particularly in its sensitivity to the cleavage between the philosopher and the non-philosopher.²⁰³ According to Strauss, the philosopher seeks to communicate with, and perhaps convert, the non-philosopher. Yet he cannot do so by the principles of philosophy proper. Accordingly, the genuine philosopher adopts language and argumentative strategies that

²⁰² Nehamas (1999) 70, 103.

²⁰³ Strauss (1964) 51.

mirror his interlocutors. Strauss, himself, focuses on the way this emerges in the *Republic*, particularly in the philosopher's engagement with the many (*demos*).²⁰⁴

The pedagogical theory of irony works toward integrating irony into philosophical considerations, but one might think that it does not go far enough. A final account, then, not only explains irony via pedagogical considerations, but also claims that it reveals important features about the human condition.²⁰⁵ On such an account, irony, in some cases, functions *internal* to Plato's philosophical project. Hyland, representative of this position, claims that irony, along with the dialectical nature of the dialogues, as well as Plato's repeated use of metaphor and imagery, demonstrates the necessary heterogeneity of the whole. This is in sharp contrast to a homogeneous conception of the whole.²⁰⁶

One interesting facet of Hyland's account is its attempt to integrate Socratic irony into Platonic irony. As Nehamas reminds us, we often forget that Socrates is Plato's literary creation. We need to always keep in mind the "irony of the author" (72) over and above the character of Socrates. Indeed, in the three theories rehearsed so far, the continuities between Socratic and Platonic irony might seem contiguous, especially if we reject that part of the developmental thesis that the early dialogues embody the views of the historical Socrates. My own argument moves back and forth between Socrates a character and Plato the author.

As I stated earlier, irony is excessively deployed as a catch-all to explain away recalcitrant evidence of a particular interpretation. Following Miller, Vlastos, and Wolfsdorf, it is useful to rehearse the development of the term in Classical Greece.²⁰⁷ It

²⁰⁴ Strauss (1964) writes that "Irony is...the noble dissimulation of one's worth, of one's superiority" (51).

²⁰⁵ Hyland (1995) 94-98.

²⁰⁶ Hyland's example of the homogeneity of the whole is Hegel.

²⁰⁷ Miller (1976) 309-313; Vlastos (1991) 21-29.

stems from the verb *eironeia*, which means ‘dissembling’. Aristophanes uses it in a more specific sense; an *iron* is someone who uses deception in order to gain some advantage over another, often by adopting a benevolent persona. The word is also used in several early Platonic dialogues.²⁰⁸ But *eironeia* is different than irony, particularly due to the malevolent nature of the former. The irony that occurs in conversation, so-called verbal irony, is neither intentionally deceptive nor malicious in end.²⁰⁹ Rather, to be verbally ironic is to deliberately emphasize the blatant falsity of an utterance. This is, obviously, often done for humor.

If this division is correct, then we can ask whether Socrates is either verbally ironic or *iron*.²¹⁰ Wolfsdorf seeks to retain the complexity of the Socratic character; he concludes that in the majority of cases, ascriptions of verbal irony to Socrates simply do not work. For instance, it is commonplace to think that Socrates’ glad-handing at the beginning of dialogues is ironic.²¹¹ Yet Wolfsdorf argues that there is no indication that Socrates is being verbally ironic.

The notion that Socrates is an *iron* is even less likely. Recall that there were two distinguishing characteristics to be an *iron*. First, one has to intentionally deceive. Does this coalesce with the Socratic character? This is a consequence of the ironic interpretation: when Socrates claims to know nothing, he is intentionally deceiving (for some other purpose) those around him. Yet for someone who so values virtue, it is

²⁰⁸ cf. *Apology* 37e5-38a1; *Euthydemus* 302b3-4; 302b6-7; *Republic* 337a4-7; *Gorgias* 489e1-3.

²⁰⁹ Another sort of irony is situational. It involves the incongruity between what someone says or believes, and the way things actually are. Oedipus, for instance, seeks to discover the Laius’ murderer, failing of course to recognize that he is the murderer. Since the analysis is focused on the Platonic dialogues, situational irony is moot. Suffice to say that it shares the same “conceptual core” (246) as verbal irony.

²¹⁰ Wolfsdorf (2006) writes, “To be more precise, since there is no good reason to assume that Socrates is a strictly transtextually identical character, the question is whether in any particular instance he is being verbally ironic or *iron*” (246).

²¹¹ cf. *Euthyphro* 5a-d.

difficult to make the case that deception is ever good. This thesis is a consequence of several argumentative engagements throughout the early dialogues.²¹²

The second criterion is even less convincing – does Socrates have a malevolent agenda when he engages with his interlocutors? Nothing could be further from the truth. Socrates' explicit aim is to seek after the truth regardless of his interlocutors' convictions. He only seeks the best argument.²¹³ The displeasure of his interlocutors is a side-effect of his investigations, but it is never his intention to harm.

In his own work on the consistency of Socrates' philosophical claims, Wolfsdorf²¹⁴ introduces the concept of a-structure, which he defines as a compositional technique utilized in the Platonic dialogues wherein there exists “a linear sequence or progression of beliefs and values” (15). In the case of the early dialogues, a-structure constitutes a shift from traditional Athenian views to Platonic views. For Wolfsdorf, this partly explains both the intertextual and intratextual inconsistencies of the early dialogues. In other words, depending on the stage of argumentative development in a particular dialogue, Socrates may strategically adopt a certain view that is inconsistent with what he says at other stages in the same dialogue, or in another dialogue altogether. According to Wolfsdorf, Plato utilizes a-structure for protreptic reasons, that is, to encourage readers to adopt philosophy as opposed to tradition and custom.

Granted, Wolfsdorf applies a-structure to the early dialogues. It is certainly debatable that the concept can be applied to middle dialogues like the *Phaedrus*. But I think it can since the *Phaedrus* embodies both old and new Platonic positions. As I argue shortly, the standard reading of Socrates' first speech interprets it in light of Socrates'

²¹² It is akin, for instance, to the argument that doing wrong is never justified (*Crito* 49a-b)

²¹³ cf. *Crito* 46b.

palinode. It is supposed that *from the very beginning* of his engagement Socrates is well informed about the nature of *eros*. Consequently, Socrates is ironic when he delivers his first speech about the negative effects of *eros*. In the next section, I examine the initial exchange between Socrates and Phaedrus.

Part II – The Frame (227a-230e)

The frame of Plato's dialogues foreshadows and even structures subsequent philosophical arguments. The *Phaedrus* is no exception. I emphasize three components of the frame. First, there is the strangeness of the surroundings. Socrates does not normally find himself outside the city walls, frequenting nature. Second, there is the theme of loving speeches, specifically the effects they have on both performer and audience. Finally, there is the myth of Boreas and Orithuia, and Socrates' beguiling interpretation of it.

Having departed the company of Lysias, Phaedrus runs into Socrates outside of the city walls. Plato rarely depicts Socrates outside the Athenian walls. Paradoxically, Socrates delights in the divine nature of his surroundings (230b-c). Such delight is checked, however, by Socrates' insistence that nature cannot teach him anything (230d). With Lysias, Phaedrus enjoyed a speech on *eros*. Socrates, characterizing himself as someone sick to hear speeches (228b5-6), asks Phaedrus to rehearse it for him. Already the distinct character of the dialogue presents itself, for Socrates is not the sort of person who normally loves speeches.²¹⁴

Having met Socrates, Phaedrus finds a companion for his "frenzied dance" (*sugkorubantiōnta*) (228b7), which consists of practicing Lysias' speech.²¹⁵ Phaedrus

²¹⁴ cf. *Protagoras* 334c-335c, *Gorgias* 449b-c, 461d-462a.

²¹⁵ On the dramatic setting of the *Phaedrus*, see Ferrari (1987) chapter 1, and Griswold (1986) 33-36.

insists that he did not memorize the speech only to have Socrates point to the written text beneath his cloak. Instead of memorization, Phaedrus is consigned to read from a text. This looks forward to the discussion of rhetoric in the latter half of the dialogue. Socrates further uses the term “drug” (*pharmakon*) (230d6) to characterize Phaedrus’ effort to have him leave the city.²¹⁶ These ideas – frenzied dance and potions that charm – underscore the most important component of *eros*, which is its ability to take hold of a person and put them in a new state of mind, beyond their immediate control.

Prior to beginning his speech, Phaedrus cites the myth of Boreas and Orithuia.²¹⁷ Does Socrates think the myth is true when most intellectuals (*sophoi*) reject its truthfulness?²¹⁸ Socrates replies that he could offer a “clever story” (*sophizomenos*) (229c6), but developing such an explanation necessitates an account of all the other mythical creatures like the Chimera and Gorgons.

Instead, Socrates insists on spending his time with more important matters, namely self-knowledge. How can he spend his time on myth if he does not, *pace* the Delphic oracle, even adequately understand himself? Socrates concludes by stating that he is persuaded by “what is generally believed” (*peithomenos de tō nomizomenō peri autōn*) (230a3-4) and re-iterates his interest in self-knowledge. It is a puzzling assertion because Socrates usually goes out of his way to reject what is believed by the many. Charitably, Plato has Socrates make such a declaration because of his commitment to self-knowledge. It is insufficient to simply re-interpret this one myth; such a re-

²¹⁶ This looks forward to the interlude between the Socrates’ first speech and the palinode where he reiterates that he was “charmed through your [Phaedrus’] potion” (242d8).

²¹⁷ Along the Ilisus river, Boreas abducted Orithuia. The theme of violence manifests itself in the first two speeches on *eros*. Possession, as well, emerges throughout the dialogue. Griswold (1986) 36-37.

²¹⁸ I follow Ferrari’s translation. Of note, Hackforth argues that the *sophoi* refers to a “school of allegorical interpretation” (26). For Ferrari, both interpretations flatten out the rich interpretative potential of the statement. The vagueness of the term must be left intact. 234-235.

interpretation leads to an entire overhaul of myth. Socrates has no time for such investigations.²¹⁹ It is still wrong to conclude that Socrates opposes myth *tout court*. Rather, myths are relevant the degree to which they help him achieve his goal, which is first and foremost determining the nature of virtue and achieving self-knowledge.²²⁰

Less charitably, Socrates affirms a decidedly un-Socratic tenet, namely that it is justifiable to agree with the *demos* because they constitute the majority. In other dialogues, Socrates unabashedly defends the thesis that one should not accept the convictions of the *demos*.²²¹ Socrates is usually depicted as evaluating such accounts according to 1) what he takes to be the truth, and 2) what he takes to be useful in the context of the ideal state.²²²

The uncharitable interpretation of this passage implies that Socrates is ironic; he does not seriously think that people should ever believe what the *demos* think. I think this is a distorted reading. In believing what is generally believed, Socrates simply means that mythological investigations are secondary unless they are relevant to his search for self-knowledge.

Nevertheless, what is crucial to draw from the frame is the mesmeric nature of the surrounding environment together with the mesmeric effect of speeches. Again, these two points are fundamentally modified by Socrates' main priority, which is self-knowledge. How does self-knowledge relate to the effects the world can have on a person? This theme gets developed in Lysias' speech.

²¹⁹ At *Phaedo* 96b-99a, Socrates expresses dissatisfaction with naturalistic explanations because they do not coalesce with *his own* concrete actions and decisions. Nicholson (1999) 20-22.

²²⁰ This legitimizes the myths that arise later in the dialogue, such as the allegory of the Chariot and the myth of the cicadas.

²²¹ cf. *Crito* 44c

²²² Consider Socrates' exchange with Adeimantus in *Republic* II. All the traditional myths of Homer and Hesiod are evaluated and condemned for being both 1) untrue, and 2) unproductive. Similar assertions are made at *Euthyphro* 6b and 6c.

Part III – Phaedrus’ Performance (231a – 234c)

The aim of the Lysias’ speech is to seduce a boy, but to do so in a surprising fashion. Rather than be seduced by a man in love, the speech argues that it is best to give into the man who is *not* in love. The argument depicts a fundamental tenet of rhetoric in late 4th century Athens – the role of paradox. Persuading an audience of a recognized truth was one thing. But far more impressive was convincing an audience of something counter-intuitive. Lysias’ speech is a fine example.

Most of the reasons depend on emphasizing the inherent instability and transience of the lover’s affections. For instance, the lover eventually regrets the promises he made once his erotic passion abets. In fact, he is likely to fall in love with someone else. Another reason centers on the sheer number of possible suitors. If you are only willing to give yourself to a lover, the range of potential partners is relatively small. By contrast, if you determine to give yourself to a non-lover, you open yourself up to a much larger group of people. More choice equals more possibility of success.

The affections of the lover are undesirable even when he is in the midst of his passion. His jealousy damages the social ties of the boy; he loves the boy’s body, not his character or soul. In fact, he exaggerates his praise even if it is untrue or harmful. Indeed, the lover is ruled by need, by necessity, whereas the non-lover can improve the boy’s quality of life, and he follows through with such a promise because he agrees to it while in his right mind.

The lover is in dire need of a fine reputation and so proudly declares his love to all who will hear him (231e). This comes to a fore at the end of the speech when Phaedrus declares:

If it were true that we ought to give the biggest favor to those who need it most, then we should all be helping out the very poorest people, not the best ones, because people we've saved from the worst troubles will give you the most thanks (233d5-7).

eti de ei khrē tois deomenois malista kharizesthai, prosēkei kai tois allois mē tous beltistous alla tous aporōtatous eu poiein: megistōn gar apallagentes kakōn pleistēn kharin autois eisontai.

It is preferable to give your affections to someone who can return them. This is the non-lover, a person without such outrageous sentiments. He is characterized by his sober judgment. Whereas the lover's "desire has impaired his judgments" (*kai autoi kheiron dia tēn epithumian gignōskontes*) (233b1), the non-lover's most salient characteristic is temperance (232a). Accordingly, it is best to give yourself to the non-lover.

Granted, the lover has a measure of self-awareness; he knows that he is unable to think clearly (231d3). But his inability to think straight together with the fact that he is possessed by *eros* means that his actions are forced (231a). He has no control over himself. Indeed, this is the canonical, albeit negative, feature of the lover as Lysias' speech conceptualizes it.²²³

Even though Socrates' first speech shares affinity with Lysias' speech, both speeches are rejected in Socrates palinode. Are there any clues in the speech that foreshadow this event? For one, consider that the non-lover displays remarkable ingenuity at convincing a boy to give himself over.²²⁴ He uses rhetoric to satisfy his

²²³ Another main quality of the lover is fear. The lover will prevent his beloved from pursuing and maintaining social relationships because he fears that other people will impress his beloved (232c). The lover will also offer the beloved excessive compliments; he fears being disliked (233b1).

²²⁴ Rosen writes that the non-lover, "combines qualities of hedonism, utilitarianism, and technicism in such a way as to abstract from such human qualities as the beautiful and ugly or the noble and base" (433). He later adds that the non-lover is akin to the (Platonic) philosopher in the sense that "he disregards human individuality in his pursuit of the general or steadfast" (433). This is the criticism often leveled at the penultimate speech of the *Symposium*; coming into contact with the form of beauty bankrupts romantic love of its fundamental singularity. Instead, all instantiations of beauty are celebrated. An identical line of

desires. The non-lover's desire, in fact, is the same as the lover's. Both want the boy's affections. The difference is the strategy employed to secure such affection. In this way, the non-lover has a measure of freedom, far more than the lover. Yet his conception of reason is exclusively instrumental. Given how he characterizes the lover, it is puzzling that the non-lover wants the same thing.

The non-lover admits of a sharp dichotomy between reason and desire.²²⁵ His seduction is based on reason; it is in the best interest of the boy to give himself over. But something more is needed. A prospective beloved needs to feel as though he is desired *as an individual*. Phaedrus' speech gives good reasons why the boy ought to acquiesce, but it does not express erotic desire for the boy.²²⁶

Part IV – Socrates' First Speech (237b – 241d)

There are two sections to Socrates' speech. This first part runs from 237b to 238c, followed by a brief interlude, and the second part runs from 238e to 241d. In the first section, Socrates begins with an invocation of the Muses (237a) and requests their help in his speech.²²⁷ Akin to Lysias' speech, Socrates begins by highlighting an attractive boy with many suitors. Although all of these suitors are lovers, one of them adopts a different strategy. The boy should give himself to the person whom he does not love!

In making his case, this "wily" (*haimulos*) (237b2) seducer begins in paradigmatic Socratic fashion by establishing the need to define the nature of love, together with its effects (237d2). Two principles of humanity are identified. First, there is the desire for

argument arises in the Protagoras. If we were able to discover a hedonistic calculus, we would be able to know what is best for us. But this seems to ignore the particularity of our attachments.

²²⁵ Griswold (1986) 48-51.

²²⁶ Accordingly, with the introduction of "divine philosophy" (*theia philosophia*) (239b4) in Socrates' first speech, there is conceptual progress. Reason and desire become inextricably bound together. Reason shapes desire, and vice-versa.

²²⁷ The Muses are the divinities associated with poetic madness (259d).

pleasure. Second, there is the rational pursuit of what is best. Sometimes they are in unison; sometimes one holds sway over the other (237e). When desire for pleasure holds sway, and is contextualized in our desire for beauty, we call this *Eros*.

In the second part of the speech (238e-241d), Socrates wonders whether it is the lover or the non-lover who most benefits the boy. The lover, governed uncontrollably by his desire for pleasure, does not want to be in a relationship with someone of equal or superior status. There are three senses in which the lover harms the boy. First, he crushes intellectual development. The boy will be ignorant of “divine philosophy” (*theia philosophia*) (239b4), which we later discover is the development of the soul (241c).²²⁸ Divine philosophy is the superlatively valuable (241c6).

Second, the lover wants a body that is soft and unmanly. The physical development of the boy is abandoned. This has the objectionable effect of putting confidence in one’s enemies during times of war. Now it is unclear why the lover wants such a body – insofar as he seeks physical beauty, he should prefer a healthy one that has received training and beautification.²²⁹ Nevertheless, for Socrates, this point is self-evident (239d8).

Finally, material possessions are not exempt either. Since the lover is exclusively concerned with his own pleasure, any potential obstacles must be curtailed. As a result, the lover prefers his beloved to be “wifeless, childless, and homeless” (*agamon, apaida, aoikon*) (240a7). Wealth enables a level of autonomy, thereby making the boy more difficult to control. Even in the case of flattery (240b), which provides transient pleasure, the lover fails the test. He is not even willing to give his beloved a day of pleasure.

²²⁸ This is the first use of *psuche* in the dialogue.

²²⁹ According to Socrates, the lover goes after a boy who makes himself beautiful by cosmetics.

This is so because the lover is driven by necessity. He stalks the boy, fawning over him, giving him excessive compliments, while at the same, remaining hypersensitive to jealousy. Throughout Socrates' description of the lover, the language of necessity is used repeatedly (240a, 240c, 240d, 241c).²³⁰ This exhibits a central feature of *eros*; the lover does not have any control over his affections and actions. He is driven by an insatiable desire that cannot be consciously altered or rationally persuaded with.

But changes in affections do happen. Often spontaneously and without rhyme or reason, the lover's affection weakens or evaporates entirely over time. It has already been established that the lover is both destructive and repulsive (240e7). But once his affections weaken, he becomes an entirely new man. All the promises the lover has made – about the boy's future, about what he will receive – no longer hold. In other words, “right-minded reason” has replaced the “madness of love” (*noun kai sōphrosunēn ant' erōtos kai manias*) (241a3).²³¹ Investing in such a person is fraught with disaster from the very beginning.

Since the lover eventually regains his faculties, the notion that he lacks reason is complicated. When his reason returns, he regains the ability to pursue his rational self-interest. But it is peculiar that he regains this faculty of reason only when he must begin to repay his debt to the boy. In other words, the transition back to reason at the very moment when it serves him best gives credence to the idea that his reason never completely abandons him. Thus, the language of necessity, which the lover is so quick to deploy, is a pragmatic strategy to secure his desire. Fundamentally, it is nothing but a

²³⁰ Also used is “compulsion” (*anagke*).

²³¹ Importantly, this is the first use of *nous* and *mania* in the dialogue, the latter of which will become extraordinarily important for our discussion of divination.

charade. We are thus left with an account of the lover who constitutes a mixture of desire and reason.

The non-lover is a parallel phenomenon. Despite his pretense for solemn rationality, despite his logical arguments that dismantle the case of the lover, he is after the exact same end. As we saw earlier, his concept of reason is purely instrumental. His *desire* for the boy exists beyond the realm of *reason*, thereby establishing a connection between the two.²³²

Socrates' speech is in essence a re-articulation of Lysias's speech. Persuasive reasons are given why a boy should give himself to a non-lover as opposed to lover. But Socrates goes on to state that he has sinned against *eros*. He rehabilitates *eros* in the palinode. Was Socrates always planning this reversal? There is some evidence in Socrates' first speech that he does not seriously advocate Lysias' position. In the next section, I rehearse the evidence for the ironic thesis that Socrates does not seriously assert his first speech. I outline reasons to reject the ironic interpretation.

Part V – The Ironic Interpretation

The ironic interpretation has been the dominant view.²³³ There are three interrelated reasons for this. First, in the interlude between Lysias' speech and Socrates' first speech, Phaedrus characterizes Socrates' reaction as ironic. For Phaedrus, Socrates' reaction is excessively maudlin. That Socrates is overwhelmed by Phaedrus' performance coalesces with his claim to be inspired, which according to the ironic interpretation,

²³² Griswold writes, "The nonlover is a concealed lover, and the lover is a concealed nonlover" (64).

²³³ Calvo (1992) 47 provides a list. Calvo claims that despite particular differences, the standard view of most scholars detaches Socrates from the views expressed in his first speech. In particular, it is thought that the content of both speeches is the same for this is what Socrates literally claims. What is different is merely aspects of style. Also, what causes Socrates to deliver the palinode is "moral distaste" (48) for the content of the speech.

distances Socrates from being committed to his own speech. By the same token, another example of Socrates' distancing is that he covers his head when he proceeds to perform his own speech. Socrates is ashamed. Finally, on the level of content itself, the ironic interpretation emphasizes that Socrates' first speech is inter-textually and extra-textually antithetical to Platonism. I interrogate each of these reasons.

a. Socrates' reaction to Lysias' speech and Phaedrus' characterization

When Phaedrus finishes his performance of Lysias' speech, Socrates exclaims that he is "in ecstasy" (*hōste me ekplagēnai*) (234d1) and that he shares in Phaedrus' Bacchic frenzy.²³⁴ This has happened before.²³⁵ It is also similar to the effect a poetic or dramatic performance has on an audience.²³⁶ Inspiration is not private; it spreads to other people like a disease. This is why Plato finds it so troubling, especially when what is being disseminated is untrue and unhelpful.

Phaedrus, exasperated and suspicious, asks, "Do you think you should joke about this? (*houtō dē dokei paizein;*) (234d6). Socrates apes Phaedrus' question – does Phaedrus not think he was being serious? This is a familiar Platonic trope; an interlocutor accuses Socrates of irony.²³⁷ Socrates justifies himself by distinguishing between the speech's style and content. Whereas the content is relatively banal the style is what caused Socrates to become enthralled. In fact, the content diverges from what wise people have claimed (235b). Who are these individuals? Socrates states that "perhaps it

²³⁴ An allusion to the frenzy (228b7) associated with the love of speeches.

²³⁵ cf. *Cratylus* 396d.

²³⁶ cf. *Ion* 533e.

²³⁷ cf. *Republic* 337a.

was the lovely Sappho or the wise Anacreon or even some writer of prose” (*ē pou Sapphous tēs kalēs ē Anakreontos tou sophou ē kai suggrapheōn tinōn*) (235c3-5).²³⁸

Subsequently, Socrates claims that he can make a better speech. Socrates, in some way, is claiming to be inspired.²³⁹ As Phaedrus, a speech lover, urges Socrates to perform his speech, Socrates states that he was “only criticizing your beloved in order to tease you” (*hoti sou tōn paidikōn epelabomēn ereskhēlōn se*) (236b5-6). Socrates is unimpressed with the main points, for they are rather banal. He can, however, praise the form, or the arrangement, in which they were organized (236a). For Socrates, it is obvious that it is better to give oneself to a non-lover than to a lover. The only way Socrates thinks that he can improve on the Lysias’ speech is in the formal sense.

But Socrates does not want to perform his speech. This causes Phaedrus to threaten Socrates with physical force. He states, “We are alone, in a deserted place, and I am younger and stronger” (*iskhuroteros d’ egō kai neōteros, ek de hapantōn toutōn ‘sunes ho toi legō*) (236d1-2).²⁴⁰ Although the initial threat is physical, it quickly takes on a discursive form. Phaedrus will never again recite a speech to Socrates unless he gets what he wishes. Socrates, a lover of speeches (228c), exclaims that Phaedrus has found the proper means of forcing his hand (236e). Socrates is compelled to perform.

²³⁸ Rowe (1986) discusses Socrates’ appeal to Sappho and Anacreon. He states, “The tone of the expressions ‘the excellent (and/or ‘lovely’, ‘beautiful’: *kalos*) Sappho’ and ‘the wise (*sophos*) Anacreon’ is thoroughly ironical” (151). Rowe disagrees with Robin that this provides cursory support for the strong thesis that Socrates is already looking forward to his second speech. It does not jive with Socrates dramatic turnabout. But consider that Socrates is citing poets who valorize human love in conjunction with the topic of the speech, which is the valorization of the non-lover. Rowe surmises that the poet probably has a sense of the strongest case against love, given the nature of his explorations.

²³⁹ Cook (1985) claims this satirically alludes to the “quantitative assumption” (431) of Lysias’ speech.

²⁴⁰ This recalls the similar situation at the beginning of the *Republic*, thereby highlighting an important Platonic distinction between force and persuasion.

According to Griswold, the interlude constitutes one of the most protracted sections of irony and humor in the entire Platonic corpus.²⁴¹ Despite what he says explicitly, Socrates has not in fact been overwhelmed by Phaedrus' speech. One consequence of this claim is that Socrates' own speech must be interpreted in the same manner. Socrates claims he is overwhelmed by Phaedrus' performance but Phaedrus is suspicious that he is not genuine. Should the reader be suspicious as well?

b. Distancing maneuver 1: Socrates' appeal to inspiration

According to the ironic interpretation, there are two ways Socrates distances himself from his first speech. Such a maneuver is evidence that Socrates does not actually mean what he says. First, there are his repeated claims that he is inspired. According to the interpretation, Socrates is not committed to his speech because he was not in his right mind when he gave it. Whether he is actually or not is irrelevant. What matters, fundamentally, is that he is not responsible for what comes out of his mouth.

In fact, it's quite peculiar the way Socrates contextualizes his inspiration. For one, he appeals to several sources of inspiration – Phaedrus' performance (234d), the Muses (237a), and the nymphs (238c9-d1, 241e). His inspiration also needs to be qualified by Socratic ignorance, for he states that he does not know “where and from whom I heard them [the words of other people streaming in through his ears]” (*hupo de nōtheias au kai auto touto epilelēsmai, hopōs te kai hōntinōn ēkousa*) (235d2-3).

When Socrates is midway through his speech, he breaks off the discussion and states that he is in “the grip of something divine” (*theion pathos peponthenai*) (238c4). Phaedrus acquiesces and Socrates goes on to extrapolate the sources of this divinity – the natural setting and the madness of nearby nymphs. The nymphs, specifically, may cause

²⁴¹ Griswold (1986) 51-52.

him to begin using dithyrambs. Socrates characterizes such a possibility as an attack.²⁴² This exchange seems to depict two tiers of inspiration. Although Socrates is already inspired by something divine – Phaedrus’ performance together with the surrounding atmosphere – he recognizes that he can descend further into madness. He is close to speaking in dithyrambs (238d2); the attack of the nymphs may yet be stopped (238d5); Socrates will find out as he progresses with his speech.²⁴³

Consider after all how Socrates mimics Phaedrus’ own ecstatic state. Socrates repeatedly characterizes Phaedrus as in a state of frenzy (228b, 234d) and the speech itself lambastes the *mania* of the lover. Socrates not only claims to be inspired, but claims it several times, and from several different sources. In this way, Socrates outdoes Phaedrus and foreshadows his later re-appropriation of *mania* in the palinode. If this is correct, then Socrates’ appeal to external inspiration is a rhetorical strategy. It is Socrates, in fact, who produces the speech.²⁴⁴ His claim to be inspired is ironic. That he echoes what occurs to Phaedrus coalesces with the protreptic function of irony that I discussed in part I of this chapter.

One weakness with the thesis that Socrates’ appeals to inspiration are ironic is the invocation of the Muses, which begins Socrates speech. He invokes them so that they can help him perform (237a10). The Muses have a long history associated with inspiration.²⁴⁵

²⁴² Note as well that Socrates also claims that Phaedrus is the cause of his current state. This is not a claim that Phaedrus has inspired Socrates. Instead, it is an allusion to Phaedrus *forcing* Socrates to deliver a speech (236c-d).

²⁴³ Nymphs have already been alluded to in the frame (230b), thereby underscoring the divine nature of the environment. Rowe (1986) contextualizes Plato’s appeal to dithyrambs by citing *Hippias Major* 292c and *Cratylus* 409c, both negative characterizations. Nevertheless, nymphs have a long history associated with madness and frenzy – e.g., *Theogony* 1-7, 130, 187, *Odyssey* 17.240.

²⁴⁴ Griswold (1986) 53 argues that it is indeed Socrates who formulates the speech.

²⁴⁵ cf. the opening of both Homeric epics together with Hesiod’s *Theogony* and *Works and Days*.

The appeal to the Muses is a decisive problem for the ironic interpretation.²⁴⁶ In fact, properly speaking, the invocation does not function as inspiration conceptualized as possession. This is in contrast to how Socrates characterizes the nymphs. Instead, by invoking the Muses, Socrates is praying that they will approve of what he says in the speech.²⁴⁷

Another glaring weakness of the ironic interpretation is the appearance of the *daimonion* at the end of Socrates' first speech. The *daimonion* only appears in order to prevent Socrates from doing a serious wrong.²⁴⁸ If Socrates' first speech is ironic, then this bankrupts the function of the *daimonion*. Yet, in all other cases, the *daimonion* is a genuine instance of the divine communicating with Socrates.

c. Distancing Maneuver 2 – Socrates' shame

A second way Socrates distances himself from his speech is by covering his head when he performs. This eliminates, or at least minimizes, the shame of having to look Phaedrus in the eye.²⁴⁹ Ostensibly, this is a reaction to Phaedrus, who has basically forced Socrates to speak. By covering his head, Socrates will prevent embarrassment from having to look at Phaedrus (237a). In other words, Socrates' is not fully committed to what he says. He is ashamed. Not only has Phaedrus forced his hand, but Socrates also frets that he cannot compete with a professional like Lysias. Socrates' shame arises later

²⁴⁶ Hackforth, Nussbaum (1986) 202-203. Nussbaum, for instance, contrasts Socrates' appeal the Muses with his later appeals to Pan and the nymphs (279b-c; 262d; 263d-e). She claims that the Muses ought to be interpreted as either the Muses of a "healthy rationalism" or of the "middle dialogues" (203). By contrast, Rowe (1986) thinks that the appeal to the Muses reveals the ironic nature of the passage, emphasizing Socrates later reticence about the speech (241e-242a) and the fact that the inspiration comes from an external source. 153

²⁴⁷ At *Timaeus* 27b-c, Socrates urges Timaeus to invoke the gods (27b8) before delivering his speech. In so doing, Timaeus prays that the gods will approve of what he says.

²⁴⁸ cf. *Apology* 31d. For Nussbaum (1986) this demonstrates that Socrates is "genuinely tempted to the wrong view" (201).

²⁴⁹ On the theme of shame in the *Phaedrus*, consult Griswold (1986) 56-57.

when his *daimonion* causes him to see that the *content* of his first speech was shameful (242d).

But there is another way of understanding Socrates' action. It is a temperate gesture made in order to quell his erotic attraction for Phaedrus. This functions on two levels. The beauty of the physical surroundings, the solitude, and the topic of conversation all point to Socrates' erotic attraction to Phaedrus. Even deeper, the content of the speech itself reveals Socrates' erotic desire for Phaedrus. For on the one hand, as I discussed earlier, the non-lover, despite his pretensions of rationality, is still fundamentally identical to the lover.²⁵⁰ This is so because the non-lover shares the same end as the lover. Accordingly, although Socrates valorizes the non-lover, the valorization is deceitful. The non-lover (Socrates) is erotically attracted to the lover (Phaedrus).²⁵¹

There is textual evidence in Socrates' speech that underscores the thesis that the non-lover is Socrates. Granted, the first speech only engages with the lover yet there is evidence that Socrates is implicated. In a speech that is relatively blithe about its content, the most explicit evaluative statement Socrates makes is that the non-lover prevents his beloved from "divine philosophy" (*theia philosophia*) (239b). The remark is tendentious and antithetical to the view of most Athenians.

Furthermore, consider the ways in which the lover impinges on his beloved, particularly in those ways that allude to Socrates. The beloved is kept poor (240a). Why does Socrates promote material wealth? One aspect of his philosophical mission is to challenge conventional wisdom about the importance of material wealth in the good life. It comes as no shock, then, that poverty is simply asserted. It is not wholeheartedly

²⁵⁰ Linck (2003) follows Rosen (1988) in using 'concealed lover' to characterize the non-lover.

²⁵¹ Tejera (1975) and (1992) explicates this thesis. Griswold also makes this connection.

condemned. Instead of wealth and community, the boy is left with an older man who has lost his physical beauty. Again, this alludes to Socrates' famous bodily ugliness.

In a surprising way, Socrates' implicit erotic attraction to Phaedrus is further buttressed by his claim that his interlocutor caused him to give his speech (237a9-10, 244a1).²⁵² Superficially, it is obvious that Phaedrus forced his hand by threatening violence. But implicitly, there is also Socrates' erotic passion for Phaedrus.

d. The content of Socrates' first speech

In the palinode, Socrates renounces his first speech (242e-243a). According to the ironic interpretation, Socrates did not seriously advocate the position that the non-lover is to be preferred to the lover. His motivation for performing the first speech is protreptic. In other words, Socrates seeks to legitimize philosophy in the eyes of Phaedrus. But given the limitations of his interlocutor, he cannot engage in straightforward philosophical persuasion. Rather, different strategies are needed according to the context and aptitudes of the interlocutor. In the case of Phaedrus, who has fallen in love with Lysias' speech, the way forward is through this ecstatic desire.

From an extra-textual perspective, the palinode more accurately embodies Platonic views than Socrates' first speech. The intelligible realm makes an appearance, as does the theory of recollection (249c-d). Furthermore, that the Platonic view comes later in the dialogue confirms its a-structure, which I rehearsed earlier. Along this line, whereas in the first speech Socrates parrots a conventional view, in the second he transitions to the Platonic view.

Yet, there are several features of the first speech that coalesce with Socratic views. For one, Socrates begins by stating the need for definitional knowledge. For only

²⁵² In fact, Phaedrus is the cause of both speeches.

by agreeing on the scope of *eros* can the lover and the boy make any conceptual progress. We should not dismiss this point as a matter of form because the very act of seeking an adequate definition presupposes important conceptual content.²⁵³ Furthermore, while it remains undeveloped, there is mention of divine philosophy (239b5), which the lover will irrationally keep his beloved away from.

In light of this point, to what degree is Lysias' position attractive? Nussbaum, for one, claims that the two early speeches embody Plato's middle position, specifically the metaphysical and epistemological precepts of the *Phaedo* and the *Republic*. In particular, Nussbaum identifies four theses from the *Republic* that find their way into the two early speeches:

1. The appetites are "blind animal forces" (206).
2. The non-intellectual elements, if left unchecked, "tend naturally to excess" (206).
3. The non-intellectual elements are unable to guide a "person towards insight and understanding of the good" (206).
4. The intellectual element are "both necessary and sufficient for the apprehension of truth and for right choice" (206). It succeeds the degree to which it rules the other elements.

According to the first two speeches, *eros* is uncontrollable. If it is not reigned in, it advances toward immoderation. A life dedicated to *eros* is not a good life, but a life consumed by jealousy and obsession. The best life is one that minimizes *eros* and promotes the intellectual part of the soul. Suddenly, the thesis that it is best to give oneself to a non-lover seems less extreme. Rather, in the context of Classical Athens, it may well constitute a genuine dilemma for the young male coming of age.²⁵⁴

²⁵³ Consider all of Socrates' interlocutors in the early definitional dialogues. One of Socrates' main philosophical convictions, it seems, is that genuine knowledge entails the ability to define. One might go so far as to claim that this move progresses toward the theory of recollection as well as the theory of Forms in Plato's middle period.

²⁵⁴ Nussbaum (1986) 207-208 goes to great lengths in order to legitimize that a young male like Phaedrus might well have to make such a decision.

Conclusion

Plato always engages with worthy interlocutors.²⁵⁵ It is no secret that the dialogues are populated with representatives of sophistry, poetry, and rhetoric.²⁵⁶ One of Plato's goals in his dialogues is to legitimize philosophy and debunk its competitors. Such a goal is better accomplished by arming Socrates' interlocutors with strong arguments. This has the satisfying effect of giving better definition to the Platonic position.

I evaluated four reasons deployed to justify the ironic interpretation. First, I analyzed Phaedrus' response to Socrates' reaction. Second and third, I analyzed two ways in which Socrates purportedly distances himself from his speech. In the last section, I interrogated to what degree the first speech embodies Platonic tenets. The extent to which Socrates is not committed to the speech certainly rides on whether or not the speech's content is consistent with his other ideas.

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²⁵⁵ Nussbaum (1986) 202.

²⁵⁶ In the context of Classical Athens, even rhapsody enjoyed great prestige, thereby explaining why Plato, in the *Ion*, attack rhapsody as opposed to poetry.

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Chapter 5 – The Status of Divination in the *Phaedrus*

Abstract

In this chapter, I analyze the status of divination in the *Phaedrus*. The distinction between technical and possession divination, which often frames any discussion of Plato and divination, is critically evaluated in context with the other forms of madness discussed – telistic, poetic, and philosophic. One puzzle that emerges is Socrates' laudatory account of prophetic madness together with the relatively low ranking of divination on the hierarchy of souls. I rehearse several attempts to explain this puzzle – Ferrari, Rowe, Griswold, and Brisson – and contextualize my own view, which emphasizes the epistemological limitations of divination in relation to philosophy, the highest form of madness.

Introduction

One primary focus of the *Phaedrus* is the notion of *eros* conceptualized as madness (*mania*), although the meaning of this latter concept shifts as the dialogue progresses. In the last chapter, I interrogated the first two speeches of the *Phaedrus*, which assert that the temperance (*sōphrosunē*) of the non-lover is preferred to the madness of the lover. The palinode marks a transition; madness is now praiseworthy.

The notion that madness is beneficial runs opposite the account presented in Plato's middle-dialogues – *Phaedo*, *Symposium*, and *Republic*.²⁵⁷ Has Plato changed his mind about the role and value of madness in the good life?²⁵⁸ Or does he appropriate and transform madness and apply it to philosophy?²⁵⁹ Both questions presuppose an account of divination; along with poetry and mystic rites, it is the foundation upon which Plato

²⁵⁷ In the *Phaedo*, madness is linked to the non-rational components of the soul, which indulge the body. This strict division between body and soul emerges again in the *Republic*'s condemnation of the passions (Book I) and its critique of poetry. Finally, consider Alcibiades in the *Symposium*. He is depicted as the polar opposite of Socrates. Whereas Socrates' account leads to a stable state in communion with the forms, Alcibiades is corrupted by the *mania* of personal love. Nussbaum (1986) 9, 201-204

²⁵⁸ Naddaf (2012) argues in fact that there is a positive account of inspiration in the *Republic*, specifically in the sense of *epipnoia* (6.499b-c) and in the appeal to "divine chance" (*theia tuchē*) (592a8-9). 1-8

²⁵⁹ Werner (2011) 47-48.

rehabilitates madness and incorporates it into his account of the philosopher coming to know the intelligible realm.²⁶⁰

In this chapter, I investigate the seemingly ambivalent nature of divination. By this, I mean that in the span of four Stephanus pages (*Phaedrus* 244-248) divination is first lauded then devalued. Initially, Socrates states that the best things we have come from madness (244b-d); divination is a paradigmatic example. Yet, on the other hand, when the hierarchy of souls is presented, divination is ranked comparatively low, beneath the financier, the doctor, and the physical trainer (248-e). This ambivalence is not only specific to divination; both poetry and mystic rites are subjected to the same incongruence.

In order to remedy this puzzle, it is necessary to contextualize the aims of the *Phaedrus* itself. One interpretation holds that Plato judges the three forms of madness – divination, mystic rites, and poetry – to be *historically* prestigious. This is in contrast to a new, higher form of madness – philosophy – which transcends, and debunks, the three older ones.²⁶¹ This is untenable to the extent that all three retain a significant level of prestige, both in the *Phaedrus* and in Plato's later dialogues. My aim in this chapter, then, is to develop an account of the three forms of madness that explains their relatively low status on the hierarchy of soul. This depends on accounting for the status of all the other souls on the list.

Part I – The Four Forms of Madness

Socrates' *daimonion* triggers his palinode (244a–257b). He is compelled to remedy his impiety and do justice to the divine nature of *Eros*. Socrates should not have

²⁶⁰ It has been argued that divination's importance is overestimated. Chiasma (1992) 313-319.

²⁶¹ Ferrari (1987) 113-119.

rejected *Eros* due to its negative effects, particularly the loss of self-control that results from it.²⁶² In fact, Socrates now states that “the best things we have come from madness, when it is given as a gift of the god” (*nun de ta megista tōn agathōn hēmin gignetai dia manias, theia mentoi dosei didomenēs.*) (244a9).²⁶³ This does not mean that madness is an unqualified good. It can still engender vice. In fact, the notion that madness is good when it has a divine origin distinguishes it from the human induced madness that was presented in the first two speeches. Accordingly, there are now two types of madness at play. The first is human, which is still rejected. The second is divine, which is laudable. There are at least four sorts of madness that counter the notion that madness is wholly evil – mantic, telistic, poetic, and philosophic.²⁶⁴

The intimate relationship between madness and the divine is fleshed out either in a traditional context (i.e., the Olympian gods), or in a philosophical context, which arises with philosophical madness. In what follows, I sketch the first three kinds of madness. Special emphasis will be placed on prophetic madness, not only because this is my primary interest, but also because it is given the most attention. This enables a better understanding of the transition to philosophical madness.

a. Prophetic Madness (244b-d)

Socrates begins by citing the Pythia at Delphi and the Priestesses at Dodona. Both seers constitute model representatives of institutional divination in Ancient Greece.²⁶⁵ He

²⁶² The mad lover cannot control himself (231d4) and acts irrationally (238a1, 238b8) (*alogos; aneu logou*).

²⁶³ The phrase – ‘a gift of the god’ – is echoed later when Socrates states that the cicadas can give them the “gift from the gods” (*ho geras para theōn ekhousin anthrōpois didonai*) (259b3) if they proceed with their philosophical conversation, which is the best kind of music (259d).

²⁶⁴ The list is not automatically exhaustive, as noted by Burger (1980) 48, White (1993) 74, and Werner (2011) 50.

²⁶⁵ According to Ferrari (1987), the Pythia and the priestesses of Dodona were prestigious in Archaic Greece, but that their influence was waning by Plato’s era. This is so although Ferrari himself grants, “the

goes on to refer to the Sybil, insisting that he will not critically engage with them because their authenticity is evident to all.²⁶⁶ All three examples of prophetic madness are female. According to Socrates, such seers accomplish “little or nothing” (*brakhea ē ouden*) (244b4-5) when in their right mind (*sophronousai*). Prophetic madness is praiseworthy to the extent that it originates from the gods, thereby establishing a distinction between the divine and human realms.

The Pythia is the canonical seer who undergoes possession; this is verified later when Socrates rehearses the four forms of madness (265b), and the god that characterizes each. In the case of prophecy, it is Apollo. This is so despite the fact that at Dodona, it was Zeus who inspired the seers. Indeed, something more must be said about the Priestesses at Dodona. Dodona arises later when Socrates rehearses the Egyptian rejection of writing. Phaedrus claims that Socrates is good at composing stories (275b).

Socrates responds:

...the priests of the temple of Zeus at Dodona say that the first prophecies were the words of an oak. Everyone who lived at that time, not being as wise as you young ones are today, found it rewarding enough in their simplicity to listen to an oak or even a stone, so long as it was telling the truth... (275b5-8)

...brakhea ē ouden hoi de g', ō phile, en tō tou Dios tou Dōdōnaiou hierō druos logous ephēsan mantikous prōtous genesthai. tois men oun tote, hate ouk ousi sophois hōsper humeis hoi neoi, apekhrē druos kai petras akouein hup' euētheias, ei monon alēthē legoien...

Socrates must mean the opposite of what is said. His claim about the ancients – that they were not as wise as Phaedrus and his generation – is inconsistent with several other

Delphic oracle... was still active in his [Socrates'] time (114). Flower, by contrast, rejects the thesis that divination waned in Classical Greece.

²⁶⁶ Throughout Classical Greece, there were collections of oracles attributed to among others, the Sibyl(s). The *chresmologoi* were qualified to interpret such oracles. In Old Comedy like Aristophanes, seers are often lampooned by being characterized as *chresmologoi*. It suffices that the Classical authors – Herodotus, Euripides, and Plato – continued to distinguish between the two. Flower (2008) 60-64

pieces of evidence. For not only does Socrates make the opposite claim at the beginning of his Egyptian myth – “I can tell you what I’ve heard the ancients said, though they alone know the truth” (*akoēn g' ekhō legein tōn proterōn, to d' alēthes autoi isasin*) (274c1-2) – but the same conviction arises in other dialogues as well.²⁶⁷

At Dodona, the method of divination was xyromancy, or divination by trees. A large oak tree sat in the sanctuary; the sound of the wind through its leaves was the voice of Zeus. The seer interpreted the sounds and was able to glean the will of Zeus. Indeed, this allusion to xyromancy is further entrenched at the conclusion of the dialogue when Socrates offers a prayer to Pan (279b). The oak tree was sacred to Pan. It is uncertain whether or not the seers at Dodona actually underwent possession.²⁶⁸ But Plato’s depiction reveals how he conceptualized them.

Possession divination is valuable to the extent that it arises from divine contact; he also offers some cursory support via etymological evidence. The ancients used the word ‘manic’ for what happens to the Pythia, thereby inextricably “weaving insanity into prophecy” (*auto touto tounoma emplekontes manikēn ekalesan*) (244c2). For Socrates, his generation has forgotten this and now includes a *tau* in the word, forming ‘mantic’.

Possession divination contrasts with technical divination, which is characterized rationally and uses “birds and other signs” (*te ornithōn poioumenōn kai tōn allōn sēmeiōn*) (244c5). It was originally called ‘oionoistic’, which is a combination of intelligence (*noun*) and learning (*historian*), but now is called ‘oionistic’. Socrates states:

²⁶⁷ cf. *Philebus* 16c; *Timaeus* 22b. The reason Socrates introduces the prophetic site of Dodona is to buttress the Socratic tenet that the truth, no matter how it is presented, or from where it stems, is the most important. Phaedrus is caught up in irrelevant considerations; all that matters is the truth and the degree to which it can be justified. cf. *Crito* 46b; *Protagoras* 333c

²⁶⁸ Flower (2008) 217.

To the extent, then, that prophecy, mantic, is more perfect and more admirable than sign-based prediction, oionistic, in both name and achievement, madness from a god is finer than self-control of human origin, according to the testimony of the ancient language givers (244d2-5).²⁶⁹

hosō dē oun teleōteron kai entimoteron mantikē oiōnistikēs, to te onoma tou onomatos ergon t' ergou, tosō kallion marturousin hoi palaioi manian sōphrosunēs tēn ek theou tēs par' anthrōpōn gignomenēs.

This dichotomy between technical and possession divination proves to be tremendously influential.²⁷⁰ Possession divination is overtly privileged over technical divination. This is so because possession divination stems from a god, and technical divination stems from humankind.²⁷¹

Socrates' example of technical divination is noteworthy. Augury was a legitimate form of divination in ancient Greece, although its eminence had waned by Plato's time. Indeed, in the context of the Homeric epics, one might well claim that augury constituted the paradigmatic form of technical divination.²⁷² Birds occupy an intermediary stage between the human and divine realms.

b. Telistic Madness (244d-e)

Telistic madness purifies wrongdoings and can even prophesize certain goods to come. One might be part of a cursed family, or be in the process of undergoing hardship. Such madness provides temporary relief. The god characteristic of telistic madness is Dionysus (265b), thereby suggesting that Socrates is referring to the cults of Dionysus.²⁷³

Like prophetic madness, telistic madness emerges at various stages in the dialogue. For

²⁶⁹ Although the etymologies have been characterized as “extravagant” (Ferrari 114) and “playful” (Burger 49), most scholars are content to contextualize them in the context of the *Phaedrus* itself.

²⁷⁰ Johnston (2008) notes that “ancient intellectuals...persistently made the distinction between natural and artificial types of divination” (9). Cicero's *On Divination* is a fine example.

²⁷¹ Werner (2011) 50.

²⁷² Halliday (1913) notes many archaic references to augury. 249-261

²⁷³ Dodds (1951) 75-80; Burkert (1985) 290-95.

instance, it undoubtedly refers to the interlude between Socrates' first and second speeches. He has committed a wrong against the gods and needs purification (243a); he only realizes this once his *daimonion* appears.²⁷⁴ Telistic madness encompasses a range of activities – purifications, prophecies, and mystic rites.²⁷⁵

That telistic madness might prophesize future goods puts it in close proximity to divination. Indeed, seers themselves were often thought to be capable of purification. Consider Euthyphro's occupation – a seer – and what triggers his presence in Athens – the presence of pollution (*miasma*). His father has committed a wrong and together with his community is in desperate need of purification. Socrates often discusses the need to purify himself.²⁷⁶

c. Poetic Madness (245a)

Poetry is the third sort of madness. According to Socrates, the poet undergoes possession by the Muses (265b) and gains the ability to poeticize the grand elements of the past – principally the Homeric epics. One recurrent theme in Plato's account of poetry is the relationship between inspiration and *technē*. This context is no exception. For Socrates, the poet who only possesses the ordinary poet, no matter how skilled, will always be trumped by the poet who experiences possession; this underscores yet again the distinction between madness and self-control (245a).

It is not that the poet with technical prowess cannot compose poetry; it is that his poetry will be of lesser value than that of the inspired poet. Poetic *madness* is a necessary condition for poetic *greatness*. The same idea emerges with prophetic madness – the

²⁷⁴ During the palinode, the language of telistic madness is used with reference to erotic madness (249c7-9, 250b8, 253c3). Griswold (1986) 77

²⁷⁵ Linforth (1946) 163-72.

²⁷⁶ cf. *Phaedo* 60e2; *Cratylus* 396d-e. For a discussion of knowledge as philosophical purification – Dorter (1972) 198-218. For divination and purification in the *Phaedo* – Morgan (2010) 68-76.

distinction between *mania* and *sōphrosunē* is tantamount to the distinction between greatness and banality. So far, then, there are now two conceptions of madness at play in the dialogue. The first is the human generated madness of lust, and the second is the madness originating from a god.²⁷⁷ In fact, Socrates asserts as much when he later distinguishes between the madness produced by “human illness” (*nosēmatōn anthrōpinōn*) and the other that is “divinely inspired” (*theias*) (265a).

d. The Madness of Love (249d-257b)

Each form of madness, so long as it originates from a god, gives rise to great things. According to Socrates, laudable madness also encompasses *eros*, which is governed by Aphrodite. In order to establish this thesis, Socrates first examines the nature of the soul and its relationship to the divine. The soul already arose three times earlier in the dialogue.²⁷⁸ The madness of philosophical lovers must be characterized in stages.²⁷⁹ The first stage consists of an initial perceptible experience of beauty, often through seeing it, since vision is the most astute of bodily senses (251d3-4). The soul of such individuals fumes and rages (251c1); the psychic shafts or the lover’s soul begin to re-awaken. A distinctly human sort of madness permeates the lover – they cannot sleep at night and are obsessed with the beloved (251e).

²⁷⁷Werner (2011) writes that “human madness is a state defined by reference to psychic disharmony, and not external possession” (51-52) as it is with the case of the seer possessed by Apollo, or the poet possessed by the Muses.

²⁷⁸ First, in the latter part of Socrates’ first speech, it is claimed that the true object of education (*paideusis*) is the soul (238e-239b). Second, there is the paradoxical claim that the soul itself is a sort of seer (242d), that is, it has access to divine truths. Finally, the soul is mentioned in the preceding section on the notion of poetic madness. The Muses take an innocent soul (245a2) and enable it to create beautiful speeches, which educate laypeople about past glories. In both the first and third instances, there is a practical element to the use of soul in that both involve education. This introduces the need to give a more theoretical explanation of soul and explains why Socrates so abruptly turns to it.

²⁷⁹ I am indebted to Werner (2011) 54-55 for much of this account.

In the next stage, the lover's soul emulates the god it was formerly associated with in its psychic state. There is a clear sense of hierarchy here – those associated with Zeus emulate him in all of their actions, to the best of his or her ability. This extends to the beloved as well, for the lover considers the beloved to reflect the character of Zeus. The same thing happens for all of the other gods – Ares, Hera, Apollo, etc.

In the third stage, the soul of the lover deals with internal strife. The black horse (appetite) violently urges for sexual gratification; the charioteer (reason), together with the white horse (spiritedness), restrains themselves out of a sense of shame (254c). Eventually, the black horse has been tamed, but it has been a struggle. The result is that finally the beloved develops reciprocal feelings for the lover, although in a weaker sense (255e). The beloved is seeing himself in the lover, as one would in a mirror (255e7). Now that the lover and beloved have coupled, there are two possibilities. If they submit to their base appetites they will be consigned to live in friendship. By contrast, if the best components of their soul become sovereign, they will engender virtue, and live with self-control (256b).

Philosophic madness has a lot in common with the intense madness of human sexuality, which opens the *Phaedrus*. Nevertheless, as the philosophical lover reaches the apex of his development, madness falls away and is 'enslaved' by the charioteer (reason). Similarly, there is also some affinity between the divine madness of the seer and poet, and the philosophical lover, particularly in the progress of his love. Like the possessed seer, the philosopher lacks self-control. He is compelled by the beauty of the beloved. Nevertheless, and akin to human induced madness, the developed philosopher transcends the waxing and waning of possession. He is self-controlled and self-consciousness. Both

of these properties are absent in those who undergo divine madness. In fact, this makes sense when we consider the ultimate object of the philosophic madness. It is not the anthropomorphic gods that possess the seer and poet, but the Platonic Forms (247c-d).²⁸⁰

Even though philosophic madness trumps the other forms of madness, we must still recognize that they are praiseworthy. Accordingly, the puzzle still remains as to why they are listed so low on the hierarchy of souls. In the next section, I rehearse the opening of the palinode and interrogate several possible hypotheses meant to explain this asymmetry.

Part II – The Hierarchy of Souls

According to the allegory of the chariot, the soul consists of a charioteer, two horses, and wings. Both the horses and the wings enable motion. Whereas the horses are responsible for horizontal motion, the wings are responsible for vertical motion. Motion is connected to desire.²⁸¹ The charioteer, by contrast, represents reason and is able to exercise control over the moving components – the wings would fly blindly without reason, and the horses would move without purpose.

For those few souls, such as the gods, who rise to the highest plane, they will come into contact with the Forms, which are immutable and unchanging (247d-e). Such a soul has knowledge. For Socrates, the apex is only accessible by the gods (248a); there is a three stage hierarchy for everybody else. First, and closest to the divine, are those souls who are able to catch a view of reality as it is. Second, there are souls who are pulled back and forth between both extremes. They see part of reality but completely miss other

²⁸⁰ In the intelligible realm, Socrates relates that one will experience Justice Self-control, and Knowledge (247d). It is instructive that Self-control is mentioned; this buttresses the idea that the mature philosopher is temperate, not mad.

²⁸¹ *Eros* is the sort of desire associated with wings (251c).

parts. Finally, there are those who are simply trying to ascend, but with little success. They are consigned to never having seen the intelligible realm (248b).

Every thousand years, there is a hierarchical incarnation. Socrates enumerates souls in descending value; one's place on this list corresponds to how much of the intelligible realm a particular soul has experienced. The list (248d-e):

1. The lover of wisdom or beauty (*philosophou ē philokalou*)
2. The law-abiding King or fit General (*basileōs ennomou ē polemikou kai arkhikou*)
3. Statesman, household manager, financier (*politikou ē tinos oikonomikou ē khrēmatistikou*)
4. Doctor and trainer (*philoponou ē gymnastikou ē peri sōmatos iasin tinos esomenou*)
5. Seer and Priest (*mantikon bion ē tina telestikon*)
6. Poets and other representational artists (*poiētikos ē tōn peri mimēsin tis allos harmosei*)
7. Manual laborer and farmer (*dēmiourgikos ē geōrgikos*)
8. Sophist and demagogue (*sophistikos ē dēmokopikos*)
9. Tyrant (*turannikos*)

The only soul who has ever had the chance to grow wings is the philosopher or the person “who loves boys philosophically” (*paiderastēsantos meta philosophias*) (249a2-3). This is so because the philosopher's memory is best. It can recall the intelligible realm. One consequence of this proximity to divinity is that everyone else fails to see that the philosopher is “possessed by a god” (*enthousiazōn*, 249d3).

Most people do not understand the philosopher. Instead, they believe the philosopher is mad. For it is when the philosopher sees earthly beauty that he or she is reminded of true beauty; turning skyward, the philosopher ignores the perceptible world. There is some continuity between the philosopher's genuine possession, and the lay conviction that he or she is mad. Both constitute atypical behavior; the difference is that non-philosophers do not perceive the philosopher as someone who has experienced the

ineffable. In other words, we must distinguish between the external behavior of the philosopher, which is considered by the *polloi* to be wild and senseless, and the internal state of the philosopher, which is manifestly rational. The philosopher has achieved the best cognitive state; rapturous joy emerges from this state.

There are several important puzzles associated with the list of souls. Ostensibly, the list acts as a simple demarcation between the philosopher and the non-philosophers. Still, questions abound. For one, how are we supposed to connect different souls with their appropriate god? Which god, for instance, corresponds to the tyrant? Furthermore, how do the multiple vocations within one level relate to one another? For instance, Apollo is connected to prophecy and Dionysus to the priest of the mysteries (265b). Do the statesman, household manager, and financier each have a separate deity? Finally, consider the hierarchy itself. Why does the doctor rank higher than the poet or seer, if poetic and prophetic madness are great gifts bestowed upon humankind? In the next section, I examine the hierarchy of souls with the aim of explaining why the three forms of madness occupy their station.

Part III – The Status of Divination in the *Phaedrus*

There have been various attempts to solve the puzzle between the laudable account of prophetic madness (242c) and the seer's comparatively lower rank on the hierarchy of souls (248d-e). One effort has been to apply the distinction between possession and technical divination to the hierarchy of souls.²⁸² In extolling prophetic madness, Socrates privileges possession divination while discrediting technical divination. Their difference turned on the presence or absence of divine madness.

²⁸² Hackforth (1953) 84; Nussbaum (1986) 89.

Since technical divination like augury does not consist of becoming possessed by a god, it cannot compare to someone like the Pythia. Nevertheless, the technical seer is still a seer. Accordingly, the fifth rank on the hierarchy is actually the technical seer. A similar explanation, in fact, could be given for poetry. Some poets learn how to compose poetry, but the truly valuable poetry must come from a possessed poet. This, then, explains the poet's low rank on the hierarchy. Socrates is merely referring to the uninspired, technical poet.

There are three problems with this explanation. First, this still leaves unexplained why divination occupies the fourth rung, and poetry the fifth. In other words, there needs to be something else provided in order to make sense of the division between the kinds of madness. Second, although the distinction between possession and technical divination exists in poetry as well, there is no such division presented in telistic madness. Yet it is still ranked with divination on the fifth rung. Third, and the most glaring problem, if it is the case that technical divination occupies the fifth rung, then the word *oionistikon* should be used instead of *mantikon*. But the latter is employed. This suggests that if it is anyone, it is the possessed seer who it intended. In the following, I rehearse several other accounts that seek to explain the discrepancy.

a. Ferrari's Account

Ferrari proposes that the three forms of madness constitute an historical claim.²⁸³ Issues of temporality pepper each account. In the case of telistic madness, for instance, "ancient crimes" (*epeita khronon*) (243e3) are relieved; poetic madness glorifies "achievements of the past" (*tōn palaiōn erga*) (245a2-3). Finally, the oracular sites at Delphi and Dodona, together with the Sybil have historical prestige. Ferrari also points

²⁸³ Ferrari (1987) 113-119

out that the etymological evidence must be characterized along these lines. Those ancient people who constructed the language “in the old days” (*tōn palaiōn*) (244b8) thought madness was commendable, so they connected it to prophecy.

For Ferrari, Socrates is sincere in his praise for these historical forms of madness. However, his praise must be qualified according to the baggage each art acquires as it develops down through the centuries. This baggage has two components. First, it shows that present day people care more about linguistic differences (omegas and omicrons) than the genuine distinction between possession and technical divination. Second, the technical poet is ignorant in the sense that he thinks he can develop his expertise merely by recourse to “textbook codification” (Ferrari 116).²⁸⁴ Ferrari contextualizes this in the context of the subsequent critique of rhetoric, which falls prey to the same criticism. Rhetoric, in Plato’s time, relies on too many formalized rules.²⁸⁵

Other signposts ground the idea that we must qualify Socrates’ praise for divine madness. For one, Ferrari notes that Socrates characterizes himself as a seer, though not an altogether “serious one” (*spoudaios*) (242c4-5). Similarly, consider that Socrates’ *daimonion*, which enjoys affinity with divination, is what initially triggers the Palinode. The *daimonion* exclusively negates (*Apology* 31c); it is left to Socrates to use his critical capacities to interpret its meaning. In other words, like the interpreter of the Pythia, Socrates must evaluate his *daimonion*. This introduces the role for a new sort of madness – philosophic madness. For Ferrari, philosophy replaces the older divine forms of madness.

²⁸⁴ Ferrari characterizes the technical seer in the same way.

²⁸⁵ Ferrari contrasts the historically prestigious forms of madness with contemporary *technai* like medicine, and contemporary dramatists like Sophocles and Euripides. He states that Socrates “adduces rather those ancient rites of healing which Hippocratic physicians in his day were casting in the unfavourable light of superstition” (114). Ferrari cites Lloyd (1979) for this topic.

This distinction, between historical forms of madness (prophetic, telistic, and poetic) and the new form of madness (philosophy) constitutes Ferrari's response to the puzzle of the hierarchy of souls. Although the seer and poet are historically prestigious, there are transcended by philosophy. As a caveat to this, Ferrari maintains that Plato undoubtedly intends for the reader to experience a level of cognitive dissonance. The reason being that the transition to philosophy is not seamless, but fraught with uneven terrain.

Like the first proposal, I submit three problems with Ferrari's account. The first centers on Socrates' claim that he is not a serious seer. Ferrari presents this as a hint that Socrates accepts the divine forms of madness, but only in a qualified sense. Socrates is not entirely earnest in his affirmation. But the translation of *spoudaios* is contestable. The most common translation is 'earnestness', which agrees with Ferrari's use. This indeed introduces a playful, or ironic, tone.

Yet another possible translation of *spoudaios*, which I think is stronger in this context, is being 'good' or 'excellent'; Socrates is thus merely claiming to be a competent seer. This translation, which is now commonplace, is the one I favor. The reason for preferring this translation is Socrates' analogy with people who can just barely read and write (242a). Although such people do not have a *technē*, or have knowledge in the propositional sense, they do have a certain rudimentary ability, which shares features with knowledge, and is probably best characterized as a kind of ability, or know-how. Indeed, such an analogy has a great deal of affinity with divination. The Pythia cannot explain her oracle much like the language speaker cannot explain the linguistic rules that underlie their language use.

Another issue is historical, namely the degree to which the influence of the three forms of madness had actually waned by Plato's time. Although it contributes to Ferrari's case to claim that by the 4th century, the prestige of the Pythia was abetting, it is not altogether clear that that is the case. This is not fatal to Ferrari's interpretation; he can still rely on the textual evidence that clearly depicts historical considerations as a central feature of how to think about the divine forms of madness. Finally, Ferrari fails to explain why the seer and the priest of mystic rites are ranked above the poet and representational artist.²⁸⁶

b. Brisson's Account

Brisson's account is more comprehensive than that of Ferrari. This is so due to his explicit aim to clarify the nature of divination in the *Phaedrus* as well as Plato's dialogues more generally. This synoptic approach does not negate Brisson's ability to shed light on specific puzzles. For instance, Brisson emphasizes that telistic madness and prophetic madness share a great deal of affinity, and indeed together seem to have more in common with philosophic madness than poetic madness.²⁸⁷

Even more fruitfully, when Brisson distinguishes between the first three forms of madness and philosophic madness, he does so by appeal to the former's epistemological status. In a word, all three forms of madness constitute *technai*. Divination "implique un savoir" (227) that is not scientific, but technical in nature. The evidence for this is not only in the *Phaedrus* – it is obvious that the technical seer has a *technē* – but also in other dialogues. This is an important point, if it stands up to critical evaluation, because it

²⁸⁶ He does have a good explanation for why the doctor is ranked so high, which depends upon Socrates' discussion of medicine later in the dialogue.

²⁸⁷ On the affinity between prophetic and telistic madness – *Ion* 533-536d. On their affinity with philosophic madness as opposed to poetic madness – *Symposium* 202e-203a, 188b-c, 187a-e. Brisson (1974) 226.

explains the place of the seer and poet on the hierarchy of souls. Both register beneath the doctor but above the farmer and other productive laborers, that is, both are bookended by *technai*. This strongly reinforces the idea that technical expertise is constitutive of divination, mystic rites, and poetry.²⁸⁸

Indeed, Brisson characterizes the fourth rung – the doctor or trainer – as essentially the person who favors physical activity. In a way this points to the higher rung, the general, since he who is interested in military affairs must take care of the body.²⁸⁹ In fact, since the doctor is undoubtedly someone with technical expertise, Brisson rejects the notion that the fourth rung – the *philoponos* – should actually be conceptualized as a doctor! Rather, it must be someone who is concerned with the development of the body – in order to “retablir l’équilibre de l’organisme” (232) – but not in a curative sense, but in the sense of exercise. In other words, if the goal is a healthy body, it is the difference between taking a pill and training your body.

Brisson organizes the hierarchy of souls in the following way:

Group 1:

1. The lover of wisdom
2. The lover of beauty
3. The law-abiding King and the fit General
4. Statesman, household manager, financier

Group 2:

5. Doctor and trainer

Group 3:

²⁸⁸ Brisson (1974) notes that in characterizing divination as a *technē*, and indeed as an auxiliary to royalty (*Statesman* 290c-291a), Plato is tapping into a tradition that goes back to Homer (*Odyssey* 17.382-85). 227-228

²⁸⁹ Part of Brisson’s (1974) claim is to underscore how Plato separates occupations that in the *Republic* are synthesized into one. 231-232

6. Seer and Priest
7. Poets and other representational artists
8. Manual laborer and farmer

Group 1b²⁹⁰

9. Sophist
10. Demagogue
11. Tyrant²⁹¹

As is clear, the sixth, seventh, and eighth stages constitute one group, specifically their epistemological nature as constitutive of a *technē*. This yet necessitates the need to explain why they register in their particular order. For one, Brisson notes that unlike the *Republic* where the imitative artist is banished, here he is brought into the fold. The reason the seer and priest are ranked higher than the imitative artist is because Plato considers such practices less ambiguous than poetry. In fact, to a certain degree, all three forms of divine madness are somewhat ambiguous. In later dialogues, unsatisfied with this ambiguity, Plato goes to specify them as much as possible, thereby making them as beneficial as possible. Nevertheless, even in the context of this ambiguity, Brisson claims that poetry and the other imitative arts are more ambiguous than divination and purification, thereby justifying their lower station.²⁹²

For Brisson, the first three forms of divine madness “s’exercent dans le monde sensible, soumis au passage du temps et appréhendé par l’opinion vraie (234). In other words, each form of madness functions in the sensible world. Epistemologically speaking, such practices can only ever be said to have true beliefs. Philosophic madness,

²⁹⁰ Group 1b is an inverted, and distorted, version of group 1. For instance, the demagogue is the distorted mirror image of the legislator and general. Brisson (1974) 233.

²⁹¹ Brisson (1974) 233.

²⁹² Brisson (1974) writes that the poetic madness “étant affectée d’un degré d’amiguité plus marqué que les deux précédentes” (235). Even stronger, he goes on to say that the seer and priest disclose the sacred, whereas the poet discloses the profane.

by contrast, aims at the intelligible world about which it can have knowledge. These are crucial points to understanding the scope of the divine forms of madness. The seer and the poet are inspired by the gods, who while enjoying proximity to the intelligible realm nevertheless occupy the sensible world.

Not only is it the case that we must cash out the epistemology of the seer by recourse to the strong division between the intelligible and sensible worlds – that we can only opine the sensible world and know the intelligible world – but Plato is quite clear that seers are unable to give an account of their true claims. This is so because the seer, specifically the possessed seer, is literally possessed by a god.²⁹³ Brisson goes on to discuss Plato's rehabilitation, and transformation, of divination and mystic rites in the later dialogues.²⁹⁴

Brisson's explanation is impressive, but there are still certain threads left unexplored. For instance, he correctly emphasizes that Plato repeatedly characterizes divination as a *technē*, but the full force of his account depends upon the notion that seers and poets only have access to true beliefs. This is so because they function in the sensible world. In this sense, all *technai*, including farming, must be categorized low on the hierarchy. This is what we see on the hierarchy of souls.

Nevertheless, there is, I submit, an important difference between all the *technai* that populate Plato's dialogues, and the epistemological status of the seer and poet. What is emphasized in dialogues like the *Meno* is that the seer cannot offer an account of their divinations. In other words, although they may claim something true, they cannot justify

²⁹³ cf. *Meno* 99-100.

²⁹⁴ He does so in two senses. First, he identifies an anthropological recuperation, specifically Plato's account of the mortal soul and the site of divination in the *Timaeus*. Second, he examines the political role in the context of the *Laws*.

it. This seems to me altogether different than the claim that the farmer only has access to true beliefs because his knowledge is of the sensible world. Note as well that this division cannot be resolved chronologically by insisting that the introduction of the sensible/intelligible world distinction transforms Plato's theory of knowledge. Divination is still treated as a *technē* in a late dialogue like the *Statesman*. I return to this after rehearsing Griswold's account.

c. Griswold's Account

Griswold picks up on the notion that the final few rungs mirror the first few, and applies it to the whole hierarchy.²⁹⁵ The difference between them is the difference between care and distortion:

1. Philosopher – care of the soul
2. King or General – care of the city
3. Statesman, household manager, or financier – care of the city
4. Doctor or trainer – care of the body
5. Prophet or Priest – care of the gods
6. Poet or representation artists – distortion of the gods
7. Manual laborer or farmer – distortion of the body
8. Sophist or demagogue – distortion of the city
9. Tyrant – distortion of the soul

In other dialogues, the tyrant lives the worst possible life, precisely because his soul is the most unharmonious.

There are several problems with this explanation. First, the distinction between the fifth and sixth rungs is dubious. If madness is laudable in divination and poetry, then both can be exemplary. Contrastingly, without madness, both are rather ordinary. The Pythia displays nothing of value when in her right mind; the poet with technical proficiency is banal without inspiration from the Muses. So why does divination constitute care of the city and not poetry? In both of Plato's ideal states, the poets will

²⁹⁵ Griswold (1986) 102-104.

have a central role to play.²⁹⁶ By the same token, criticisms of divination populate the dialogues, both early and late.²⁹⁷

Rather than depict the hierarchy according to the care/distortion distinction, I think there is great merit in conceptualizing the hierarchy in terms of epistemology. This is, in part, an interpretation developed by Rowe, but mine goes further in several respects. For instance, like Griswold, Rowe fails to give an account as to why divination and mystic rites are ranked above poetry and the other mimetic arts. The criterion for ranking souls is based on how much of the intelligible realm a particular soul has experienced. In what follows, I examine each entry of the hierarchy of soul in order to contextualize its place. This depends upon other inter-textual evidence as well as extra-textual evidence from other dialogues, notably the *Republic* and *Meno*.

i. The lover of wisdom or beauty –

The entire palinode is meant to validate *Eros* and this includes specifying its appropriate object. The philosopher's soul is that which has come into the closest contact with the intelligible realm. Strictly speaking, since there is an inextricable connection in the *Phaedrus* between philosophy and *Eros*, the philosopher's soul, due to his or her very embodiment, is unable to remain in the intelligible realm and has taken "on a burden of forgetfulness and wrongdoing" (*lēthēs te kai kakias plēstheisa barunthē*) (248c7-8).

Nevertheless, it still remains the case that the philosopher's soul is that which has seen the most of the intelligible realm (248d2). The intelligible realm is specified as:

What is in this place is without color and without shape and without solidity, a being that really is what it is, the subject of all true knowledge, visible only to intelligence, the soul's steersman. Now a god's mind is nourished by intelligence and pure knowledge, as is the

²⁹⁶ Naddaf (2007) 329-349.

²⁹⁷ cf. *Meno* 99d; *Timaeus* 71-72.

mind of any soul that is concerned to take in what is appropriate to it, and so it is delighted at last to be seeing what is real and watching what is true...(247c6-d4).

hē gar akhrōmatos te kai askhēmatistos kai anaphēs ousia ontōs ousa, psukhēs kubernētē monō theatē nō, peri hēn to tēs alēthous epistēmēs genos, touton ekhei ton topon. hat' oun theou dianoia nō te kai epistēmē akēratō trephomenē, kai hapasēs psukhēs hosē an melē to prosēkon dexasthai, idousa dia khronou to on agapa te kai theōrousa talēthē...

Socrates goes on to relate that the sort of knowledge associated with this realm is authentic knowledge (247e2).²⁹⁸ Thus, the philosopher's soul is ranked highest because it is the closest to knowing the intelligible realm.

ii. *The lawful king, or someone fit for generalship and ruling* –

In the *Republic*, the ideal state will only emerge if (1) a philosopher becomes a king, or (2) a king becomes a philosopher (473d).²⁹⁹ If this is so, the connection between the philosopher and the lawful king may only be a matter of degree. In fact, according the *Republic*, a lawful king – the sort that would rule the ideal state – would be best in both war and philosophy (543a).

It is instructive to meditate on the connection between the king and the general. In *Republic* VIII, Socrates presents a regress of states and the souls that mirror them. The first stage after the Kallipolis is the timocracy (547a-550b), which is ruled by those who privilege victory and honor (548c). It constitutes the midpoint between aristocracy (e.g., the Kallipolis) and oligarchy (547c), and fundamentally concerns itself with matters of

²⁹⁸ It is also worth wondering why the lover of beauty enjoys this prestigious rank. The explanation, I think, has to do with the nature of beauty and the fact that it can initiate someone into searching after more and substantial kinds of beauty. In this way, I am thinking of the ascent passage in the *Symposium*. As Rowe (2008) claims the lover of beauty, music, and *Eros*, once properly developed, mean nothing else than the philosopher – the lover of wisdom. 180-181

²⁹⁹ Naddaf (2012) notes that in the *Republic*, the ideal state will not come about until either philosophers take charge of the city, or a god inspires the present rules to become philosophers (*ek tinos theias epipnoias*) (499a-b, 540d-541b). 8-9

“warfare and warlike activities” (*all' apo ergōn tōn te polemikōn kai tōn peri ta polemika*) (549a5). The timocratic soul is governed by the spirited part of the soul (*Republic* 548c); its authority emerges because there is fear to appoint wise individuals as rulers. Consequently, there is an inclination toward those individuals with a natural aptitude for war, as opposed to peace (547e). In other words, individuals who have a “love of victory and the love of honor” (*philonikiai kai philotimiai*) (548c3-4). They justify themselves by their aptitude and deeds in war (549a4-5). This underscores the affinity between the second best constitution, together with the second best soul, and concern for military affairs.

The only allusion to kings and kingship in the *Phaedrus* is when Socrates recounts the tale of writing in Egypt. At the time, Thamus was king and when persuaded by Theuth, an Egyptian God, to disseminate writing throughout Egypt, he argued that rather than aiding a person’s memory, writing actually caused more forgetfulness in the soul. The distinction between knowledge and ignorance is absolutely central to Platonic epistemology and Thamus’ reasoning demonstrates his expertise. After all, given that Thamus’ argument is deployed in the service of Socrates’ argument, he should be considered the paradigmatic lawful king. In fact, further buttressing Thamus’ stature is that he was considered to be the king of the Egyptian gods. This underscores his divinity and therefore his prestige.

iii. The statesman, household manager, or financier –

The third stage marks the end of the ruling-classes. The souls associated with these occupations do govern, but neither with the exemplary knowledge of the philosopher nor with the spirited expertise of the king (*Republic* 547e). Nevertheless,

there is a marked shift once we get to the doctor and trainer on the fourth rung. Although there is scant mention of these occupations throughout the rest of the dialogue, we can glean some idea of their expertise from other political dialogues like the *Republic* and the *Statesman*.

Consider the *Republic* and the next stage in the degeneration of states. After timocracy there is the oligarchy. The principal interest of the oligarchic soul is money (*Republic* 554a). The degeneration consists of a slide from “victory-loving and honor-loving men” to “lovers of making money” (*anti dē philonikōn kai philotimōn andrōn philokhrēmatistai kai philokhrēmatoi teleutōntes egenonto*) (551a5-6). Consequently, this city is two cities, one poor and one rich (551d). How this comes about is that the oligarchic soul has been affected by poverty since the timocratic soul did not have sufficient concern for such material goods.

Indeed, although it is generally situated in Plato’s later period, the introduction of the method of collection and division in the *Phaedrus*’ latter stages (265-266) certainly looks forward to dialogues like *Statesman*. The principal goal of the *Statesman* is to clarify the nature of the statesman’s expertise. One of statesmanship’s essential features is that it governs over the rest of the citizenry. In this way, it is akin to a shepherd overlooking his or her flock (*Statesman* 267d). The rest of the citizenry possess crafts subordinate to the statesman (290b-c). Accordingly, such expertise is more laudable than other crafts.

One might take exception with the introduction of *technē* here, but it ought to be pointed out that *technai* have always been granted epistemological status (*Apology* 22d). The search for the political *technē* is a consistent theme in Plato’s dialogues. Technical

knowledge is genuine knowledge; it is not the highest form of knowledge but it does have advantages. Note, as well, that statesmanship is regularly connected with the king (*Statesman* 259b; 276e), thereby underscoring the continuities between them.

iv. *The doctor or trainer* –

The souls associated with the doctor and trainer marks an important transition, and devolution, from the first three rungs. The object of the philosopher’s expertise is the cosmos (which includes the state) and the object of the king and statesman is the state. But with these occupations, we have a less comprehensive expertise, namely that of the human body.³⁰⁰ Medicine, in particular, often crops up in the early dialogues as Socrates works through the *technē* analogy for morality.³⁰¹ According to this proposal, as medicine improves the health of the body, moral knowledge improves the soul. Indeed, later in the dialogue, Socrates develops a rapport between rhetoric and medicine. According to Socrates, “in both cases we need to determine the nature of something – of the body in medicine, of the soul in rhetoric (*ho autos pou tropos tekhnēs iatrikēs hosper kai rhētorikēs*) (*Phaedrus* 270b5-6).”

What qualifies as knowing medicine? One must not only know how to engender a certain effect in a body, but know the scope of such treatments – the timing and the intensity (268c). Otherwise, the person is wrong to call himself a doctor. In fact, one must understand the whole – both body and soul. Hippocrates and “true argument” (*ho alēthēs logos*) (270c8) say this.

The *Charmides* supports the notion that one must take into account the whole. At 157b, Socrates states that good doctors cannot treat the eyes without treating the head,

³⁰⁰ Note that medicine and gymnastics are connected during Eryximachus speech in the *Symposium* (187a).

³⁰¹ cf. *Republic* 332c. Medicine begins a long list of *technai*, which are deployed in the context of puzzling over the nature of justice.

and cannot treat the head without treating the whole body. In other words, treating the part necessarily encompasses the whole. This is the mistake of most Greek doctors – they fail to recognize that they must treat the whole, which of course includes the soul!³⁰² So, to recapitulate, medicine and gymnastics occupy their place because medicine encompasses the body together with the soul.

Although Plato regularly connects medicine and divination³⁰³, there is an important sense in which they are dissimilar, namely with respect to inspiration. It is for this reason that the seer and the priest of the mysteries are placed lower on the hierarchy. For rather than possessing technical knowledge, the seer has right opinion.

v. The seer or priest –

The epistemological status of divination regularly emerges throughout the dialogues. In the *Meno*, for instance, Socrates states that the outcome of divination, conceptualized as the result of inspiration, is not knowledge but *right opinion* (99c). This contradicts the thesis that divination is a *technē*.

The idea occurs when Socrates and Meno realize that because there are no teachers of virtue, and that since every *technē* is teachable, virtue cannot be taught (96d). It is Socrates who realizes that the assumption – “only knowledge can lead to correct action” (*phronēsis monon hēgeitai tou orthōs pratein*) (*Meno* 97c1) – is false. In fact, right opinion, so long as one has it, will *always* lead to right action. This is what differentiates it from sheer luck.

The distinguishing characteristic of knowledge is that it is tied down by “an account of reason” (*aitias logismō*) (98a3). Right opinion, by contrast, is unstable. Yet, in

³⁰² Holmes (2011) notes that even though Plato subordinates the body to the soul he nevertheless utilizes medical analogies of the body in characterizing ethical wisdom, which is situated in the soul. 192-202

³⁰³ cf. *Ion* 539c; *Laches* 195c, 196d

the present discussion on how to achieve virtue, knowledge has failed as a candidate. Thus, Socrates surmises that becoming virtuous must be a matter of simply developing the correct ideas about virtue in whatever way possible (e.g., through habituation). The statesman who makes fine speeches has right opinion and in this way as well:

...they (statesmen) are no different from soothsayers and prophets. They too say many true things when inspired, but they have no knowledge of what they are saying. (99c2-4).³⁰⁴

...ouden diapherontōs ekhontes pros to phronein ē hoi khrēsmōdoi te kai hoi theomanteis: kai gar houtoi enthousiōntes legousin men alēthē kai polla, isasi de ouden hōn legousin.

And later:

We should be right to call divine also those soothsayers and prophets whom we just mentioned, and all the poets, and we should call no less divine and inspired, those public men who are no less under the gods' influence and possession, as their lead to success in many important matters, though they have no knowledge of what they are saying (99c8-d5).

orthōs ar' an kaloimen theious te hous nundē elegomen khrēsmōdous kai manteis kai tous poiētikous hapantas: kai tous politikous oukh hēkista toutōn phaimen an theious te einai kai enthousiazein, epipnous ontas kai katekhomenous ek tou theou, hotan katorthōsi legontes polla kai megala pragmata, mēden eidotes hōn legousin.

Socrates goes full circle and returns to the topic of virtue. If it is neither an innate talent, nor something that can be taught, he concludes by a process of elimination that virtue is the result of inspiration akin to occupations that encompass divine contact.³⁰⁵

vi. The poets or other representational artists –

³⁰⁴ It is crucial to distinguish between the *Statesmen* as outlined in the eponymous dialogue and the statesman whom Socrates is comparing with the seer. In the *Statesman* itself, Socrates is explicit that the expertise of the statesman is not possessed by any actual leaders of the state.

³⁰⁵ Note that this affinity between seers and politicians emerges again in the first book of the *Laws*. The legal code of the lawgivers will be inspired by both Zeus and Apollo (634a).

From an epistemological perspective, the poets seem equivalent with the seers. Both types of soul lack knowledge, but they do have right opinion, which is the result of inspiration, not *technē*. So what justifies the poet's lower place? The answer hinges on the reference to imitation.

It is well established that Plato's greatest problem with the poets is their affirmation of *mimesis*.³⁰⁶ At *Republic* III, Socrates claims that due to the specialization of labor – that a person can only do well in one vocation – imitation is self-defeating. This is so because Socrates thinks that imitation is itself one vocation, and so whatever the imitator imitates, say medicine, is something else (394e-395b).

Furthermore, imitation consumes the individual such that the distinction between himself and what is imitated becomes blurred. According to Plato, this can have the disastrous consequence of molding individuals in the wrong way (395d). This does leave open the possibility that a poet might confine himself to only composing works that imitate decent people, and we will return to this idea shortly.

In the meantime, however, there is blanket condemnation of imitation at *Republic* X. This is stronger due to the metaphysical and epistemological theses established in Books IV-VII. The existence of the intelligible realm diminishes the value of the sensible realm, which in turn, diminishes imitations of the sensible realm, whence poetry. This strong position on poetry has generated a great deal of controversy. What I would like to emphasize in this debate, and what informs my own argument, is the line that recognizes Plato's affability to the poets in what is considered his late work. In other words, rather than totally banishing the poets from the ideal state, there seems to be good evidence for

³⁰⁶ cf. *Republic* II, III, X.

thinking that Plato has a more moderate view, namely one that refines and transforms poetry.

With this mind, poetry's station, beneath divination and purification, rests on its mimetic nature. Although imitation is not a principal theme of the *Phaedrus*, there is some lexical evidence. Later in Socrates' palinode, as he extrapolates the soul's ascent, he states that the person who witnesses "a godlike face or some form of body which imitates beauty well" (*hotan theoeides prosōpon idē kallos eu memimēmenon ē tina sōmatos idean*) (251a3-4) will feel ill (251b1) as their wings develop. Further on, as Socrates discusses how each soul aligns itself with a god, he remarks that the soul honors the god by "imitating him" (*ekeinon timōn te kai mimoumenos eis to dunaton zē*) (252d3). The same thought occurs again (253b5). What this means is that the proper activity of a human soul is to imitate, to the best of its ability, the sovereign god through which it aligns itself. The problem with imitation, however, is that it does not always mimic appropriate objects like the gods.

vii. *The manual laborer or farmer* –

In the final three rungs, the regression from knowledge to ignorance continues. It is possible to translate *demiourgikos* as 'craftsmen' where we ought to think of the farmer as the paradigmatic example of someone with a productive *technē*. The good of farming is to produce food (*Euthyphro* 14c), and this often gets developed in the political dialogues.

For instance, in the *Republic*, farming arises in the discussion of the ideal state, which contains three classes of citizens (466b; 547d). There is also a reaffirmation of this point in the frame of the *Timaeus* (17c). Consider also the myth of the metals. According

to Socrates, the god who created humankind mixed gold into those who are fit to rule, silver into the auxiliaries, and finally, “iron and bronze in the farmers and other craftsmen” (*tois te geōrgois kai tois allois dēmiourgois*) (415a5). The farmer exemplifies the working class in the ideal state and is its lowest member, beneath both the rulers and the auxiliaries.

Like every other occupation in the *Republic*, farming is subject to the specialization of labor. The farmer will only pursue farming and nothing else. Whatever surplus of food he produces will be distributed amongst the citizenry. Indeed, this point is re-affirmed in the *Critias*, where it is asserted that the true farmer is none other than the person who devotes themselves exclusively to farming (111e).

Like medicine, farming emerges in the latter half of the *Phaedrus*. As Socrates develops his condemnation of writing, he connects it with painting. Both seem alive but are actually silent. When you question a text or a painting, it cannot help but say the same thing. Since it cannot speak for itself, it requires the support of its father – the writer or the painter. By contrast, if a “discourse that is written, with knowledge, in the soul of the listener; it can defend itself, and it knows for whom it should speak and for whom it should remain silent” (*hos met' epistēmēs graphetai en tē tou manthanontos psukhē, dunatos men amunai heautō, epistēmōn de legein te kai sigan pros hous dei*) (276a5-7).

An analogy develops then in the context of farming, between the farmer who would plant in the middle of summer to immediately bear fruit (and did this seriously) or rather, would he employ his expertise to plant when it was appropriate and be content that it bore fruit later (some 7 months later). The latter is preferred. Similarly, “the dialectician chooses a proper soul and plants and sows (*phuteuē te kai speirē*) within it

discourse accompanied by knowledge” (276e). Thus, at their very best, texts only remind people of what is already known.

On the face of it, farming seems oddly placed. As a *technē*, albeit a minor one, it seems as though it ought to be ranked two places higher, above the seer and the poet. This is so because the farmer actually possesses technical knowledge; the other two only possess true beliefs.³⁰⁷

viii. *The sophist or demagogue* –

The sophist and demagogue register one step down beneath the productive *technē*. In fact, according to Plato, the sophist does not actually possess a *technē* at all. Rather, he characterizes the expertise of the sophist, together with the orator and the cosmetician, to be more akin to a knack than a *technē* (*Gorgias* 463b). One way to understand this idea of a knack is to think of it as a distorted, or alien, version of a genuine *technē*. According to Socrates, just as pastry making is a distorted version of medicine, so too is sophistry a distorted version of legislation (*Gorgias* 465c4-5).

In the *Republic*'s degeneration of states, the sophist and demagogue embody the *ethos* of the democracy. In an oligarchy, the poor come to deeply resent the rich, resulting in a struggle between the two groups. Democracy emerges when the poor are victorious. Under this constitution, one finds all kinds of people. There develops false and arrogant convictions. Sophistry is antithetical to philosophy. It privileges opinion over knowledge, rhetorical victory over genuine inquiry, and embodies a relativistic moral position that Plato finds abhorrent no less than completely wrong. Plato's rejection of the sophists is

³⁰⁷ It is worthwhile to note that agriculture emerges in the *Laws*; it seems that at least some citizens are farmers, or at least, oversee the functioning of agriculture on their estate. Samaras (2012) notes “activities like farming and bee-keeping in which one may engage for the direct benefit of one's household, are not regarded in the *Laws* as incompatible with meaningful citizenship (8).

well-known.³⁰⁸ It is not only that the sophist is ignorant, but that they willingly mislead others as well. In this way, they qualify for such a long rung on the hierarchy of souls.

They are outdone by only one other occupation – the tyrant.

ix. *The tyrant* –

The tyrant is the person with the most corrupt soul. The largest discussion of the tyrant emerges in *Republic* Book IX. The development of the tyrant occurs when a powerful erotic love, “like a great winged drone” (*hupopteron kai megan kēphēna tina*) (572e7) is implanted and made leader of a person’s desires. The drone then:

...adopts madness as its bodyguard and becomes frenzied. If it finds any beliefs or desires in the man that are thought to be good or that still have some shame, it destroys them and throws them out, until it’s purged him of moderation and filled him with imported madness (573a6-4).

...tote dē doruphoretai te hupo manias kai oistra houtos ho prostatēs tēs psukhēs, kai ean tinas en autō doxas ē epithumias labē poioumenas khrēstas kai eti epaiskhunomenas, apokteinei te kai exō ōthei par' hautou, heōs an kathērē sōphrosunēs, manias de plērōsē epaktou.

It is instructive to note that the concept of *mania* is conceptualized negatively, and this ought to recall Socrates’ and Lysias’ speech at the beginning of the *Phaedrus*. Recall that erotic love, in those two initial speeches, was characterized as wholly negative.

The tyrant is ruled by erotic love, and this can be explicated in terms of the appetitive part of the soul. In this way, the tyrant is actually a slave (577c). Consequently, the tyrant is unable to do what he wants, that is, unable to do what is best for him. Also, keep in mind that the tyrant’s desires can never be genuinely satisfied. Anytime an object of his desire appears, the tyrant will be compelled to try and satisfy it. Sometimes, he will not be able to satisfy these desires, thereby generating discontentment, and anyway, by

³⁰⁸ Recall that Socrates is accused of being a sophist in the *Apology*.

pursuing one appetite, he necessarily precludes pursuing another, yielding more discontent.

The tyrant's sense of his own good is distorted. He is enslaved, full of disorder, regretful, poor, and governed by fear (577c-578a). In pursuing injustice, the tyrant rejects justice, condemning it in ignorance (589c). Indeed, the tyrant must be discreetly persuaded of his error. In other words, the essence of the tyrant is someone who pursues all the wrong things, and so is in complete ignorance about what is true, and what is valuable to pursue. Consider the in-depth discussion of tyranny at *Republic IX*.

Conclusion

I have attempted to resolve the apparent inconsistency between the thesis that prophetic madness is laudable and that the soul of the seer is not as esteemed as that of the financier or even the doctor. My argument depends upon contextualizing the value of prophetic madness once philosophical madness has properly taken hold. This does not totally debunk prophetic madness but it does noticeably transform and restrict it, particularly when cast in epistemological terms. More concretely, I have argued that while prophetic madness remains laudable due to its divine connections, it cannot sustain itself on the level of knowledge.

Rather, I have argued that divination can only access true beliefs, however superlative, and that this explains the apparent inconsistency between the two references to divination under consideration. Part of the project of justifying this thesis is to show that Plato does in fact make the connection between divination and true belief, and that the other members of the hierarchy can be appropriately extrapolated via epistemology.

This focus on true belief might seem puzzling in the context of the *Phaedrus*, but as we turn to the *Symposium* in the next chapter, and in particular, the figure of Diotima and her exchange with Socrates in the penultimate speech of the symposium on *Eros*, I hope to show how true beliefs are absolutely central, not only to divination, but to Plato's entire project.

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Chapter 6 – Plato’s *Symposium* and Divination

Abstract

I argue that the character of Diotima, a seer who knows the Form of Beauty, cannot be classified according to the dichotomy developed in the *Phaedrus*. I contextualize Diotima’s role and wisdom, and argue that she represents a superlative seer who is functionally no different than a philosopher, as Plato defines them.

Introduction

Plato’s *Symposium* is an encomium on *eros*; it contains six speeches and a seventh given by the late-comer, Alcibiades. In the previous chapter, we saw Socrates distinguish between possession and technical divination, where the former is privileged over the latter. In this chapter, that distinction will be critically re-assessed in light of Diotima, a figure who flouts Socrates’ distinction. What I hope to show is twofold. First, that Diotima’s knowledge is the result of her being seer, and that this helps us better understand her account of *eros*. Second, that Diotima is an exemplary seer, capable not only of divining superlative truths, but also of defending them with rational argument. Exemplary seers like Diotima, I intent to show, are functionally no different than philosophers.

In addition to Diotima, something must be said of the characters Plato chooses to employ in the *Symposium*. As has been repeatedly pointed out, the inclusion of Phaedrus, Eryximachus, and Alcibiades cannot help but occasion the scandal that occurred in 416-415 B.C.E. All three were accused of defiling the *Hermai* and profaning the Eleusinian mysteries.³⁰⁹ This is significant insofar as the Eleusinian mysteries arise in my discussion of Diotima, whom I regard as appropriating and transforming the mysteries in the context of Plato’s metaphysical and epistemological project. The other three who give speeches –

³⁰⁹ Rosen (1968) 7-8.

Socrates, Agathon, and Aristophanes – represent philosophy, tragedy, and comedy respectively. One might think of these three in competition.³¹⁰

The inclusion of Phaedrus and others foreshadows Diotima’s appropriation of the mysteries in her account of *eros*. Her entire exchange with Socrates, as retold by the man himself, reflects a relationship between initiate and initiated. More substantively, the content of her ideas about *eros*, especially as the philosopher comes to encounter the form of beauty, echoes the Eleusinian mysteries. I will have more to say about this when I come to Diotima’s speech itself.

Although the conversation between Socrates and Diotima will garner the majority of my attention, it is necessary to recapitulate the earlier instances of divination, inspiration, and *mania* in the dialogue. This is so because the earlier speeches give definition to Socrates’ speech. Indeed, one methodological approach to the *Symposium* is to emphasize the additive nature of the dialogue, namely that each speech, while critiqued and transformed by Socrates, nevertheless retains a kernel of truth that develops in his own account.³¹¹

I rehearse three instances: first, Eryximachus’ account of the role of *eros* in divination (188c-d); second, Aristophanes’ analogy between the human soul and an oracle (192d); and finally, Agathon’s claim that *Eros* has created all sorts of *technai*, including prophecy (197d).³¹²

³¹⁰ Pausanias seems to have no place. Another way of casting the characters is in their respective relationships. Pausanias and Agathon are lovers; Eryximachus and Phaedrus are friends; Aristophanes and Aristodemus are demesman; Socrates and Alcibiades are lovers and about to be sent to Potidaea together. Nails (2006) 181.

³¹¹ Sheffield (2006) 23-24 argues for a great deal of continuity between the “so-called expert opinion” (24) of the early speeches and Socrates’ philosophical account. Although in the same volume, Rowe states, “What Plato is doing is to *contrast* the peculiar Socratic view with more ordinary views, not derive it from them” (21).

³¹² Agathon’s characterizes *Eros* as a god so I capitalize it here and where appropriate.

Part I – Three Cases of Divination in the Preliminary Speeches

a. The Speech of Eryximachus (186a-189a)

As noted by Edelstein, Eryximachus is one the more prestigious speakers in the *Symposium*.³¹³ He is the third person to give a speech. He extends Pausanias' bipartite view of *eros* to include everything in the universe. The Pre-Socratic influence –Heraclitus and Empedocles – is apparent (187a).³¹⁴ For Eryximachus, *Eros* is a fundamental principle of the universe; it is responsible for all change and stability. Also like Pausanias, Eryximachus thinks that *Eros* must be instantiated in an activity. It is not in itself good or bad; *Eros* manifested by health is good, and is different than *Eros* manifested by disease, which is bad. Indeed, there is one concept of *Eros* at play, but it instantiates itself differently, depending on the context, and the way it emerges.

Eryximachus extrapolates his claim by showing how *Eros* functions in four different *technai* – medicine (186b-186e), music (187a-187e), astronomy (187e-188b), and divination (188c-d). I will briefly rehearse all four, not only because they demonstrate the range of Eryximachus' expertise, but because they also exhibit the manner in which Eryximachus might differ from mainstream medicine.

Eryximachus, first and foremost, is a physician, and he seems to be quite familiar with Hippocratic medicine.³¹⁵ The subject matter of medicine is the body and the goal of the physician is to engender a healthy body (186c). As I previously stated, Eryximachus recognizes two sorts of *Eros* in the human body. The *Eros* of "health" (*hugieinō*) is

³¹³ His influence appears at several junctions. He cautions against heavy drinking and proposes an evening of speeches on a topic. Ostensibly, the topic of *eros* is chosen by Phaedrus, but in reality, it is Eryximachus who does the talking (176a-177a). Also, upon the arrival of Alcibiades, again it is Eryximachus who urges the latecomer to give a speech on Socrates, as opposed to *eros*. Edelstein (1945) 85-103.

³¹⁴ Sheffield (2006b) 21.

³¹⁵ McPherran (2006) 76.

different than the *Eros* of “disease” (*nosōdei*) (186b11). The job of the physician is to identify what type of *Eros* exists in a particular body, and how to encourage it if it is good, and quell it if it is bad. Fundamentally, the physician seeks to establish a harmony between the basic elements of the body (186d).

Eryximachus’ next example is music and poetry. Eryximachus offers a novel interpretation of Heraclitus’ fragment.³¹⁶ It cannot be, as the fragment might imply, that in the midst of harmony there is yet discord. Rather, Heraclitus must mean that a harmony arises by resolving two prior discords. He concludes that music is “simply the science of the effects of Love on rhythm and harmony” (*kai estin au mousikē peri harmonian kai rhuthmon erōtikōn epistēmē*) (187c4-5). In this particular example, the effects of music are broad. While it may be easy to identify the effects of music within the realm of rhythm and harmony, it is more complex when the audience is taken into account. In other words, again, *pace* Pausanias, different sorts of music will have different effects on different sorts of people. Some music is produced by the Heavenly Muse (187e); the love that emerges from such music ought to be cultivated. Vulgar music, by contrast, must be enjoyed with extreme caution, lest it corrupt you.³¹⁷

Eryximachus’ third example is astronomy. The subject matter of astronomy is the stars and the seasons. For Eryximachus, when the proper sort of *eros* holds sway of such objects, the climate is temperate and conducive to excellent harvests (188a). In other words, the elements of the seasons, such as hot/cold and wet/dry, are in harmony. By

³¹⁶ Fragment B 51.

³¹⁷ Pausanias declared that all of the gods must be praised, but from the content of his speech, it is clear that he assigns no value whatsoever to Common *Eros*. In fact, he enumerates its hazards. Eryximachus, by contrast, has at least carved out a space wherein Common *Eros*, albeit in moderation, is permissible.

contrast, when these elements are in disharmony, the climate is poor and consists of famine and frost.

Finally, at the conclusion of his speech, Eryximachus explicates divination. He states:

Consider further the rites of sacrifice and the whole area with which the art of divination is concerned, that is, the interaction between men and gods. Here, too, Love is the central concern: our object is to try to maintain the proper kind of love and to attempt to cure the kind that is diseased. For what is the origin of all impiety? Our refusal to gratify the orderly kind of Love, and our defence to the other sort, when we should have been guided by the former sort of Love in every action in connection with our parents, living or dead, and with the gods. The task of divination is to keep watch over these two species of Love and to doctor them as necessary. Divination, therefore, is the practice that produces loving affection between gods and men; it is simply the science of the effects of Love on justice and piety (188c1-d3)

eti toinun kai hai thusiai pasai kai hois mantikē epistatei—tauta d' estin hē peri theous te kai anthrōpous pros allēlous koinōnia—ou peri allo ti estin ē peri Erōtos phulakēn te kai iasin. pasa gar asebeia philei gignesthai ean mē tis tō kosmiō Erōti kharizētai mēde tima te auton kai presbeuē en panti ergō, alla ton heteron, kai peri goneas kai zōntas kai teteleutēkotas kai peri theous: ha dē prostetaktai tē mantikē episkopein tous erōntas kai iatreuein, kai estin au hē mantikē philias theōn kai anthrōpōn dēmiourgos tō epistasthai ta kata anthrōpous erōtika, hosa teinei pros themin kai eusebeian.

As McPherran relates, this is a rich statement.³¹⁸ In particular, as an *apologia* for divination, it flies in the face of most mainstream Hippocratic texts. Accordingly, Plato's Eryximachus is something of a rogue physician, intent on retaining some role for the divine in medicine.³¹⁹ There is also the claim here that divination will be able to produce, maintain, and remedy a loving relationship between humans and the gods. In particular, seers will direct the appropriate sacrifices to be made. This already looks forward to

³¹⁸ McPherran (2006) 85.

³¹⁹ By contrast, Hippocratic texts tend to minimize the role of the supernatural. Instead, they try and offer physical explanations. McPherran (2006) 83-84.

Diotima's reputation, which is grounded in part by her success in preventing a famine for 10 years.³²⁰

Nevertheless, we know that Diotima will argue that the gods, properly conceived as perfectly good and beautiful, do not love. This is so because they are self-sufficient and lacking in nothing. *Eros*, as we will see in the conversation between Socrates and Diotima, must always strive after something that is lacking. If the gods do not lack anything, they cannot be thought of as lovers.

Moreover, Eryximachus' concept of divination, together with his more general account of medicine, implies that divination is more than merely accessing the will of the gods. It is a stronger claim, namely that divination can produce positive affection between humankind and the divine. In other contexts, Plato completely rejects the notion that humans have the ability to influence the gods. Since seers enjoyed such influence, lavish gifts were often bestowed upon them by political and military leaders. The expectation was that gift-giving won divine favor. Both Herodotus and Xenophon offer plenty of examples.³²¹ Plato condemns this action as a form of bribery.

In the *Republic*, for instance, Socrates heartily rejects the notion that people have the ability to bribe the gods to inflict harm on both just and unjust people (364c). This is echoed again in Book X of the *Laws* where the Athenian states that seers, together with

³²⁰ McPherran maintains that the prevalent concept of piety in 5th century Athenian religion was the *do ut des* principle, which consists of reciprocity. Someone trades a sacrifice to the gods for something else. However, Lannstrom (2011) 266-268 argues that the evidence better fits a concept of piety based on "mutual esteem" (266) between humankind and the gods. On this view, a sacrifice is not a trade with the gods, but rather a gift from humankind to the divine. In the *Euthyphro*, for instance, Euthyphro uses the word *charis* which denotes reciprocity. It is Socrates who avoids such language. Although trade and gift have something in common, the important difference is that a gift works to engender intimacy between the giver and the recipient. Also, as Lannstrom points out, whereas a trade consists of an exchange between two items of more or less equal value, gifts are permitted to be of unequal value. This is so because the participants might come from a different economic background. In the case at hand, for instance, the gods' gift to humankind is markedly more valuable than an animal sacrifice.

³²¹ cf. *Histories* I. 14; 25; 50-51; *Anabasis* III. 1; V. 3.

priests and poets, often claim that the gods can be influenced by gifts to excuse injustice (885d). That the gods could be bribed is absurd to the Athenian; he later recommends imprisonment for seers who mislead people into thinking they can influence the gods through the “alleged magic powers of sacrifices and prayers and charms” (*hōs thusiais te kai eukhais kai epōdais goēteuontes*) (909b3).³²² The textual evidence, however, is full of individuals conferring gifts in an attempt to win divine favor, and Eryximachus, in this case, seems to embody Greek mores.³²³

What I urge we take from this discussion is that Eryximachus does not represent a generic doctor. Rather, his willingness to integrate religious concerns and medicine looks forward to Diotima’s integration of religiosity and philosophy.³²⁴

b. *The Speech of Aristophanes (189d-193d)*

In perhaps the most famous speech of the dialogue, Aristophanes offers a tragicomic myth concerning the origins and nature of *eros*.³²⁵ In time primeval, there were three types of humans – men, women, and androgynous people (189e). They possessed the features of two people – four arms and legs, two sets of genitals, etc. They were spherical like their parents.³²⁶ Considering themselves powerful enough to take on the gods, they went to war but were defeated handily. It was left to the gods to decide

³²² See also *Laws* 908d wherein seers are characterized as individuals of cunning and deception, which is one sort of impiety the Athenian enumerates.

³²³ Dodds (1959) writes in both the *Republic* and the *Laws* “the authority of Delphi is to be absolute in all religious matters” (223). According to Dodds, this recourse to Delphic authority is a strategic appeal to a conservative force that will anchor the citizenry’s from deviance.

³²⁴ Consider *Charmides* 156 b-c where Socrates claims that the mark of a good doctor is to treat the whole body, not the particular ailment. It is irresponsible to try and remedy one part of a body without treating the whole thing. Also relevant is *Republic* 408d-e and 591c. McPherran (2006) 79-80 discusses this.

³²⁵ The myth may appear most obviously comical, but the tragic elements are no less important. It has become increasingly recognized by scholars that Plato is subverting drama according to philosophical principles. Relevant to this speech is the conclusion of the dialogue where Socrates has attempted to establish that anyone who can write a comedy must necessarily be able to write a tragedy. Hyland (1995) 111-120.

³²⁶ The male was the offspring of the sun; the female of the earth, the androgynous kind of the moon, which combined elements of both sun and earth.

their fate. One possibility was their eradication. According to Aristophanes, the gods deemed this undesirable because they enjoyed humankind's sacrifices and worship (190c).

Instead of eliminating humankind, Zeus decides to cut each person in half. Since each person's natural state is to be unified with another:

Love is born into every human being; it calls back the halves of our original nature together; it tries to make one out of two and heal the wound of human nature (191d2-4).

esti dē oun ek tosou ho erōs emphutos allēlōn tois anthrōpois kai tēs arkhaias phuseōs sunagōgeus kai epikheirōn poiēsai hen ek duoin kai iasasthai tēn phusin tēn anthrōpinēn.

Aristophanes goes on to explain sexual orientation according to one's original nature.

The sense of belonging to someone else transcends sex. As Aristophanes states,

It's obvious that the soul of every lover longs for something else; his soul cannot say what it is, but like an oracle it has a sense of what it wants, and like an oracle it hides behind a riddle (192d2-4).

all' allo ti boulomenē hekaterou hē psukhēdēlē estin, ho ou dunatai eipein, alla manteuetai ho bouletai, kai ainittetai.

There is the ubiquitous claim that the seer speaks in cryptic and ambiguous language. Is this a conscious decision? For Aristophanes to claim that the seer 'hides' behind his or her divination with a riddle might imply that this so. By analogy, the soul yearns for its other half, but it cannot articulate it. Indeed, there is a probably a connection between the soul's inability to articulate what it wants and its beguiling nature. The soul wants to be reunited with its other half, but it does not know who this is. Similarly, the seer wants access to the gods, but he or she does not know what the divine answer will be.³²⁷

c. The Speech of Agathon

³²⁷ Flower (2008) on how random oracles were in the marketplace.

Agathon's speech is particularly important because it leads directly into Socrates' own speech. He starts his speech with a familiar caveat. For although some of the earlier speeches did well, Agathon claims that they only outlined the gifts that *Eros* imparts. They did not give an account of *Eros* in itself. Agathon intends to first praise *Eros* for who he is and then proceed to extrapolate his gifts (195a).

Against Phaedrus, Agathon states that love is the youngest of the gods. *Eros* is the most beautiful god and the happiest. Other qualities of love include: a delicate constitution (195e), balance, and fluidity. The ancient stories of Hesiod and Parmenides are the principal evidence that *Eros* is old. But they are untrue; had *Eros* been present, there would have been peace amongst the gods. So, it was necessity not *eros* that caused all of the conflict among the Greek gods.³²⁸

Eros is the loveliest of gods. He has all of the virtues – justice, temperance, courage, and wisdom.³²⁹ Agathon's compliments do not end there. More than poetry, *Eros* enables all sorts of *technai*, both human and divine. Apollo, for instance, invented archery, medicine, and prophecy with the aid of *Eros* (197b).³³⁰ The inventions of the other gods followed a similar pattern.

Agathon is then suddenly inspired (197c) to recite two lines of poetry. Thereafter, he is inspired to offer a sweeping poetical oration on the laudable nature of *Eros*. *Eros* is praised in numerous senses. It dissolves difference. It guards against the wicked. It captivates both god and human. Agathon's speech is inspired by *Eros*. The degree to which this inspiration is genuine hinges on the veracity of his claims. That he will be

³²⁸ The notion of necessity as a contrast to *eros* arises repeatedly in Agathon's account. Whereas necessity, by definition, means compulsion and a lack of freedom, Agathon claims that the relationship between *Eros* and everyone else is one of voluntary reciprocity (196c).

³²⁹ Recalling the four cardinal virtues of the *Republic*.

³³⁰ Note again how medicine and divination coalesce.

refuted by Socrates confirms again that Plato is suspicious of poetry and the authenticity of poetic inspiration more generally.

Nevertheless, Agathon's speech ends to thunderous applause. Socrates, to Eryximachus, states "Didn't I speak like a prophet a while ago when I said that Agathon would give an amazing speech and I would be tongue-tied" (*all' ou mantikōs ha nundē elegon eipein, hoti Agathōn thaumastōs eroi, egō d' aporēsoimi;*) (198a5-6). Eryximachus replies, "You were prophetic about one thing, I think, that Agathon would speak well." (*mantikōs moi dokeis eirēkenai, hoti Agathōn eu erei*) (198a7-8).

I want to reject an ironic interpretation of this exchange. At first blush, it might seem like the best interpretation. Socrates is about to show Agathon that he is wrong about *Eros*. If that is so, then Socrates is not serious when he offers such extreme praise – an 'amazing speech' (198a6). But if we appreciate that Socrates once thought as Agathon did (201e), Socrates' compliment can be taken in a more genuine light. Socrates was once persuaded by Agathon's position.

As we transition to the discussion between Socrates and Diotima, there are several features of the preceding discussion that we ought to keep in mind. First, there is the common idea that divination consists of a great deal of ambiguity. The seer's pronouncements are difficult to interpret. We saw this when Aristophanes' characterized the soul's longing for its other half.

Second, medicine and divination share an affinity. We see this in both Eryximachus' and Agathon's speech. Plato, to be sure, does not deny this affinity, and indeed often conceptualizes them in tandem. Whereas medicine improves bodily health, divination improves the health of one's relationship to the gods.

Finally, we see that divination is not only a descriptive practice, that is, it does not merely access the gods. Rather, divination is able to placate the gods, and improve humankind's relationship to them. Plato, as we see in the *Republic* and *Laws*, rejects that one can bribe the gods. But this does not mean that the seer's directives, to make the appropriate sacrifices for instance, cannot improve humankind's relationship to the gods.

Part II – The Figure of Diotima

In this section, as I draw out the exchange between Socrates and Diotima, I seek to establish Diotima's mantic credentials by appeal to three pieces of evidence. First, there is her origin and previous achievements. Second, there is her discussion of *daimons* and the claim that through them all prophecy passes (203a). In this section, I will also rehearse her account of the lower mysteries. Finally, in the ascent section, there is the mystical imagery in the final step toward the Form of Beauty. I will examine how this final step echoes the Eleusinian mysteries. After rehearsing this evidence, I will pose a question – why is Diotima appealed to in the first place? There are many possible answers to this question, but one topic that too often gets neglected is how Diotima herself has come to know the Form of Beauty. Given that so few people, if any, can ever ascend to knowing the Form of Beauty, and given her occupation as a seer, it is reasonable to conclude that Diotima has divined such information from heavenly sources.

Two puzzles emerge. First, divination accesses the will of the gods, but in the ascent section, it is clear that Diotima has come into contact with the intelligible realm. In what way can we conceptualize a seer's relationship to the intelligible realm, a realm normally only accessible by a philosopher? Second, and deepening the first puzzle, Diotima's exchange with Socrates shows that she has consciously reflected and reasoned

about her divinations, but this is an impossibility given the epistemological constraints Plato imposes upon seers in other dialogues.

i. Diotima's Introduction and Credentials (201d-202a)

Diotima is introduced directly after Socrates runs an *elenchus* on Agathon. Agathon submits to two incompatible theses regarding *Eros*. First, love is always love of *something*, and second, the beloved is always something that love lacks (200e). Socrates demonstrates that such convictions are incompatible given that *Eros* is beautiful. Socrates states, "Love needs beauty, then, and does not have it" (*endeēs ar' esti kai ouk ekhei ho Erōs kallos*) (201b3). Moreover, since everything that is beautiful is also good, *Eros* does not have goodness. This impasse triggers the final speech wherein Socrates immediately appeals to the wisdom of a third party – Diotima. Superficially, this is so because Socrates once believed what Agathon believed, namely that *Eros* is perfectly good, beautiful, and virtuous (201e). It was only after engaging with Diotima that Socrates came to understand the paucity of such an account.

It is formative that Diotima is presented as a seer.³³¹ Her name – Diotima – means 'Zeus-honour', thereby implying divine favor.³³² She hails from Mantinea whose etymology stems from *mantis*, which means 'seer'.³³³ She prevented a plague for ten years by directing the Athenians toward the appropriate sacrifices (201d). According to Socrates, Diotima is the person who taught him "the art of love" (*ta erotika*) (201d5). In

³³¹ Halperin submits that "Diotima's vocation is to be explained at least in part by reference to her gender, not *vice versa*" (124). If Plato was set on a diviner of sorts to whom Socrates would appeal, he could have just as easily made Diotima a man. There is myriad evidence of male diviners, both in Plato and other texts.

³³² Nussbaum (1986) 177.

³³³ Hobbs (2006) 264 also points out that Diotima is referred to as "xene" (201e). This connects her to the Eleatic Stranger in the *Sophist* and *Statesman*, and the Athenian in the *Laws*. Hobbs goes on to say that her closest equivalent is the seer at *Meno* 81a, mostly likely for epistemological reasons.

fact, she is characterized as “wise about many things” (*hē tauta te sophē ēn kai alla polla*, 201d3), which only serves to ground her exemplary nature.

Currently in vogue is the notion that Diotima is Plato’s fictional creation.³³⁴ Her very existence may be tailored to the author’s needs. The presence of Diotima enables Socrates to engage in dialectic with someone. The alternative would be to give a speech on the nature of *eros* like everyone else. We know that Socrates vilifies the value of speech-making in relation to the possibilities inherent to philosophical conversation. Furthermore, Diotima’s religiosity permits Plato to subvert the dominant religious institutions of Athens, thereby creating space for philosophy to emerge and entrench itself.

If Diotima is merely a rhetorical device, the divined wisdom she depends upon is not anchored in reality. Yet even though it may be the case that Diotima did not physically exist, it is not clear this constitutes a serious objection to the main thesis. That Plato would utilize his artistic license in creating such a figure betrays the recognition that his audience would understand the conceptual possibility of such a figure.

ii. Eros as a Daimon (202a-209e)

In this section, I will examine Diotima’s initial account about *eros*, paying careful attention to the intermediary nature of *eros* as well as Diotima’s reasoning capacities. Diotima rejects the thesis that love is both beautiful and good. Socrates then claims the opposite as a matter of disjunctive elimination (201e). Diotima rejects this move as well

³³⁴ Unlike other characters that populate Plato’s dialogues, there is no strong extra-textual evidence of Diotima. For much of the 19th century, scholars tended to grant Diotima some measure of historical existence. Taylor (1926), for one, subscribes to the historical reality of an actual conversation between Diotima and Socrates. In a similar way, the seers of tragedy, while often declaring remarkable prophecies, pivot on the ordinary ability of lay seers to prophesize. Given the public nature of drama in Classical Greece, there was no doubt a symbiotic relationship between real seers and fictitious ones.

and establishes a middle ground between knowledge and ignorance, namely correct judgment. The ignorant masses believe *Eros* is a god, but they are irrelevant. Diotima points out that the only people who matter are those individuals with knowledge (202b). According to Diotima, *Eros* is not a god. Rather, she claims that *Eros* is a *daimon*, an entity that occupies a middle ground between humankind and the gods. Note then how *eros* is an intermediary in a dual sense. Epistemologically, *eros* is situated between knowledge and ignorance.³³⁵ Metaphysically, *eros* is situated between the gods and humankind.

Indeed, according to Diotima, any communication humankind has with the gods must travel through *daimons*. She states “Through them [*daimons*] all divination passes, through them the art of priests in sacrifice and ritual, in enchantment, prophecy, and sorcery” (*dia toutou kai hē mantikē pasa khōrei kai hē tōn hierēōn tekhnē tōn te peri tas thusias kai teletas kai tas epōdas kai tēn manteian pasan kai goēteian*, 203a1-2). Since the gods are superlative, they never directly interact with humankind, hence the role for *daimons*. Diotima goes on to contrast religious knowledge with technical knowledge. Whereas a person who has the former is a “man of the spirit” (*daimonios anēr*, 203a6), the latter is a mere “mechanic” (*banausos*, 203a7).³³⁶

Diotima next provides Socrates with a mythical account of the origins of *Eros* (203b-d). As the child of *Penia* (‘poverty’), *Eros* is always lacking, always in need. His

³³⁵ Sheffield (2006b) 64-65 notes that “Socrates does not explicitly ascribe correct belief to Eros (it is only a parallel, albeit a significant choice of one)” (64) but goes on to say that one might reasonably think that “correct belief is one outcome of Eros’ philosophical activity” (64). She cites the slave boy in the *Meno* as an example of philosophical engagement that engenders true belief, but only after a long trial-and-error process.

³³⁶ McPherran (2006) 91 points out this is an allusion to Eryximachus, specifically those doctors who do not integrate religiosity into their expertise. According to McPherran, these spiritual people are those with the ability to philosophize.

appearance is ugly.³³⁷ Like his father *Poros* ('resource'), however, *Eros* has guile and seeks after wisdom. In other words, *Eros* is both lacking knowledge and yet conspiring for it.

Not only does Diotima enlighten Socrates about the nature of *Eros*, but she also explains the deficiencies of Socrates' own account. He was, she claims, mistaken in focusing on 'being loved' as opposed to the proper *explanadum*, namely that of 'being a lover' (204c). Socrates acquiesces and pointedly turns the discussion toward the human realm – what use do humans have for *eros*? What is most interesting about Diotima's reply is that she replaces beauty for goodness. The lover desires beautiful objects to become his own, but for what purpose? If beauty is replaced by goodness, then the answer is easy – happiness. (205a).³³⁸

Of course, insofar as everyone wants happiness, are we then forced to conclude that all people are in love? There follows a provocative analogy between *eros* and *poiesis*. *Poiesis*, strictly speaking, means 'making' and this encompasses all instances of creation, whether literary or professional. However, the more precise meaning confines the domain to the literary.

In the same way, even though it might be trivially true that everyone is in love in the general sense of wanting happiness, the more specific conception of love does not include all activities oriented toward achieving happiness – making money, attending festivals, playing sports. Rather, in the strict sense, everyone loves the good (206a). The

³³⁷ One cannot help but see this description as alluding to Socrates.

³³⁸ A.E. Taylor (1926) makes a strong identity claim between the form of *Kalon* in the *Symposium* and the form of *Agathon* in the *Republic*. Although Lear (2006) 102-103 thinks the replacement is *ad hoc*. She urges that we do not collapse this claim with those in other dialogues, like the *Republic* or *Phaedrus*. Rather, she maintain that the answer for the transition lie in Diotima's efforts to better communicate to Socrates. He is clearly having trouble understanding Diotima's position and the substitution thus functions as a means for Socrates to better understand.

exchange culminates in Diotima's definition of love, which is "wanting to possess the good forever" (*ho erōs tou to agathon hautō einai aei.*) (206a11). Lovers pursue this by "giving birth to beauty" (*esti gar touto tokos en kalō*) (206b8); this is the first instance where Socrates expresses genuine confusion rather than mere surprise over a claim made by Diotima. He implores for divination, no doubt an allusion to Diotima's expertise, in order to understand.

What does it mean for a lover to give birth to beauty? Diotima introduces the concept of reproduction. In the first straightforward sense of physical reproduction, Diotima claims that such an activity is the mortal version of immortality. This drive toward immortality is characteristic of all mortal creatures, even non-human animals (207d).

To further substantiate her case that all mortal things desire immortality, Diotima appeals to the human desire for glory, fame, and eternal recognition. For Diotima, heroes like Achilles would not have sacrificed themselves unless they believed their memory would live on for generations.³³⁹ Monuments to such figures and literary works preserve these memories. Diotima believes that those 'children' that come from the mind – thoughts, laws, customs – are more valuable than mere physical procreation because their creation is unique to us as humans. Nevertheless, both physical and psychic lovers are to be distinguished, and subordinated to, the philosophical lover, which arises in the ascent section.

c. The Ascent Section (210a-212c)

³³⁹ Consider further the notion of memory, particularly as it relates to the gods in Hesiod's *Theogony*. The Muses were born from the union of Memory (*Mnemosyne*) and Zeus and inspire both poets and kings. In the proem, Hesiod writes that if the poets "sing of the famous deeds of men of old" as well as the Gods in Olympus, they will forget their troubles and have peace of mind. Here, the relationship between memory and forgetting is central. See Skarsouli (2006).

Diotima twice sketches the different stages in the ascent toward the form of beauty. She first gives a more detailed account (210a-212a), but within this she also provides a short synopsis (211b-d) not altogether identical with what we see in the longer account. The lover's first stage is that of a single body (210a4-8). He must begin as a young person, and if he is led correctly, his love will give rise to beautiful *logoi*. If pursued correctly, the lover will then move to the next stage, which is to love two bodies rather than one. This tiny, almost insignificant step comes out in the reprieve (211c4). After grasping that beauty in other bodies is equivalent, the lover will extend himself to all beautiful bodies (210a8-b6). One body will then seem inconsequential in comparison. Note how the ascent begins with familiar objects of love, and only then transitions to increasingly unfamiliar, less accessible, objects.³⁴⁰

The next stage constitutes a transition from body to soul. The lover will come to recognize that a beautiful soul is more valuable than a beautiful body. The lover will try to give birth to *logoi* that will improve young men (210c). Of note, this stage is absent from the summary. Nevertheless, in improving young men, the lover will be forced (*anagkaste*) to witness beautiful activities and *nomoi*, and to see that all of this is beautiful (210c4-6). After activities, the lover is led to various sorts of knowledge (210c6-7), the idea here being that there is beauty not in a single body, soul, or activity, but in many different kinds of knowledge. By focusing on this "great sea of beauty" (*to polu pelagos tetrammenos tou kalou*) (210d4), the lover will produce many beautiful *logoi* and thoughts (*dianoemata*).

In the final step, the philosopher "all of a sudden (*exaiphnes*)...catch[es] sight of something wonderfully beautiful in its nature (*katopsetai ti thaumaston tēn phusin*

³⁴⁰ This is akin to the development of the initiate in the Mysteries. Burkert (1985) 285-90.

kalon)” (210e6-211a1). This object which was the *telos* of all his previous erotic endeavors, is unchanging and stable. It is qualitatively different than all previous instantiations of beauty, and seeing the form of beauty enables the lover to give birth to “true virtue” (*aretēn alēthē*) (212a7) as opposed to images of virtue.³⁴¹ Such a person, if they could progress to such heights, would become godlike (212b).³⁴²

It has long been noted that the ascent section draws upon religious language and imagery, particularly those of the Eleusinian mysteries.³⁴³ In Classical Greece, the canonical way of honoring the divine was through animal sacrifice, usually state sponsored. Priests and leaders of political office conducted such rituals. Mystery cults subverted this institution by removing the intermediary and permitting those who were not Athenian citizens (i.e., women, the poor, even slaves) to interact directly with the gods. There were three roles at the annual festival at Eleusis. The initiates of a given year were led by a group of acknowledged leaders whilst being viewed by a third party of watchers. Having formerly participated as initiates, the watchers returned to the festival because it was understood that such an event was worth repeating. All three parties, it seems, learned something of value during the festival.

Diotima’s speech must be understood against the backdrop of the Eleusinian mysteries. Consider the ascent passage. Diotima’s prefaces it with the following:

Even you, Socrates, could probably come to be initiated into these rites of love. But as for the purpose of these rites when they are done correctly –

³⁴¹ Note that throughout the ascent passage, when the lover’s erotic attachment produces speeches, or virtue, Plato characterizes the process as ‘giving birth’ (*genesthai*), which fits with Diotima’s repeated appeals to reproduction.

³⁴² It is left ambiguous then whether Diotima actually thinks someone can achieve such knowledge or whether it is a conceptual impossibility for humans on earth. Blondell (2006) 147-179

³⁴³ Evans writes, “By far the most important mystic cult during Plato’s time, and indeed throughout most of antiquity, was the mystery cult of Demeter at Eleusis, a small town sixteen miles outside of Athens” (5). Evans (2006) argues for a connection between Diotima and the yearly celebrations of Demeter at Eleusis. Halperin, as well, states that Plato uses “Eleusinian imagery in speaking of *eros*” (127).

that is the final and highest mystery, and I don't know if you are capable of it. I myself will tell you, she said, and I won't stint any effort. And you must try to follow if you can. (210a1-6)

tauta men oun ta erōtika isōs, ō Sōkrates, kan su muētheiēs: ta de telea kai epoptika, hōn heneka kai tauta estin, ean tis orthōs metiē, ouk oid' ei hoios t' an eiēs. erō men oun, ephē, egō kai prothumias ouden apoleipsō: peirō de hepesthai, an hoios te ēs.

Analogous to the performance of the mysteries, Socrates is the novice who will be initiated into the mysteries of love by Diotima, the acknowledged expert.

Only after the initiate has been taught to appreciate the beauty of someone else can he or she come to realize that beauty of one body is analogous to beauty of bodies in general. The acknowledged expert falls away and the initiate ascends on their own to the innermost secrets (by analogy, the form of beauty).³⁴⁴ This helps us understand the teleology of the ascent. One of the particularities of the ascent passage is that although the form of beauty is the final end, the initiate, in the earlier stages of the ascent, cannot have had an intention to arrive at the form of beauty.³⁴⁵

The generic concept of teleology states that an action is performed for the sake of some end, where that end is known and intended. But one does not know the form of beauty until the final stage of the ascent. Indeed, its effect is transformative and beyond anything the initiate has heretofore experienced.³⁴⁶ Nevertheless, the ascent is still teleological in the sense that an action brings about a result through the performance of some function, and that that result acts as a criterion for evaluating other performances of

³⁴⁴ Nussbaum (1986) characterizes the third and fourth steps as considered 'decisions' made by the initiate. 179-180.

³⁴⁵ Contra Nussbaum (1986) 183 who holds the part of the initiate's motivation is the form and its attributes.

³⁴⁶ Following Payne (2008) 123-145 who labels the generic concept of teleology – "agency-centered" (135)

the same function.³⁴⁷ In other words, although each stage of the ascent has value in itself, it can also develop the appropriate capacity required to ascend to the next stage. Not every lover of a body will rise to the next stage; the lover must love in the correct way in order to develop the capacity to love all beautiful bodies, and so on up the ladder.

Thus, Diotima's speech clearly references the performance of the Eleusinian mysteries. Since it was taboo to ever speak of the mysteries, we know little about the specifics of what occurred as one moved toward the higher mysteries. In the same way, we know very little, without actually experiencing it ourselves, what it actually means to reach the final stage of the ascent.

Part III – Evaluating the Status of Diotima

In the previous section, I posed a question concerning Socrates' motivation for introducing a figure like Diotima. One could take a variety of positions, but I want to focus on Diotima's occupation as a seer, and how this relates to the content of her speech. This is so in two senses. First, recall that one of the precepts established in the earlier speeches is that divination is an indeterminate *technē*. Not only for a technical seer to accurately gauge divine will, but those who are left to interpret the pronouncements of possession seers must cope with poetically ambiguous language. Diotima, however, flouts this ubiquitous feature of divination. After she defines *eros* as wanting to possess the good forever (206a8), Socrates implores for divination in order to help to understand. Diotima's response is quite instructive. She responds that she will express herself "more clearly" (*saphesteron*) (206c2). She proceeds to extrapolate the idea that all humans are pregnant.

³⁴⁷ Adopted from Payne (2008) 124-125.

Second, Diotima's speech, as retold by Socrates, is a reasoned account. Not only does she criticize Socrates' position, but she offers her own as a viable alternative. Indeed, Diotima is at her most dialogical when she is engaging, and critiquing, Socrates' account of *eros*. Although the ascent section constitutes the essence of *eros*, the earlier discussion of the lower mysteries ought not to be dismissed as irrelevant. In fact, the lower mysteries are descriptively true for *hoi polloi*. The ascent passage is directed at the rare and exemplary philosopher.

Nevertheless, it ought to be pointed out that Diotima's arguments are actually fallacious. For instance, Agathon claimed that *Eros* lacks and so desires some beautiful things (201c), but Diotima equivocates, and transforms this to mean that *Eros* lacks any beauty whatsoever. In this way, it is not a god, but a *daimon*. Another example comes later when Diotima prevaricates from the claim that we all desire good things to the claim that we desire good things forever, hence the introduction of immortality (207a).³⁴⁸ In neither case does Socrates object to Diotima's modifications.

On the other hand, Diotima is repeatedly lauded by Socrates. She is called "wise" (*sophē* 201d3) and "most wise" (*sophōtatē* 208b8). Moreover, it is not as though Socrates is innocent from utilizing fallacious argument himself (199d-201c).³⁴⁹ One good way to explain Socrates' use of fallacious argument is his conviction that one must tailor one's argument to the audience. It seems fair to ascribe a similar idea to Diotima.³⁵⁰

³⁴⁸ Ioncescu (2007) 37 offers these examples, and like myself seeks to explain them without rejecting the veracity of Diotima's personage. One point Ioncescu discusses is that a seer like Diotima is unconcerned with arguing for her position, as opposed to revealing it in some roundabout way, as befitting her status as a seer.

³⁴⁹ Sprague (1962) 1-87.

³⁵⁰ Given the conversational participants in the *Symposium*, along with the others who do not speak, but are in attendance, it seems fair that Socrates would 'talk down' to their level. Similarly, since Diotima is introduced in contradistinction to Socrates (who initially thought as Agathon did), she can be characterized as 'talking down' to Socrates, at least initially.

In fact, throughout the exchange between Socrates and Diotima, there are repeated references to sophistry. Recall that one of *Eros*' parents was *Poros*, (or resource). In Diotima's description of *Poros*, she states that He is both a "lover of wisdom" (*philosophōn*) and a "sophist" (*sophistēs*) (203d7-8). Socrates refers to Diotima as the "perfect sophist" (*teleoi sophistai*) (208c3). Finally, Alcibiades makes several assertions that make Socrates sound as though he were a sophist. Socrates' love is "deceitful" (*exapatōn* 222b3); he is a crafty schemer (213c). But if we keep in mind that the ends of each – *Eros*, Socrates, and Diotima – are laudable, then their willingness to engage in sophistical techniques are pedagogical, and therefore justified in a cursory fashion.

In line with this argument, Ionescu gives three reasons why Socrates appeals to Diotima. All of them, to a degree, have to do with pedagogy. First, Socrates' interlocutors are better persuaded by hearing that Socrates underwent an initiation, and moved from ignorance to knowledge. Second, by replacing Agathon with Socrates, and introducing Diotima, Plato is able to deliver a more technical and sophisticated account than would have been possible had Socrates directly engaged with Agathon. Finally, Diotima represents a religious perspective and so enables Plato to attract a greater audience. In specifying the differences between Socrates and Diotima, Ionescu writes,

Diotima speaks with the authority of a priestess who is already wise (201d3, 208b8), while Socrates receives his teaching as a philosopher, i.e., a lover of wisdom who is not yet wise (39).

Both parties act as intermediaries between the divine and the human realms. The difference between them is that the seer lowers the divine by means of divination, while the philosopher shows us the way upward by means of argument.

These reasons fail to do justice to the fundamental strangeness of Diotima, particularly in the way that Plato normally conceptualizes divination. Recall that the *Phaedrus* (244a8-d5) holds that there are only two kinds of divination – possession and technical. Diotima most resembles a possession seer. This is so for several reasons. For one, she is a woman, and women tend to be possession seers. Second, Plato privileges possession divination over its technical counterpart. Diotima speaks correctly about the nature of *eros*, and even about the intelligible realm. Such superlative subject matter is appropriate to the highest form of divination. Third, there is an analogy between the notion of *eros* as *daimon*, and the possessed seer, in that both serve as intermediaries between the human and divine realms. Finally, mystical elements pertaining to the Eleusinian mysteries, particularly in the transition to the Form of Beauty, coalesce with the notions of possession and *mania*.

Diotima's eccentricity centers on her ability to critically reflect on the content of her own divinations. Recall that one of the main features of the possession seer is that she cannot interpret her divinations, either during or after the prophetic episode. This is so because the possessed seer has temporarily lost her sense of self. This means that the possessed seer requires someone else to interpret her prophetic utterances. But this is not the case with Diotima! She is able to evaluate them herself. Moreover, she is able to contextualize her divinations with current beliefs and engage with Socrates over his own beliefs about *eros*.

Indeed, Ionescu's claim that Diotima is a seer "who is already wise" (39) presupposes a host of questions and concerns. For one, we know that according to Plato, seers can never be wise. The best a seer can ever hope to achieve is a collection of

superlative true beliefs. Since Diotima can argue for her position, she is not a seer of the usual Platonic sort. In fact, in her ability to argue and extrapolate a position, she seems to act much more like Socrates, say in the *Apology*, despite the fact that she is not a philosopher.

The ascent section characterizes the development of the philosophical lover. There is no discussion of other routes to the apex of the ascent. How did Diotima become so wise about the nature of *eros*? There are two possibilities. Either she divined it in the ordinary way of a seer, or she herself was initiated and rose step-by-step to the intelligible realm. In fact, both have something in common, specifically the idea of a formal progression toward a superlative end. Consider that the possessed seer cannot simply access divine will whenever she wishes. Rather, consulting the gods was a highly circumscribed affair.

It might be helpful to ask where Socrates himself resides in the ascent. Recall that the entire conversation with Diotima took place in the distant past, some 25 years before the symposium at Agathon's house.³⁵¹ In this way, Socrates has had a quarter century to develop his capacity as a philosophical lover. What kind of progress, if any, has he made? To be sure, one option is to place Socrates at the highest stage of the ascent, having come into contact with the intelligible realm.³⁵² His possession of the art of love might consist of knowing the form of beauty.³⁵³ Another possibility is to emphasize Socrates' affinity with *eros*, as perpetually seeking after wisdom, but failing to attain it. This coalesces with our general sense of what it means to be Socratic.

³⁵¹ Blondell (2006) 152.

³⁵² Robin (1908) 196-198; Burnet (1928) 140; Taylor (1960) 232-233; Lowenstam (1985) 92-93; Nussbaum (1986) 183-184; Gill (1990b) 80; and Hadot (2002) 48.

³⁵³ Blondell (2006) 156-158 enumerates all the reasons why Socrates might reside at the highest stage.

Still others try and synthesize the two, insisting that Socrates occupies “all of the steps on the ‘ladder of love’” (Blondell 174).³⁵⁴ Although Socrates has been to the apex and glimpsed the form of beauty, he is still human, and must descend. To be sure, the argument is not that Socrates occupies each stage of the ascent all at once. If one is held captive by the form of beauty, one will not notice particular instantiations of beauty like Alcibiades. Nevertheless, since Socrates is still mortal, he cannot unceasingly contemplate the intelligible realm, but must descend at various times as befitting his nature. None of this precludes the possibility that Diotima can be given a similar treatment. Like Socrates, she has both come into contact with the intelligible realm, and descended to a lower stage in order to dialogically engage with Socrates.

Conclusion

Although I take Diotima to be a Platonic construction, her character pivots on what Plato thinks is permissible. We have seen that she flouts the ordinary constraints Plato imposes on divination. This is so in two senses. First, she speaks clearly and explains herself. Second, in her knowledge of *eros* and her ability to dialogically engage with Socrates, Diotima flouts the epistemological constraints of the possession seer. In fact, in a very real way, she seems more akin to a philosopher like Socrates. Not only does she argue like a philosopher but the content of her wisdom – the nature of *eros* and the intelligible realm – befits a philosopher.

This analogy might not seem so counter-intuitive if we emphasize that the opposite is true, namely that the genuine philosopher enjoys continuity with the exemplary seer. Indeed, there is a great deal of evidence throughout the dialogues that support philosophy’s close connection to divination. In the final chapter, I examine how

³⁵⁴ Blondell (2006) 175-177 and Lowenstam (1985) 94-98 argue for this thesis.

Socrates, Plato's paradigmatic philosopher, relates to religion and to divination more specifically. His *daimonion*, or divine sign, is notoriously obscure, yet it shares a kinship with divination.

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Chapter 7 – Socrates, Divination, and the *Daimonion*

Abstract

In this chapter, I argue that Socrates' *daimonion* cannot be grafted onto the distinction between technical and possession divination. Nevertheless, this does not mean that Socrates is functionally identical to an exemplary seer like Diotima, even though both individuals can successfully interpret and reflect on their divine experiences. This is so because Socrates' *daimonion* exclusively negates Socrates from acting. This is unique to Plato's Socrates.

Introduction

In the last twenty years, scholarly interest in Socratic religiosity has witnessed a healthy resurgence.³⁵⁵ This has dismantled the traditional idea of Socrates as the consummate philosopher-*cum*-secularist.³⁵⁶ Rather than focusing exclusively on ideas like Socratic intellectualism, greater attention to the religious dimension of Socrates' thought has created a richer, more paradoxical, figure. One consequence of this new

³⁵⁵ Brickhouse and Smith' *Socrates on Trial* (1989); McPherrren's *The Religion of Socrates* (1996); Smith and Woodruff's *Reason and Religion in Socratic Philosophy* (2000); and Smith and Destrée' *Socrates' Divine Sign: Religion, Practice, and Value in Socratic Philosophy* (2005) are representative examples.

³⁵⁶ Vlastos is the canonical example.

attention is that a number of interesting puzzles have emerged – the rationality of religious belief, epistemological issues associated with divine possession, and finally, the very nature of Socrates’ strangeness in the context of Plato’s dialogues. One focal point of such discussions is Socrates’ divine sign – his *daimonion*.³⁵⁷ Questions abound concerning the precise nature of this sign. Is it meant earnest or ironic? What is its relationship to the Socratic *elenchus*? What are its epistemological consequences, both for Socrates and for us as interpreters?

These are all interesting questions, and I touch on them throughout this final chapter. My aim is interrogate Socrates’ association with divination, which helps inform, or enlighten, his *daimonion*, and his religiosity more generally. Three considerations have prompted this thesis. First, generally speaking, Plato thinks that philosophy and divination are similar insofar as both are products of madness.³⁵⁸ Second, and more concretely, Socrates self-identifies as a seer.³⁵⁹ He is also interpreted as such by others.³⁶⁰ Finally, there are continuities between possession divination and the sort of Socratic ‘possession’ that the *daimonion* instantiates. First, I rehearse the features of Socrates’ *daimonion*, specifically the account given in the *Apology*, since in many ways it provides the most explicit articulation of the *daimonion*.

I also extrapolate Socrates’ identification with divination. One notable feature of Socrates is that he often identifies himself with various occupations. For instance, he self-

³⁵⁷ cf. *Apology* 31c-e, 40a-c, *Euthyphro* 3b, *Euthydemus* 272e, *Republic* VI 496c, *Phaedrus* 242 b-c; *Theaetetus* 151a. The *daimonion* is also mentioned at *Alcibiades* I 103a-b, 105 d-e, 12c-d, as well as *Theages* 128d-131a. Since the authenticity of both is considered doubtful, I exclude them from my argument.

³⁵⁸ cf. *Phaedrus* 244a-249e.

³⁵⁹ cf. *Phaedo* 85b4; *Phaedrus* 242c.

³⁶⁰ cf. *Cratylus* 396d.

identifies as a gadfly³⁶¹ and a midwife.³⁶² Such is the case as well with his interlocutors. Euthyphro refers to Socrates as a Daedalus³⁶³; Meno compares Socrates to an electric ray.³⁶⁴ Each case is rich and deserves close study. Nevertheless, there is something exceptionally relevant about Socrates' identification with divination. This is so not only because religious considerations are absolutely central to Socrates' philosophical mission but also due to the frequency in which divination arises in other contexts.³⁶⁵

I conclude that Socratic 'possession' is not necessarily divergent from the experiences of *exemplary* seers like Diotima in the *Symposium*, which I investigated in the previous chapter. Although, fundamentally, Socrates is a philosopher, he is *not* an anomaly impossible to replicate. Keep in mind that it is his explicit aim to engender philosophy in the souls' of others. Still, what marks Socrates as unique is the essentially negative function of the *daimonion*.³⁶⁶ There is no counterpart for this in divination.

Part I – Socrates' *Daimonion* in the *Apology*

Directly after running an *elenchus* on Meletus, Socrates generalizes the discussion to his atrocious reputation. From whence did this reputation originate? As Socrates extrapolates his divinely-ordained mission to examine others as well as himself (28e), he points out that these dialogical investigations have not occurred in the political sphere. Socrates has failed to engage with the affairs of the city because of his *daimonion*. He states:

³⁶¹ cf. *Apology* 31c.

³⁶² cf. *Theaetetus* 149a.

³⁶³ cf. *Euthyphro* 11b.

³⁶⁴ cf. *Meno* 80a.

³⁶⁵ For instance, it is deployed as a *technē* in arguments about the nature of moral knowledge (*Laches* 195e; *Ion* 531b; 539). It is also deployed epistemologically, that is, as a sort of intermediary between knowledge and ignorance (*Symposium* 203a; *Meno* 99c). Finally, it is characterized as a form of laudable madness (*Phaedrus* 244a).

³⁶⁶ The exclusively negative function of the *daimonion* differentiates Plato's depiction of it from that of Xenophon. Dorion (2003) 169-192.

I have a divine or spiritual sign which Meletus has ridiculed in his deposition. This began when I was a child. It is a voice, and whenever it speaks it turns me away from something I am about to do, but it never encourages me to do anything (31d1-4).

hoti moi theion ti kai daimonion gignetai phōnē, ho dē kai en tē graphē epikōmōdōn Melētos egrapsato. emoi de tout' estin ek paidos arxamenon, phōnē tis gignomenē, hē hotan genētai, aei apotrepei me touto ho an mellō pratein, protrepei de oupote.

Four features of the *daimonion* arise in this quotation: the *daimonion* is a sign, it has occurred to Socrates since childhood, it only discourages, and finally, he is charged for impiety, at least in part, due to its existence.

1. *The daimonion is a sign*

First, the *daimonion* is a sign (*semeion*) and often manifests as a sound (*phōnē*).³⁶⁷ This is crucial because a sound is not necessarily linguistic in nature. In other words, what occurs to Socrates is not something propositional, but an auditory signal that indirectly triggers Socrates to stop.³⁶⁸

Socrates does not characterize his experience in the substantive language of a god or a *daimon*. Rather, he most often uses the adjectival *to daimonion*, which is functionally equivalent to ‘*to daimonion semeion*’ – A divine sign. Only once does Socrates refer to a *theion*.³⁶⁹ Is the exception that proves the rule? As a matter of fact, an alternative interpretation holds the *daimonion* equivalent to *theos*.³⁷⁰ The two terms, at the time, were used synonymously. Whether or not the *daimonion* is a sign or an actual god/spirit is negligible in the context of Socrates’ self-awareness. Socrates, in his ability to articulate and reflect on what happens to him, recognizes the appearance of the *daimonion*.

³⁶⁷ cf. *Apology* 31d3, *Phaedrus* 242c2.

³⁶⁸ Brisson (2003) 2.

³⁶⁹ cf. *Apology* 31c8. I am indebted to Brisson (2005) 1-12 for much of this discussion.

³⁷⁰ Dorion (2003) 180-183; Macnaghten (1914) 185-189.

Contrast this with possessed diviners who lose all semblance of self-consciousness, and are thus, for Plato, unable to interpret their divinations.³⁷¹

There is still a good deal of debate surrounding the nature of the god that comes to Socrates. Is it Apollo? Some other god in the Greek Pantheon? Apollo is an attractive option; after all, it is from Apollo representative – the Pythia – that has triggered Socrates' dialogical investigations for moral knowledge.³⁷² Nevertheless, there are good reasons to reject the thesis that Apollo is the god who communicates with Socrates. I defend this idea in the next section, insisting that neither Apollo nor another traditional Greek deity is responsible for the *daimonion*.³⁷³ Rather, all that can be adduced from the textual evidence is that the god embodies those characteristics that Socrates ascribes to the divine. For one, the gods appears to be omniscient. This is based on their knowledge of the future.³⁷⁴

2. *The daimonion has occurred since childhood*

The *daimonion* has occurred since Socrates' childhood. This has the consequence of altering our understanding of the Delphic Oracle story. The standard reading holds that Socrates only began his divinely-ordained dialogical investigations into himself and the Athenian citizenry *after* he was informed of the Pythia's oracle. Given that he has

³⁷¹ cf. *Timaeus* 71d-72a.

³⁷² Van Reil (2012) 57-58 points out that if Apollo was the god that sent the divine sign, it would mean that Socrates ought to undergo the type of possession that the Delphic Oracle experiences. Since he does not, Apollo is not the origin of the *daimonion*.

³⁷³ Brisson (2005) 2-4 thinks that the god of the *daimonion* is a traditional god, but he does not specify whether it is Apollo or some other traditional deity.

³⁷⁴ McPherran (2005) 21-25 thinks that whatever else, the origin of the *daimonion* must be an omniscient god.

experienced the *daimonion* all of his life, it is puzzling why so many scholars attempt to hold the *daimonion* together with Socrates' philosophical mission.³⁷⁵

Since the power of the *daimonion* is based on repeated success throughout Socrates' life, like others, I urge that we interpret the *daimonion* empirically.³⁷⁶ Although induction does not guarantee certainty, Socrates has yet to experience the *daimonion*'s getting it wrong. The fallibility of the *daimonion* emerges in Socrates' discussion of death in the *Apology*. In the *Apology*, Socrates initially expresses agnosticism about the nature of death. He states, "No one knows whether death may not be the greatest of all blessings for a man" (*oide men gar oudeis ton thanaton oud' ei tugkhanei tō anthrōpō pantōn megiston on tōn agathōn*) (29a6-8). In other words, death may be a dreamless sleep or a meeting with mythical heroes, or it may not. It may be exactly as everyone thinks. The important Socratic point is that one should not fear what one does not know. Yet, later, when he sentenced to death, he cites his *daimonion* as "convincing proof" (*mega moi tekmerion*) (40c1) that death is not an evil for the good person.

3. *The daimonion only discourages*

The *daimonion* only discourages. It never induces. It appears whenever some wrong might occur to Socrates. This is why, as I alluded to earlier, Socrates has not partaken in public affairs. He would have long ago been put to death. Socrates would then have benefited no one.³⁷⁷ The notion that the *daimonion* prevents Socrates from

³⁷⁵ The argument in favor of such a connection is that all examples of the *daimonion* in Plato yield philosophical consideration. One, thus, wonders in what circumstances the *daimonion* would arise in Socrates prior to his philosophical mission took off.

³⁷⁶ Brickhouse and Smith (2005) 44-55 contrast this approach with what they call the reductionist account, which explains away the *daimonion* by appeal to irony, and the interpretationist account, which claims that the *daimonion* means nothing until Socrates interprets with his reason, and finally the foundationalist account, which holds that Socrates' reason ground all of his supernatural beliefs, including that of the *daimonion*.

³⁷⁷ cf. *Apology* 31e

experiencing a wrong emerges again later in the *Apology* after Socrates has been sentenced to death.³⁷⁸ Although conventional wisdom holds that death is an evil, the *daimonion* has not stopped Socrates, thereby giving him reason to think that death is not an evil.

Although the present context is charged with significance, Socrates asserts that his *daimonion* emerges even in negligible cases. He states:

At all previous times my familiar prophetic power, my spiritual manifestation (*hē tou daimoniou*), frequently opposed me, *even in small matters (panu epi smikrois)*, when I was about to do something wrong, but now that, as you can see for yourselves, I was faced with what one might think, and what is generally thought to be, the worst of evils, my divine sign (*to tou theion sēmeion*) has not opposed me... (40a3-7, italics added)

This is a puzzling claim. Does the *daimonion* prevent Socrates from something banal? A certain dish for dinner? A certain route to the park? This does not coalesce with the claim that the *daimonion* only emerges in order to prevent Socrates from experiencing some evil. The most attractive answer to this puzzle is to integrate this claim into the textual evidence we have from other Platonic dialogues.

In the *Phaedrus*, for instance, the *daimonion* comes to Socrates only as he traversing the river. Granted, he comes to recognize that he has wronged *Eros*, a god, in his first speech. But, importantly, what the *daimonion* prevents him from doing is merely to cross a river. In fact, the *Phaedrus* contradicts what Socrates says about the *daimonion* in the *Apology*, namely that the *daimonion* emerges in order to prevent Socrates from committing a wrong. In the *Phaedrus*, Socrates has already delivered his Lysian speech against *eros*. Consequently, he has already wronged *eros*. He must, therefore, make up for his mistake by delivering another speech.

³⁷⁸ cf. 38b.

Another corroborating example is the *Euthydemus*. How does Socrates first engage with Euthydemus and Dionysodorus? He tells Crito that he was sitting in the dressing room, and intending to depart, when his “customary divine sign put in an appearance” (*de mou egeneto to eiōthos sēmeion to daimonion*) (272e4). This caused him to sit down for a moment, whereby his two interlocutors entered. This event again substantiates that feature of the *daimonion* that prevents Socrates from acting, but it is also demonstrates the banality of the *daimonion* – it simply stops him from leaving a dressing room! It is only after his dialogical investigation with his interlocutors that the full scope of the *daimonion*’s purpose is understood. That the *daimonion* only discourages enables Plato to present Socrates as simultaneously religious and rational, pious and autonomous.

4. Socrates is charged because of his daimonion

It is also crucial to recognize the nature of Socrates’ *daimonion* in conjunction with the charges that are brought against him. There are two charges.³⁷⁹ According to Socrates, the new charge is the one that has brought him to court. It claims that Socrates is “guilty of corrupting the young and of not believing in the gods in whom the city believes, but in other new spiritual things” (*Sōkratē phēsin adikein tous te neous diaphtheiron ta kai theous hous hē polis nomizei ou nomizonta, hetera de daimonia kaina*, 24b7-8). Ignore, for the moment, the *elenchus* that Socrates runs on Meletus, which consists in having Meletus commit to the bald thesis that Socrates is an atheist, a charge that is later summarily refuted. Instead, consider the meaning of ‘new spiritual things’. There can be little doubt that Meletus has the *daimonion* in mind! Indeed, this interpretation is corroborated in the *Euthyphro*.

³⁷⁹ cf. *Apology* 19b, 24b.

The dramatic setting of the *Euthyphro* is the agora. On his way to trial, Socrates encounters Euthyphro. In this way, what emerges in the *Euthyphro* must be interpreted in conjunction with the *Apology*. Socrates rehearses Meletus' charge; Euthyphro paraphrases the indictment. He states:

This is because you say that the divine sign keeps coming to you. So he [Meletus] has written this indictment against you as one who makes innovations in religious matters, and he comes to court to slander you, knowing that such things are easily misrepresented to the crowd (3b5-7).

hoti dē su to daimonion phēs sautō hekastote gignesthai. hōs oun kainotomountos sou peri ta theia gegraptai tautēn tēn graphēn, kai hōs diabalōn dē erkhetai eis to dikastērion, eidōs hoti eudiabola ta toiauta pros tous pollous.

The *daimonion* is a break from conventional Athenian religious practice and Meletus has focused in on this in attempting to discredit, and ultimately condemn, Socrates.

Part II – The *daimonion* and divination

How does Socrates' *daimonion* relate to divination? In the previous section, I rehearsed four features of the *daimonion* that emerge in the *Apology*. Like the *daimonion*, the *Apology* also contains several references to divination. For one, there is Chaerephon's visit to the Pythia and Socrates' philosophical challenge of the Pythia's oracle.³⁸⁰ As well, consider who Socrates' investigates in order to determine the veracity of the oracle – the politicians, the poets, and finally the craftspeople.³⁸¹ His account of the poets consists of a simile to seers on the grounds that both lack knowledge. Instead of knowledge, the seer only has true opinion, which is the result of divine possession:

³⁸⁰ One ongoing debate is the tension between the widespread conviction in the veracity of the Pythia's claims and Socrates' attempt to refute the oracle. If the authenticity of the Pythia is axiomatic, then the oracle's failure is a result of misinterpretation. Socrates, or any other interlocutor, has simply failed to adequately interpret the Pythia's oracle. Another interpretation, which marks Socrates with a more conventional religious outlook, claims that he is merely seeking to adequately interpret the Pythia, thereby taking for granted the Pythia's authenticity. Gonzalez (2009) 124-129.

³⁸¹ cf. 22a-e.

...the poets do not compose their poems with knowledge, but by some inborn talent and by inspiration, like seers and prophets who also say many fine things without any understanding of what they say” (22c1-4).

... alla phusei tini kai enthousiazontes hōsper hoi theomanteis kai hoi khrēsmōdoi: kai gar houtoi legousi men polla kai kala, isasin de ouden hōn legousi.

This characterization of divination appears antithetical to Socrates’ *daimonion*. The most glaring difference between the two is that what happens to Socrates is usually characterized as a sign, which implies that Socrates maintains a level of self-awareness. That the *daimonion* and divination are distinct is best expressed by Van Reil’s paraphrase of McPherran position:

[Socrates’] *daimonion* is not of the same order as is recourse to divine inspiration or divination, or even a dream. Take for example the divine inspiration of poets (such as discussed in the *Ion*), or the Homeric hero possessed by a god, or the possession of the Maenads: each time, the subject is deprived of reason, and an external divine force takes control of his actions. There is none of this with regard to Socrates’ *daimonion*... Divination and dreams, for their part, are occasional interventions of the divine, signs given by a god outside of us (34).

It is important to flesh out and clarify this complex argument. First, Socrates’ *daimonion* contrasts with the divine inspiration of divination and poetry. When inspired, the seer and the poet become literally possessed by a god. As mediums, they utter true propositions, but they cannot later comment, or interpret on, these propositions. This is so because they lack self-consciousness when the oracle is delivered, or the poem performed. A similar assessment can be given to Homeric and Maenadic possession.

In the last phrase, Van Reil writes that “divination and dreams... are occasional interventions of the divine” (34) and this must be understood as technical divination like augury. The presence of a hawk, for instance, is a “sign given by a god outside of us”

(34). In fact, dreams are awkwardly placed in this regard. Undoubtedly, Greek divination recognized prophetic dreams and Plato does not diverge from this conviction.³⁸² In the *Crito*, for example, Socrates recalls and correctly interprets his dream as a prophecy for the day he will be executed (44a).

Similarly, in the *Phaedo*, Socrates recalls the cryptic command of his dream, which instructed him to practice the arts (60c-e). What this demonstrates is that although Socrates is asleep (e.g., not conscious), he remembers the dream. This is in sharp contrast to those who undergo possession by a divinity. For Plato, as we have seen, such individuals cannot interpret their experiences. In this way, dreams are altogether different than possession, and therefore do little work in differentiating Socrates from seers and poets. Upon consideration, it is clear that they are also different than the *daimonion*. This is so for several reasons. For one, the *daimonion* has never misled Socrates. Dreams, by contrast, can deceive us.³⁸³

In fact, Socrates elides divination, dreams, and the *daimonion* when he characterizes his elenctic mission as having been given to him by the god “by means of oracles and dreams, and in every other way that a divine manifestation has ever ordered a man to do anything” (...*kai ek manteiōn kai ex enupniōn kai panti tropō hōper tis pote kai allē theia moira anthrōpō kai hotioun prosetaxe prattein.*) (33c4-7). One of these final ways includes Socrates’ *daimonion*.

Despite the argument that Socrates retains his self-consciousness where seers and poets do not, I maintain that there are strong reasons to give divination a formative role in a satisfactory account of Socrates’ relationship to the divine, most distinctly arising in the

³⁸² cf. *Charmides* 173; *Crito* 44; *Phaedo* 60c-e; *Republic* 2.383a, 5.476c, 7.533b, 9.571e, 9.574; *Theatetus* 157e, 158b, 201d; *Timaeus* 46a, 72a; *Laws* 10.910a.

³⁸³ cf. *Charmides* 173; *Theatetus* 201d.

case of his *daimonion*. I have three reasons to support this claim. First, if arguments in previous chapters are plausible, then a simple disjunction between possession and technical divination cannot stand. More concretely, such a disjunction does a disservice to prestigious seers – Diotima and Theoclymenus – who do not seem constrained by the epistemological consequences of divine inspiration. Exemplary seers, much like Socrates, experience the divine and yet remain self-aware. They can comment, and interpret, their divinations. This brings a seer like Diotima close to a philosopher like Socrates.

Second, one reason often cited to differentiate Socrates' *daimonion* from other forms of human-divine interaction is that the *daimonion* is unique to Socrates.³⁸⁴ But there is good evidence that this thesis is erroneous. In the *Republic*, Socrates himself states that the *daimonion* can arise in others: “it [the *daimonion*] has happened to no one before me, or to only a very few” (*ē gar pou tini allō ē oudeni tōn emprosthen gegonen*) (496c2-3). Only to a very few! What does this mean? At the very least, it underscores the rarity, and not the exclusivity, of the *daimonion*. More generally, it is noteworthy that this claim arises as Socrates specifies the nature of the philosopher.³⁸⁵ The life of politics is rife with madness, specifically by the majority. It is consequently terribly hard for a philosopher to engage in politics. Much more likely the philosopher, or person of a

³⁸⁴ Van Reil (2005) insists that “the link between Socrates and his *daimōn* is absolutely exclusive, which is never the case when it comes to the intervention of traditional divinities” (35). Van Reil goes on to emphasize that the *daimonion* is untraditional – you cannot sacrifice to it. Also, it elides the human with the divine in a way adverse to Greek norms.

³⁸⁵ Destrée (2005) 63-79 argues that the *daimonion* is not exclusively Socratic. He states “that Plato never says that the *daimonion* has appeared to someone else, but that is because Socrates is, until now, the only true philosopher, since he is the only true believer in the god” (75).

philosophical nature, is content to remain outside of politics. Nevertheless, Socrates insists that the best life for those who have the ability is the philosophical life.³⁸⁶

Third, Socrates twice connects his *daimonion* with divination. In the *Phaedrus*, for example, as Socrates contextualizes the sudden appearance of his *daimonion*:

In effect, you see, I am a seer, and though I am not particularly good at it, still – like people who are just barely able to read and write – I am good enough for my own purposes. I recognize my offense clearly now. In fact, the soul too, my friend, is itself a sort of seer; that’s why, almost from the beginning of my speech, I was disturbed by a very uneasy feeling, as Ibycus puts it, that ‘for offending the gods I am honored by men’ (242c4-d2).

eimi dē oun mantis men, ou panu de spoudaios, all' hōsper hoi ta grammata phauloi, hoson men emautō monon hikanos: saphōs oun ēdē manthanō to hamartēma. hōs dē toi, ō hetaire, mantikon ge ti kai hē psukhē: eme gar ethraxē men ti kai palai legonta ton logon, kai pōs edusōpoumēn kat' Ibukon, mē ti para theois “amblakōn timan pros anthrōpōn ameipsō:”

Although he was disturbed by an uneasy feeling it was not until he almost departed from Phaedrus’ company that his *daimonion* appeared. In other words, his *daimonion* can be interpreted as constitutive of Socrates’ claim that he is a kind of seer. Of course, it is also clear that Socrates can interpret his *daimonion*. Not only does he know that he has wronged *Eros*, but he is also able to offer Phaedrus an explanation. He reasons that *Eros* must be a god because he is the son of Aphrodite. Consequently, a speech that disparages *Eros* constitutes an offense.

The second occasion that Socrates’ *daimonion* is tied to divination is when he characterizes it as divinatory (*mantikē*): “At all previous times my familiar prophetic power, my spiritual manifestation...” (*hē gar eiōthua moi mantikē hē tou daimoniou...*)

³⁸⁶ Weiss (2005) 81 – 96 argues that the *daimonion* is not something Socrates has *qua* Socrates, but rather, “*qua* man or *qua* man with a sense of justice, something that he shares potentially with all just men or with all men with a sense of justice, however few” (82).

(40a4). Brisson provides an illuminating analysis of this passage.³⁸⁷ He notes that *mantikē* is usually interpreted in conjunction with *technē*, so that the passage translates as ‘divination, that is familiar to me...’ but once tied to *hē tou daimoniou* – the full passage has at least two surprising translations:

1. ‘Divination that comes from the *daimonion*.’
2. ‘Divination that pertains to the *daimonion*.’

Both are surprising because they connect divination with Socrates’ *daimonion* in a strong way. Brisson urges that once “we understand *phōnē* after *mantikē* and *semēiōu* after *daimonion*” (3) the translation becomes: “the divinatory voice that is familiar to me, the one in which the divine signal consists” (40a4).³⁸⁸

The two passages cited demonstrate that the *daimonion*, as depicted by Plato, is a species of divination. That said, it is neither a dream nor possession that occurs to Socrates. As I stated earlier, there is some affinity between Socrates and exemplary seers in the sense that both remain aware as the divine communicates with them. Consequently, both can interpret and reflect on such oracular experiences. Still, there is one thing that differentiates Socrates’ *daimonion* from exemplary seers, and indeed divination more generally, namely the simple and straightforward fact that Socrates’ *daimonion* only ever prevents him from acting. Divination, in all its variety, can both direct and hinder action. Plato’s purpose for confining the *daimonion* to something that only prohibits must be in order to carve out space for Socrates’ *elenchus*.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I investigated the relationship between divination and Socrates’ *daimonion*. I rehearsed the main features of the *daimonion* and investigated the two

³⁸⁷ Brisson (2005) 3.

³⁸⁸ Brisson cites McPherran (1996) 185-195 as close to his own position.

passages that characterize the *daimonion* as a form of divination. The *daimonion*, however, cannot be grafted onto the distinction between technical and possession divination. There is no intermediary, so it is not technical. As well, since Socrates is able to reflect and interpret his *daimonion*, he does not undergo possession akin to the possessed seer like the Pythia. Although Socrates enjoys some affinity with exemplary seers like Diotima, such as remaining self-aware while divining, there is at least one peculiar feature that remains. This is the exclusively negative function of the *daimonion*.³⁸⁹

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³⁸⁹ McPherran (1996) writes "it is entirely in keeping with Socrates' epistemic modesty that he should avoid any firm specification of its [the *daimonion*] nature" (196). McPherran states this in the context of extrapolating the adjectival nature of the *daimonion* as a sound or sign.

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Conclusion

There are at least two general approaches to Plato scholarship. One is to focus exclusively on a particular dialogue, or set of dialogues, and develop an in-depth, exhaustive treatment of that subject matter. Another approach is to focus on a particular theme, which emerges in various dialogues. This dissertation is squarely in the latter category. My focus, Plato's concept of divination, emerges in different dialogues, and in different stages of Plato's authorial life.

In the opening chapters, I investigated how Plato utilizes divination in Socrates' search for adequate definitions of specific virtues. In the *Euthyphro*, for instance, Socrates interrogates Euthyphro's account of piety and pokes holes in each definition. My guiding question was whether or not Euthyphro's occupation as a seer informs the argumentative and dramaturgical elements of the dialogue.

I also analyzed Plato's depiction of divination in the context of (1) the investigation of courage in the *Laches*, and (2) the nature of *technē*, which emerges in multiple dialogues. Concerning the former, the relationship between generalship and divination proves unique to Plato. It was never as highly systematized as Plato has Socrates suppose. I also investigated the puzzle of divination's subject matter, specifically the essentially temporal nature of divination.

In Plato's *Ion*, I continued my investigation of the *technē* of divination. This pithy dialogue brings together two potentially incompatible features of divination. On the one hand, it is a craft with a set of specialized skills, but on the other, it is a result of divine inspiration. The primary topic of the *Ion* is rhapsody, or poetry, more generally, and this has the pleasing consequence of introducing a theme that emerges in later dialogues, namely the affinity between divination and other forms of divine inspiration, specifically poetry and philosophy. This dialogue is also my first foray into what I take to be the most contentious part of my dissertation, namely whether or not Plato recognizes a laudable form of divination that cannot be easily assimilated into a distinction between technical and possession divination.

This distinction, the fulcrum of my argument, emerges in the *Phaedrus*, which constitutes chapters four and five. In chapter four, I looked at the opening stages of that

dialogue. Although it does not explicitly deal with divination, the relationship between *eros* and divination, and between *mania* and divination, justifies its inclusion. Unlike other dialogues, which characterize *eros* and *mania* negatively, the *Phaedrus*, with its sympathetic account of these concepts, provides indispensable evidence pertaining to Plato's concept of divination.

Chapter five is a thorough analysis of divination in the *Phaedrus*. I rehearsed Plato's influential distinction between technical and possession divination. The puzzle of this chapter consists of divination's praiseworthiness contrasted with the relatively low rank of the seer on the hierarchy of souls. Accordingly, I analyzed various scholarly answers to this puzzle – Rowe, Griswold, and Brisson – and developed my own account that emphasizes the epistemological facet of this contrast.

In chapter six, I interrogated Plato's *Symposium*, specifically the penultimate speech, which is the recalled conversation between Socrates and Diotima. Akin to Euthyphro, Diotima is a seer, and I interrogate the degree to which Diotima's occupation as a seer informs her account of *eros*. Unlike Euthyphro, who falls prey to Socrates' elenctic arguments, Socrates' appeal to Diotima is an appeal to what he takes to be true. To recall, Socrates once believed as Agathon did. His critical engagement with Diotima is a move away from ignorance to knowledge. Equally striking is Diotima's knowledge of the intelligible realm. In my view, she can only have access to the intelligible realm via divination. This is so despite the fact that her dialogue with Socrates reveals an ability to do something antithetical to the possessed seer – Diotima can reflect and engage with the content of her divinations. In this way, I conclude that both in the substance of her knowledge – the intelligible realm – and in the form through which she argues – giving

and being sensitive to reasons – Diotima enjoys continuity with Socrates, Plato’s paradigmatic philosopher.

In fact, this is the jumping off point of my final chapter. Whereas Diotima has affinities to philosophy, I shift and examine Socrates’ relationship to divination. From a cursory perspective, Socrates is a paradigm of rationality. But a more in-depth analysis reveals a complicated relationship to the divine, most notably in the context of the *daimonion*. I conclude that Socrates’ *daimonion* is only distinguishable from Diotima’s ability in that the *daimonion* negates. In terms of remaining self-aware while divining, and in the ability to reflect on particular divinations, Socrates and Diotima are indistinguishable.

Looking Forward

Plato’s dialogues are so rich in style and content that one can never hope to adequately account for everything. New answers to old questions trigger new questions and new answers, and so on. My expectation is that this dissertation has provided some answers, but also some new questions and directions for research. In this last section, I briefly sketch two directions.

I. The Metaphysical Implications of Divination

One direction of research is to move from the epistemology of divination (What does a seer know? What are the implications of divine possession?) to the metaphysical side of the issue.³⁹⁰ I am thinking specifically of the *Timaeus-Critias*. Consider the traditional gods and how Plato re-contextualizes them out of their brutishness and into a functional role within Timaeus’ cosmogony. Instead of being cantankerous and petty, the

³⁹⁰ Van Reil (2013) is a comprehensive study of Plato’s theology.

gods are assigned to fashion mortal beings (e.g., humans and animals). The demiurge assigns the traditional gods the task of creating those that are mortal.³⁹¹

In other words, the gods of Hesiod and Homer have been trumped by Plato's benevolent demiurge and put to use in the formation of the cosmos understood as a justification for the proper ethical and political life. There are numerous examples of this re-contextualization throughout the *Timaeus-Critias*. For instance, the gods created plants for human benefit.³⁹² As well, Plato has the Egyptian priest describe the allocation of earth in peaceful terms. This contradicts other well-known accounts that consist of a violent struggle between deities over the earthly domain. The gods cannot be in competition with one another.³⁹³

II. The Literary Function of Divination

In the opposite direction of metaphysics, it may be worthwhile to investigate its role in the drama of Plato's dialogues. As I said in the introduction, I have attempted to remain sensitive to dramaturgical elements in Plato's dialogues. But fundamentally, my primary focus is a philosophical analysis of divination. In other words, this dissertation has investigated various puzzles pertaining to the epistemology of divination - as a *technē*, as the result of inspiration or *mania*, and finally as a way to conceptualize philosophy itself.

In Plato's dialogues, divination functions as a literary specific device. The ability of the seer to access the future is often deployed as an instance of foreshadowing. Furthermore, it also affects the expectations of characters, together with readers of particular dialogues. Consider Plato's first tetralogy – *Euthyphro*, *Apology*, *Crito*, and

³⁹¹ cf. 69c.

³⁹² cf. 77a-b.

³⁹³ Luc Brisson (1998) 20.

Phaedo. All four constitute a thematic unity – the trial and death of Socrates – and contain rich allusions to divination conceptualized in the context of narrative time. As early as the *Apology*, readers witness Socrates’ mantic awareness about the nature of death. Once Socrates has been sentenced to death, he makes a prophecy, befitting those who are close to death.³⁹⁴ He divines that there will be a retaliatory response against those who convicted him. This functions on two levels. First, it underscores Socrates’ moral principle that it is always bad to do wrong. This principle is developed and defended in other dialogues.

The prophecy also constitutes an allusion to Plato himself for it is Socrates’ death that triggers Plato’s philosophical inquiries. Indeed, at the end of the *Apology*, Socrates characterizes death as one of two possibilities: either it is a dreamless sleep or the soul goes to a place where it can interact with an amalgam of Greek heroes and poets.³⁹⁵ In this latter way, Socrates includes himself amongst figures with mythic prestige.

The theme of death and divination continues in the *Phaedo*. Socrates relates to his interlocutors a prophetic dream that bid him to compose music.³⁹⁶ For a long time, he interpreted this to mean the call to cultivate philosophy, specified as the greatest music. But with death approaching, he decides to pursue the common music – poetry – just in case this was the purpose of the dream. This foreshadows the swansong section at the end of Socrates’ argument for the immortality of the soul.³⁹⁷

The swans belong to Apollo and are therefore prophetic. Incidentally, the swans sing the loveliest prophecy when they are close to death. The parallels with Socrates are

³⁹⁴ cf. 39c.

³⁹⁵ cf. 41a.

³⁹⁶ cf. 60e.

³⁹⁷ cf. 84d-85b.

explicit. Socrates also serves Apollo, enjoys prophetic power, which actually increases as he nears death. Not only do Socrates and the swans have access to the future but they can sing benefits of the underworld. This is so despite the fact that everyone else thinks such singing is wistful.

Final Thought

Plato's concept of divination is heterogenous. In some ways, he embodies popular notions of Greek divination. In another sense, however, divination is radically transformed once subjected to philosophical and dialogical analyses. I hope that this dissertation has developed and clarified some of the puzzles pertaining to Plato's depiction of divination. What else but continue to puzzle through them until the setting of the sun (*hēliou dusmōn khronō*)?³⁹⁸

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³⁹⁸ cf. *Phaedo* 61e.