

## CLEOMBROTUS OF AMBRACIA: INTERPRETATIONS OF A SUICIDE FROM CALLIMACHUS TO AGATHIAS\*

At *Phaedo* 59b Echecrates asks Phaedo who was present on the day when Socrates drank the hemlock in prison. Various Athenians are named (59b 6–10), then various foreigners (59c 1–2), but when Echecrates subsequently asks if two other foreigners, Aristippus and Cleombrotus, were present,<sup>1</sup> Phaedo replies that they were said to be in Aegina (59c 4). After this fleeting reference to Cleombrotus, Plato does not mention him again in the *Phaedo* or any other dialogue; and yet in later antiquity a certain Cleombrotus of Ambracia rose to fame in connection with the *Phaedo*. Callimachus is our earliest source for the anecdote which immortalized the Ambracian (*A.P.* 7.471):<sup>2</sup>

Εἴπας ‘Ἦλιε χαῖρε’ Κλεόμβροτος ὠμβρακιώτης  
ἦλατ’ ἀφ’ ὑψηλοῦ τείχεος εἰς Ἀῖδην,  
ἄξιον οὐδέν ἰδὼν θανάτου κακόν, ἀλλὰ Πλάτωνος  
ἐν τὸ περὶ ψυχῆς γράμμ’ ἀναλεξάμενος.

How is Cleombrotus to be viewed? Is he to be admired for his ideological high-mindedness, or to be dismissed as a fool for his actions? Modern reaction to the epigram holds that Cleombrotus was indeed a fool, but certain scholars also detect an anti-Platonic emphasis which is invisible to others.<sup>3</sup> Ancient reaction is less varied, however; or so I propose to show by arguing that, with the predictable exception of the Christian apologists who were so antipathetic to pagan philosophy, the epigram was consistently read in antiquity as firmly anti-Cleombrotean and certainly not as an attack on Plato. The Neoplatonists robustly defend Plato's role in the suicide, but other writers, especially Cicero and Ovid, reveal a subtlety of response to Callimachus which, as we shall see, requires more careful scrutiny. But first a preliminary issue: is the Cleombrotus who took his life after reading the *Phaedo* the Cleombrotus named in that dialogue?<sup>4</sup> The question is of importance to my central argument because one

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<sup>1</sup> That Aristippus and Cleombrotus are ξένοι is not actually stated in the text; but it is logically inferred from the initial reference to ξένοι at 59b 11.

<sup>2</sup> *Epigr.* 23 Pf.; *HE* 1273–6 (= Callimachus LIII); Page, *OCT* 1378–81. *Περὶ ψυχῆς* seems to have been an alternative title for the *Phaedo* (see Gow and Page, 2 p. 204); Plato may have supplied it if *Ep.* 13 is genuine (cf. *ἐν τῷ περὶ ψυχῆς λόγῳ*, 363a). Cicero knew the work as *eum librum qui est de animo* (*Tusc.* 1.24).

<sup>3</sup> For the anti-Platonic line see especially Sinko, *passim* with Spina, pp. 21–2 and A. S. Riginos, *Platonica: The Anecdotes Concerning the Life and Writings of Plato* (Leiden, 1976), p. 181 ('Callimachus here parodies the doctrine of the *Phaedo*'). Wilamowitz, *Hellenistische Dichtung* (Berlin, 1924), 1 p. 177 finds philosophical theory being derided in the epigram, but cf. his *Platon* (Berlin, 1920), 2 p. 57, where Cleombrotus is said to be ridiculed, Plato praised.

<sup>4</sup> The standard response in modern scholarship is neither to affirm nor deny the identification. For suspension of judgement see on *Phd.* 59c the editions of D. Wytttenbach (London, 1810), p. 118, I. Bekker (London, 1826), 5 p. 131, G. Stallbaum (Gotha, 1850), p. 15, W. D. Geddes

strand of ancient interpretation relies on the identification of the two Cleombroti to explain his death as anything but philosophical in its cause. If that explanation is correct, the epigram commemorates a death whose philosophical justification (or otherwise) is beside the point, thereby ruling out my proposed approach to the epigram. In defence of that approach, then, my first task is to challenge Demetrius' interpretation of *Phd.* 59c at *Eloc.* 288.

### I. ONE CLEOMBROTUS OR TWO?

Modern critics sometimes offer what is judged to be an 'over sophisticated' reading of a text which ancient critics read with an embarrassing plainness. Examples of the opposite are much rarer, but Demetrius' interpretation of *Phd.* 59c offers a suggestive case in point. Why, the question goes, should Plato bother to mention the insignificant absence of Aristippus and Cleombrotus on the day when Socrates drank the hemlock? A plain answer might be that Plato conveys the impression that he is recording the events leading up to Socrates' death in scrupulous detail, but Demetrius offers a more complex response: under the surface of his text, Plato is subtly scolding Aristippus and Cleombrotus for their indifference to Socrates' impending death.<sup>5</sup>

Demetrius claims that by casually referring to their absence in Aegina, Plato is delivering an understated rebuke *ἐν σχήματι*, or through a figure of speech (*litotes*; Plato uses *εὐπρεπεία*, not *λοιδορία*). Demetrius elaborates the alleged insult by stating that, true to the hedonist he was, Aristippus had delayed on Aegina with Cleombrotus to indulge in extended feasting (*ἐν Αἰγίνῃ ὀψοφαγούντας δεδεμένου Σωκράτους Ἀθήνησιν ἐπὶ πολλὰς ἡμέρας, καὶ μὴ διαπλεύσαντας ὡς τὸν ἑταῖρον καὶ διδάσκαλον, καίτοι οὐχ ὅλους ἀπέχοντας διακοσίους σταδίους τῶν Ἀθηνῶν, Eloc.* 288).<sup>6</sup> The juxtaposition of *ὀψοφαγούντας* and *δεδεμένου* sharpens the barb that Cleombrotus and Aristippus were shamelessly living it up while their teacher suffered; and the duration of their stay (*ἐπὶ πολλὰς ἡμέρας*) and their proximity to Athens (*οὐχ ὅλους διακοσίους σταδίους*) add to Demetrius' emphasis by aggravating the charge of careless neglect. And yet even if Aristippus and Cleombrotus had indeed gone to Aegina for disreputable reasons, Demetrius goes too far when he detects an unmistakable rebuke in the Platonic reference to the absentees.

Plato himself was absent on the day in question, allegedly through illness (59b 10). But whatever is read into this,<sup>7</sup> various factors suggest that Aristippus and

(London and Edinburgh, 1863), p. 181; also Burnet, p. 10, Hackforth, pp. 30–31, and Gow and Page, 2 p. 204. C. J. Rowe, in his new edition (Cambridge, 1993), is at first similarly tentative about the identification (see p. 116 on 59c 3) but then (on c 4) accepts as probable that the epigram is about the Platonic Cleombrotus.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. D. L. 2.65 and 3.36, reporting that Xenophon and Plato were hostile towards Aristippus. Hence the slight in the *Phaedo*; but for justified scepticism about the rumour of hostility see Hackforth, p. 31.

<sup>6</sup> On Aristippus, his hedonistic views and possible (but controversial) role in the founding of the Cyrenaic school, see W. K. C. Guthrie, *Socrates* (Cambridge, 1970), pp. 170ff.

<sup>7</sup> A factual point faithfully recorded? And/or one which sets up an implicit contrast between Plato's honourable absence and the less forgivable absence of Aristippus and Cleombrotus? Cf. Guthrie, *op. cit.*, p. 169 n. 2: 'His [Plato's] feelings may have been so intense that he could not bear the prospect of witnessing the actual death of "the best, wisest and most righteous man he ever knew"'. He could have made his farewell earlier to an understanding Socrates. But since we have absolutely nothing to go on but his own four words, all such guesses at motivation are idle'. See now G. W. Most, 'A cock for Asclepius', *CQ* 43 (1993), 96–111, ingeniously arguing that with Socrates' last words (*ὦ Κρίτων, ἔφη, τῷ Ἀσκληπιῷ ὀφείλομεν ἀλεκτρυόνα, Phd.* 118a 7–8) Plato has the latter thank Asclepius for Plato's anticipated recovery from illness; Plato is more present in the dialogue than his absence suggests.

Cleombrotus were hardly to be blamed for not making it back to Athens before Socrates died. Socrates' death was delayed by the annual *θεωρία* to Delos, during which time executions were suspended at Athens.<sup>8</sup> As Burnet notes, 'it had only become known the day before [i.e. the day before the events described in the *Phaedo*] that the ship had returned from Delos, and we learn from the *Crito* (43d 3) that the news came from Sunium where she had touched. Aristippus and Cleombrotus could hardly have heard this in time, if they were in Aegina'.<sup>9</sup> If such was the sequence of events, Demetrius has drawn an unwarranted inference from *Phd.* 59c and consolidated it with his own charge that the visit to Aegina was certainly disreputable; and, as Burnet further observes,<sup>10</sup> there is nothing to indicate that Aristippus and Cleombrotus were absent on Aegina for the whole period of Socrates' imprisonment during the *θεωρία*, even though Demetrius implies as much (cf. *ἐπὶ πολλὰς ἡμέρας*) in support of his broader interpretation of the passage.<sup>11</sup>

But suppose for a moment that Demetrius' interpretation is correct. If it is further assumed that the two Cleombroti are identical, a motive is supplied for the Ambracian's death as portrayed in the Callimachean epigram. When Cleombrotus read the *Phaedo* and saw his own name in the work, he understood only too clearly that Plato was rebuking him for his absence in Aegina. Aghast at his public disgrace, Cleombrotus saw only one way out: the high wall beckoned and he leapt to his death out of shame at his dishonour. An engaging theory, which Wilamowitz inherited from the eighteenth century;<sup>12</sup> but quite apart from the distinct possibility that Demetrius reads too much into *Phd.* 59c in the first place, line 3 of the epigram presents a serious objection. If the Ambracian recognized that his dishonour was so embarrassingly published in the *Phaedo*, he presumably thought his *κακόν* a motive for suicide; so how could Callimachus claim that Cleombrotus had seen 'no evil worthy of death'?

The case for identifying the two Cleombroti on this shame-theory and on Demetrius' interpretation of *Phd.* 59c thus amounts to an imaginative but flawed argument. But can the two Cleombroti be identified as one on other grounds? If it were possible to prove that they share more than a coincidental connection with the *Phaedo*, Callimachus' epigram would certainly gain in witty suggestiveness. If only Cleombrotus had not been away in Aegina on Socrates' last day! Had he been one of the interlocutors engaged in the debate on the immortality of the soul, Socrates might have subjected him to rigorous self-examination before the Ambracian decided that suicide was the only option for the 'true' philosopher. When Cleombrotus eventually reads the Platonic dialogue, he jumps first to his conclusion and then to his death without testing his inferences as he might have done in the Socratic elenchus. The point of the epigram would then hinge on the Platonic reference to Cleombrotus: his absence in Aegina proves to be his downfall.

<sup>8</sup> At *Phd.* 58a10–c5 the origins and procedure of the Delian *θεωρία* are described by Phaedo in order to explain the time-lapse between Socrates' trial and death.

<sup>9</sup> Pp. 10–11 on *Phd.* 59c 4.

<sup>10</sup> P. 11.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Ath. 12.544d (III p. 200 Kaibel), where Aristippus is said to have wasted time living it up in Aegina (*διέτριβεν... τὰ πολλὰ ἐν Αἰγίνῃ τρυφῶν*); Athenaeus may be alluding to (the Demetrian interpretation of?) *Phd.* 59c.

<sup>12</sup> Gow and Page, 2 p. 104 refer to Wilamowitz (*Platon*, 2 p. 57) for the theory, adding J. Geffken, *Griechische Literaturgeschichte* (Heidelberg, 1934), 2 p. 92 (Anm. 171). But Geddes, op. cit. (n. 4), p. 181 attributes it to C. M. Wieland, who nevertheless absolves Cleombrotus from the charge of negligent absence; in a letter to Aristippus (*Aristipp* II 10 = *Christoph Martin Wieland Werke*, Bd. 4 [ed. K. Manger, Frankfurt am Main, 1988], pp. 268–9 and 446–7 n. 2), Wieland has the Ambracian explain his absence on the grounds that he could not bear to witness his beloved master's death.

But serious objections still tell against the identification. To begin with, the connection cannot be made on the grounds that Cleombroti are rare; the name is relatively common,<sup>13</sup> a point suggestively underscored by Callimachus' defining emphasis on the Ambracian origins of his Cleombrotus.<sup>14</sup> Secondly, of writers who refer directly to the epigram in later antiquity, none connects the two Cleombroti. Since those writers include Cicero and Ovid, it would be rash to assume that Callimachus was too subtle for *all* his ancient readers; and even if these later sources saw the suggestive coincidence of names for themselves, they make nothing of it. Or could it be that the ancient readers never draw attention to the identification because they think it obvious? Conceivably so; but it could equally be inferred from this silence that the identification was never made precisely because it was never taken to be certain. The Ammonian school offers late but telling evidence in this respect, for Ammonius, David, Elias and pseudo-Elias all quote the Callimachean epigram in contexts which refer directly to the *Phaedo*,<sup>15</sup> but in no instance is Callimachus' Cleombrotus identified with his Platonic namesake. If there was every reason to assume that the two Cleombroti were one and the same, is it likely that all these sources would have quoted the epigram in connection with the *Phaedo* and consistently failed to spell out the identification?

Beyond these initial points, the case for identifying the two Cleombroti meets objections which hinge on Callimachus' portrayal of the Ambracian as a philosophical novice who had read only one Platonic work. Even though Plato mentions Cleombrotus only once, it is reasonable to suppose that the latter was not unfamiliar with, and to, the Socratic circle, and that in making Echecrates ask after him in the *Phaedo*, Plato exploited the fact that he, Echecrates, or his informed reader might have expected Cleombrotus' presence at the prison on Socrates' last day on grounds that were personal, philosophical, or a combination of both. Of those said to have been present, Phaedo, Simmias, Cebes, Euclides, Aeschines and Antisthenes are all known philosophers in their own right, while Hermogenes, Ctesippus, Terpsion and Apollodorus all appear in other dialogues, indicating that their personal and philosophical association with Socrates was of long standing;<sup>16</sup> Menexenus and Crito of course give their names to dialogues. Even though his sole appearance in Plato tells against a long established acquaintance with Socrates, Cleombrotus would presumably not have warranted Echecrates' enquiry if he was a complete stranger to the Socratic circle or to philosophy in general. Moreover, since Echecrates asks after Aristippus and Cleombrotus in the same breath, and since both are said to be away in Aegina together, the further implication is that Cleombrotus shared not only the Cyrenaic's friendship, but possibly also his philosophy.

If, then, the Platonic Cleombrotus was familiar to the Socratic circle and shared an association with Aristippus, himself a Socratic pupil, is it credible that he knew

<sup>13</sup> Various Cleombroti are listed at *RE* XI 677–9; P. M. Fraser and E. Matthews, *A Lexicon of Greek Personal Names I* (Oxford, 1987), pp. 261–2 also list fourteen Aegean Cleombroti from the fifth/fourth century onwards.

<sup>14</sup> The epithet *Ἀμβρακιώτης* could conceivably imply that Callimachus follows an early tradition apart from Plato, though other possibilities remain. Perhaps Callimachus invents Cleombrotus' Ambracian origins; if so, does he develop the Platonic hint that (the other) Cleombrotus was a *ξένος*?

<sup>15</sup> For Ammonius see *CAG* 4.3.4.18–25 Busse; Elias, *CAG* 18.1.14.1–7; David, *CAG* 18.2.31.27–33; pseudo-Elias, *In Porph. Isag.* 12.4–5, 38–9 = pp. 14, 18 Westerink.

<sup>16</sup> For background on these various figures see Burnet, pp. 7–10 on *Phd.* 59a 9ff. with Hackforth, pp. 30–31 and G. C. Field, *Plato and his Contemporaries* (London, 1930), pp. 158–80.

nothing of Socrates' general position on the immortality of the soul until he read the *Phaedo*? And can Cleombrotus have known so little, if only through hearsay, of Socrates' dialectical method to interpret the *Phaedo* as a text of dogmatic instruction rather than an exploratory discourse? Of course, arguments of this sort unduly limit Callimachus' freedom of manoeuvre in the epigram; it is not as if the philosophical abilities and experience of the Platonic Cleombrotus could not have been grossly misrepresented to witty effect. But if Callimachus is allowed to have distorted the Platonic 'reality', even to the extent of inventing the suicide, this new concession to Callimachean fiction warns against pressing the identification of the two Cleombroti too far. Given that allusive suggestiveness is a pervasive feature of Callimachean art, and that the epigram assumes at least partial familiarity with the *Phaedo*, the better course is to suppose only that Callimachus might have seen the possibility of a play on the coincidental name. If so, the two Cleombroti do not have to be formally identified for the witty potential of the epigram to be realized: while the original Cleombrotus was absent from the original discussion, his Callimachean namesake is so distant from intelligent involvement with the written text that he misunderstands the Socratic/Platonic message. So where might he have gone wrong?

## II. THE FATAL ERROR

### 1. Plato on suicide

At *Phd.* 62b Socrates suggests two reasons why suicide is wrong. The first is that voluntary death is an illegal escape from or act of desertion from the bodily prison or military post which houses the immortal soul.<sup>17</sup> On this Orphic/Pythagorean argument,<sup>18</sup> Cleombrotus' suicide would have to be viewed as illegal or cowardly or both, but Socrates temporarily saves him from disgrace by dismissing this first argument as 'a lofty idea and not easy to penetrate'.<sup>19</sup> Then he proposes a second argument, asserting that since man is a possession of the gods, man is not free to dispose of his life as he pleases. True, on this second argument suicide is not entirely ruled out, but preconditioned by the kind of divine *ἀνάγκη* which Socrates goes on to claim for himself: the willing acceptance of death, his own included, is only permissible when a god sanctions it.<sup>20</sup> Cleombrotus would seem to have disobeyed his

<sup>17</sup> *φρουρά* (62b 4) allows both meanings, 'prison' and 'garrison'. 'Prison' fits the recurring notion in the *Phaedo* of the soul incarcerated in the body (e.g. 67d 1–2, 82e–83a). But for 'garrison' see Cic. *Sen.* 74 ('vetatque Pythagoras...de praesidio et statione decedere') with J. G. F. Powell's commentary (Cambridge, 1988), pp. 247–8 and 248 n. 1; Cicero seems to have been aware of the ambiguity in *φρουρά* because elsewhere he interprets the word as 'prison' (cf. *Tusc.* 1.74, *Rep.* 6.15 Ziegler).

<sup>18</sup> With *ἐν ἀπορρήτοις* (62b 3) *Phaedo* alludes to the Orphic origins of the doctrine of the soul's immortality (see Burnet, p. 22 *ad loc.*). J. C. G. Strachan, 'Who did forbid suicide at *Phaedo* 62b?', *CQ* 18 (1970), 220 argues that Plato 'need not be taken to refer to any Pythagorean belief-theory' here; but for fusion of Orphic/Pythagorean influences see Burnet, pp. 23–4, with Hackforth, p. 38.

<sup>19</sup> Gallop's translation, p. 6; see also pp. 83–4 for objections to this first argument because (i) to condemn suicide as illegal is to ignore the moral issues suicide raises ('if suicide is sinful or morally wrong, presumably it is so whether it is legal or not'), and (ii) to condemn suicide as cowardly is to invoke a term of moral reproach ('cowardice') which does not explain the moral status of suicide *per se*.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. Gallop, p. 85: 'Socrates is not maintaining an absolute veto upon suicide. On the contrary, with the words "until God sends some necessity, such as the one now before us" ([62]c 7–8), he implies that his own death will be self-inflicted. In his case, self-destruction would be not merely permissible, but a religious duty'.

guiding text by committing suicide—unless, incredibly, his sudden conviction that he must release his soul from its bodily prison is somehow taken to be an instance of divinely sent *ἀνάγκη*.<sup>21</sup>

In the context of the Platonic/Socratic position on suicide as set out in the *Phaedo*, then, Cleombrotus' voluntary death is indefensible.<sup>22</sup> The fact that neither Plato nor Socrates could have condoned his suicide is crucial to my argument, for Cleombrotus is rendered solely responsible for his misguided death. If Callimachus' aim in the epigram was to celebrate Plato's achievement as a writer of such profound influence that the *Phaedo* could even persuade a man to commit suicide, the disconcerting consequence is that Plato is praised for inducing something which is expressly forbidden in his own text. If, on the other hand, Callimachus is taken to be hinting at the dangerous influence of the *Phaedo*, with Plato implicitly attacked for inducing Cleombrotus to take his life, an immediate objection is that Plato cannot be held responsible for the actions of a reader who misunderstands the message of the text and who commits suicide without Platonic warrant. And yet certain modern critics are in no doubt that the epigram is anti-Platonic in emphasis. Prominent among those critics is T. Sinko, whose influential arguments<sup>23</sup> warrant careful scrutiny.

## 2. Was Callimachus anti-Platonic?

Sinko connects *κακόν* in line 3 of the epigram with the *Phaedo*: 'Platonis liber unicum erat malum, quo conspecto Cleombrotus mortem sibi optandam esse putavit. Epigrammatis acumen in eo est positum, quod *κακόν* [3] ita ambigue collocatum est, ut etiam ad Platonis librum referri posset, nisi ex improvviso adderetur verbum: *ἀναλεξάμενος*. Quae cum ita sint, Callimachi epigramma contra Platonem eiusque doctrinam de animarum immortalitate scriptum esse putamus, non contra Cleombrotum, quem potius vanae philosophiae victimam cecidisse poeta opinatus est.'<sup>24</sup>

An initial objection to Sinko's argument is that the dual function he detects in *κακόν* relies on a syncopated reading of the epigram which unduly suppresses *ἀναλεξάμενος*. As soon as the participle is read, *ἀλλά* inevitably loses the sense which

<sup>21</sup> But cf. Gallop, pp. 84–5, arguing that if everything is ordained by cosmic intelligence (cf. 97c–d), anyone who commits suicide does so according to divine will; *ἀνάγκη* cannot be adduced only in special cases. If this was a fully persuasive argument and Cleombrotus had seen it for himself, his suicide might have been less indefensible in Platonic terms.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. *Laws* 873c–d, where Socrates discusses the punishment to be imposed on the corpse of a man who takes his life in defiance of 'the decree of destiny' (*τὴν τῆς εἰμαρμένης... μοῖραν*, c 4). Unlawful suicide is in fact distinguished from three categories of voluntary death which are apparently permissible: suicide on the order of the state (as in Socrates' case), suicide to escape intolerable pain or oppression, and suicide to avoid disgrace. On the assumption that Cleombrotus did not kill himself to escape the disgrace of Plato's alleged rebuke in the *Phaedo*, only the second of these three justifications for suicide could apply to him, and only then if the definition of what constitutes intolerable pain is stretched: Cleombrotus' only justification could be that his soul's bodily imprisonment was a form of oppression too painful to be endured. Otherwise, and damningly, his death could only be viewed as a cowardly and illegal evasion of one of the ordinary hardships of life—having to live with the soul imprisoned in the mortal body. Given this parallel for Platonic restrictions on suicide, does Callimachus hint at the dangers implicit in Cleombrotus' limited reading when he writes *ἐν... γράμμῃ ἀναλεξάμενος* (4)? Cf. A. J. L. van Hoof, *From Autothanasia to Suicide: Self-Killing in Classical Antiquity* (London, 1990), pp. 76–7: 'he [Cleombrotus] jumped from a wall after reading the book of Plato. Had he ceased to be a "vir unius libri" by reading, apart from the *Phaedo*, Plato's *Laws*, he could have reached different conclusions'.

<sup>23</sup> See my opening bibliography for the reference.

<sup>24</sup> P. 3.

Sinko requires ('Cleombrotus had seen no evil *except* the *Phaedo*')<sup>25</sup> and acquires a different meaning ('Cleombrotus had seen no evil, but he had read the *Phaedo*'). If reading the *Phaedo* is different from seeing evil, how could Cleombrotus have been wickedly misled by perusing the dialogue? More importantly, Sinko bases his anti-Platonic argument on the assumption that Callimachus did not believe in life after death and was therefore opposed to Platonic theory on the immortality of the soul. His 'evidence' is drawn from two other Callimachean epigrams, but neither yields the straightforward insight into the poet's own beliefs which Sinko claims to find.

In *A.P.* 7.520<sup>26</sup> an epitaph 'speaks': 'If you enquire in Hades for Timarchus in order to learn about the soul or about rebirth, ask for the son of Pausanias of the *phyle* Ptolemais; he will be among the righteous'.<sup>27</sup> Sinko claims that the Timarchus referred to in the epigram is 'philosophus quidam Academicus aut Pythagoraeus';<sup>28</sup> the Pythagorean connection is especially important to Sinko, for it allows Timarchus to be satirized ('irrisus est') by a poet who allegedly rejects the possibility of reincarnation. But there are at least three Timarchi who could be Callimachus' subject, and there is no evidence to indicate that any one of them was a confirmed Pythagorean;<sup>29</sup> and, *contra* Sinko, the implicit point of the epigram surely lies in the emphasis placed in lines 3–4 on Timarchus' civic nomenclature, which gives a local, particularizing identity to αὐτόν (4) and ensures him a place ἐν εὐσεβέων as an honoured Athenian citizen. This—his civic identity—is how he is still to be identified (cf. δίζεσθαι, 3; δῆεις, 4), not as a disembodied soul or as a candidate for reincarnation.

*A.P.* 7.524 is perhaps more complex.<sup>30</sup> A passer-by enquires of a gravestone whether a certain Charidas rests underneath.<sup>31</sup> Charidas' voice enigmatically emerges to answer the questions which the passer-by puts to him about the Underworld. What is the Underworld like? πολὺ σκότος (3). What of reincarnation? ψεύδος (4).<sup>32</sup> And what of Pluto? μῦθος (4). This is the truth (οὗτος ἐμός λόγος ὕμιν ἀληθινός, 5) which Charidas imparts to the passer-by, who may or may not be identified with Callimachus;<sup>33</sup> but quite apart from the ironic joke that this passer-by 'dies' (cf. ἀπωλόμεθα, 4) when his illusions about the Underworld are shattered, and quite apart from the riddle that Charidas reports either truth or falsehood about what happens to mortals after death (who knows?),<sup>34</sup> Sinko wrongly assumes that Callimachus' own views about death are transparently communicated in the

<sup>25</sup> For (rare) examples of ἀλλά in this sense see *LSJ* s.v. I 3.

<sup>26</sup> *Epigr.* 10 Pf.; *HE* 1199–1202 (= Callimachus XXXIII); Page, *OCT* 1304–7.

<sup>27</sup> The paraphrase is from Gow and Page, 2 p. 190.

<sup>28</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 8. Sinko assumes that the words πάλι πῶς ἔσσει (2) refer to reincarnation, but in A. W. Mair's Loeb translation (London, 1927) they are rendered differently ('how it shall be... hereafter'); Gow and Page, 2 p. 191 *ad loc.* favour πάλι in the Pythagorean sense. I take 'again' to be the more natural rendering, with 'hereafter' an extended sense of the term; cf. πάλιν associated with rebirth and reincarnation in *παλιγγενεσία* (see *LSJ* s.v. 1, 2).

<sup>29</sup> For these three Timarchi see Gow and Page, 2 p. 190.

<sup>30</sup> *Epigr.* 13 Pf.; *HE* 1187–92 (= Callimachus XXXI); Page, *OCT* 1292–7.

<sup>31</sup> Nothing is known of this Charidas, but Gow and Page, 2 p. 188, do not doubt that he existed.

<sup>32</sup> I take ἀνοδοι (3) to refer to reincarnation; 'for if ψεύδη and μῦθοι are to be distinguished [cf. 4], such ἀνοδοι as those of Persephone, Heracles, Sisyphus, Orpheus, or Adonis are, like Pluto, rather μῦθοι than ψεύδη' (Gow and Page, 2 p. 189 on 3).

<sup>33</sup> Cf. Gow and Page, *ibid.*: 'the enquirer is more likely to represent any passer-by than Callimachus himself'.

<sup>34</sup> Cf. Gow and Page, *ibid.*: 'The drift of the conversation is compatible with Charidas either confirming from the grave views which he had maintained in his lifetime, or admitting the truth of those held against him'.

epigram.<sup>35</sup> The more salient point is surely that Callimachus plays on his readers' inevitable inability to prove Charidas either right or wrong: only death will enable mortals to see the truth (if there is any truth to see), and Callimachus wittily portrays the *ἀπορία* to which any post-mortem inquiry of this sort is inevitably reduced.

As soon as allowance is made in these two epigrams for a Callimachean persona which need not represent the poet's own beliefs, Sinko's claim that Callimachus was sceptical about life after death and Platonic theory on the soul is open to immediate qualification—even if Callimachus could feasibly have viewed Plato's experimental theorizing as dogmatic assertion. Further, Sinko's anti-Platonic argument obliges him to play down Callimachus' recognition that Cleombrotus contravened the Platonic ban on suicide in the *Phaedo*. If Callimachus really did set out to attack or parody Plato in the epigram on Cleombrotus, his choice of words in line 3 amounts to an embarrassing admission that he himself either misunderstood or was ignorant of the Platonic ban. But is it likely that a poet with such a proven reputation for *doctrina*, possibly extending to considerable familiarity with Plato,<sup>36</sup> could have been so mistaken? If Callimachus is given the benefit of the doubt, his target is surely Cleombrotus rather than Plato.

### 3. The Neoplatonic perspective

Ammonius and his Neoplatonic successors clearly interpreted the epigram in this latter sense in order to fend off the Christian accusation that Plato induced Cleombrotus to commit suicide through the pernicious influence of pagan doctrine. Lactantius leads the Christian charge,<sup>37</sup> followed by Jerome and Gregory of Nazianzus,<sup>38</sup> but Cleombrotus is also ridiculed for his foolish belief in empty pagan philosophy. Notably, however, Augustine is more restrained than other Christian apologists when he discusses Cleombrotus' case in the *City of God*. In a chapter devoted to the question of whether suicide is ever a sign of greatness of mind (1.22), he begins with the premise that high-minded suicides can be admired without necessarily being deemed wise. Cleombrotus is a case in point: Augustine concedes

<sup>35</sup> Cf. Gow and Page, *ibid.*: 'it may be that, whatever views Charidas had held, this epigram expresses C.'s'. Perhaps; but surely rash to assume so.

<sup>36</sup> For evidence of Callimachus' knowledge of Plato see *Iamb.* 5.26ff. and 31 (= fr. 195 Pf.) with Pfeiffer *ad loc.* and P. M. Fraser, *Ptolemaic Alexandria* (Oxford, 1972), I pp. 740–41; fr. 460 with Pfeiffer *ad loc.* on Plato's possible role in Callimachus' *Πρὸς Πραξιφάνην*; fr. 589 with Pfeiffer, *History of Classical Scholarship* (Oxford, 1968), pp. 93–4. Cf. Fraser, *op. cit.*, I p. 410 on the attested familiarity with and use of Plato in Callimachus' contemporary (and pupil) Eratosthenes.

<sup>37</sup> Cleombrotus died 'nullam aliam ob causam nisi quod Platoni credidit. Exsecrabilis prorsus ac fugienda doctrina, si abigit homines a vita' (*Inst.* 3.18). On Lactantius' hostility to pagan Greek philosophy see G. L. Ellspermann, *The Attitude of the Early Christian Latin Writers toward Pagan Literature and Learning*, *The Catholic University of America Patristic Studies* LXXXII (Washington, DC, 1949), pp. 79ff. Whether Lactantius knew the Callimachean epigram at first hand is doubtful, for his allusions to the Greek poets seem limited to Homer, Hesiod, Euripides and Musaeus; see R. M. Ogilvie, *The Library of Lactantius* (Oxford, 1978), pp. 20–27.

<sup>38</sup> Jerome, *Ep. ad Paulam* 39.3 (= *P.L.* 22.468): 'tales stulta philosophia habeat martyres, habeat Zenonem, Cleobrotum [sic] vel Catonem' (Cato allegedly read the *Phaedo* before committing suicide after defeat at Thapsus in 46 B.C.; cf. Cic. *Tusc.* 1.74, Lact. *Inst.* 3.18). At *Or.* 4.70 (= *P.G.* 35.588) Gregory includes Cleombrotus in a list of pagan martyrs who are contrasted unfavourably with Christian counterparts (τὸ Κλεομβρότου πῆδημα τοῦ Ἀμβρακιώτου, τῷ περὶ ψυχῆς λόγῳ φιλοσοφηθέν).



that he died high-mindedly, but he was nevertheless unwise because Plato himself adjudged suicide to be forbidden.<sup>39</sup> Augustine's reluctance to criticize Plato is perhaps a reflection of his early Neoplatonic education;<sup>40</sup> he also tactfully avoids fuelling Neoplatonic outrage at Christian slander of Plato.

Ammonius' defence of Plato runs as follows:

Κλεόμβροτος γάρ τις ὀνόματι ἐγκύψας τῷ Πλάτωνος Φαίδωνι καὶ ὅτι μὲν δεῖ τὸν φιλόσοφον θάνατον μελετᾶν γνούς, ὅτῳ δὲ δεῖ τρόπῳ μὴ γνούς, ἀνελθὼν ἀπὸ τοῦ τείχους ἑαυτὸν κατεκρήμνισε. τούτου μαρτύριον ὁ τὸ εἰς αὐτὸ τὸ Ἀμβρακιωτικὸν μειράκιον ἐκθέμενος ἐπίγραμμα ποιητής. φησὶ γὰρ Εἵπας...<sup>41</sup>

After quoting the epigram, Ammonius mounts his defence by asking τί ποτε βούλεται ἡ ῥηθείσα τοῦ θανάτου μελέτη;. What exactly does Socrates mean when he states at *Phd.* 67e 4–5 οἱ ὁρθῶς φιλοσοφούντες ἀποθνήσκειν μελετῶσι? Ammonius answers by distinguishing two kinds of death, the natural separation of the soul from the mortal body at the end of life (ὁ φυσικὸς θάνατος) and 'purposive death' (ὁ προαιρετικὸς θάνατος), or what the true philosopher undergoes in preparing his soul for its release from the body when natural death eventually claims him. By the words ἡ θανάτου μελέτη, claims Ammonius, Plato means this stage of preparation (ὁ προαιρετικὸς θάνατος), but Cleombrotus misunderstood him: interpreting the phrase ἡ θανάτου μελέτη as an injunction to commit suicide (ἡ τοῦ φυσικοῦ θανάτου μελέτη), he took his life accordingly. After portraying Cleombrotus as a keen young student who studied the *Phaedo* with more enthusiasm than intelligence, Ammonius quotes Callimachus' epigram as a testament to ignorant folly (cf. τὴν ἐξ ἀγνοίας... συμβᾶσαν τῷ νέῳ ἐγχέιρῳ).<sup>42</sup> Plato himself cannot be held responsible for Cleombrotus' failure to understand him.

Elias, David and Pseudo-Elias faithfully follow Ammonius in distinguishing ὁ φυσικὸς θάνατος from ὁ προαιρετικὸς θάνατος and in casting Cleombrotus as a fool because he mistook the true meaning of ἡ θανάτου μελέτη.<sup>43</sup> Olympiodorus

<sup>39</sup> For discussion of Augustine's chapters on suicide as sin (*C.D.* 1.17–27) see P. W. van der Horst, 'A pagan Platonist and a Christian Platonist on suicide', *Vigiliae Christianae* 25 (1971), 282–8. Augustine's source at 1.22 may have been Cicero, for the 'Theombrotus' reported in certain of the Augustinian mss. is paralleled in the Ciceronian mss. at *Tusc.* 1.84 and *Scaur.* 4. On the improbable assumption that Cicero himself was in error, misquotation from memory offers one explanation, dependence on an unreliable text another; for discussion see S. Lundström, 'Falsche Eigennamen in den *Tuskulanen*?', *Erano*s 58 (1960), 66–79, with Spina, pp. 22ff.

<sup>40</sup> For which see *Conf.* 7.13 (9), 7.26 (20), 8.3 (2). Augustine might also have seen the Christian relevance of Plato's argument that man, as a possession of the gods, is not free to dispose of his life as he pleases (*Phd.* 62c–d); see J. Bels, 'La mort volontaire dans l'oeuvre de saint Augustin', *Revue de l'Histoire des Religions* 187 (1975), 170.

<sup>41</sup> *CAG* 4.3.4.18ff. Busse.

<sup>42</sup> Cf. Gow and Page, 2 p. 204: 'Ammonius... calls Cleombrotus μειράκιον without warrant from Callimachus'. The innovation arises naturally out of Ammonius' interpretation of the epigram: Cleombrotus' folly is attributed to his immaturity. Despite the hint of boyishness in τῷ νέῳ, μειράκιον could denote a student of 20 or so years (see *LSJ* s.v.). The term ἐγκύψας certainly suggests a student busily poring over his books (cf. προσίωμεν τοῖνυν καὶ ἀνοίγωμεν τὰ γραμματεῖα καὶ ἐγκύπτωμεν τοῖς ἐγγεγραμμένοις καὶ ἴδωμεν..., J. Chrys. *Expos. in Psal.* 5.1 [= *P.G.* 55.61]). I take it that Bentley, in proposing ἐγκύρσας ('stumbling upon') for ἐγκύψας (see C. J. Bromfield, *Callimachi quae supersunt*... [London, 1815], p. 150), sought to stress Cleombrotus' amateurish approach to the *Phaedo*.

<sup>43</sup> For Elias see *CAG* 18.1.13.7ff. Busse; David, *CAG* 18.2.31.3ff. Busse; pseudo-Elias, *In Porph. Isag.* 12.22–6 = pp. 16–17 Westerink, Cf. Olymp. *In Alc.* 5.1ff. Westerink (summarizing Damascius): through his suicide Cleombrotus rudely severs the bonds connecting the body and soul rather than loosening them, as the true philosopher should, διὰ τοῦ συμπαθοῦς (i.e. the intermediate stage of μετριοπάθεια which the philosopher goes through on his way to ἀπάθεια).

presumably took the same line, but his only extant comment on Cleombrotus survives in two verses recorded by David and written, it seems, in response to the Callimachean epigram:

εἰ μὴ γράμμα Πλάτωνος ἐμὴν ἐπέδησεν ἐρωήν,  
ἤδη λυγρὸν ἔλυσα βίου πολυκηδέα δέσμον.<sup>44</sup>

Olympiodorus wittily poses as Cleombrotus-like in his erstwhile desire to free his soul through death. Olympiodorus, however, read the *Phaedo* correctly: not only does he stay alive because he understood the correct meaning of ἡ θανάτου μελέτη, but he controls his desire for death with the Platonic philosopher's abhorrence of passion. Cleombrotus, by contrast, is anything but a Platonist, for he compounds his misreading of the *Phaedo* with abject surrender to his impulse for dying.<sup>45</sup>

### III. THE CICERONIAN VERDICT

In the *Pro Scauro* Cicero introduces Cleombrotus as part of a complex argument against the charge that Marcus Aemilius Scaurus, while governor of Sardinia, had driven the wife of a certain Aris to suicide by his unwelcome sexual advances. Cicero deviously argues that genuine instances of crisis-induced suicide are so rare that it is hardly likely that Aris' wife died in such circumstances. So it 'proves', at least on the outrageous evidence which Cicero adduces to support his scepticism: since Aris' wife could hardly have attracted Scaurus' advances in the first place ('constat enim illam cum deformitate summa fuisse tum etiam senectute', 6 Clark), she cannot have committed suicide to protect her honour. Since her honour was never at risk (cf. 'quae potest ... ulla libidinis aut amoris esse suspicio?', *ibid.*), and since she therefore had no reasonable grounds for suicide, the only plausible explanation for her death, Cicero goes on to argue, is that she was murdered ... by her husband (7ff.).

Cleombrotus' role in the argument is crucially conditioned by the *exempla* of apparently noble suicide which precede him. Cicero's few Roman examples force the loaded question:<sup>46</sup> who could believe that Aris' humble Sardinian wife was capable of an act virtually unparalleled even in Rome's distinguished past? After seeming to run out of Roman examples, Cicero predictably claims that Greek illustrations of noble suicide are equally hard to find (*Scaur.* 3):

Quid? in omnibus monumentis Graeciae, quae sunt verbis ornatiores quam rebus, quis invenitur, cum ab Aiace fabulisque discesseris, qui tamen ipse 'Ignominiae dolore', ut ait poeta, 'victor insolens se victum non potuit pati', praeter Atheniensem Themistoclem, qui se ipse morte multavit?

By not dwelling on Greek *fabulae* Cicero conveniently avoids drawing awkward parallels between Aris' wife and the likes of Iocasta and Phaedra. But by alluding to

<sup>44</sup> CAG 18.2.32.1-2 Busse (= *App. Anth.* 3.177, p. 320 Cougny); also in Elias (CAG 18.1.14.9-10), pseudo-Elias (*In Porph. Isag.* 12.38-9 = p. 18 Westerink) and schol. to Dion. Thrax (*Gram. Gr.* 1.[3].160.19-23 Hilgard = *Anec. Gr.* 725-6 Bekker). Perhaps, as Cougny suggests (*op. cit.*, p. 375), λυγρός should be read in the second line to avoid two unconnected adjectives with δέσμον. Elias claims the couplet as his own, but Busse argues (CAG 18.1 p. vii) that Elias' lectures were set down by a pupil who was responsible for the careless and false attribution.

<sup>45</sup> The difference between Olympiodorus and Cleombrotus lies ultimately in the difference between ἐπέδησεν and ἐπήδησεν; a quaint coincidence, or is Olympiodorus making a playful point?

<sup>46</sup> On the alleged (but disputed) suicides of the two 'heroic' Crassi distinguished at *Scaur.* 1-2 see B. A. Marshall, 'Some Crassi in Cicero's *Pro Scauro*', *Latomus* 35 (1976), 92-6 with *idem*, *A Historical Commentary on Asconius* (Columbia, 1985), pp. 140-44.

Greek *fabulae* in the first place, Cicero's strategy is to claim that noble suicide is prevalent only in myth, not in real life. The two tragic lines which he quotes thus dismiss truly noble suicide to the realms of dramatic fiction;<sup>47</sup> and when he turns to Themistocles as an apparently historical example of honourable suicide, his choice is conveniently problematic.

Thucydides reports that Themistocles died through illness (1.138.4), but he adds the rumour of suicide: *λέγουσι δέ τινες καὶ ἐκούσιον φαρμάκῳ ἀποθανεῖν αὐτόν* (ibid.).<sup>48</sup> Cicero clearly knew the Thucydidean passage and was well aware that suicide was only rumoured, but his attitude to the rumour shifts according to the context in which he introduces Themistocles. At *Brut.* 43 Atticus is made to discuss the rumour of suicide as a rhetorical invention devised for dramatic effect, but at *Amic.* 42 Cicero relies on the 'fact' of suicide to illustrate his argument that the duties of friendship do not extend to complicity in treason: Themistocles committed suicide because he lacked allies to avenge Athens for his expulsion.<sup>49</sup> At *Scaur.* 3 Cicero again presents the rumour as an accepted fact for contextual reasons; but what if any of the jury knew that suicide was only rumoured? To the uninitiated, Cicero's appeal to Themistocles' example sets a standard for glorious suicide which is unthinkable in Aris' wife. To the initiated, however, Cicero's reliance on mere rumour 'proves' yet again how difficult it is to find even a single authentic example of noble suicide in Greek history—and how difficult it must therefore be to believe that Aris' wife died in such an unprecedented way. The subtle effect of Cicero's argument is that both audiences, the historically informed and uninformed, are led to the same conclusion by different means.

As if to confirm the dearth of historical examples available to him, Cicero explicitly introduces Cleombrotus' suicide as a fiction which is to be regarded as suspiciously as its Greek inventors: 'Graeculi quidem multa fingunt' (4).<sup>50</sup> Cicero's argument now reaches its climax: Cleombrotus is his last example to show that authentic cases of high-minded suicide are so rare that Aris' wife must have died in more suspicious circumstances. No one is left in any doubt about the idealistic background to Cleombrotus' death, for in a single sentence structured with more than the usual complexity (4), Cicero offers a summary of Socrates' arguments in the *Phaedo* regarding the soul's bodily imprisonment and post-mortal release. Since Cicero faithfully reports that Cleombrotus was not driven to suicide by any affliction ('non quo acerbatis accepisset aliquid', 4), the initial impression conveyed in this passage is that Cleombrotus illustrates what Aris' wife evidently was not—an ideologically motivated suicide. Cicero immediately drives home the advantage by asking a tongue-in-cheek question: 'num igitur ista tua Sarda Pythagoram aut Platonem norat aut legerat?' (5). His question anticipates the obvious answer: Aris' wife had not read Plato, she knew nothing of Pythagoras, and no, she is not in the same class of suicide as Cleombrotus. Or is she?

Cicero's subsequent allusion to the Platonic ban on suicide instantly transforms Cleombrotus' role in the argument (*Scaur.* 5):

Qui tamen ipsi [Pythagoras et Plato] mortem ita laudant ut fugere vitam vetent atque id contra foedus fieri dicant legemque naturae. Aliam quidem causam mortis voluntariae nullam profecto iustam reperietis.

<sup>47</sup> *TRF*<sup>3</sup> fr. xxxiv (*in incertis*) Ribbeck, who conjectures that the lines belong to Accius' *Philocteta*. <sup>48</sup> Cf. Aristoph. *Eg.* 83–4, Diod. 11.58.3, Plut. *Them.* 36.1.

<sup>49</sup> See also *Att.* 9.10.3 (Themistocles did better to commit suicide than make war on his homeland) with D. R. Shackleton Bailey, *Epistulae ad Atticum* (Cambridge, 1967), IV p. 378 *ad loc.* <sup>50</sup> For examples of *Graeculus* used contemptuously see *OLD* s.v. 1a.

Even if Aris' wife had read Plato, the argument goes, she would have found no justification in the *Phaedo* for taking her life. What, then, of Cleombrotus? However ideological his motive for suicide, the fact remains that he contravened what Cicero portrays as the absolute Platonic ban on voluntary death; and so even though his ideological motive distinguishes him from Aris' wife, the Ambracian's action is no more defensible in strict Platonic terms than the woman's suicide would have been. The full relevance of Cicero's statement that Cleombrotus had suffered no affliction which understandably drove him to suicide despite the Platonic prohibition (cf. 'non quo acerbitalis accepisset aliquid') only emerges with the revelation that Aris' wife was too ugly even to attract Scaurus' unwelcome advances: like Cleombrotus, she was not driven to suicide under the duress ('acerbitalis') which allegedly distinguishes the cases of Ajax and Themistocles. While these earlier examples might have disputed Cicero's claim that suicide in contravention of the Platonic ban and natural law can never be justified (cf. 'aliam quidem causam mortis voluntariae nullam profecto iustam reperietis'), there are no extenuating circumstances to excuse Cleombrotus—and this despite his high-minded (but misguided) idealism. Cicero thus 'proves' that Aris' ugly wife could only have killed herself in circumstances as ill-judged and philosophically unjustifiable as those of the Ambracian's death.

On the evidence of the *Pro Scauro*, then, I suggest that Cicero interpreted the Callimachean epigram as firmly anti-Cleombrotean. So how does *Tusc.* 1.83–4, the only other passage in which Cicero mentions Cleombrotus, compare? Cicero is discussing the proposition that death delivers us from evil rather than good. The belief had induced notable cases of suicide:

Et quidem hoc a Cyrenaico Hegesia sic copiose disputatur, ut is a rege Ptolomaeo prohibitus esse dicatur illa in scholis dicere, quod multi iis auditis mortem sibi ipsi consciscerent. Callimachi quidem epigramma in Ambraciotam Cleombrotum est, quem ait, cum ei nihil accidisset adversi, e muro se in mare abiecisse lecto Platonis libro. eius autem, quem dixi, Hegesiae liber est Ἀποκαρτερῶν, [in] quo a vita quidam per inedia[m] discedens revocatur ab amicis, quibus respondens vitae humanae enumerat incommoda.

Whether it was Ptolemy I Soter or Ptolemy II Philadelphus who barred Hegesias from lecturing is unclear,<sup>51</sup> but it may well be that Hegesias and Callimachus were at least near contemporaries at Alexandria, and possibly that the Callimachean epigram was composed in a climate of debate over the philosopher's freedom of speech: if Hegesias is to be barred from lecturing on the benefits of voluntary death, then why not go to the absurd extreme of banning Plato on the grounds that the *Phaedo* might equally induce the odd student to commit suicide?<sup>52</sup> But however suggestive the connection

<sup>51</sup> See T. W. Dougan's commentary (Cambridge, 1905), p. 106 *ad loc.* For the anecdote that Hegesias influenced his students to commit suicide see Plut. *Mor.* 497d, Val. Max. 8.9.3.ext., D.L. 2.86 (Hegesias was known as Πεισιθάνων) with J. Clark Murray, 'An ancient pessimist', *The Philosophical Review* 2 (1893), 24–34; testimonia are assembled by G. Giannantoni, *Socratis et Socraticorum Reliquiae*<sup>2</sup> (Naples, 1990), 2 p. 63 (fr.160) and pp. 113–15 (frs.1–7).

<sup>52</sup> This is the suggestive line taken by S. White in an article entitled 'Callimachus on Plato and Cleombrotus' (*TAPhA* 124 [1994], 135–61). But cf. M. Griffin, 'Philosophy, Cato and Roman suicide', *G&R* 33 (1986), 71: 'Despite the predominantly negative view of Plato and his pupil... there is a kernel of truth in the story of Cleombrotus: that is the *impression* Plato's dialogue could make on the unwary reader, overwhelmed by its message of the immortality of the soul and its incarceration in the body'. Could Callimachus be warning of the possible ill-effects of philosophy on impressionable readers/listeners? But even if so, can Plato be held responsible for Cleombrotus' decision to commit suicide? For the charge that Plato exerted an unhealthy influence by inducing many to study philosophy superficially, cf. Dicaearch. ap.

between Callimachus and Hegesias, Cicero is not engaged in sophisticated literary or philosophical interpretation when he paraphrases the epigram: after describing how Hegesias' students were persuaded to take their lives, he introduces Cleombrotus as a second example of the phenomenon without any explicit comment on the wisdom or philosophical justification of the Ambracian's action.

But various factors tell against taking Cicero's allusion to Cleombrotus as an example of admirable self-killing. Whereas Hegesias' students and Cleombrotus are persuaded to commit suicide by external influences, the hunger-striker depicted in the *Ἀποκατεργῶν* appears not to be so induced. After reaching his own conclusion that life is worthless, he lives with that decision through the process of gradual starvation. His reasoned response to the friends who try to dissuade him was perhaps an important element in Hegesias' narrative, for those friends provide a form of elenchus which tests his resolution even as he is dying. Cleombrotus is hardly in the hunger-striker's class of patient and considered suicide: whether or not the latter welcomed his friends' informal elenchus, he did not die rashly—unlike the Ambracian. Moreover, Cicero claims that, like the hunger-striker, he too could enumerate life's discomforts, but not to the extent of agreeing that life is wholly pointless (cf. 'possem idem facere, etsi minus quam ille, qui omnino vivere expedire nemini putat', 1.84). If in Cicero's judgement the hunger-striker went too far, can he have viewed Cleombrotus any differently? I suggest not, even though Cicero would agree with Cleombrotus on one general point: death delivers us from evil (cf. 'a malis... mors abducit, non a bonis, verum si quaerimus', 1.83).

#### IV. THE OVIDIAN VERDICT

In the curse-catalogue of the *Ibis*, Cleombrotus' suicide is but one of the innumerable deaths which Ovid wishes on his enemy (493–4 La Penna):

vel de praecipiti venias in Tartara saxo,  
ut qui Socraticum de nece legit opus.

Whether or not he uses the case of Cleombrotus because Callimachus had done so in the lost *Ἰβίς*,<sup>53</sup> Ovid's evident familiarity with various other Callimachean epigrams surely suggests that he knew of the epigram on the Ambracian.<sup>54</sup> The Ovidian couplet raises various points of interest in this connection, but first a textual problem. When Cicero reports at *Tusc.* 1.84 that Cleombrotus leapt into the sea ('quem ait [Callimachus]... e muro se in mare abiecisse'), his error may be due simply to his recalling the epigram imperfectly from memory.<sup>55</sup> Or was his Callimachean text corrupt?<sup>56</sup> Whatever the case, there is just a suggestion that Ovid himself was aware of this alternative (Ciceronian) version of events. In lines 491–2 Ovid's subject is Lichas, hurled to his death in the Euboean sea by Hercules after the latter had donned the deadly cloak; then, in lines 495–6, Ovid alludes to Aegeus' suicidal leap into the

Philodem. *Syntax. philosoph.* col. 1.11–42 (= pp. 125–6 with commentary on pp. 203–6 in T. Dorandi's edition [Naples, 1991]); but allowance should be made here for anti-Platonic propaganda.

<sup>53</sup> Sinko, op. cit., p. 9 is inclined to think so on the (questionable) assumption that the *Ἰβίς* was one of the few books which Ovid took into exile (cf. *Tr.* 3.14.37–8).

<sup>54</sup> Cf. (e.g.) *Am.* 2.19.35–6, where Ovid alludes to *Epigr.* 31.5–6 Pf.; and he clearly knew *Epigr.* 2 Pf. (see my 'Conversing after sunset: a Callimachean echo in Ovid's exile poetry', *CQ* 41 [1991], 169–77).

<sup>55</sup> So Gow and Page, 2 p. 204.

<sup>56</sup> Sinko, op. cit., p. 2 and n. 1 reports scholarly claims that Cicero may have read *εἰς Ἀἰδην* for *εἰς Ἀἰδην*.

sea after Theseus forgot to signal his victory over the Minotaur. By positioning his allusion to Cleombrotus between these two instances of drowning, Ovid makes neat allowance for any variation in line 2 of the Callimachean epigram. If, with Cicero, Cleombrotus is assumed to have leapt into the sea (εἰς ἄλαδε?), the setting of *Ibis* 493–4 allows Ovid's Cleombrotus to have done the same; and yet Ovid is scrupulously careful to preserve Callimachus' εἰς Ἀΐδην by writing 'venias in Tartara'.

'In Tartara' is not a slavish translation of εἰς Ἀΐδην, however, for Ovid's words yield a nuance which is not in the Greek. The Tartarus which awaits Ibis is not the Underworld in general, but that hellish region where sinners meet their just deserts,<sup>57</sup> a destination already mapped out in lines 173–4:

in loca ab Elysiis diversa fugabere campis,  
quasque tenet sedes noxia turba coles.<sup>58</sup>

The hellish connotation of Tartarus makes Ovid's curse in line 493 consistent with 173–4; but if 'Tartara' (493) is interpreted in this pejorative sense, which kind of Tartarus did Cleombrotus leap into? Since he had seen 'no evil worthy of death', one implication of the epigram when viewed against the *Phaedo* is that he sinned by taking his life unnecessarily; and the place which Socrates himself reserves for sinners in the *Phaedo* is hellish Τάρταρος (cf. 113e). Far from needing to know the *Phaedo* intimately to recognize the Callimachean hint of culpability in Cleombrotus' action, all Ovid required was what Cicero presents in the *Pro Scauro* and elsewhere as common knowledge, that Plato and the Pythagoreans prohibit suicide.<sup>59</sup> If read in this light, the curse instantly becomes more pointed: 'I hope you leap straight into hellish Tartarus,' Ovid tells Ibis, 'just as the Ambracian did after wrongly construing what he thought was a book encouraging suicide'.<sup>60</sup>

A further implication of the Ovidian couplet is that Cleombrotus was right to believe in life after death, but that his soul faces greater suffering in the afterlife than during its bodily imprisonment. Cleombrotus thus pays an ironic penalty for dying precipitately; that he should have been more patient is implied in a late epigram by Agathias, *A.P.* 11.354.

## V. AGATHIAS AND NICOSTRATUS

In Agathias' epigram<sup>61</sup> a philosopher named Nicostratus is asked to describe the nature of the soul: is it mortal or immortal, corporeal or incorporeal, tangible or intangible (3–6)? Nicostratus immediately consults Aristotle's *De Anima*, Plato's *Phaedo* and the rest of his philosophical library to find the answer (7–9). After being heralded as ἄλλον Ἀριστοτέλην and ἰσοπλάτωνα (1), he turns out to be a second Aristotle and Plato in the rather less flattering sense that he is wholly reliant on their accumulated wisdom. Armed with the whole truth of the matter (10), he adopts a suitably philosophical pose by wrapping his cloak around him and by stroking his

<sup>57</sup> For this latter connotation see Virg. *Aen.* 6.543, 551, 577.

<sup>58</sup> For Tartarus termed 'sclerata sedes' or the like see Cic. *Clu.* 71, Tib. 1.3.67–8, Virg. *Aen.* 6.563, Ov. *M.* 4.456.

<sup>59</sup> See *Scaur.* 5, *Tusc.* 1.74, *Rep.* 6.15 Ziegler, *Sen.* 73.

<sup>60</sup> Given his malevolent intent in the *Ibis*, Ovid creates a suitably black irony by abandoning the *Phaedo*'s Greek title and portraying the dialogue 'on the soul'/'on life' (*Περὶ ψυχῆς*) as a dialogue 'on death' ('de nece', 494; but cf. Cicero's description of the *Phaedo* as 'liber de morte' [*Scaur.* 4]). Alternatively, 'Socraticum' could be construed as a transferred epithet (sc. '... ut qui Socratica de nece legit opus').

<sup>61</sup> For succinct commentary see G. Viansino, *Agazia Scolastico: Epigrammi* (Milan, 1967), pp. 152–3 (= *Epigr.* 95).

beard thoughtfully (11–12),<sup>62</sup> only to give a non-committal verdict. His admission that he is unsure about the state of the soul (οὐδὲ γὰρ οἶδα, 13) is an affected reminiscence of Socratic ignorance, but without the attendant Socratic irony: Nicostratus is not feigning when he claims to have no answer, and he proves to be anything but Socratic by basing his ‘conclusion’ on a form of bookish knowledge which Socrates himself dismisses in the *Phaedrus* as mere *δοξοσοφία* (275cf.). He passes judgement in the manner of the straw-splitting logician that he is (cf. *σκινδαλαμοφράστην*, 2),<sup>63</sup> but his words prove to be as decorative as his philosophical pose: his apparent analysis of the alternatives (ἡ θνητὴ πάντως ἐστὶν ἡ ἀθάνατος, / *στεγνοφυῆς ἡ αὐλός* [*ψυχῆς φύσις*], 14–15) is lifted straight out of the question (cf. 4–5), but with impressively technical vocabulary substituted for the more obvious terms of the question (cf. 5–6).<sup>64</sup>

One humorous implication of the epigram is that Nicostratus exemplifies the futility of philosophical enquiry into the unknowable.<sup>65</sup> The ‘complete truth’ (*πάσαν... ἀτρεκίην*, 10) which he gleans from his reading proves to be hopelessly incomplete, for the real truth of the matter (*τὸ νημερτές*, 16) will only reveal itself in death. His reputation as a second Plato is thus of no practical advantage; everyone, his questioner included, will turn out to be *ἰσοπλάτων* in the sense that everyone will eventually make the same discovery which Plato made when he died (cf. 15–16). The impatient can hasten the discovery, however (17–20):

εἰ δ' ἐθέλεις, τὸν παῖδα Κλεόμβροτον Ἀμβρακιώτην  
μυμοῦ, καὶ τεγέων σὸν δέμας ἐκχάλασον  
καὶ κεν ἐπιγνοίης δίχα σώματος αὐτίκα σαντόν,  
μούνον ὅπερ ζητεῖς τοῦθ' ὑπολειπόμενος.

If Nicostratus' questioner emulates Cleombrotus, he will immediately acquire the self-knowledge he craves, but at what cost? Cleombrotus may or may not have released his soul from its bodily prison when he made his death-jump, but what if the soul is not in fact immortal? Is the risk of staking all on mere belief in the immortality of the soul worth taking? Nicostratus is much too cautious a philosopher to leap to rash conclusions in Cleombrotean fashion, and for that reason he leaves it to his questioner to judge the Ambracian's action for himself (cf. *εἰ δ' ἐθέλεις... μυμοῦ*, 17–18); but Nicostratus' indecision is set in salutary contrast to Cleombrotus' fervent if reckless enthusiasm.

Although Agathias was probably a Christian,<sup>66</sup> it would be going too far to interpret Nicostratus' failure to define the nature of the soul as an attack on pagan philosophy. The epigram bears out what appears to be Agathias' general view of philosophical speculation on death, pagan or otherwise: *τὴν ἀληθεστάτην βάσανόν τε καὶ ἀντίδοσιν τῶν ἐνταῦθα βεβιωμένων, ἥτις ποτέ ἐστιν, ἐκέισε ἐλθόντες εἰσόμεθα. λεγόντων μὲν οὖν περὶ τούτων ἄλλοι τυχὸν μὲν ταῦτα, τυχὸν δὲ ἕτερα, ὥς πη ἐκάστω ᾧ βουλομένῳ* (*Hist.* 5.4.6).<sup>67</sup> Judged by Agathias' criterion, Nicostratus emerges from

<sup>62</sup> The *τρίβων* is the philosopher's common garb (see *LSJ* s.v. for examples); the diminutive *τριβώνιον* makes Nicostratus the most scantily clad of philosophers. For the beard as part of the philosopher's image see Viansino, op. cit., p. 153 on 11.

<sup>63</sup> For *σκινδαλαμός* used of the hair/straw-splitting philosopher *par excellence* see Aristoph. *Ra.* 819 and *Nu.* 130 with K. J. Dover (Oxford, 1968), p. 110 *ad loc.*

<sup>64</sup> Nicostratus invents *στεγνοφυῆς* for his erudite purpose; *αὐλός* is the rarer and post-Aristotelian alternative to *ἀσώματος* (cf. 5).

<sup>65</sup> So Viansino, op. cit., p. 150.

<sup>66</sup> See Averil Cameron, *Agathias* (Oxford, 1970), pp. 89–111, countering previous claims that Agathias was a pagan.

<sup>67</sup> Cited by Viansino, p. 153 on 16. Cf. Cameron, op. cit., p. 105, linking the epigram with Agathias' belief ‘that human knowledge can never reach the whole truth’.

the epigram as an ambivalent figure, a philosopher who illustrates the futility of exhaustive research which leads nowhere, and also a patient observer of human reality, whose enquiries lead ultimately to a conclusion (cf. 15–16) with which Agathias would seem to agree. The irony is that, for all his futile efforts, Nicostratus' scholarly caution is vindicated by the contrary example of Cleombrotus, and his allusion to the Ambracian is as much a defence of his philosophical approach as it is a form of provocation to his questioner: the true philosopher never takes unnecessary risks.

## VI. END OF STORY?

In pseudo-Lucian's *Philopatris*, probably of the tenth century or later,<sup>68</sup> a certain Critias is overwhelmed by the excessive enthusiasm which his teachers have for every aspect of the classical culture which they try to pass on to him. Dizzied by the experience, Critias is saved from committing suicide like Cleombrotus only by the timely greeting of his friend Triepho: [Critias] ἀλλὰ κατὰ ὠθοῦμην ἂν ἐπὶ κεφαλῆς σκοτοδινησας, εἰ μὴ ἐπέκραξάς μοι, ὦ τάν, καὶ τὸ τοῦ Κλεομβρότου πῆδημα τοῦ Ἀμβρακιώτου ἐμυθεύθη ἐπ' ἐμοί (IV p. 368 Macleod). Critias' allusion to Cleombrotus is of course ironic: Cleombrotus serves to illustrate not only the extent of Critias' new-found erudition, but also the suicidal madness which comes with his quickly acquired learning. The use of ἐμυθεύθη further suggests that Critias was on the point of reproducing a legend (μῦθος) which bore no closer relation to λόγος than the suicidal urge which almost destroyed him. If pseudo-Lucian is alluding here to Cleombrotus' proverbial reputation as a suicidal madman, the allusion evolves out of what we have seen to be the consistent interpretation of the suicide from the Classical age down to Ammonius and beyond—and it is important to remember that Plato's Christian opponents do not absolve Cleombrotus from criticism for his precipitate death.<sup>69</sup> Pseudo-Lucian would seem to have understood the Callimachean epigram—if he knew it at first hand—in the same way as Cicero, Ovid and the Neoplatonists. Whether Milton was later to write with irony when he refers to '...he who to enjoy / Plato's Elysium, leapt into the sea, Cleombrotus' (*Paradise Lost* 3.471–3) is open to question.

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<sup>68</sup> For this dating see S. Reinach, 'La question du *Philopatris*', *RA* 40 (1902), 79–110 with R. Anastasis' edition (Messina, 1968), pp. 7–34; but for an earlier post-classical date see B. Baldwin, 'The date and purpose of the *Philopatris*', *YCS* 27 (1982), 321–44 with stylistic analysis of the piece.

<sup>69</sup> The anonymous referee suggests that the joke in pseudo-Lucian may lie not in Critias' alluding to Cleombrotus' proverbial reputation as a madman, but in his deriding something 'unquestionably true, beautiful, good'. An intriguing possibility; but does it not go against the weight of classical opinion on Cleombrotus, at least as I have presented it?