

THE VOICE OF AUTHORITY: DIVINATION AND PLATO'S *PHAEDO**

Over the last few years there has been considerable interest in, and progress made on, the important roles played by myth and religion in the Platonic dialogues. My article aims to contribute to this discussion not by making any general claims about the nature of Platonic or Socratic myth and religion, but by focussing on the implications of speech grounded in the religious realm in one particular dialogue. I shall suggest that in the *Phaedo* Plato takes the cultural structures of divination and makes them over into the image of philosophy. Here, as elsewhere, Plato engages in a programmatic reinterpretation of the some of most important elements of his society. Just as the *Protagoras* and the *Gorgias* attempt to redefine what counts as pleasure or political expertise, the *Phaedo* does the same with divination. At stake, as always, is what it means to lead a philosophical life.

Divination is a particularly resonant concept because it allows us to focus on the problem of the authoritative voice. The most obvious example is the voice of Delphic Apollo, mediated by his oracle, but Plato also presents us with human 'authorities' who have some pretensions to 'oracular' authority. Those who receive such pronouncements must decide how to deal with them, and clearly Plato and his Socrates will be concerned with a properly philosophical response. The *Phaedo* also foregrounds the issue of the extent to which Socrates can or should be included among such authoritative voices. Plato has Socrates juxtapose an Apollonian world of divination (*mantike*) and music (*mousike*) with his own Apollonian world of philosophy to dramatize a question that is particularly pressing on the last day of his life: what authority are we to give to Socrates' *logoi*? Can he be replaced once he is gone? I maintain that the dialogue moves from presenting Socrates as a purveyor of quasi-oracular wisdom to recognizing that, talented as Socrates is, the argument is more important, and that pursuing truth through argument is a transferable skill that his disciples must take up and must continue in his absence.

The authoritative voice of divination is only one variety of religious discourse, and thus I shall also be concerned to some degree with the nature of Socrates' relationship with the supernatural, although I do not hope to establish either Socratic or Platonic religious beliefs. My focus is on Socrates' interaction with this discourse. Religious speech, associated as it is with initiation, revelation and non-human authority is contrasted with philosophical enquiry. It is the task of philosophy to absorb and transform it. Mark McPherran has already argued from a historical perspective that divination was taken seriously by Socrates, although he recognized that it could not stand alone and must be subjected to rational examination.¹ My

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¹ M. McPherran, *The Religion of Socrates* (University Park, PA, 1996), 186–8. T.C. Brickhouse and N.D. Smith, *Socrates on Trial* (Princeton, 1989), 106–7, 253–4, while taking seriously

point is related but makes no claim about the historical Socrates: true divination will turn out to be philosophy.

This approach differs also from that of recent scholars who have worked intensively on Pythagorean and mystic elements in Plato. Christine Schefer, for example, has argued in reference to the *Phaedrus* that ‘the unspeakable religious experience of the mysteries is not only the heart of *erôs* and *logos*, but also the heart of the whole Platonic philosophy’.² She sees the *Phaedo* as a prose hymn in honour of an Apollo refigured as god of gods and an aspect of the Good, if not the Good itself. The dialogue is not speculation on immortality but revealed knowledge that comes directly from Apollo; philosophy is a kind of ecstasy where the soul is transported into the realm of Apollo.³ More conservatively, Michael Morgan sees the dialogue as a synthesis of Pythagorean, Orphic and Eleusinian elements, and philosophy in the dialogue as an ‘initiatory purification rite’, although he correctly proposes that Plato ‘following Socrates, turns religious rite into rational discipline’.⁴ Both Morgan and Theodor Ebert, however, see Socrates in the dialogue as a Pythagorean. For Morgan, Socrates is the new Pythagoras, while for Ebert, Socrates is portrayed as an *anima naturaliter Pythagorica*.⁵ While I agree with these scholars that the *Phaedo* draws heavily on imagery of religious revelation and initiation, including many Pythagorean elements, I resist the conclusion that philosophical enquiry in the *Phaedo* (or elsewhere) simply *is* revelation, ecstasy or initiation. Philosophy does not merely appropriate these models but transforms them.⁶ My approach is thus akin to that of Auguste Diès, who developed a model of what he called ‘la transposition platonicienne’, whereby Plato made use of the concepts of his time while giving them a deeper significance.⁷ The *Phaedo*, however, highlights the problems involved in drawing religious and mystical models into a philosophical discussion. As we shall see, the appeal to revealed authority, whether the authority is Pythagorean, Apollonian or Socratic, must be resisted. Socrates is no Pythagoras, authoritative sage and purveyor of oral doctrine and commandments.

The argument that follows has four parts. The first sketches the connections between Socrates and Apollo. The second explores the discourse of divination and prophecy, and associated problems. Parts three and four will focus more inten-

Socrates’ belief in divination, also agree that the truths accessible through divination are ‘worthless for the pursuit of the sorts of truth Socrates seeks philosophically – truth that explains and defines’. G. Vlastos, *Socrates, Ironist and Moral Philosopher* (Ithaca, NY, 1991), 171 gives a powerful argument for the ‘exclusive authority of reason’.

² C. Schefer, ‘Rhetoric as part of an initiation into the mysteries: a new interpretation of the Platonic *Phaedrus*’, in A. Michelini (ed.), *Plato as Author: The Rhetoric of Philosophy* (Leiden, 2003), 175–96, at 191.

³ C. Schefer, *Platon und Apollon. Vom Logos zurück zum Mythos* (Sankt Augustin, 1996), 149, 157, 241–51, 160–1.

⁴ M. Morgan, *Platonic Piety* (New Haven, 1990), 64, 75.

⁵ M. Morgan (n. 4), 57; T. Ebert, “‘Wenn ich einen schönen Mythos vortragen darf ...’”. Zu Status, Herkunft und Funktion des Schlussmythos in Platons *Phaidon*’, in M. Janka and C. Schäfer (edd.), *Platon als Mythologe. Neue Interpretationen zu den Mythen in Platons Dialogen* (Darmstadt, 2002), 251–69, at 268.

⁶ See E. Rohde, *Psyche: The Cult of Souls and Belief in Immortality Among the Greeks*, tr. W.B. Hillis (London, 1950), 470–1 on appropriation of religious models.

⁷ A. Diès, ‘La transposition platonicienne’, *AIPH* 2 (1913), 267–308. Diès covers briefly the transformation of mystery and Orphic motifs in the *Phaedo* (although his focus is on the *Phaedrus*): ‘il est difficile de ne pas voir que Platon joue, après d’autres, avec des formules consacrées et qu’il transpose, en ornements du dialogue, croyances et légendes aussi bien que formules’ (302).

sively on the *Phaedo*, first on the variety of Socrates' *logoi* in the dialogue and the authority that stands behind them, and then on Socrates' relationship with his disciples as he nears death. Both Socrates and the disciples must guard against a reliance on intuition and received dogma. Faith and mythological consolation are the reward for hard philosophical work, not the replacement for it.

1. SOCRATES AND APOLLO

Socrates' relationship with the supernatural is a source of some discomfort to interpreters. In his essay on Socratic piety, Vlastos felt compelled to argue against the notion that 'Socrates is counting on two disparate avenues of knowledge about the gods, rational and extra-rational respectively, yielding two distinct systems of justified beliefs, one of them reached through elenctic argument, the other by divine revelation through oracles, prophetic dreams and the like.'⁸ As McPherran points out, Vlastos's anxiousness to deprive Socrates' mantic aspects of intellectual authority means that he treats them all as subjective and irrational, although this overstates the case.⁹ Certainly, one must agree that from a philosophical point of view, argument must come first. Yet if we change our focus from what Socrates may have believed to how he was received by his contemporaries and the first generation of his students, we can see that locating the master in a proper religious context was essential.¹⁰ In Xenophon's case, this meant arguing that Socrates' religious beliefs were nothing out of the ordinary and that he practised a familiar type of divination.¹¹ Plato's technique is subtler. He constructs for Socrates a relationship with the religious world that shows him to be pious, but also shows how philosophy transforms religious paradigms. This is important not just for Plato's portrayal of Socrates' beliefs, but because it engages with the problem of philosophical reception of Socrates. The *Phaedo*, indeed, portrays a crucial point in that reception, as the disciples must bid farewell to the master and prepare to live their lives without him. These disciples must not think that they are losing a kind of shaman or diviner. Rather, they must all aspire to Socratic 'wisdom' and a different sort of philosophical divination.

Socratic reaction to religious pronouncements is famously illustrated in Chaerephon's trip to the Delphic oracle and its aftermath, narrated by Socrates in the *Apology*.¹² This narrative is clearly intended to be foundational for the

⁸ Vlastos (n. 1), 167.

⁹ McPherran (n. 1), 192–7.

¹⁰ For R. Loriaux, *Le Phédon de Platon*, vol. 1 (Namur, 1969), 39, the purpose of the Apollonian theme in the dialogue is to show Socrates in contact with divine reality.

¹¹ *Mem.* 1.1.2–9, with V. Gray, *The Framing of Socrates: The Literary Interpretation of Xenophon's Memorabilia*, *Hermes Einzelschriften* 79 (Stuttgart, 1998), 28–33.

¹² It is possible that Chaerephon's trip to the oracle may be a Platonic fiction. W. Nestle, 'Sokrates und Delphi', in id., *Griechische Studien* (Aalen, 1968), 173–85, at 173 gives references to early doubts about the oracle stretching back into antiquity. For recent doubts about historicity, see P. Vander Waert, 'Socratic justice and self-sufficiency: the story of the Delphic oracle in Xenophon's *Apology of Socrates*', *OSAPh* 11 (1993), 1–48, at 27–9. For a defence, see Brickhouse and Smith (n. 1), 89, n. 71. The truth of the matter is probably unattainable, but even if the oracle is invented, this does not affect my point here: Plato uses the oracle story to explore the nature of Socratic and divine intellectual authority.

interpretation of the Socratic elenchus.¹³ Chaerephon inquired whether there was anyone wiser than Socrates, and the Pythia replied that there was not (*Ap.* 21a4–7). Plato's Chaerephon must have expected that such a pronouncement would serve to establish Socrates' prestige in response to the fame of sophists such as Gorgias and Hippias who gave epideictic displays at Panhellenic sanctuaries.¹⁴ Socrates' response, however, is no complacent acceptance of his pre-eminence.¹⁵ The oracle puts him into a state of perplexity. He concludes that the oracle is riddling; he is conscious that he is not the wisest but knows also that it is not right for the god to lie (*Ap.* 21b3–7). Thus he admits that the oracle should be authoritative but his state of *aporia* compels him to test it because he cannot understand *how* it is true. His solution is to test the wisdom of local experts, since if he can find someone wiser than he, he will be able to disprove the oracle (ἐλέγξων τὸ μαντεῖον, 21c1) and say to it 'This man is wiser than I, but you said that I was'. It is this annoying activity that has given him a reputation for wisdom and aroused enmity towards him (22e7–23a3).

Analysis of this anecdote sometimes sets up a dichotomy between the proposition that Socrates used a divine apparatus as a form of public relations to justify his elenctic lifestyle and the proposition that Socrates believed in and was inspired by the oracle.¹⁶ It is perhaps more fruitful to focus on the ideology of the narrative. First, the account is a Platonic attempt to inscribe Socrates into a Panhellenic wisdom tradition. Like the Seven Sages, who were also connected with Delphi and each of whom refused the title of 'wisest', Socrates displays modesty about his wisdom and humility before the god.¹⁷ Yet unlike these wise men, Socrates methodically questions the underpinnings of contemporary attributions of wisdom. Second, the narrative foregrounds the primacy of interpretation when faced with an authoritative declaration. The oracle is not useful unless Socrates can understand how it is true. This response is paradigmatic of Socratic reception of all statements that claim authority. Socrates' relationship with Apollo is not one of passivity.

The *Phaedo* resumes the Apolline theme introduced in the *Apology* and again makes prominent Socrates' connections with the god. First, Socrates' death is delayed by the Athenian embassy to Delos during the festival of the Delia sacred to Apollo. Second, Socrates' activity during his final days is associated with the god. We are told that Socrates has composed a proem to Apollo and versified some of Aesop's fables. He has done this in an effort to 'test' some dreams he has had (ἐνυπνίων τινῶν ἀποπειρώμενος τί λέγῃ, 60e2). He had frequently been commanded by these dreams to 'make *mousike* and work at it' (60e6–7) and had previously thought that these orders were encouragements to continue his inquiries, since philosophy was the greatest music. Since, however, the embassy to Delian Apollo was postponing his death, he decided to compose 'common' poetry (the

¹³ On the oracle as a version of the 'call to philosophy', see O. Gigon, *Sokrates: Sein Bild in Dichtung und Geschichte* (Bern, 1947), 94–100; Vander Waert (n. 12), 32; Schefer (n. 3), 65–70, 78.

¹⁴ K.A. Morgan, 'Socrates and Gorgias at Delphi and Olympia: *Phaedrus* 235d6–236b4', *CQ* 44 (1994), 375–86.

¹⁵ As it is in Xenophon (Vander Waert [n. 12], 33–4, 39–43).

¹⁶ McPherran (n. 1), 212–13 summarizes the issue well. Cf. also Brickhouse and Smith (n. 1), 96–9.

¹⁷ K.A. Morgan, 'Philosophy at Delphi: Socrates, sages, and the circulation of wisdom', in L. Athanassaki, R. Martin and J. Miller (edd.), *Apolline Politics and Poetics* (Athens, 2009), 549–68.

proem to Apollo and the versification of Aesop's fables) and thus 'purify' himself in case the dreams had meant this kind of music (60e7–61b1). This musical activity may perhaps be seen as a failure of nerve on Socrates' part, but more importantly as another instance of thorough interpretation and epistemological modesty. When Socrates receives a divine pronouncement, he acknowledges its authority but immediately sets about to interpret it in the light of his philosophical beliefs. The case of Chaerephon's oracle has already shown us that he is no literal interpreter, and this *Phaedo* passage confirms it. In the former instance he redefines what it is to be wise, in the latter what it means to 'make music'. Yet he will always consider the possibility that he may be wrong. In the case of music-making he is willing to consider a literal interpretation, even though by the end of the dialogue we will conclude that he was right all along.

These issues are brought to the surface again in the swansong passage (84d–85b). Simmias and Cebes are afraid to bring up their objections to Socrates' arguments for immortality because they are unwilling to upset him as his death draws near. Socrates reassures them by comparing himself to swans who sing when they perceive that they must die. People are mistaken to think that this song is a lamentation. Rather they sing through joy since they know they are going to the god, Apollo, whose servants they are. Since they belong to Apollo they have prophetic powers and know the good things that are in Hades. Socrates is sacred to the same god and has similar mantic powers. Thus he is not disheartened by objections to the argument, and it is implied that, like the swans who sing throughout their lives but most beautifully when about to die, Socrates will on this day produce his most beautiful music. As Hackforth points out, his is philosophical music, which will encompass both the upcoming arguments and the final myth.¹⁸ Indeed, the bulk of the *Phaedo* will show how Socrates' original interpretation of his dream was correct: the *Phaedo* itself is Plato's portrayal of Socrates' philosophical *mousike*.¹⁹ What is more, the dialogue shows us how and why this must be true. It moves programmatically from ordinary music and divination to their philosophical counterparts.²⁰ Even at the point of his death, the point where a human being is most likely to make a true prophecy, Socratic conversation must ground itself in rational inquiry. Attempts to sidestep this process are doomed to failure.

Socrates, then, is connected to the god of prophecy. He is a recipient of divinatory messages (such as his dreams and the *daimonion*), and thus has mantic powers. We note that he calls himself a *mantis* (although not an entirely serious one) in the *Phaedrus* (242c), at the point where his *daimonion* prevents him from

¹⁸ R. Hackforth, *Plato's Phaedo* (Cambridge, 1955), 37–8; Loriaux (n. 10), 41, both on 60–1. Cf. also K.A. Morgan, *Myth and Philosophy from the Presocratics to Plato* (Cambridge, 2000), 192–6. Schefer (n. 3), 149 argues that the beginning of the *Phaedo* marks Socrates' realization that common music and philosophy, the greatest music, must go hand in hand and that he therefore integrates myth into his philosophy. Yet the common music of the proem to Apollo and the versified fables is in no way analogous to the final myth, which is clearly more philosophical than 'common'.

¹⁹ For a more detailed treatment of the relationship of philosophy and music, see K. Dorter, *Plato's Phaedo: An Interpretation* (Toronto, 1982), 193–203; Schefer (n. 3), 143–9 (stressing the importance of music for the Pythagoreans but arguing that it is Plato who makes philosophy into music); D. Gallop 'The rhetoric of philosophy: Socrates' swan-song', in Michelini (n. 2), 313–32, at 315.

²⁰ M. Morgan (n. 4), 58 presents the *Phaedo* as a 'revolutionary' and 'seditious' document of dissent against both Athens and Delphic theology. I argue that the dialogue sympathetically transforms rather than rejects the Delphic model.

leaving the scene after slandering love. There too, his mantic self demands that he give a ‘musical’ performance to purify himself (*Phdr.* 242c3, cf. *Phd.* 60e2, 61b1). Moreover, at the end of the *Apology* he explicitly makes a point of death prophecy: καὶ γάρ εἰμι ἤδη ἐνταῦθα ἐν ᾧ μάλιστα ἄνθρωποι χρησμοφδοῦσιν, ὅταν μέλλωσιν ἀποθανεῖσθαι, (‘I am now in the situation where men prophesy most of all, when they are about to die’, 39c1–4). The content of this prophecy (that killing him will not stop criticism of his judges) is more a case of reasoned inference than an inspired prediction. Socrates also speaks to those who voted for his acquittal, using the failure of his *daimonion* to alert him during the trial as evidence for the proposition that death is not an evil (40a–c). This conviction also provides the emotional starting point for the discussion of the *Phaedo*, where mantic conviction must transform into philosophy. To understand why this must be, it is necessary to examine some aspects of Plato’s treatment of divination.

2. DIVINATION AND PROPHECY (*MANTIKE*)

Let us start by reminding ourselves of Plato’s distinction between two differing types of divination. At *Phaedrus* 244a8–d5 Socrates distinguishes divination that comes through divine madness and inspiration from its counterpart undertaken by sane men through birds and other signs. The former is more honourable because it is inspired: divine madness trumps human moderation. The most famous example of oracular divination is of course the Pythia at Delphi, who speaks while possessed and is then interpreted. Since oracular speech is riddling and enigmatic even Apollo’s oracles need interpretation. Heraclitus, himself a producer of enigmatic utterances, declares that the Lord whose oracle is at Delphi neither hides nor reveals, but gives a sign (DK 22B93) – or, as Critias declares in the *Charmides*, the god speaks αἰνιγματωδέστερον δὲ δῆ, ὥς μάντις, ‘quite enigmatically, like a *mantis*’ (164e6–7). When the *mantis* divines by signs such as birds there is no possession, but rather interpretation of evidence. Both varieties of divination, then, require interpretation, but oracular divination brings the authoritative pronouncements of the divine into the human sphere. Numerous passages in Plato show that, in the view of Socrates, the good *mantis* will be inspired and will not be able to demonstrate rationally the truth he knows.²¹

The divinatory *logos* is authoritative, because its source is divine, but has no intellectual authority.²² This might be culturally unproblematic – if someone is truly inspired by Apollo we would have a *theios logos* – even though philosophically unsatisfactory. The case of the diviner by bird signs is more problematic. We may doubt that the diviner has read the signs correctly (or, like Oedipus in the *Oedipus Tyrannus*, think that the diviner has been corrupted). Even in the case of religious divination, then, there are issues both with the source of the pronouncement (is the diviner truly inspired? Has the diviner rightly interpreted the signs?) and with its reception (if it is enigmatic, how do we know what it truly means?).

Prophecy, however, is not the only discourse that one might call ‘Delphic’. We know from Plato’s *Protagoras* (343a–b) that the Seven Sages were associated with

²¹ So e.g. *Ap.* 22c2, *Meno* 99c3, *Ion* 534d1, *Ti.* 71e2–72b5. *La.* 195e–196a asserts that the *mantis* knows signs, but not their moral implications.

²² Cf. Vlastos (n. 1), 168–71.

Delphi.²³ The Delphic maxims 'Nothing to excess' and 'Know thyself' are said there to be the 'first fruit' of their wisdom, dedicated to Apollo. The pronouncements of intellectual experts can thus be associated with Delphic pronouncements. But of course, they will – and to an even greater degree – carry with them the same worries about authority and interpretation. A number of passages in Plato associate mantic and enigmatic speech negatively with intellectual obfuscation or ignorance. Thus when the redneck Anytus at *Meno* 92b–c declares his hostility towards the sophists even though he has no experience of them, Socrates responds, *Μάντις εἰ ἴσως, ὦ ἄνυτε· ἐπεὶ ὅπως γε ἄλλως οἶσθα τούτων πέρι, ἐξ ὧν αὐτὸς λέγεις θαυμάζοιμ' ἄν* ('Perhaps you are a *mantis*, Anytus, since I would be amazed how else you know about them, from what you yourself say', 92c6–7). Similarly in the *Cratylus* Hermogenes accuses Cratylus of speaking unclearly when he (Cratylus) comments on his (Hermogenes') name:

καὶ ἐμοῦ ἐρωτῶντος καὶ προθυμουμένου εἰδέναι ὅτι ποτὲ λέγει, οὔτε ἀποσαφεῖ οὐδὲν εἰρωνεύεται τε πρὸς με, προσποιούμενός τι αὐτὸς ἐν ἑαυτῷ διανοεῖσθαι ὡς εἰδώς περὶ αὐτοῦ, ὃ εἰ βούλοιο σαφῶς εἰπεῖν, ποιήσειεν ἄν καὶ ἐμὲ ὁμολογεῖν καὶ λέγειν ἅπερ αὐτὸς λέγει. εἰ οὖν πῃ ἔχεις συμβαλεῖν τὴν Κρατύλου μαντείαν, ἥδεως ἂν ἀκούσαιμι.

When I ask and am anxious to know what in the world he means, he doesn't clarify anything and ironizes towards me, pretending that he's having some private thought and knows something about the matter, with which, if he wished to speak clearly, he could make me agree and say the things he says. So if you can somehow interpret the oracle, I would gladly hear it. (383b7–384a5)

Even better, Socrates should give his own theories on the correctness of names (384a6–7). As Andrea Nightingale demonstrates, Cratylus' evasiveness shows that he is not in control of his own discourse.²⁴ Socrates himself, when he plays inventively with etymology, is compared to inspired persons who give oracles, and his explanation is that he has been 'possessed' by Euthyphro the Prospaltian, a possession from which he will soon need to purify himself (396d–e). At 428c, Cratylus adopts this vision of oracular inspiration, but Socrates resists. He 'denies and debunks "his own wisdom" and insists on further discussion'.²⁵ Oracular responses may be intellectually disreputable.

The most telling development of this theme comes in the *Theaetetus*. Faced with what he sees as an incoherence in Protagoras' *Aletheia*, Socrates wonders whether Protagoras was joking and spoke from the *adyton* (innermost shrine) of his book (162a1–3). The theory of Man/Measure relativism, which Socrates thinks is self-refuting, is thus seen as oracular and enigmatic. Like the Pythia, Protagoras speaks from the *adyton* and needs interpretation; his doctrine must face Socratic examination. Socrates ironically attributes oracular wisdom to the sophist, just as, earlier in the dialogue, he compared the theory to a riddling mystery doctrine whose truth was revealed only to the initiated (152c8–11).²⁶ A self-professed intellectual

²³ G. Nagy, *Pindar's Homer* (Baltimore, 1990), 334; Morgan (n. 17).

²⁴ A. Nightingale, 'Subtext and subterfuge in Plato's *Cratylus*', in Michelini (n. 2), 223–40, at 232.

²⁵ Nightingale (n. 24), 233.

²⁶ R.A.H. Waterfield, *Plato: Theaetetus* (London, 1987), 65, n. 1 suggests that the solution to the famed problem of Protagoras' head in the *Theaetetus* (which is imagined to stick up out of the ground and argue with Socrates) is an allusion to the severed head of Orpheus, which still

expert attempts to gain authority by affecting an oracular style, but we are left with the suspicion that this may hide argumentative incoherence. The authoritative presentation of a theory may disable rather than enable analysis. Delphic speech, therefore, seems far from philosophical discussion. Still, we note the importance of the Socratic response: interpretation and analysis.

The passages from the *Cratylus* and the *Phaedrus* present a mantic Socrates who can be moved into giving speeches that can be compared to oracles and other products of inspiration, although the analytic imperative remains. This imperative opens the door for a reconception of the meaning of divination along philosophical lines. The rationalization of divination among some fifth-century intellectuals may have its roots in the reception in Greek cities of oracular pronouncements from Delphi. Riddling oracles, as Robert Parker says, force 'the client to construct by interpretation his own response'. In the case of Athens at the time of the Persian Wars, the 'wooden walls' oracle 'referred the problem back to them; discussion resumed ... Arguments about the interpretation of particular oracles are so common as to suggest that they are not a by-product but an essential part of the institution's working'.²⁷ By the fourth century, the practice of states consulting Delphi had begun to decline and in Athens at least was replaced by discussion in the assembly. Parker speaks of rhetoric as a 'secular mode of divination',²⁸ and this perception is validated by another passage in the *Theaetetus*, where we learn that Protagoras claimed that he knew what would seem plausible in a law court. He persuaded his associates, says Socrates, that he knew what would be and what would appear to be in the future better than a *mantis* or anyone else (178e9–179a3). Nor was Plato's Protagoras the only intellectual to make such a claim. Antiphon, who may have written on the interpretation of dreams (DK 87A1–2), defined divination as the conjecture of a wise man (*ἀνθρώπου φρονίμου εἰκασμός* DK 87A9).²⁹ Similar viewpoints are represented by Euripides fr. 973 (Nauck), *μάντις δ' ἄριστος ὅστις εἰκάζει καλῶς* ('the best *mantis* is he who guesses well'), and *Hel.* 757, *γνώμη δ' ἀρίστη μάντις ἢ τ' εὐβουλία* ('judgement and good counsel are the best seers').³⁰

There was thus a well-developed tradition of Greek oracular interpretation, and the intellectual trends of the second half of the fifth century seem to have gone further and isolated human reason and judgement as replacements for divination. How does Socrates fit into this picture? As we might expect, he champions rational calculation without privileging, as he accuses the sophists and orators of doing, the probable over what is really the case (*Phdr.* 272d–e), and without separating the operation of human reason from a commitment to what is objectively true (not that the sophists would have accepted this formulation). He prizes the divine and reformulates it as the goal of reason. He therefore uses the vocabulary of

sang after death. I find this suggestion attractive since it reinforces the image of Protagoras as an oracle with mystic resonance.

²⁷ R. Parker, 'Greek states and Greek oracles', in P.A. Cartledge and F.D. Harvey (edd.), *Crux: Essays Presented to G.E.M. de Ste. Croix on his 75th Birthday* (Exeter, 1985), 298–326, at 301–2.

²⁸ Parker (n. 27), 320–4; quote at 323.

²⁹ M. Gagarin, *Antiphon the Athenian: Oratory, Law, and Justice in the Age of the Sophists* (Austin, 2002), 99–101. On DK 87A9 see also G. Pendrick, *Antiphon the Sophist* (Cambridge, 2002), 242–3. Like Gagarin, I believe that there was only one Antiphon, but even if there were two, the crucial point is the connection of divination with rational conjecture.

³⁰ The testimonia are collected and discussed by Nestle (n. 12), 176–7, together with references to fifth-century disdain for oracle-mongering.

divination both of philosophical intuition and of philosophical argument. The verb *manteuomai* is often used in Plato of a supposition in the course of philosophical argument. In the *Lysis*, for example, although he professes himself confused by the argument, he 'divines' (*ἀπομαντευόμενος*, 216d3) that what is friendly to the good is neither good nor evil. So too in the *Republic*, the verb is used of the 'insight' that self-control is a kind of harmony (431e7).³¹

Philebus 67b1–7 is of considerable interest in this context. Here, Socrates declares that we must not, like the many, rely on signs from the animal world (as *manteis* rely on birds) and thus allow ourselves to be convinced of the primacy of pleasure:

Πρώτον δέ γε οὐδ' ἂν οἱ πάντες βόες τε καὶ ἵπποι καὶ τᾶλλα σύμπαντα θηρία φῶσι τῷ τὸ χαίρειν διώκειν· οἷς πιστεύοντες, ὥσπερ μάντις ὄρνισιν, οἱ πολλοὶ κρίνουσι τὰς ἡδονὰς εἰς τὸ ζῆν ἡμῖν εὖ κρατίστας εἶναι.

But [we will not give pleasure] first place – not even if all the cattle and horses and all the other beasts together say so by pursuing pleasure. It's trusting in them, as *manteis* trust in birds, that the many judge pleasures to be most powerful for us for the purpose of living well.

The only authoritative witnesses are *logoi*: τῶν ἐν μούσῃ φιλοσόφῳ μεμαντευμένων ἐκάστοτε λόγων ('which on each occasion make their divination with the help of the philosophical Muse'). What we seem to have here is warrant for a philosophical kind of *mantike*, where we are to use arguments for our signs as seers use birds. Divination through animals, however, is devalued by being associated with the mental activities of mortals who pursue base pleasures because they are following the examples of animals, which are said to 'tell' us to do so. Philosophical 'divination' avoids using animals as a source of information and draws on argument instead. The mention of the 'philosophical Muse' also brings into play the model of inspiration as a source of knowledge. One would not normally expect divination by signs to be facilitated by the Muse, philosophic or otherwise. In a transformed philosophical reality, however, reformed inspiration, divination and ratiocination combine. This final example confirms that the metaphor of divination is live in the passages cited; all of them conform to the Platonic practice of giving new (philosophical) content to cultural *topoi*.

3. SOCRATES' *LOGOI* IN THE *PHAEDO*

We have seen that Socrates is no normal prophet. Prophecy is associated with inspired and even enigmatic speech. But enigmatic presentation can be a cover for lack of rigour, and inspired delivery is not the result of knowledge. The danger in the *Phaedo* is that Socrates' closeness to death will make him 'inspired' in a bad way, give enigmatic accounts that will escape rational investigation, return to the 'mythological' model represented by the proem to Apollo and the versified fables.

³¹ Compare also *Resp.* 505e1, where the soul pursues the good, *divining* that it is something. Socrates' 'dream' of wisdom in the *Charmides* imagines a world where divination is real knowledge of what is to come (173c2–7). This knowledge will, however, be useless, unless the *mantis* also has the knowledge of good and evil.

The imminence of death puts pressure upon him to deliver narratives of belief, but a lifetime of dialectical practice does not let the matter rest there. In line with his analytic imperative Socratic divination and music transform themselves into philosophy. Narratives of belief can be investigated in argument and placed on a firm footing. The beginning of the *Phaedo* sets up a tension between two different kinds of accounts: reasoned philosophical argument that must generate its own authority vs inspired (or received) accounts that claim, but do not justify, their authority. The dialogue as it progresses mediates these extremes. We see the received and imaginative *logoi* that Socrates presents in the first half of the dialogue pressed until Socrates is forced to justify, as well as he can, the beliefs he communicates to his companions.³² Let us now examine the progression of Socrates' *logoi*.

I have already mentioned Socrates' first *logoi* in the dialogue: his poem to Apollo and his versified Aesop. Both are composed not for their own sake, but as an exercise in interpretation and self-purification. We are also presented with a variety of other *logoi* as the dialogue progresses: snippets of mystical and/or religious lore Socrates deems significant, together with his narrative expansions and interpretations thereof, his imaginative reconstruction of a philosophical conversation, his habitual arguments on recollection and various other philosophical arguments, an autobiographical narrative culminating in his summary of his own method, and lastly the final great myth (provided with its own commentary noting where poets and geographers are wrong). The use made of these *logoi* is diverse.

A significant aspect of the *logoi* that open the dialogue is their Pythagorean flavour. In the dialogue frame Phaedo tells his narrative to Echecrates, a member of a Pythagorean *hetaireia* in Phlius. Simmias and Cebes, Socrates' interlocutors in the main dialogue, have Pythagorean interests and have listened to the lectures of Philolaus, the famed Pythagorean.³³ One of the first topics to be taken up is the legitimacy of suicide, which, 'they say', is not allowed (*οὐ γάρ φασι θεμιτὸν εἶναι* 61c10). Socrates' information is based on what he 'happens to have heard', and he proposes to use this as a basis for a discussion that will consist of 'examining and mythologizing' (*διασκοπεῖν τε καὶ μυθολογεῖν*: a noteworthy combination) about the next world (61d9–e2).³⁴ Cebes responds that he has never yet heard anything clear on the subject, even from Philolaus when he visited Thebes (61e5–9). The first authoritative discourse to which the dialogue reacts is thus Pythagorean and is widespread enough that Cebes has heard it from others as well as Socrates and Philolaus. In spite of its currency, however, the teaching has been without explanation. Much Pythagorean teaching was transmitted in the form of *akousmata*, sayings that W. Burkert describes as ancient magico-ritual commandments.³⁵ The form that the prohibition on suicide took is uncertain, but whether or not it was an *akousma*, it seems clear that even Philolaus, who supplied arguments for Pythagorean doctrines, did not supply them in this case.³⁶ Socrates and Cebes may have heard

³² Cf. C. Rowe, *Plato. Phaedo* (Cambridge, 1993), 2–3 on the philosophical importance of understanding the progression of these arguments in context.

³³ D. Nails, *The People of Plato* (Indianapolis, 2002), 138; W. Burkert, *Lore and Science in Ancient Pythagoreanism*, tr. E.L. Minar, Jr. (Cambridge, MA, 1972), 198; M. Morgan (n. 4), 57; Schefer (n. 3), 131. For a more conservative assessment, see Rowe (n. 32), 6–7.

³⁴ Rowe (n. 32), 125; Morgan (n. 18), 194.

³⁵ Burkert (n. 33), 177.

³⁶ G.S. Kirk, J.E. Raven and M. Schofield, *The Presocratic Philosophers*² (Cambridge, 1983), 328.

things – but without having them interpreted. The resultant lack of clarity shows that even a belief approved by Socrates needs analysis, and this is what Socrates tries to give, after referring to a secret doctrine that men are in a metaphorical guardpost or prison from which they must not run away (62b2–6). This doctrine too may be Pythagorean or Orphic, and Socrates calls it difficult to understand.³⁷ He therefore restricts himself to approval of the belief that men are the possessions of the gods, and moves on from there. Socrates, then, partially appropriates a Pythagorean belief he finds congenial, although he reduces its specificity to a more general religious intuition that seems to him to be ‘well-spoken’ (62b6–7).

Socrates’ first argument in defence of this hearsay is unsuccessful because of Cebes’ objection. Cebes here takes the role more usually associated with Socrates in his prime: *ἀεί τοι ... ὁ Κέβης λόγους τινὰς ἀνερευνᾷ, καὶ οὐ πάννυ εὐθέως ἐθέλει πείθεσθαι ὅτι ἂν τις εἴπῃ* (‘Cebes always investigates *logoi* and isn’t immediately willing to believe whatever anyone says’, 63a1–3). This ‘Socratic’ resistance causes Socrates to embark on a formal defence (*ἀπολογία*, 63b4–5), stressing his ‘good hope’ and his insistence that he will be with the gods after death (63c1–5). Part of this defence consists of a reconstruction of what legitimate philosophers would say (66b3–67b5) – a narrative tactic significant because it enables Socrates to present a body of material without interruption. The conclusion of this argument (69b–d) again alludes to the mysteries: those who established them may have been right to say that the uninitiated person who arrives in Hades lies in the mire, but the initiate lives with the gods. Socrates transforms the paradigm, however: the initiated are those who have practised philosophy. Reinterpreting the enigmatic formulation of those who established the mysteries and redescribing them as philosophy appropriates their cultural authority. Socrates’ procedure is based, as we might expect, on interpretation, as if religious culture or Orphic/Pythagorean doctrine were riddling texts (*αἰνίττεσθαι*, 69c5) that he can decipher for us. Yet once again, the appropriation of this sort of authority seems premature as Cebes raises another objection (70a–b).

Cebes’ reservations cause Socrates to ask whether they should go on ‘spinning tales’ on the subject (*διαμυθολογῶμεν*, 70b6).³⁸ After he has secured agreement, the next step is to prove that the soul exists after death. He will attempt this through the ‘cyclical argument’ for immortality. This argument is presented as an alternative to an ‘ancient story’ (*παλαιὸς ... λόγος*, 70c5–6) that the souls of the dead exist in another world and return to this world from there – in other words, reincarnation. If this story is true, it would be clear that the living come from the dead. If not, there is a need for ‘another argument’ (70d4–5), which is what Socrates proceeds to supply. The cyclical argument seems to be an attempt to put reincarnation on a sounder basis. It is subsequently reinforced by the argument from recollection introduced by Cebes – again as a type of hearsay (72e), with the comment that this is an argument that Socrates frequently used to tell them. In this case, fortunately, the author of the *logos* is himself present to expand upon the important points.

³⁷ Loriaux (n. 10), 93–5, 109–11 argues that the primary reference of allusions to mysteries and purification is Pythagorean. Rowe (n. 32), 128, ad 62b3–5, points out the difficulty of specifying precisely which mystic doctrines may be referred to (cf. Morgan [n. 4], 63–4), and even speculates that the details here may be Plato’s own invention.

³⁸ For the translation here, see Rowe (n. 32), 153.

Socrates' first three attempts to justify his optimism in the face of death thus spring from quasi-religious beliefs, whether Pythagorean or Orphic. These *logoi* draw on the authority of tradition and hearsay. The first two assume the existence of the soul after death and the third is designed to ground the 'ancient story' of reincarnation. The argumentative strength of these *logoi* varies, although they are all rationally supported. We move from an exploration of the prohibition on suicide to a 'defence' that posits philosophy as the purification of the soul from the effects of the body and finally to *logos* that starts with what must generally and necessarily be the case (70d–e). All of them are drawn under the rubric of 'mythologizing', an indication that they may lack (in differing degrees) a certain rigour and that they are coloured by association with Pythagorean and Orphic material. We see something similar at the end of the argument from affinity, where Socrates returns again to tradition with an appeal to the mysteries (81a) and an account of ghosts. This account is marked as oral tradition by the phrase *ὥσπερ λέγεται* ('as it is said', 81c11). Socrates' explanation of transmigration into animal bodies is an extrapolation from popular tales of ghosts, mingled with Pythagorean belief. We have been presented with a pattern whereby authoritative narratives are presented for consideration but are found wanting. Socrates, the mantic swan of Apollo, is convinced he knows what will happen after he drinks the poison. His mantic conviction may well be the conjecture of a wise man, as Antiphon would have it, and his performance may be under the aegis of Apollo, but it consistently returns to prior doctrines about the soul for confirmation and is rooted in them. This dynamic reflects Socrates' firm belief that he knows his own future, a belief he finds echoed in a variety of traditions and that generates the philosophical speculation about immortality in the first part of the dialogue.

This cannot be allowed to continue. The problem comes to a head immediately prior to the swansong passage. The discussion seems to have come to a natural conclusion before the dissatisfaction of Simmias and Cebes with Socrates' accounts starts it up again (84c–e). The discouragement felt by the majority of the disciples (and by Echecrates in the frame conversation) here means that they are in danger of falling into the state of despondency that is the forerunner of misology, the loss of faith in argument (88c–d). The description of misology at 89–90 is a commentary on their reactions: repeated disappointment may lead to the belief that nothing is intellectually stable and we may thus lose the chance to find out the truth. Socrates sees the distress of his audience, insists that they fight for the argument, and recognizes that he is influenced by the situation in which he finds himself. The fate of the *logos* and fate of Socrates are parallel,³⁹ and he acknowledges that he is fighting to convince himself and not fall into self-pity (91a–b). This is dangerous; to find the truth and assess validity one must be able to detach the argument from personality and context.⁴⁰ Yet one reason that misology is such a danger at this point in the dialogue is the very multiplicity of *logoi* that have been told. This multiplicity results in a lack of authority since the accounts Socrates has been giving are insufficient. Socrates himself will admit, as soon as

³⁹ Cf. Rowe (n. 32), 212 (on 89b4–10).

⁴⁰ In this respect, the problems in the *Phaedo* are emblematic of those besetting all Platonic dialogues: they are tied to particular individuals in particular contexts. This is one reason they are dramatically and rhetorically effective, but the search for truth must rise above the particular. On this series of issues, see R. Blondell, *The Play of Character in Plato's Dialogues* (Cambridge, 2002).

Simmias and Cebes object, that they present many opportunities for attack, if one were to go through them sufficiently (84c5–7). Greater rigour is required, as well as an argumentative procedure that does not continually look to quasi-mythological religious belief. Although Socrates' mantic soul and the closeness of his death give him cultural authority, they do not give him philosophical authority.

The swansong is the turning point, where it becomes clear that Socrates must stand up for the *logos* in a much more thorough way than he has so far.⁴¹ The narratives after the swansong passage (the autobiography and the final myth) work differently. First, Socrates reviews Cebes' argument, *ἵνα μή τι διαφύγῃ ἡμῶς* ('so that nothing may escape us', 95e3). He then spends a long time in silent reflection, after which he offers to recount his own efforts in the investigation of the cause of generation and destruction. Instead of using hearsay as a basis for argument, Socrates uses his own intellectual experiences to generate a method. His intellectual autobiography narrates his early and unproductive interest in natural science (96a–97b), and then his enthusiasm for the philosophy of Anaxagoras, who, he thought, would provide a properly teleological account and thus become his 'teacher' (97d6–7). This hope was in vain, so he had to abandon his desire to learn like a student from an authoritative source and instead work out his own approach, his famous 'second sailing' (99d1). Socrates' intellectual progress is measured here by his ability to dismiss what other people have said. The autobiography culminates in Socrates' account of his method: he lays down the *logos* he thinks is the strongest (in this case, the Forms), and assumes as true whatever agrees with it. He is not satisfied, however, with the bald statement of principle but makes an offer: *σαφέστερον εἰπεῖν ἂν λέγω· οἶμαι γάρ σε νῦν οὐ μανθάνειν* ('to speak more clearly what I mean, for at the moment I think that you don't understand', 100a7–8). The explanation is, however, 'nothing new'; it is what he has always been saying, both on other days and today (100b1–3). Finally, then, we are given the underpinnings for Socrates' earlier assumptions, and far from being Pythagorean or other accounts, they are a respectable philosophical theory. Using the Forms, Socrates now presents his most successful argument that *ψυχὴ ἀθάνατον καὶ ἀνώλεθρον, καὶ τῷ ὄντι ἔσονται ἡμῶν αἱ ψυχαὶ ἐν Αἰδου*, ('the soul is immortal and imperishable, and our souls really will exist in Hades', 106e8–107a1). Here, then, is philosophical divination: perfect, predictive and impersonal.

In the case of the final myth Socrates still engages in imaginative extrapolation from 'what is said' (*λέγεται δὲ οὕτως*, 107d5–6), but with a difference. By 106e the interlocutors have concluded that the soul is necessarily immortal and imperishable. Socrates, looking back to 70d4–5, canvasses the possibility that they need 'another *logos*' (106d1) but Cebes finds he has nothing to say and Simmias, although he has misgivings owing to the magnitude of the subject, also agrees. The argument is complete. Only now does Socrates shift gear and return to the issue of eschatological traditions: if the soul is immortal we must also consider it from an eternal perspective (107c). Rather than serving as corroboration, eschatological myth is thus generated by argumentative conclusion.⁴² The myth itself is a complex mixture of borrowing from sources (named and unnamed), source commentary, Socratic inference and narrative expansion. Socrates has heard from 'somebody' that the earth is not the way the experts believe (108c6–8). Simmias

⁴¹ Cf. Rowe (n. 32), 215–16 (on 91a2–7).

⁴² Morgan (n. 18), 197–200.

asks him to explain, since, although he has heard many accounts concerning the earth, he has not heard the one that Socrates finds convincing.⁴³ Socrates now makes an explicit distinction between what he believes and what he can prove (108d4–e2) and emphasizes that his narrative expresses the former. The distinction returns at the end of the myth, where Socrates stresses that he does not insist on the particulars, but that, since the soul is clearly immortal (as the argument has established), something like this will be true. It is a belief that they should ‘sing as an incantation’ (ὥσπερ ἐπᾶδειν) (114d6–7). The *logos* that Socrates has composed in the dialogue has superseded the proem to Apollo and the versification of Aesop, and he has been proved right that philosophy is the greatest music (ὥς φιλοσοφίας μὲν οὔσης μεγίστης μουσικῆς, 61a3–4), one that has absorbed its non-philosophical counterparts.

Socrates’ manipulation of motifs from the mysteries in the dialogue reinforces this point. We have already seen (with reference to 62b and 69b–d) how he finds certain mystic doctrines attractive and reinterprets them along philosophical lines. Moreover, much of Socrates’ discourse in the dialogue is full of references to purity and purification that may have mystic resonance.⁴⁴ It is worth taking a moment to consider the change Socrates makes in the relationship of these ‘mysteries’ with their ‘public’. Shortly after Socrates alludes to the mystic doctrine that men are metaphorically stationed in a guardpost and must not therefore commit suicide, Cebes and Simmias raise their objections and Socrates insists that something awaits the soul after death, ὥσπερ γε καὶ πάλαι λέγεται (‘as has long been said’, 63c6). Simmias asks a significant question, αὐτὸς ἔχων τὴν διάνοιαν ταύτην ἐν νῷ ἔχεις ἀπιέναι, ἢ καὶ ἡμῖν μεταδοίης; κοινὸν γάρ δὴ ἔμοιγε δοκεῖ καὶ ἡμῖν εἶναι ἀγαθὸν τοῦτο (‘Do you intend to depart keeping your opinion to yourself, or might you share it with us too? For indeed, it seems to me that this good is for all of us’, 63c8–d1). It seems likely that Simmias is playing upon the notion of mystic secrecy. The mysteries are effective partly because they are secret and hedged with taboos, not to be communicated to outsiders. In the case of the Eleusinian Mysteries, disclosing the secret carried a death sentence. Pythagorean doctrine, too, could be surrounded by secrecy and silence.⁴⁵ We now see why Simmias is afraid that Socrates may not tell what he knows: no initiate would. By contrast, if the true initiation is philosophy, the need for open conversation is paramount. The fate of the soul is a matter that is important for everyone, as Simmias remarks. Progress was made in the dialogue because Simmias and Cebes were not afraid to voice objections and say what they really thought.⁴⁶ When they asked Socrates to explain, he responded. Moreover, when Socrates presents his method and his concomitant belief in the Forms at 100a–b, he is at pains to stress that his theory is

⁴³ Morgan (n. 4), 76 and Ebert (n. 5) argue that many aspects of the myth are influenced by Pythagoreanism. If this is so, it is perhaps surprising that Simmias, who has spent time with Philolaus and has heard many theories about the earth, knows nothing of it.

⁴⁴ On purity and purification see Loriaux (n. 10), 109–11; R. Parker, *Miasma: Pollution and Purification in Early Greek Religion* (Oxford, 1983), 281–3; E.E. Pender, *Images of Persons Unseen: Plato’s Metaphors for Gods and the Soul* (Sankt Augustin, 2000), 174–6, with Appendix 2, 249–50. For purification and teleology in the final myth, see D. Sedley, ‘Teleology and myth in the *Phaedo*’, *BACAP* 5 (1989 [1991]), 359–83, at 381. For knowledge as a form of philosophical purification, see K. Dorter, ‘Equality, recollection, and purification’, *Phronesis* 17 (1972), 198–218.

⁴⁵ Burkert (n. 33), 178–9.

⁴⁶ Cf. *Grg.* 486e–488a.

nothing new but that the Forms are *ἐκεῖνα τὰ πολυθρύλητα* ('those well-known / notorious entities'). Nothing could be less secret. The result of discussion is not death (although Socrates will be dead by the end of the day), but life and freedom for the soul.

People in the Platonic dialogues often complain that Socrates is ironic, that he makes fun of others while refusing to put forward his own opinions, that he keeps what he knows to himself (this is partly what lies behind Alcibiades' comments at *Symposium* 215a–217a). But the point is that Socrates has no *secret* wisdom, only his dialectical method and the results this has generated over the years.⁴⁷ His philosophy is not a mystery. When he recounts what he believes in the *Phaedo*, the results are at first problematic. Because of the closeness of his death, Socrates starts the dialogue by telling stories that reflect both what he would like to believe and the conclusions he has reached during a life devoted to an examination his own and others' beliefs. Under the aegis of *mantike* and *mousike*, he alludes to various cultural traditions and allows them to carry a weight of authority that has not yet been fully justified by argument. This is not to say that he has not engaged in argument at all but, as I have argued earlier, that the first forays into rational justification of the idea that death is not an evil and the soul is immortal are too much coloured by quasi-mythological and mystic doctrines. The immortality of the soul needs to be explored systematically and without emotion, and this is what occurs in the second part of the dialogue. Socrates' initial strategy of presenting Orphic/Pythagorean narratives in association with his arguments 'feels' right because of his association with the god of music and prophecy. The approach at first appeals to his disciples because they too are caught up in the 'prophecy at the point of death' model. But the swansong interlude sets us back on the right track. The music and the divination are now philosophical. We cannot give them the authority of a *theios logos* (for we have seen that even Socrates is an unsatisfactory intermediary for this), but we can construct the best and most rational human account. This may still fall short of absolute certainty, but it will have superior human authority: *ἀκολουθήσετε τῷ λόγῳ, καθ' ὅσον δυνατόν μάλιστ' ἀνθρώπῳ ἐπακολουθήσαι* ('You will follow the *logos* as far as it is possible for a man', 107b7–8).

4. SOCRATES AND THE DISCIPLES

This final section examines how the issue of Socratic authority affects Socrates' relationship with his students and friends and has important repercussions for the conduct of philosophy after Socrates has gone. We have already seen that Socrates' relationship with Apollo is particularly marked on the final day of his life. He is a performer of music and divination but must transform this role in order to practise philosophy properly. If, however, the possibility of non-authoritative and non-justified performance threatens Socrates, it also threatens his associates and, by extension, all readers of Platonic dialogues. The danger is that they and we will value Socrates as a source of doctrine rather than as an example of method. There is a clear feeling, both in the prologue frame and in the internal narrative, that

⁴⁷ Clearly, then, I do not align myself with the esotericist school of Platonic interpretation, although it generates rich readings of Platonic texts.

the words spoken by Socrates on the day of his death are especially significant. As the dialogue opens, the disciples in Phlius are anxious to know what Socrates said or did on his last day. They participate in the feeling that one's last words are especially significant, even prophetic. Of course, there is another important aspect to Socrates' last day: not just what he said, but the way he behaved, and it is clear from Phaedo's narration that Socrates' behaviour is paradigmatic (and thus protreptic).⁴⁸

The internal narrative stresses that this day is the last chance for the disciples to get the benefit of listening to Socrates. This is a particular concern for Simmias. His request to Socrates at 63c that Socrates should not keep his thoughts to himself now that he is leaving them behind has already been mentioned. Somewhat later, when the argument from recollection is introduced, Simmias stresses that he does not necessarily disagree with the proposition that learning is recollection, but just wants to be reminded 'in what way you tried to say it' (73b9–10). As the recollection argument continues, Socrates asks Simmias whether everyone can give a *logos* on the present subject matter. Simmias replies that he fears that after tomorrow no one will be able to do so worthily (76b). 78a is particularly resonant. Socrates has speculated that Simmias and Cebes are spinning out the discussion not because they need proof but because they are childishly afraid that the soul is destroyed along with the body. What they need is someone to sing charms over them until the fear is gone. But, asks Cebes, how will the disciples find a good *epoidos* (charmer) now that Socrates is leaving? (78a1–2). As Rowe says, Socrates thinks that the answer to this lies close at hand, in themselves.⁴⁹ This is an important point and I shall return to it, but the importance of the singing motif here also needs stressing. What is it that we want from Socrates? The hypnotic comfort of his presence? His personal authority? Socrates seems to suspect that it is his charisma that is at issue, and this is why the image of the magical charmer is particularly apt.⁵⁰

The passages I have cited here concern threats to the rigour of philosophical discussion posed by Socrates' imminent death. Simmias and Cebes fear that the death of Socrates will mean the collapse of worthy philosophical discussion. As Socrates takes his final bath the disciples compare themselves to those who have lost a father and will have to live the rest of their lives as orphans (116a7–8). The image of Socrates as father may recall the possible Pythagorean practice of calling a teacher the 'father', a practice that may also have occurred in mystery cults, where whoever has led the candidate to be initiated is called the 'father'.⁵¹ We may also be reminded of the *Phaedrus*, where written discourse in the absence of its author is said always to need the help of its father (275d–e) and is opposed to the living discourse planted by the dialectician in the soul, which matures and

⁴⁸ For the emotional affect of the dialogue, see Gallop (n. 19), 325–32.

⁴⁹ Rowe (n. 32), 180, ad 78a4–8.

⁵⁰ Both Hackforth (n. 18), 79, n. 1 and D. White, *Myth and Metaphysics in Plato's Phaedo* (London and Toronto, 1989), 100–4, suggest that Socrates' charms are at least partly to be identified with good arguments (for White, good arguments in conjunction with myth). For Platonic reconfiguration of the language of magic to construct philosophy as a 'counter-magic' against the dangers of rhetoric and false belief, see E. Belfiore, 'Elenchus, epode, and magic: Socrates as Silenus', *Phoenix* 34 (1980), 128–37. My focus here is on the attitude of the disciples this vocabulary betrays. Socrates seems to them almost a magician, and as Belfiore shows, the magic of words is ambivalent.

⁵¹ Burkert (n. 33), 179.

generates new discourses (276e–277a). The image thus sheds new light on the disciples' concern with tying down Socrates' position so they can remember it later, a concern generated by a fear that Socrates, because of the closeness of death or mystic tendencies, will keep what he thinks to himself.

Socrates has underestimated Simmias and Cebes, as their objections to his arguments show, but their hesitation in bringing up those objections in case they will disturb Socrates (84d) shows how close to the mark he came. These tensions are all brought to a head in the swansong passage, where the commitment to argument is reinforced. Before they can proceed Socrates must reassure them that he is the same as he always was, and that his mantic authority is philosophical enough to take the challenge. It is then that Simmias makes the important distinction between the best human account and a *logos theios*:

ἐμοὶ γὰρ δοκεῖ, ὦ Σώκρατες, περὶ τῶν τοιούτων ἴσως ὥσπερ καὶ σοὶ τὸ μὲν σαφές εἶδέναι ἐν τῷ νῦν βίῳ ἢ ἀδύνατον εἶναι ἢ παγχάλεπόν τι, τὸ μέντοι αὖ τὰ λεγόμενα περὶ αὐτῶν μὴ οὐκὶ παντὶ τρόπῳ ἐλέγχειν καὶ μὴ προαφίστασθαι πρὶν ἂν πανταχῇ σκοπῶν ἀπέλπη τις, πάνυ μαλθακοῦ εἶναι ἀνδρός.

I think, Socrates, and perhaps you do too, that clear knowledge on such matters is either impossible or very difficult in our present life, but it is the characteristic of a feeble man not to examine in every way what is said on the subject and give up before one has become tired by examining it in every way. (85c1–6)

One must either learn the truth, he goes on to say, or adopt the best and most difficult to refute human *logos*, and use this as a kind of raft, if one cannot find something more secure and less dangerous, that is, a *theios logos* (a divine account). He will, therefore, make his objection so that later (when Socrates is dead) he does not reproach himself for not saying what he thought (85c7–d7). We should note how Simmias' worries about Socrates' future absence are now presented more positively by being placed in the philosophical context of commitment to dialectical conversation. Simmias will press Socrates because it is his last chance to say what he himself thinks and to elicit Socrates' response.

We may ask what Simmias' divine account would be. Surely Socrates has been giving that sort of account in the first part of the dialogue and it has been proved unsatisfactory?⁵² Perhaps the problem is that such divine accounts are communicated through an intermediary and therefore do not carry their authority with them. We would need an unmediated divine account, to which we have no current access. From the perspective of the later dialogues, one might suggest that it would be a completely satisfactory and adequate philosophical account by a master of dialectic. Nevertheless, by the end of the dialogue we achieve the best argument possible in the present circumstances. At 107a Cebes points out that they have arrived at the final opportunity for objections. Crucially, Simmias' continued doubts are blessed by Socrates who encourages them to carry on without him. Even the hypotheses

⁵² R.D. Archer-Hind, *The Phaedo of Plato*² (London, 1894), 63 (ad 85d) suggests that Simmias, as a Pythagorean mystic, naturally prefers a *theios logos* to dialectical demonstration. This is not, however, the thrust of Simmias' statement. A divine, exhaustive, and accurate account is a consummation devoutly to be wished by all the interlocutors, but this is not currently available (cf. Rowe [n. 32], 'the principles which Simmias is about to suggest appear to be identical to S[ocrates]').

that they find convincing need further examination. If they do this, they will follow the *logos* to the extent that humans can (107b4–9).⁵³

As the discussion draws to a close, therefore, Socrates represents not an irreplaceable divine voice but the voice of a teacher and trainer whose authority lies in his example rather than in his doctrine. Having struck this human note, Socrates can now return to mythical material without intellectual guilt.⁵⁴ His imaginative *logos* is marked as a particular type of philosophical *mousike*, not that which is argument, nor proved, but as reasoned speculation based on argument. Our confidence in this account is based not on Socrates' charisma or magical poetic powers, but on the reasoning that precedes. One of Socrates' last charges to his friends again refuses to say anything new, but repeats

Ἄπερ ἀεὶ λέγω ... οὐδὲν καινότερον· ὅτι ὑμῶν αὐτῶν ἐπιμελούμενοι ὑμεῖς καὶ ἐμοὶ καὶ τοῖς ἐμοῖς καὶ ὑμῖν αὐτοῖς ἐν χάριτι ποιήσετε ἅττ' ἂν ποιήτε, κἂν μὴ νῦν ὁμολογήσητε· ἐὰν δὲ ὑμῶν [μέν] αὐτῶν ἀμελήτε καὶ μὴ θέλητε ὥσπερ κατ' ἴχνη κατὰ τὰ νῦν τε εἰρημένα καὶ τὰ ἐν τῷ ἔμπροσθεν χρόνῳ ζῆν, οὐδὲ ἐὰν πολλὰ ὁμολογήσητε ἐν τῷ παρόντι καὶ σφόδρα, οὐδὲν πλέον ποιήσετε.

... the things I always say, nothing new: that if you care for yourselves you will gratify both me and mine and you yourselves in whatever you do, even if you do not now agree with me. But if you neglect yourselves and are not willing to live, so to speak, in the footsteps of what has been said now and previously, you will do no good even if you agree vigorously now. (115b5–c1)

The aim of the conversation has not been to convert people through his *logoi*, make them agree with and have faith in his authority, but to model a process.

It may seem paradoxical to argue that a major purpose of the action of the *Phaedo* is to convince its audiences, both internal and external, that Socrates is not indispensable. After all, the dialogue is perhaps Plato's most moving creation and Socrates is at his most admirable. The character of Socrates, his charisma, is responsible for the enduring literary success of most of Plato's *œuvre*. As David Blank observes about the *Phaedo*, 'The capacity of Socrates to perceive and heal his companions' wounded spirits, as well as his ability to size up and take advantage of their emotions and weaknesses is an essential characteristic of Socratic dialectic ... Socrates' symbouleutic and protreptic function could only be exercised in person.'⁵⁵ Ruby Blondell goes even further. She acknowledges that Socrates' task 'may plausibly be understood as an effort to reproduce himself in such a way as to constitute an intellectual community of the like-minded, who will echo his own outlook and values', but she also argues forcefully that the very success and intensity of Plato's portrayal of Socrates undermines Socrates' contention that philosophy can go on without him.⁵⁶ One might respond, however, that this would

⁵³ As Gallop (n. 19), 319 notes, the proofs in the dialogue are not a series of discrete arguments but 'successive phases in a dialectical conflict between opposed positions'. The end of the dialogue signals that 'further work is required'.

⁵⁴ Sedley (n. 44) demonstrates how even this final myth can be read as taking the first steps in making myth responsible to science/teleology, a project later taken up in *Timaeus*. Thus the details of the myth would show 'the mathematicization of cosmology already well under way in the *Phaedo*' (368).

⁵⁵ D. Blank, 'The arousal of emotion in Plato's dialogues', *CQ* 43 (1993), 428–39, at 436.

⁵⁶ Blondell (n. 40), 86. Blondell agrees with me that the *Phaedo* dramatizes 'the problem of doing philosophy without Sokrates', but 'in the same moment ... it grants Sokrates literary

make Plato's character-drawing skills a philosophical liability. Socrates' life and charisma, his moral intuitions and intellectual skills, were a fortunate serendipity, almost a 'divine' dispensation, that allowed the development of a particular kind of philosophy and made it attractive. Nevertheless, both Socrates (the character) and Plato insist that philosophical method and vocation are paramount. It might be optimistic to say that we must try to carry on where Socrates leaves off. It is certainly an extremely difficult task, but it must be attempted.⁵⁷

When Kenneth Dorter wrote of Plato's use of religious elements in the *Phaedo*, he suggested that Plato has Socrates use these elements to manipulate his audience on the basis of their prior beliefs: 'By setting forth his views in the terminology of popular religion, he makes it seem that they are both confirmations and consequences of the religion and that they thus both support and are supported by the religious beliefs.'⁵⁸ Socrates in this dialogue, he thinks, is an advocate out to persuade rather than a disinterested observer and lover of wisdom. I have contended in this essay that something more subtle is going on than this analysis would suggest, and something more true to the values of philosophy. Plato has Socrates start the dialogue more or less in the way Dorter describes, although, for the reasons I have mentioned above, Socrates does not merely appeal to, but integrates religious motifs into his rhetorical strategy. Nevertheless, as the dialogue progresses Socrates does rise to the philosophical challenge and urges his interlocutors to do so also. In the *Phaedo*, as in other dialogues, we find Plato making over cultural structures into the image of philosophy. Divination through signs becomes inference through argumentation. The *Phaedo* dramatizes how Socratic inquiry transforms the paradigms of religion and religious divination employed by the characters.⁵⁹ It also demonstrates how Socratic charisma must be transformed into a life of philosophy, as Socrates the man becomes Socrates the lifestyle. It is the duty of philosophers to do the hard work required when inspiration and charisma fail.

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immortality as uniquely instantiating the true philosopher's life and death' (n. 40), 88.

⁵⁷ Cf. Brickhouse and Smith (n. 1), 271, 'it is the degree of his devotion to the task that is unique, not his ability to perform it at all'.

⁵⁸ Dorter (n. 19), 94–6 (quote at 96).

⁵⁹ Cf. Diès (n. 7), 304–5: 'Il y a gradation dans les preuves présentées pour démontrer l'immortalité de l'âme ... Mais cette progression est parallèle d'une autre progression; car la certitude s'affermir à mesure que l'argumentation scientifique s'épure de tout alliage, à mesure que légendes et traditions, orphisme et mystères, s'effacent devant la lumière croissante des Idées.'