

FRAME SCENES IN PLATO'S PHILOSOPHICAL
DRAMA AND THE CASE OF ASCLEPIUS' COCK
(*PHAEDO* 118A7–8)



ABSTRACT: In Plato, the ‘philosophical drama’ is often foiled by introductory frames. Besides two introductory frames, the *Phaedo* contains a concluding frame depicting Socrates’ death. Whereas the first introductory frame serves to suggest that what follows is an actual report of the philosopher’s teaching during the last day of his life, both the second frame and the concluding frame function to present Socrates’ ‘human drama.’ Therefore, Socrates’ enigmatic last words — a request to sacrifice a cock to Asclepius — must be read as operating in the context of a quasi-realistic representation. The dying Socrates, and all surrounding him with whom he explored the questions of the immortality of the soul and the true philosopher’s attitude toward death, owe a sacrifice to the god, whose *φάρμακον* granted him a painless death and thus permitted a suitable epilogue to the conclusions reached during the ‘philosophical drama.’

The problem and a review of some solutions

SOCRATES’ FAMOUS LAST WORDS, ὦ Κρίτων, τῷ Ἀσκληπιῷ ὀφείλομεν ἀλεκτρονῶνα· ἀλλὰ ἀπόδοτε καὶ μὴ ἀμελήσητε (“Crito, we owe a cock to Asclepius: please pay the debt, and don’t neglect it,” *Phd* 118a7–8),¹ still puzzle classicists, philosophers, and political scientists. The interpretations that have been proposed belong basically to two categories, metaphorical and literal.

The prevailing metaphorical interpretation stems from the commentaries of Proclus, Damascius and Olympiodorus, the leaders of the Neoplatonic Schools of Athens and Alexandria during the 5th and 6th centuries CE. According to their view, the dying Socrates feels gratitude to Asclepius because

1. All the translations of the *Phaedo* passages which are used in my paper are by Gallop (1975); my own translations are within single quotation marks. Quotes from the Greek text of the *Phaedo* are from the edition by Strachan (1995).

his soul will be freed from life's sickness.² Here is a token list of supporters of this view from the middle of the 19th century on: Lasaulx (1858), Nietzsche, Archer-Hind, Burnet,³ Robin, A.E. Taylor, Gill, Dorter, Burger, Nehamas, C.C.W. Taylor, and White (2000).⁴

There are two problems with this metaphorical interpretation: (1) the view that life is sickness is not his own, says Socrates, but Cebes';⁵ and (2) Asclepius was a god who helped sick people get well, not die.⁶

Accordingly, scholars have stretched their ingenuity to overcome these objections: for example, (1) Socrates' request was "an offering to a source of real healing, a petition for release of both living and dead from the 'Orphic' wheel" (Stewart [1972] 258); (2) his "last words express gratitude for a virtuous death" (Peterson [2003] 47);⁷ or (3), he "has succeeded — metaphorically — in giving birth to his own death" (Wilson [2007] 147).

Others espousing the metaphorical approach have suggested that Asclepius has cured Socrates' friends of the sickness-to-death of an anti-philosophical life or from wrong notions, i.e.: (1) of the disease of false beliefs and arguments (Foucault [2011 (1984)] 95 ff.);⁸ (2) of Pythagorean eclecticism (Crooks [1998] 120–121);⁹ (3) of misogyny (Crooks [1998] 121–123);¹⁰ (4) of the death of *logos* (Nagy [2013] 682–683).

The second, literal, interpretive category consists of attempts to explain Socrates' gratitude to Asclepius by means of assumed or interpolated facts. For example: (1) Socrates did not have his mental capacities intact because of the hemlock poisoning (Gautier [1955]); (2) he suddenly

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2. Damascius 561 Westerink: *διὰ τί τῷ Ἀσκληπιῷ τὸν ἀλεκτρούνα ἀποδίδωσιν; ἵνα τὰ νεροσηκότα τῆς ψυχῆς ἐν τῇ γενέσει ταῦτα ἐξιάσῃται.*
 3. In Burnet's (1911) 118 comment, "Socrates hopes to awake cured like those who are healed by *ἐγκοίμησις* (*incubatio*) in the Asklepieion at Epidaurus," the use of "cured" implies that Burnet follows the Neoplatonic view. Socrates, however, neither calls death "sleep" nor is he asleep while dying.
 4. Lasaulx (1858) 94, Nietzsche (1887 [1882]) 253, Archer-Hind (1894) 146, Burnet (1911) 13, 216, A.E. Taylor (1951 [1933]) 136, Gill (1973) 28, Dorter (1982) 161, 178, Burger (1984) 216, Nehamas (1998) 157–188, C.C.W. Taylor (2000) 87, and White (2000) 107.
 5. But see Nehamas (1998) 161 ff. for a contemporary defense of such a reading of the Platonic text.
 6. As Wilamowitz-Moellendorff (1920) 58 had long ago observed.
 7. Cf. Gilead's (1994) 75 reading: "Socrates dies healthy, in body and soul (moral health), and in such a case it was the custom to offer a cock to Asklepios."
 8. Following Dumézil (1984).
 9. Following Mitscherling (1985).
 10. Following Minadeo (1971).

remembers: (a) that Asclepius had saved him when he was a foot soldier during the Athenian retreat at the battle of Delium (Hirzel [1895] 194–195),¹¹ or (b) that a family member once recovered from a serious illness (Wilamowitz-Moellendorff [1920] 57–59); (c) “[I]n his last moments,” the teacher is “envisioning Plato,” who was absent because of an illness, “and celebrating his recovery” (Most [1993] 110);¹² (d) he realizes that his execution was delayed because of the ceremony commemorating Athens’ recovery — with the help of Asclepius — from the plague of 420/419 BC (McPherran [2003] 79, 85–86).

Other interpreters venture equally imaginative hypotheses for a literal reading. One proposes that Socrates’ request has to do with the cock’s being a sacred bird protecting the transmigration of souls to the underworld (Cumont [1943] 124). Another asks, was Socrates’ request “a bribe to the healing god to fight off the approach of death — one last affirmation of the goodness of life?” (Burger [1984] 216). A third wonders if Socrates “perhaps ... is afraid that he may be punished in Hades for owing sacrifices to the gods” (Ahrens Dorf [1995] 113).¹³ And a fourth envisions Socrates thinking of himself as a voluntary scapegoat (*φαρμακός*), and thanking the god in advance for curing the Athenians of their ailments (Waterfield [2009] 204).¹⁴

The impasse produced by the multitude of conflicting opinions has led some to question the need of explaining the matter,¹⁵ or, owing to specified methodological criteria, to leave out the last passages of the *Phaedo* alto-

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11. This spurious information is from a letter, written supposedly by Antisthenes: “And when he [Socrates] drank the drug [hemlock], he told us to sacrifice a cock to Asclepius. For he said he owed it according to a vow, when he was ill after returning from the battle at Delium” (Prince [2015] 73). Cf. Heiberg’s (1902) 114 comment for Hirzel’s use of this information: “After 25 years!”
 12. Following Clark (1952) 146. See Crooks (1998) for some arguments against Most’s claim (an otherwise very well researched paper).
 13. As Cumont, Ahrens Dorf, and Burger understand it, Socrates’ request would indicate a fear of death that conflicts with the oft-noted astonishing “calmness” displayed by the philosopher during the day of his execution.
 14. Derrida (1972) 133–153 finds that Socrates resembles both a *φαρμακεύς* (a sorcerer who administers the *φάρμακον*, medicine, of the right philosophy to youths) and a *φαρμακός* (an outsider who dies for the city by drinking the *φάρμακον*, poison). Two *φαρμακοί* were driven out of the walls of Athens annually on the 6th of Thargelion, the day Socrates supposedly died.
 15. See Ebert (2004) 460, who believes that if Plato considered Socrates’ last words important, he would have explained them; for Ebert they need not of an explication, their function as indication of Socrates’ religiosity is their meaning.

gether, as many philosophers have done.¹⁶ One could list several additional scenarios that have been suggested,¹⁷ but I think that the examples I have selected are sufficiently indicative of a thorny enigma that has so far resisted meaningful progress toward a persuasive solution. I therefore propose to approach the puzzle from a different perspective: that of the dramatic character of the Platonic dialogues.

The function of frames in Plato's dialogues

Writing philosophical dialogues with Socrates in the leading role was not a uniquely Platonic endeavor. After his death, Socrates took on the status of a hero, and his birthday, which coincided with his death, the 6th day of the month Thargelion, was celebrated by his followers (White [2000] 153).¹⁸ From the circle of his students, at least seven — Antisthenes, Aeschines from Sphettus, Euclides from Megara, Aristippus from Cyrene, Phaedo from Elis, Xenophon and Plato — wrote Socratic dialogues.¹⁹

Although only Xenophon's and Plato's Socratic dialogues survive, it is easy to surmise that as a subgenre they do not merely consist of philosophical arguments exchanged by Socrates and various interlocutors; they clearly are literary compositions in which descriptions of places and persons, of acts and events, and the employment of figures of speech, etc. coexist with argumentation. While admitting their fictionality as a characteristic element of Plato's dialogues in particular, I also see techniques in which their author²⁰ attempts to persuade his readers that his is the only genuine representation — not of Socrates' actual words — but of his philosophy.²¹ Plato's absence

16. See, e.g., Bostock (1986); Dilman (1992); Dorter (1982). For most of the analytic philosophers who focus on the argumentative topoi and definitions, literary material is of no concern.

17. For a review of the related bibliography see also Most (1993), Kloss (2001), and Peterson (2003) (who gives a list of 21 interpretations, many of them not cited by me). Brickhouse & Smith (2004) 252 ff. devote one chapter to this subject.

18. As White points out, both the birthday and the day of death are probably inventions. What is important, however, is not the historical accuracy but the perception of Socrates' image after his death.

19. See Kahn (1998) 1–35; Dorion (2011) 6–16; Döring (2011) 24–47.

20. I refer throughout “Plato” as the writer of the dialogues. However, the theoretical notion behind my approach is Eco's “intention of the text.”

21. Johnson (1998) 593 says the same in a different way: “[T]he narrators in our examples of complex dramatic frames — not to mention Xenophon and other Socratic writers —

from the dialogues (he never figures as a character in them) creates a doubt as to the actuality of the dialogues; but it also adds a degree of realism to them, in that he could not have been present in all discussions in which Socrates participated.

On the basis of their fictionality, Plato scholarship has focused, in recent years, on the literary, and especially dramatic, nature of the dialogues.²² In these studies, the methodology employed is the same as that used in analyzing literary and dramatic texts. There has also been a lively interest in the frames and settings of the dialogues.²³

The frames in particular have been the subject of a still unresolved debate, owing to the relegating the ‘reportage’ of Socrates’ philosophical discussions to someone else. In the context of Plato’s philosophy, the larger question is the relation of the frames to the representation of truth. Let me just touch on the profound problem created by Plato’s writing of mimetic texts while manifesting an ambiguous if not altogether negative attitude towards mimesis.²⁴ Indeed, Plato does not merely report the various arguments of Socrates and his interlocutors; he *represents* them as discussing their respective philosophical views.²⁵ But I shall put aside those problems and the various explanations given them, in order to return to the fact that

make it clear that dialogue form too can be used simply as a (faulty) means to preserve the ‘sayings of Socrates.’”

22. See, e.g., Press (1996), Press (1997) 1–28, Ausland (1997), Blondell (2002), and Michelini (2003).
23. See, e.g., Ferrari (1987), Murray (1999), and Griswold (2002).
24. Cf. Athenaeus 11.505B (translation Gulick [1933] 267): “Plato ... in the *Republic* banish[ed] Homer and imitative poetry [from his city], while he himself wrote imitative dialogues.” Cf. also Diogenes Laertius III 35.396–399 (Hicks [1972 (1925)] 309): “They say that, on hearing Plato read the *Lysis*, Socrates exclaimed, ‘By Heracles, what a number of lies this young man is telling about me!’ For he has included in the dialogue much that Socrates never said.”
25. And the paradoxes are more than what I have just referred to. For example, Plato presents Socrates’ strong anti-sophistic stand by using sophistic persuasion strategies; he immortalized the Socratic method of oral elenchus by *writing* it; see Halperin (1992) for more. — Ausland distinguishes “between the fictional literary dialogue and a living philosophical one” (1997) 386; he considers Socrates’ argumentative technique as “an inductive art whose effect is to elicit each man’s more productive thoughts” (1997) 384. Thus, to the reader of the Platonic dialogues he offers an explanation of the ambiguities produced — whether by the lack of validity in some arguments or by the imitative dimension of the Platonic text: its author “redirect[s] his reader’s attention” (1997) 384. This is an ingenious suggestion: by locating his readers in an imitation of a conversation, in which Socrates’ interlocutors are provoked into new ways of thinking, Plato induces his readers into innovative ways of thought.

Plato wrote texts to project a philosophy developed from incidental conversations²⁶ that a philosopher who never wrote held with others on various topics. And most importantly, those dialogues are devised by Plato to appear as representations of actual discussions Socrates held during his lifetime.²⁷ The Socratic discussions, however, are sometimes reported second-hand — hence, four times removed from truth, in Plato's own terms. The “distancing” techniques employed in such frames have left philosophers and classicists alike in a veritable quandary. As Johnson (1998) 590 writes:

... the distancing mechanisms of the frame do not simply undercut or negate the authority of the account. The tension is challenging, but not, I think, deconstructing. As we have seen, Plato clearly, emphatically, and deliberately introduces details to validate the authority of the account even as he goes about constructing a frame that seems to challenge the authority. This unresolved tension is, I think, fundamental. One may think here of Platonic *paidia*, or, more helpfully, of Socratic irony.

To give a specific example of such a distancing technique or “mechanism” in the *Phaedo*, in reference to the contrived absence of Plato from the very dialogue he has authored, Murray (1999) 261 comments: “By distancing himself from the narrative being reported, Plato can have it both ways: the account can appear to be utterly realistic, but there is no guarantee of its veracity.”

Later on, after digressing briefly on truth, representation, and frames, I shall explore in greater detail my view on their function when I discuss the introductory and concluding frames of the *Phaedo*. In the meantime, I shall briefly delineate my methodology. I consider the Platonic texts as primarily philosophical in intention. Therefore, I see their dialogical form, their frames, settings, and all other literary material, as determined by philosophical considerations.²⁸ The frames — almost all of them introductory and all combining

26. The method of *dialectics*, a process of arriving at syllogistic conclusions by elenchus, as opposed to the Bakhtinian *dialogics*, a process of adapting one's answer to the prior *ad hoc* thesis of one's interlocutor.

27. Griswold (2002) 101 holds that the Platonic “dialogues are clearly fictional in character. They are not — they could not be — transcriptions of conversations which took place” (2002) 85 but also that “the dialogues must not only be treated as dialogues, but also as *representations* of dialogues.”

28. I subscribe to Frede's (1992) theses: “... not only are the dialogues pieces of literary fiction, they are also, quite definitely, pieces of philosophical writing. ... Equally obviously it would be wrong to think that the dialogues are pieces of philosophical writing in which the literary elements just constitute a superficial adornment or embellishment

both dialogue and narrative (Halliwell [2009]) — operate to foil the dialogue immediately following and describe the setting in which the Socratic discussions take place.²⁹

If the philosophical discussion is *the* drama, the “acts” and “scenes” of this “philosophical drama” are defined by the changing of basic arguments. Viewed in this light, the scenes are not marked out by the exit or entrance of a character (although another interlocutor might take the floor and cause a suspended argument to be taken up anew, or a new philosophical issue to arise) as happens in the theater but by the succession and alternation of arguments.

Thus, according to my approach, frames, are whatever precedes the separate segments of the disputation. The function of these frames is to naturalize the philosophical dialogue by furnishing details of place, character, and *Vorgeschichte*. But in my case, since I use dramatic and/or theatrical terminology for passages of mainly narrative technique, I shall use the term “frame scenes” for all parts of the dialogue which do not belong to the philosophical drama *per se*. Thus, if I use theater terms here to put certain things in greater relief, keep in mind that Plato did not write plays and that the main part of the dialogue is the philosophical argumentation. Hence, in the *Phaedo* there are two additional frames, one introductory and one concluding, which apart of their “verisimilitude” function, display the human aspect of Socrates. The frame of the discussions between Phaedo and Echecrates foils another frame, which in turn foils the philosophical argumentation. Here is the schema:

Outer (First) Introductory Frame Scene: *Phd.* 57a1–59c7: Echecrates and Phaedo.

Interior (Second) Introductory Frame Scene: *Phd.* 59d2–61c1: The beginning of Phaedo’s narrative.

Interior (Penultimate) Concluding Frame Scene: *Phd.* 115a3–118a14: Socrates’ last hour.

Outer (Last) Concluding Frame Scene: *Phd.* 118a15–17: The conclusion of Phaedo’s narrative.

which, as philosophers, we can safely disregard” (1992) 201. “It would seem rather that the very dialogue form and the dramatic setting of the dialogue are due to philosophical, rather than superficial literary or expository considerations” (1992) 219.

29. See, e.g., Halperin (1992) and Blondell (2002) for a discussion of the different types of frame in the dialogues.

This schema informs us that the articulation of the dialogue is symmetrical, even though the parts are of disparate length: two outer frames which foil the two interior frames. Since the outer concluding frame is just three lines, to simplify matters I shall use the title “Concluding Frame Scene” for both the Interior and Outer Concluding Frames.³⁰

The two introductory frame scenes of the Phaedo (57a1–61c1)

In the *Phaedo* the philosophical issues under discussion are Socrates' belief in the immortality of the soul and the proper attitude for a true philosopher in the face of death. Somewhat similar ideas about the souls of living beings were held by the Pythagoreans of the time, so Plato invents a dialogue in which Socrates discusses the matter with Cebes and Simmias — both real persons, followers of the Pythagorean school — who were living in Thebes after the Pythagoreans were banished from Southern Italy.

This discussion of immortality, however, is framed by another conversation, between Echecrates and Phaedo, which takes place, not in Thebes, but in Phlius of the Peloponnese, where Echecrates, another Pythagorean, was living with other followers of the school after the above-mentioned expulsion. They encounter Phaedo, who, after attending Socrates in his last hours, is returning from Athens to his home at Elis. Echecrates asks Phaedo to tell them in detail what happened in the jail. Echecrates and Phaedo, too, were real persons whose actual existence is independently attested.

Echecrates and the others knew about Socrates' trial but they had not had any further news, except that Socrates died quite some time after his conviction. So Phaedo begins by explaining that Socrates' execution was delayed in deference to the annual celebration of the Delia,³¹ during which time executions were forbidden until the sacred ship completed its mission to Delos and returned to Piraeus. Next, Phaedo furnishes some information about this festival.

Now, the Delia were well-known to Plato's Athenian readership and possibly to educated people in poleis all over the Greek peninsula. However,

30. In the *Symposium* there is — like in the *Phaedo* — a concluding frame in narrative but it is much smaller.

31. Plato does not name the celebration; he simply writes that the (sacred) ship had gone to Delos the day before the trial. Xenophon (*Mem.* 4.8.2) uses the name *Δήλια* in his corresponding narrative.

Plato's characteristic use of realistic techniques of 'verisimilitude' *avant la lettre* induces him to insert this lesson for the benefit of Phaedo's Pythagorean audience, who, having lived until recently in Southern Italy, very plausibly knew nothing about Athenian festivals.³²

Echecrates is impatient with all these details: "What about his [Socrates'] actual death, Phaedo? What did he say? What did he do? Who of his friends were with him? Or did the authorities not allow them to be present and he died with no friends present?" The psychological realism is achieved via the rapid succession of questions.

All the necessary information is provided in this introductory frame.

The place: the Athenian State prison.³³

The time: immediately after the return of the sacred ship from Delos (according to Xenophon *Mem.* 4.8.2, one month had passed from the conviction).

The *dramatis personae*: Socrates, Phaedo, Apollodorus, Critobulus and his father Crito, Hermogenes, Epigenes, Aeschines from Sphettus, Antisthenes, Ctesippus from Paeania, Menexenus, Simmias and Cebes from Thebes, Phaedondes, Euclides and Terpsion from Megara. Even those of the students who were not present are recorded: Plato, who was ill; Aristippus and Cleombrotus, who were in Aegina. All mentioned, present and absent, were persons who actually existed and conversed with Socrates.

Nevertheless, the frame does not finish there: the true subject of the dialogue, the immortality of the soul, must also be foiled. Phaedo favors his audience with details of the *Vorgeschichte*. Socrates' friends would gather early each day outside the prison, and as soon as the doors opened, would go in to visit with him. Having learned that the sacred ship had arrived from Delos, they gathered earlier than usual and were admitted almost immediately. They saw the unshackled Socrates and his wife, Xanthippe, sitting next to him, holding their smallest child in her lap.

32. Besides the reality effect of the particular passage as the motivation for its inclusion, we can see two more reasons for which Plato incorporates such a description in his *Phaedo*. The first has to do with the artistic coherence of the text: since one of Plato's tasks is to show the profound religiosity of Socrates — a man accused and convicted of atheism —, he must lay a foundation for Socrates' composing a hymn to Apollo, the god to whom Delia were devoted, during his imprisonment (60d2). The second reason is that Plato had in mind as his possible readership Greeks in Southern Italy and Sicily — among whom, no doubt, were some Pythagorean sympathizers.

33. Plausibly identified with ruins located in the West of the Acropolis.

Small brushstrokes refer to the emotional state: all of them now laugh, now shed tears; most of all Apollodorus. And Xanthippe:

When she saw us, Xanthippe broke out and said just the kinds of thing that women are given to saying: 'So this is the very last time, Socrates, that your good friends will speak to you and you to them.' At which Socrates looked at Crito and said: 'Crito, someone had better take her home.' So she was taken away by some of Crito's people, calling out and lamenting.

The insertion of such an inapposite episode into a philosophical dialogue can be explained if we focus on one crucial aspect of Socrates' demeanor: he is absolutely calm in the face of impending death, whereas all present are profoundly disturbed by the attendant circumstances. The following dialogue will justify this imperturbable serenity by a series of scenes and arguments whose goal is to establish Socrates as *the* paradigm for lovers of the true philosophy.

The frame in terms of playwriting, the scene with Phaedo in Phlius speaking with Echecrates in the presence of latter's companions (57a1-59c7), has now ended. It is worth noting that in the theatre the Phlius scene would be played before a closed curtain. However, the following scene — from when Phaedo and the others enter the Athenian prison to the moment the true philosopher's attitude toward death becomes the subject of discussion (59d1-61c1) — would be played after the curtain was raised. Not here. The curtain remains closed and Phaedo, still on the forestage with Echecrates and his fellow Pythagoreans, describes the events. This is the second introductory frame, since the dialogue proper has not yet started.

If the function of the first frame or scene was to establish the *reality* of all that follows, I understand this second frame as operating to present Socrates as a human being and not as the ideal philosopher. Here Phaedo first describes Socrates as sitting on the bed and rubbing his bent leg with his hand — obviously, the pain from the chains had not yet subsided — and tells us Socrates' attitude toward lack of control (Xanthippe's emotionality), toward pain (he turns his feeling of pain into a philosophical problem), his sudden need to compose poetry in his mind³⁴ while in prison. Indeed, still according to Phaedo, Socrates relates how a recurrent dream kept urging him to compose "music," which he at first takes to be an exhortation to continue his

34. Of course, he could have recited verses in his attempts to cast them into metrical patterns.

philosophizing — here is also the famous *dictum*: φιλοσοφίας μὲν οὐσίας μεγίστης μονοικῆς (61a3–4). I understand the philosophical question concerning the opposites pain/pleasure (70d–72e and 102b–107a)³⁵ as a ‘warm-up’ before the actual philosophical drama, whose theme is that the philosopher must not seek to avoid death (61c2ff.).

After the double introduction, the ‘scenes’ of the philosophical drama can begin. The Flius characters disappear behind the wings. The curtain is raised and Phaedo reappears among the characters surrounding the protagonist, at the center of the stage.

The philosophical drama of the Phaedo (61c2–115a2): a synopsis

I have expressed the view that the philosophical drama consists of a series of acts and scenes defined by the arguments. In that light, the ‘drama’ could be outlined as follows:³⁶

Act I

Scene 1: Two Views of Death (61c–63e)

Scene 2: Socrates’s Defense (63e–69e)

Scene 3: The Cyclical Argument (69c–72d)

Scene 4: The Recollection Argument (72e–77d)

Scene 5: The Affinity Argument (77e–80b)

Act II

Scene 1: Simmias’s objection (84c–86c)

Scene 2: The Defense Elaborated (80c–84b)

35. Rowe (1993) 119 does not think that this first mention of the opposites has any bearing upon the later passages.

36. With some modifications I have followed Bostock’s (1986) divisions. As a philosopher Bostock is mainly interested in separating the philosophical argumentation (the subject of his book) from the non-philosophical material. Thus, he considers the “Introduction” to be the passages 57a–63e and the passages 107c–118a to be the “Conclusion”. More specifically, he divides the “Introduction” into ‘Introduction of the Dialogue’ (57a–59c), ‘Introduction of the Scene (59c–61b), ‘Introduction of the Theme’ (61b–63e); the “Conclusion,” into ‘The Myth’ (107c–114c) and ‘Socrates’ Death’ (115a–118a). As I do, he distinguishes two introductory parts before the philosophical dialogue begins, since what he calls “theme” is the arguments on the immortality of the soul. He also calls “Interlude” what I have here as “Act II”; I call “Interlude” the brief reversion to the scene between Phaedo and Echeates in Phlius.

- Scene 3: Cebes's objection (86c–88c)
 Interlude: Phaedo and Echecrates (88c–89a)
 Scene 4: Reply to Simmias (89a–95a)
 Scene 5: Recapitulation of Cebes (95a–c)

Act III

- Scene 1: Explanations and Hypotheses (95c–102a)
 Scene 2: The Final Argument (102a–107b)
 Scene 3: Socrates's myth (107c–114c).

At this point, I have two comments to make before continuing further. First, I consider the Final Argument (that the soul is deathless and imperishable) and the myth of the different regions of Hades (where the souls dwell after death and before birth) as two scenes of the same act, since Socrates has gained the consent of his interlocutors and proceeds without objections from one scene to the next.

Second, the Interlude is played once again in front of the closed curtain. We are back in Phlius as we attend a brief exchange between Echecrates and Phaedo. The function of this Interlude is to draw special attention to Phaedo: when the curtain rises once again upon the prison scene, Phaedo is sitting on Socrates' right by the couch on a low stool. Socrates is stroking Phaedo's head and pressing the hair on the back of his neck, for the philosopher "was in the habit of playing with his student's hair at times." It looks like a brief 'warm up' is needed here, after the intermission of the Interlude: a *tableaux vivant* where all actors are motionless while the spotlight falls upon Socrates and Phaedo having a light exchange about cutting off their hair if the argument fails.

As far as the philosophical drama is concerned, I agree with Arieti (1991 [first published in 1986]) 215:

... unless one understands the arguments, and sees their weakness, he will not understand the drama of the dialogue except superficially; and it is towards the drama of Socrates' death that everything in the dialogue points. But seeing the weakness of the arguments is important only if one asks and then understands why the arguments are weak, and why their weakness is essential if Socrates is to behave heroically, and why, moreover, he is most heroic when his arguments are weakest.

But whereas Arieti holds (1991) 226 n. 5 that "the arguments must be weak for the dialogue to achieve its dramatic purpose, and [that] their intentional

weakness is the dialogue's beauty and strength," I believe that the turning points, the abrupt ends, the impasses, the forced taking the issues *da capo*, all the "weaknesses" in the argumentation are precisely what constitutes the drama. In the philosophical drama *per se* the reader/spectator — another Socrates' interlocutor — experiences a variety of contradictory feelings — reassurance/frustration, elevation/disenchantment, joy/sadness, belief/disbelief — as s/he follows the devious paths of the argumentation. These, however, are not strong emotions, like the ones you experience when you attend the performance of a tragedy. In the case of the philosophical drama the emotions are reactions of the intellect as it attends the arguments (not the sympathy or antipathy toward characters of the drama) — feelings produced by listening to the music of philosophy, a more sensual version of the distant music of the celestial spheres.

The myth narrated by Socrates is the fictional climax of the dialectical process, a veritable *coda* to it. The concluding frame will come after the curtain of the philosophical drama has fallen, so that the human drama may now resume.

The Epilogue: The frame scene of Socrates' death (115a3–118a17)

As already stated, I adopt the view, shared by all scholars on the basis of literary criteria, that the opening scene with Echeocrates and Phaedo (57a1–59c8) is a frame scene. However, as I see it, the introductory part of the dialogue also comprises a second, additional frame scene: the beginning of Phaedo's narrative of the events taking place immediately after he and the other friends and students entered the prison (59d1–61c1) in which the philosophical drama — the actual argumentation — will shortly unfold. In both these introductory scenes all conversation is extraneous to the theme ("On the Soul") of the dialogue. We are told about the place, the circumstances, the *Vorgeschichte* — information necessary for an understanding of the dialogue.

As stated above, the function of the first frame is to present the following material as at once both dubious and authentic. Both contradictory options are open. However, in light of the corresponding, concluding frame, whose function cannot be to put the preceding material leading up to it in doubt, I opt for the "realistic" representation of all frames. I wrote "corresponding," because there is, in the last scene, an obvious textual intention of a mimetic representation. Although brief "realistic" descriptions and comments appear sporadically throughout the dialogue in order to maintain the

pretense of objective “reporting,” the concluding frame is completely and coherently “realistic.”

This last frame of the dialogue, in which Phaedo relates what transpired after Socrates drank the poison, consists of material extraneous to the philosophical discourse, and functions similarly to the second introductory frame, to present the human drama of Socrates' demise. The intent is not to disassociate the philosophical drama from the human drama, as I shall show, but on the contrary, to convey specific instructions on how to understand the foregoing philosophical drama.

In my cursory review of the different ways scholars have understood Socrates' last words, I deliberately left out a one long forgotten literal interpretation. It was suggested by a Danish classicist, poet and philosopher, Johan Ludvig Heiberg (1854–1928). Written in Danish and titled “Sokrates sidste ord” (Socrates' last word), it was published in the Proceedings of the Royal Danish Academy of Sciences and Letters in 1902.

After a long list of references to Socrates's last words and a review of Greek beliefs and rituals relating to roosters, Heiberg offers his own interpretation in the last page and a half — not without first overviewing all the interpretations from ancient times to the beginning of his century, and quoting from Greek, Latin, German, French, and Danish.³⁷ His interpretation is encapsulated in three paragraphs of his (1903) 115–116:

In chapter 66 [*Phd.* 117a4 ff.] we are told, with every indication of historic credibility, how the aged jailer comes with the filled cup and gives it to Socrates; the latter looks calmly at him with a strange look (*ταυρηδόν*) and with the cup with the poison in his hand, asks whether it will be appropriate to make a libation from the drink. The man answers tactfully that there is no more than the necessary dose. Socrates replied: Well, I understand: — *ἀλλ' εὐχεσθαί γέ πον τοῖς θεοῖς ἕξεστί τε καὶ χροή, τὴν μετοίκησιν τὴν ἐνθένδε ἐκέϊσε ἐδτυγῆ γενέσθαι ἃ δὴ καὶ ἐγὼ εὐχομαί τε καὶ γένοιτο ταύτη.* With this wish he drains the cup.

37. The list is a long one (Heiberg's order of presentation): Martin Clarentius Gertz [1844–1929], P. Couvreur (1896), Suidas, Lactantius, Lamartine, Lucian, Aeschines (of Sphettus) [attributed now to Antisthenes, purported author of one of the *Epistolae Socraticorum*], Origenes, Tertulian, Theodoretus of Cyrus, Olympiodorus [attributed now to Damascius], Giovanni Pico della Mirandola (1557), Marsilio Ficino (1561), Caelius Rhodiginus [Lodovico Ricchieri] (1559), Sigebertus Haverkamp (1718), André Dacier (1699), Daniel Wyttenbach [1746–1820], Johann Georg Hamann (1759), Pausanias, Plutarch, Libanius, Herondas, Martin Schanz (1894), Karl Joël (1893), Athenaeus, and Hirzel (1895).

That the wish itself refers to the migration from here to the other world, i.e. that the expression *εὐτυχῆ γενέσθαι* means “going away well” — and not “is good luck for me” — is the most reasonable both linguistically and explainable by the situation; if Plato had not understood the words in that way — assuming they are absolutely authentic — he would hardly have let them stand unchanged, since in the light of the dialogue’s intent, it is impossible that he would allow Socrates to pray that the journey must be for his own personal happiness. Thus, Plato was absolutely sure on that. And there was good reason that Socrates would wish the migration to go well. Hemlock toxin can sometimes cause convulsions (Hasselt, *Handbuch der Giftlehre* I S. 335 ff.; it was also evident Theophrasti *Hist. Plant.* IX 16, 7 *et seq.*, that in his own time experiments were done to obtain faster and safer effects of the poison), much to the embarrassment [not only of the convicted but] also of those present.

With this wish in mind, feeling reassured that the hemlock has done its work promptly, Socrates says: “My prayer was heard, the journey progressed well, and all we have every reason to be satisfied that the poison has worked. Therefore, make a sacrifice to the god who is in charge of the drugs, as the common people are wont to make offerings to him in thanks for good treatment.”

Heiberg’s interpretation is based on a series of good but undeveloped ideas: (1) that the adjective *εὐτυχῆ* (happy) does not qualify “Socrates” but the noun *μετοίκησιν* (migration) — the inference here is that Heiberg does not agree with the Neoplatonic view that Socrates desired to die so that his soul will be cured from life’s sickness; (2) that the hemlock could produce ill-effects; (3) that these effects could also have an impact on Socrates’ friends and disciples; and (4) that Socrates thanks Asclepius for having procured him a painless death. With regard to the first point, this is a rather unnecessary argument since — as Heiberg himself observes — to connect *εὐτυχῆ* with “Socrates” would have been syntactically wrong. However, points (2), (3) and (4) are well-taken. On the other hand, Heiberg’s interpretation is mainly supported by his connecting the wish for a “happy migration to Hades’ regions” with the unpredictability of hemlock.³⁸ Owing to Heiberg’s laconic style, all the above points need further clarification.

38. Wilamowitz (1920) 58 rejected Heiberg’s interpretation: according to him, Heiberg’s hypothesis requires that Socrates would have uttered a prayer to Asclepius in advance and when he felt his feet freezing painlessly, would have understood that as an answer to his prayer, and then, he would have made the request for the sacrifice. After

*A close reading of the last passages of the Phaedo:
Socrates' first two requests*

After concluding his myth, Socrates reminds himself first, that it is the time for him to follow fate's call and take the road towards Hades (which he just had described), and second, Simmias and Cebes (the two with whom he conducted the argumentation), as well as to the others, since fate calls all humans sooner or later (*τὴν εἰς Αἴδου πορείαν ὡς πορευσόμενος [sc. ὁ ἀνὴρ] ὅταν ἡ εἰμαρμένη καλῆι*, 115a2-3). The mentioning of *εἰμαρμένη* prompts him to characterize himself — with a touch of self-irony, no doubt — an *ἀνὴρ τραγικός*.

When he is asked by Crito what are his last wishes, Socrates says that his request is that his present companions will tend themselves by promising to live in accordance with what he has argued for during the day but also in all his past philosophical discussions (115b5-c1):

‘What I’m always telling you, Crito,’ said he, ‘and nothing very new: if you take care for yourselves, your actions will be of service to me and mine, and to yourselves too, whatever they may be, even if you make no promises now; but if you take no care for yourselves, and are unwilling to pursue your lives along the tracks (*κατ’ ἔχνη*), as it were, marked by our present and earlier discussions, then even if you make many firm promises at this time, you’ll do no good at all.’

But Crito is a practical man: he wants to know what Socrates' wishes are concerning his burial. Socrates, smiling, expresses his second request: that, after promising that they — fully aware that the burial will be of his body and not of his soul — will not cry.

*Socrates' third request: libation, ταυρηδὸν ὑποβλέψας,
and the migration of the souls*

Socrates' third request is expressed when he is ready to drink the poison.

As we saw, as regard the hemlock Heiberg (1902) 115-116 refers to

Wilamowitz's rejection, Heiberg's view became obsolete. Most (1993), exceptionally, mentions Heiberg because of his *testimonia* and not of his interpretation.

Hasselt's book which was published in 1862. In recent years there has been a long discussion of Socrates's hemlock poisoning. Opinions have varied from the view that Plato softened the effects of the hemlock so that he could present Socrates as the ideal philosopher,³⁹ to the belief that Plato gave an accurate description of the facts. The most recent view was propounded by Bloch (2002) who explained that the hemlock used was not the *aconitum* but another type of the same family, the *conium maculatum*. Hasselt (1862) 335–339 already had referred to the *conium maculatum* and its effects (numbness and paralysis of the respiratory system), where he mentions Nicander and Socrates. Bloch's explanation, however, that Socrates was given a drug which induces a progressive paralysis,⁴⁰ and thus, did not produce visibly repulsive effects, only focuses on the last lines of the text, where the effects of the poison are described, instead of taking into consideration the whole scene.

When the man in charge of grinding the hemlock enters with the cup, Socrates asks him what he must do. He is instructed to drink the potion, then walk around for a while, and when he feels his legs grow numb, to lie down. Now Socrates, totally calm, asks a question that the man might well have found rather strange: *Τί λέγεις, ἔφη, περὶ τοῦδε τοῦ πάματος πρὸς τὸ ἀποσπεῖσαι τινι; ἔξεστιν ἢ οὐ;* ("What do you say to pouring someone a libation from this drink? Is it allowed or not?"). In describing how Socrates asks this question, Phaedo uses an expression no less strange: *ὥσπερ εἰώθει ταυρηδὸν ὑποβλέψας* ('looking up him in the manner of a bull, as was his wont'). The adverb *ταυρηδὸν* occurs only twice in the preserved Greek texts.⁴¹ The phrase could mean 'looking at someone with one's head bent slightly downwards' or 'looking at someone sideways,' or even aggressively (like a bull about to charge).⁴²

The problem is that the phrase *ταυρηδὸν ὑποβλέψας* seems not to jibe well with the rest of the sentence (117b3–6). In fact, it is an oxymoron, coming as it does, right after the statement: *οὐδὲν τρέσας οὐδὲν διαφθείρας οὔτε τοῦ χρώματος οὔτε τοῦ προσώπου* ("he took the cup perfectly calmly without a tremor, or any change of colour or countenance"). The adverbial clause, however, *ὥσπερ εἰώθει* gives a clue: *ταυρηδὸν ὑποβλέψας* does not

39. See Gill (1973).

40. Bloch (Brickhouse & Smith [2004] 262) describes it as follows: "ascending paralysis as a peripheral neuropathy of the Guillain-Barré type."

41. In Ar. *Ran.* 804 and here.

42. Cf. the scholiast's comment *ταυρηδὸν βλέπουσαν* on a verse (92) in Euripides' *Medea*: *ἄμμα νιν* [sc. *Μήδειαν*] *ταυρομένην*.

mean 'looking askance' but 'looking with a philosopher's penetrating eye.'⁴³ What was Socrates really concerned about? The answer to this question could have something to do with Socrates' wish to make a libation. But if so, we must consider whether whatever was in Socrates' mind when he uttered that wish *caused* him to look at the man with a 'penetrating eye.' Heiberg rightly connects *ταυρηδὸν ἐποβλέψας* with the request for a libation but he wrongly supposes that *ἐτύχης μετοίκησις* refers a painless death.

It might be useful at this juncture to further explore Plato's concept of *μετοίκησις*.⁴⁴ After death, souls have different fates. Some are abandoned by their *δαίμων* (guide), wander in the forked paths of Hades and eventually find their way to horrible Tartarus, where dwell the souls of the impious and criminal. More souls are accompanied along the river Acheron to the lake Acherousias and, after crossing it by boat, dwell on its far shore, where the souls of those who *μέσως βεβιωκέναι* ("those who are found to have lived indifferently") are. Fewer souls are guided upwards to beautiful houses, where is the region of the *διαφερόντως πρὸς τὸ δσίως βιώναι* ("those who are found to have lived exceptionally holy lives"). The most exalted place is reserved for philosophers who dwell with the gods in a landscape described as paradisiacal (110b5–111c3).⁴⁵

So, there is a lot of traveling over paths, the rivers, and lakes until the souls are established in their proper location in Hades. In the *Apolo-gy* as well as in the *Phaedo* two nouns are used to denote the soul's 'migration from here to there': *ἀποδημία* (*Phd.* 67b; *Ap.* 41a) and *μετοίκησις* (*Ap.* 40c, *Phd.* 117c).⁴⁶ Etymologically, *ἀποδημία* (*ἀπό+δήμος*) means, literally 'leaving one's *dēmos*, one's municipality (and moving to another),' while *μετοίκησις* (*μετά+οἶκος*) means 'making one's home in some other

43. Gallop translates: "fixing him with his customary stare." Cf. the earlier *Διαβλέψας οὖν ὁ Σωκράτης, ὥσπερ τὰ πολλὰ εἰώθει* (86d4).

44. In the *Phaedo* there are three instances where Plato uses a noun to denote the "migration": in 67c1 (*ἀποδημία*), 115a2 (*πορεία*), and in 117c1–3 (*μετοίκησις*). In all the other cases Plato uses a verbal syntagm, the verb usually *ἀφικνέομαι* and the prepositional phrase *εἰς Αἴδου*. *Πορεία* contains the concept of 'motion' in its semantic content, whereas both *ἀποδημία* and *μετοίκησις* contain the concept of 'settling.'

45. Cf. Rowe (1993) 277. This presentation of Hades' regions is simpler than in the *Phaedo*, where subdivisions of categories of souls and possibilities of moving from one region to another are also described.

46. *Ap.* 40c9–10: *μετοίκησις τῇ ψυχῇ [τυγχάνει οἶσα] τοῦ τόπου τοῦ ἐνθένδε εἰς ἄλλον τόπον*, *Ap.* 41a6: *ἀποδημία*, *Phd.* 67b11: *ἀποδημία*, *Phd.* 117c2–3: *τὴν μετοίκησιν τὴν ἐνθένδε ἐκεῖσε εὐτυχῆ γενέσθαι*. Cf. *Ap.* 4–5: *ἀποδημησαί ἐστιν ὁ θάνατος ἐνθένδε εἰς ἄλλον τόπον*. Note the consistency of the phraseology.

place.’ Guthrie’s (1971) 162 definition of the Socratic view of “death as a ‘change of abode for the soul from here to another place’ and ‘like going to another country’,” is very apt. Thus, Socrates’ wish that “the removal from this world to the next will be a happy one” (117c1–3), means that he hopes his soul will ‘arrive happily’ in the upper regions inhabited by philosophers’ — *εὐτυχῆ* meaning ‘without problems,’ i.e. not getting lost in forked paths before it reaches its destination. At the moment of his death, Socrates cannot know for sure how or where his soul will arrive. Therefore, he can’t be thanking Asclepius for *τὴν μετοίκησιν τὴν ἐνθὲνδε ἐκεῖσε εὐτυχῆ γενέσθαι* — not only because it is too early to give thanks for something not yet granted, but also because the god of medicine does not preside over the migration of the souls. Heiberg wrongly understood this phrase as referring to a “painless death”: *μετοίκησις* refers to the passage of the soul to its allotted part of Hades — and that is something on which poison can have no effect.

*Socrates’ fourth request: ταυρηδὸν ὑποβλέψας
and hemlock poisoning*

Although his third wish, a libation for the “happy” migration to Hades will not be granted, the ‘man’ with the cup assures Socrates that the quantity of the hemlock is exactly right. This answer is thus an indirect denial of his request. Socrates then “dr[inks] it off with good humour and without the least distaste.” All present are unable to restrain their tears, especially Apollodorus (117c5–d6):

Till then most of us had been fairly well able to restrain our tears; but when we saw he was drinking, that he’d actually drunk it, we could do so no longer. In my own case, the tears came pouring out in spite of myself, so that I covered my face and wept for myself — not for him, no, but for my own misfortune in being deprived of such a man for a companion. Even before me, Crito had moved away, when he was unable to restrain his tears. And Apollodorus, who even earlier had been continuously in tears, now burst forth into such a storm of weeping and grieving, that he made everyone present break down except Socrates himself.

The philosopher now reprimands them for behaving so unbecomingly, like the women he had sent away a little while earlier. As far as he knew, *καὶ γὰρ ἀκήκοα ὅτι ἐν εὐφημίᾳ χροῖ τελευτᾶν* (117e1–2) (“I’ve heard one should

die in silence”).⁴⁷ Like the cathartic bath which Socrates takes in order not to burden the women who will prepare his body for burial, *εὐφημία* is a word connected with the customs, rituals, and religious beliefs surrounding death, it means the silence kept in front of the dead during the ceremony of burial.

At the instruction of the man, Socrates begins to walk around the cell. He feels numbness in his legs, and lies down. The man approaches, presses Socrates' feet, and, having ascertained that the old man cannot feel anything, tells the others that he will die when the paralysis reaches the heart. Socrates has covered himself so he will not be “on view” as he dies.⁴⁸ But suddenly, he uncovers his head and he utters his last words: ὦ Κρίτων, τῷ Ἀσκληπιῷ ὀφείλομεν ἀλεκτρούνα· ἀλλὰ ἀπόδοτε καὶ μὴ ἀμελήσητε. This is a fourth, and quite unexpected, wish.

After reading Socrates' cryptic last words, it may be useful to revisit that other puzzling phrase *ταυρηδὸν ὑποβλέψας* and consider both of them together. *Ταυρηδὸν ὑποβλέψας* tells us that Socrates feels uneasy as he asks for permission to make a libation. Is the request unusual? We must regard Socrates' question in the light of the man's answer, “We only prepare as much as we judge the proper dose.” Rephrasing Socrates' question to correspond with the answer, Socrates was asking, “Is there enough of the poison to produce the desirable effect and still have some left over to make a libation?” — i.e. it is a question about quantity. Socrates is primarily concerned about offering a libation to “some [god]” for granting him a propitious migration to a philosopher's place in Hades. The penetrating look he gives the man while posing the question, indicates exactly how much profoundly serious is this question for Socrates. But implicitly, a second question surfaces within the first — a question that has been hanging on the air all along, for everyone: “Have you given me the correct dosage?” We have seen that hemlock could cause various unpleasant collateral effects, such as vomiting, convulsions,

47. One more instance of Plato's depiction of Socrates as a man who was wrongly accused of atheism because he always kept observance of the folk religious beliefs and practices. The *ἀκήκοα* here corresponds to the *ὡς λέγεται* which he interjects whenever he narrates his adaptations of Orphic or Homeric eschatological myths. See below on Socrates' practical side.

48. Covering his body could indicate that Socrates feels progressively very cold because of the hemlock poisoning; but the covering of one's head shows a gesture of *αἰδώς*, cf. Phaedo's attitude when Socrates drank the poison: *ἐγκαλυψάμενος ἀπέκλασεν ἔμαντόν* (117c).

and suffocation.⁴⁹ That is why he had moments before called the man, rather hopefully, an *ἐπιστήμων* (117a), i.e. someone who knows his job; that is why the man, rather than answer the question about libation, assures Socrates that the dosage is correct.

That is why Plato is careful to place into evidence the expertise of the man almost at the very beginning of the *Phaedo* (63d4–e8). Socrates has a brief exchange with Crito, the practical man, and not with his philosophically argumentative interlocutors, Simmias and Cebes:

‘But first let’s find out what it is that Crito here has been wanting to say, for some time past, I think.’

‘Why Socrates,’ said Crito, ‘it’s simply that the man who’s going to give you the poison has been telling me for some time that you must be warned to talk as little as possible: he says people get heated through talking too much, and one must bring nothing of that sort in contact with the poison; people doing that sort of thing are sometimes obliged, otherwise, to drink twice or even three times.’

‘Never mind him,’ said Socrates. ‘Just let him prepare his stuff so as to give two doses, or even three if need be.’

‘Yes, I pretty well knew it,’ said Crito; ‘but he’s been giving me trouble for some while.’

‘Let him be,’ he said.

Now, a little less or a little more dose of hemlock could cause unpredictable and undesirable effects. The state slave responsible for administering the poison is identified as an expert: he has had cases where the condemned did not die but had to take the poison again and again. Although the man is not present to corroborate in person what Crito reports, it is clear that his concern is that the implementation of the death penalty by hemlock should go well. Socrates’ unwillingness to comply with the man’s advice is only due to his eagerness to return to his philosophical discussions. Once the debating is over and Socrates has turned to practicalities, the question of the poison will return to the fore. But with the above passage Plato has given us a foreshadowing of the issue.

The above exchange with Crito does not belong to the second introductory frame but to the recurrent intrusions of realism which are cannily

49. See Gill (1973) 25 for references. Heiberg (1902) 115–116 points out that Theophrastus shows that the effects of the hemlock were not absolutely controlled and there still was experimentation for the achievement of better results.

positioned throughout the dialogue to remind us of its actuality. Only, as we shall see, its purpose is not merely to authenticate the scene or humanize the protagonist, but to supply the motivation for Socrates' later concern about the effects of the hemlock.

Is Plato presenting Socrates as fearful? Not exactly. The calm, composed and exemplary philosopher is not afraid of dying, since he knows what will happen to his soul after death, but he does care *how* he will die. Is it of little importance to a philosopher, who believes that pleasure and pain are only bodily phenomena and of no consequence to the immortal soul, that he should die indecorously or even painfully? Would such a man dying such a death not undermine everything that Plato has, until that very climax, built so carefully, so consistently?

Because I see in the last scene of the *Phaedo* — the concluding frame of the philosophical drama — a frame that corresponds to the second introductory frame (i.e., is designed in the logic of a “realistic representation”), I would argue that Plato portrays Socrates as afraid of dying without dignity, or in evident physical pain. It is not the pain itself, however, that worries him. Previously, when Socrates turns down the option of committing suicide (61e5–62c8), he based his decision not on the pain he might suffer, but on his assertion that the gods are the owners of our bodies. So, why was it important for Plato to present Socrates as fearing not death but the manner of dying? We are now within the level of the human drama which frames the philosophical drama: Socrates is here a tragic hero (*ἀνὴρ τραγικός*, 115a), and Plato has written a new kind of tragedy — the philosophical drama. The mimesis has taken a new turn.

Now, let us suppose that Plato had represented Socrates dying in a humiliating or degrading way, after having argued for an entire day in favor of the position that a philosopher must not be afraid of death or be concerned about bodily and earthly vicissitudes. What impression Socrates would have made to his friends and disciples — the very man who had shown himself serene in the face of imminent death? Is not the covering of his head until his last moment a sign that he was concerned not to show to the gathering a possibly ugly, even hideous spectacle?⁵⁰

This is also the most reasonable explanation for those scholars who have been puzzled by Socrates' use of the plural ... *τῶ Ἀσκληπιῶ ὑφείλομεν*

50. As quoted above, Heiberg's (1902) 115–116 hints at it: “Hemlock toxin can sometimes cause convulsions ... which would have been embarrassing even for those present.”

ἀλεκτρούνα in his request.⁵¹ His end, coming upon him quietly, paralyzing him gradually, implacably, but without pain and convulsions, did not tarnish his iconic image as the Philosopher par excellence. His “knowledge” of the immortality of the soul, made him able to argue persuasively on the matter and to prove that the real philosopher must not fear death. The manner of his dying was an ultimate proof of his teachings; nor were the latter belied by the spectacle of the teacher in agony. All present — and not Socrates alone — owe a sacrifice to the god who provided such an effective *φάρμακον* and thus, all the arguing has concluded in the post positive way.

I shall refer to one more interpretation before concluding. The description of the progressive numbness and coldness of the body from the feet upwards has led Cropsey (1986) 173–174 to wonder:

Can one be certain that Socrates’ last words, the reminder to Crito to pay the debt to Aesculapius, were not a mark of his gratitude to the great druggist for a painless death through cooling numbness rather than for release from life as if it were a disease? What the text does seem to make clear is that the intention of Plato cannot be discerned unless his Socrates is seen in his depth, free from the bonds of an exoteric dogmatism that is, after all, incompatible with his famous irony.

In his article Cropsey reflects on the significance of the fact that the Greek word for soul is *ψυχή* and for cooling *ψύχω*, and links the description of the freezing of Socrates’ body to a prior passage of the *Phaedo* (106a8–10):

ὡς δ’ αὖτως οἶμαι κὰν εἰ τὸ ἀψυκτον ἀνώλεθρον ἦν, ὁπότε ἐπὶ τὸ πῦρ ψυχρόν τι ἐπήγει, οὔ ποτ’ ἂν ἀπεσβέννυτο οὐδ’ ἀπώλλυτο, ἀλλὰ σῶν ἂν ἀπελθὸν ὄχετο.

Although the discussion of *ψυχρόν* is followed by one on the *ψυχή* (104e7–106c7), *ψυχρόν* is used in opposition to the *πῦρ* as an example of things which cannot admit their opposite, and has nothing to do with soul. So, I shall adapt a little Cropsey’s phraseology to a modified version of Heiberg’s: “Socrates’ last words, a reminder to Crito to pay the debt to Aesculapius, were a mark of his gratitude to the great druggist for a painless death.”

51. See, e.g., Most (1993) 106 — “when [Socrates] uses the first-person plural he is denoting the group made up of himself and them [his students]” — the debt of the group because of Plato’s illness), White (2000) 105 — Socrates “envisions a shared ritual, hence a communal meal”). I wanted also to point out the successive use of the vowel *α* at the beginning of five from eight words; does it give a solemn, ritual sound to the sentence?

The concluding frame scene and its function

In *Phd.* 106e8 Socrates gives a concluding summation of all the multifaceted argument that has gone before and while Cebes agrees but Simmias is not totally convinced:

‘Beyond all doubt then, Cebes, soul is immortal and imperishable, and our souls really will exist in Hades.’

‘Well, Socrates, for my part I’ve no further objection, nor can I doubt the arguments at any point. But if Simmias here or anyone else has anything to say, he’d better not keep silent; as I know of no future occasion to which anyone wanting to speak or hear about such things could put it off.’

‘Well no,’ said Simmias; ‘nor have I any further ground for doubt myself, as far as the arguments go; though in view of the size of the subject under discussion, and having a low regard for human weakness, I’m bound to retain some doubt in my mind about what’s been said.’

In answer to Simmias’ reservations, Socrates does not instigate the others to more dialectics; instead he avails himself of a tale — the story of the soul after death to wrap up the entire argument. Some contemporary philosophers who analyze the *Phaedo* omit the eschatological myth from their examination. In terms, however, of the philosophical drama, the Socratic myth is a necessary adjunct, since it offers a fitting answer to Simmias’ doubts. The seamless transition from logical disputation to imaginary description shows that for Plato there was no distinction between the myth and the preceding portion of the dialogue: they are complementary aspects of an integral whole.

Nevertheless, from the end of the myth to the end of the dialogue something changes: the focus is now on action rather than argument. Here we are no longer witnesses to a philosophical debate but, as we were at the beginning, in the second introductory frame, we are told what Socrates did and said. Has the dramatic component of the Platonic dialogue ended, i.e. are we out of the drama? Yes and no: the curtain has fallen, but in front of it something is happening. *Phaedo* appears along with Echeocrates and his companions, and we are no longer in Athens, but once again in Phlius. *Phaedo* tells the others what happened at dusk, when Socrates started readying himself to die.

The technique employed here is again narrative as in the second introductory frame. In the second section of this paper I argued that both these frames operate as to give a human aspect to the main character of the philosophical

drama. The “realistic” details are offered to persuade the reader that the contents of the dialogue — both the philosophical and the human drama — constitute an accurate report of Socrates’ last day. The human drama shows the twofold image of Socrates: the philosopher disdains the physical and the mundane, but the man does not show a disregard for practical matters.

This is made very clear at the end of the myth (114d8–115a3), where Socrates gives a final admonition to the gathering:

For those reasons (*τούτων δὴ ἔνεκα*), then, any man should have confidence for his own soul, who during his life has rejected the pleasures of the body and its adornments as alien, thinking they do more harm than good, but has devoted himself to the pleasures of learning, and has decked his soul with no alien adornment, but with its own, with temperance and justice, bravery, liberality, and truth, thus awaiting the journey⁵² he will make to Hades, whenever destiny shall summon him.

This is neither a philosophical argument nor a passage outside of it; it is the very crux of the matter, as far as the inquiry into the immortality of the soul is concerned. If the philosophical proof is of any value, it is because it offers the reason (*τούτων δὴ ἔνεκα*) why a man must conduct his life in the prescribed manner. What follows after this transitional passage is the “realistic” concluding frame scene showing Socrates’s practical side: the purifying bath, the directions for the burial, the quantity of the hemlock, the covering of the face. Socrates’ human, practical side is a paradigm (*κατ’ ἴχνη*) for an ideal philosopher’s life. It is his legacy, his testament: Be both good/right philosophers and good/right men.

The second introductory frame and the concluding frame of the *Phaedo* are each a part of the *mise-en-scène* of the philosophical drama. They constitute “proof” that the ideal philosopher can exist in reality: he cares little or nothing for bodily comforts, is observant of religious practices, devoted to the pursuit of philosophical questions, and mostly, calm in the face of death. This is a prescription for the personal conduct of the leading man: his conduct will influence the conduct, attitudes and thoughts of the people around him (not to mention the audience/readers). In this, too, is the reason why a man completely unconcerned about dying (on the contrary, he welcomes it as it came by chance into his life), should be so intent upon dying with

52. Here *πορείαν* is used.

complete composure: he must not appear inconsistent, in dying, with his own life teaching, by displaying involuntary agony while in the grasp of death.

My reading of the *Phaedo* is not intended to undermine the primacy of the philosophical drama. The human drama of the interior frames is not the spectacle itself, but the “glasses” for the spectacle. We might be engrossed by the human drama but the main objective of the philosophical drama is to convince the reader that the soul is immortal. The ending is an answering conclusion to the beginning. The dialogue begins with Echecrates’ question: *πῶς* [Socrates] *ἔτελεύτα*; (“And how *did he meet his end?*”) To this question Phaedo answers (58e1–6):

καὶ μὴν ἔγωγε θαυμάσια ἔπαθον παραγενόμενος. οὔτε γὰρ ὡς θανάτῳ παρόντα με ἀνδρὸς ἐπιτηδείου ἔλεος εἰσῆεν· εὐδαίμων γάρ μοι ἀνὴρ ἐφαίνετο, ὃ Ἐχέκρατες, καὶ τοῦ τρόπου καὶ τῶν λόγων, ὡς ἀδεῶς καὶ γενναίως ἐτελεύτα, ὅστε μοι ἐκείνον παρίστασθαι μηδ’ εἰς Ἄιδον ἰόντα ἀνευ θείας μοίρας ἶναι, ἀλλὰ καὶ ἐκείσε ἀφικόμενον εὖ πράξειν εἴπερ τις πώποτε καὶ ἄλλος.

I myself was curiously affected while I was there: it wasn’t pity that visited me, as might have been expected for someone present at the death of an intimate friend; because the man seemed to me happy, Echecrates, both in his manner and his words, so fearlessly and nobly *was he meeting his end*; and so I felt assured that even while on his way to Hades he would not go without divine providence, and that when he arrived there he would fare well, if ever anyone did.

The concluding frame corroborates this *ἔτελεύτα* of the beginning. The *ἀδεῶς καὶ γενναίως* is consistently preserved until the very end. Asclepius’ *φάρμακον* contributed to this consistency. But it is not only a matter of literary composition. It is mostly a matter of consistency between words and deeds, *logos* and *praxis*; between an intellectual search for the truth and its practical application. If there is any use for the *logos*, it is to provide us with a Model for living. And to live without following this Model — as can be ascertained through right philosophical inquiry — is like not living. *Phaedo*’s Socrates is a model for that Model.⁵³

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