

Without the Least Tremor

The Sacrifice of Socrates in Plato's *Phaedo*



M. Ross Romero, SJ

SUNY PRESS CONTEMPORARY CONTINENTAL PHILOSOPHY

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SUNY series in Contemporary Continental Philosophy

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For Sid and Ginger, whom I hope to meet again.

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ONE

WEAVING AND UNWEAVING THE FABRIC OF SACRIFICE

What if the death of Socrates was a sacrifice? How, then, should we take it? A thick fabric with many other questions already interwoven is given. To whom and to what end is this sacrifice made? Is it offered to Apollo? Or to his son Asclepius? Is this sacrifice offered to any god at all, or does it instead reveal something about the fabric of a sacrificial culture in the Athenian *polis* or the proper relationship of the philosopher to its religious practices? Or perhaps we might take it as the offering of some favor or sign for the companions of Socrates?

Furthermore, if it is a sacrifice, then who is it who makes this offering? Is it the servant of the Eleven who prepares and presides as the *pharmakon* is brought forth for Socrates to drink? Is it the city of Athens that engages in self-purification by this sacrifice? Or perhaps it is Socrates himself who receives the *pharmakon* already concocted in the cup and takes it himself “without the least tremor” and putting the cup to his lips “downed it with great readiness and relish” (117b–c).¹

Yet, if it is self-sacrifice, then why does Socrates consent to it? Is it merely from a desire to earn a place in someplace after here? Is it from a desire for release from his earthly state—imprisonment in a body as Nietzsche and others would have us take it? Or is it perhaps for some further purpose, a desire to leave a lasting glimpse of philosophy as a means of purification for philosophers yet to come? One might even begin to wonder what it does for those to whom it is given and who receive it as a gift.

Finally, does Socrates give his consent to his own death merely out of obedience to and respect for those who have convicted him and required his execution (the Laws of the *polis*, as we learn at *Crito* 51d), from a desire to set an example for those companions who are present at his death, or perhaps even for Plato, who, even though he wrote the dialogue, was apparently unable to witness this sacrifice because, as Phaedo cautiously reports, he was ill that day (59b)? Or perhaps is it possible to discern a deeper cause in the structure of sacrifice itself? Were we to lay hold of any one of these questions about the significance of sacrifice in the *Phaedo* in isolation from the others we might risk placing undue stress on a single thread of fabric that is already tightly interwoven with many others. We would thus run the risk of tearing the fabric and delivering it as pieces with frayed edges. We must take care, then, how we respond to these questions lest we, who are far less skillful at weaving than the practiced Penelope, unwittingly unravel a beautiful whole cloth.²

More than twenty years ago, Jean-Luc Nancy laid hold of sacrifice as whole cloth when he called both the death of Socrates and the death of Jesus by the name “sacrifice.” Nancy pointed out that, because of the way in which they died, their deaths brought into question this very term and initiated the ongoing fascination of the West with sacrifice.

Both of these figures—the double figure of ontotheology—deviate decidedly, and quite deliberately, from sacrifice; in doing so, they propose a metamorphosis or a transfiguration of sacrifice. What is involved, therefore, is above all a *mimesis*: the ancient sacrifice is reproduced—up to a certain point—in its form or its scheme; but it is reproduced so as to reveal an entirely new content, a truth hitherto hidden or misunderstood, if not perverted.³

For Nancy this “new sacrifice” in no way merely continues the old; instead, he asks whether this inauguration might require a “mimetic rupture?” If we follow the thread that holds the death of Socrates to be a sacrifice, then further questions arise in the wake of Nancy’s pronouncement. Are there particular aspects of a sacrificial ritual that Socrates’s death reproduces? How does this *mimesis* appear at the death of Socrates? Then again, how might it deviate “decidedly and quite deliberately” from ancient sacrifice, as Nancy proposes? What, after all, is this transfiguration, this metamorphosis, this *rupture*? Finally, what more might be said about this “entirely new content” that is thereby revealed, the truth “hitherto hidden or misunderstood, if not perverted?” Although Nancy offers us characteristics that “are clearly required and presented

by the ontotheology of sacrifice,” his reading of the death of Socrates does not carry out a thorough exploration of this *mimesis* or *mimetic rupture* that is in question.⁴ In other words, the reader of Nancy is left to ponder: How does this happen in the *Phaedo*? One wonders in what way the death of Socrates in the *Phaedo* is both *similar to* and *markedly different than* a Greek sacrificial ritual. What does it mean that the death of Socrates appears as both a sacrifice and *otherwise than* a sacrifice? Might one pick a stray thread from Nancy’s reading of sacrifice and intentionally weave, unweave, and weave again the fabric of sacrifice in the *Phaedo*? In this way we might be brought to more carefully discern the elements of sameness and difference in this particular fabric. To discern in this way requires that we mindfully exercise the care, by which we mean vigilance, of the readers of the *Phaedo* who have come before us.

I propose, then, that we take Nancy’s reading of the death of Socrates as just such a thread. There are moments in the death scene of the *Phaedo* that are remarkable in their similarity to a Greek sacrificial ritual of an animal. Such similarities stand forth in certain moments in the death scene such as the bath, the appearance of Socrates’s body, the description of his “bull’s look,” the bringing forth of the *pharmakon* in ritual procession, the offering of a libation, and in Socrates’s final words when he provides for a sacrifice of a cock to offer to Asclepius. Yet, as Nancy himself observed, crucial differences with and deviations from Greek sacrificial ritual also appear at Socrates’s death. The most notable is that Socrates drinks “without the least tremor” (117b) and thereby offers his own consent, which would not have been possible for an animal that was part of a Greek sacrificial ritual. By means of a key difference that is carefully woven into the fabric, the sacrifice of Socrates becomes a self-sacrifice. This difference allows the death of Socrates to transform the purpose of sacrifice. A standard sacrifice is performed so that the principle of reciprocity can be upheld between gods and mortals. We give to the gods so that we might receive from them. Nevertheless, Socrates, “the ruler of life” (which his name means), gives (his life) so that others might receive. As such, his death is decisively otherwise than sacrifice. This way of receiving the death scene beholds it as a careful mixing, a careful weaving, of sameness and difference—of ritual sacrifice and its other. This is what I will suggest is the significance of the sacrifice of Socrates offered in the *Phaedo*.

Merely gazing unreflectively on the tapestry before us will not do. Care and vigilance are required to look at this scene as we also engage in unweaving the tapestry. We must look, as it were, at the reverse side of the tapestry and see the threads themselves laid bare. This will require watch-keeping as Penelope once did when she was weaving a shroud, as we learn in the *Odyssey* 2.100–

118.⁵ One focus of the epic poem is Penelope's stratagem of weaving and secretly unweaving her work by means of which she delays the announcement of a decision about her marriage to one of the fourteen suitors. She thereby observes a ten-year vigil as she keeps watch for the return of Odysseus, her husband. We should recall Penelope's stated use for this shroud: the garment that she is weaving is for Laertes, her father-in-law, "to cover him for that day when the deadly fate that lays us out will take him down."⁶ Yet by means of this very action, the ritual of late night unweaving, Penelope unworks, apparently quite uselessly, her stated goal. The futile labors of Penelope seemingly render useless that death shroud for Laertes. We might wonder then whether our work and unwork on sacrifice in the *Phaedo* will have the same result—rendering death useless, and thereby powerless, after all. It is noteworthy that this uselessness of death runs counter to the prevailing interpretation of the phenomenon in the *Phaedo*. Socrates asks Simmias at 64c, is death not "the freeing of the soul from the body?" Death, it would certainly seem, is not useless at all, at least not any more useless than philosophy. Simmias points out to Socrates, "The people back home [in Thebes] would entirely agree with them that those who philosophize are genuinely ripe for death, and indeed that they're not unaware that they deserve this plight" (64b). Can it really be the case that philosophy would have this purpose? Or are we to suspect something else behind this claim of Simmias, which he makes, after all, while laughing? Should we not follow the example of Penelope and keep careful watch over a *logos* that proclaims death to be nothing but the separation of the soul from the body? This inquiry into the theme of sacrifice in the *Phaedo*, then, has deep affinity with the work of the vigilant and careful Penelope. Yet, what more might we observe?

Even as Penelope sets herself the task of weaving and unweaving a death shroud, so must we who wish to take up the thread of sacrifice in the *Phaedo* attend both to *how* and *how not* the fabric of sacrifice covers and uncovers the embodied Socrates at his death. Our work, then, begins by becoming attentive and carefully noticing such details as Plato himself discerned when, although not present at the historical event, he could nonetheless see the death of the philosopher itself. By seeing this death and reflecting on it he could then reveal how the fabric of sacrifice both covers and uncovers the death of the philosopher. In this way, *Phaedo* was able to astoundingly remember an apparently pointless and useless detail of Socrates's final moments—that Socrates had already covered himself before he uncovered. "And the parts about his lower belly had already nearly grown cold when he uncovered himself (for he had covered himself) and said what was to be the final thing he uttered ..."

(118). Phaedo's vivid memory of this act of uncovering and then covering again suggests a futile and useless movement. Yet perhaps this final gesture offers us a clue? Perhaps we might take the death of Socrates as a sacrifice but also as decisively *otherwise* than one. Taking it in this way renders us receptive to the work of philosophy and safeguards us from the fear of death and of the seeming futility of this *logos*.

Such weaving and unweaving will require some clarity concerning the fabric at hand. It is impossible to know the degree to which Plato's depiction of the death of Socrates in the *Phaedo* accurately reflects the historical event that occurred in the prison in Athens in 399 BCE. It is instructive to compare the case of the *Phaedo* with the *Apology*. The *Phaedo* differs from the *Apology* at least in one respect: in the case of Plato's *Apology*, we have other accounts of the events that are described. One of these is Xenophon's. Moreover, we are in no position to know whether or not Plato even tried to give a historically accurate account in the case of the *Phaedo*. Even with the *Apology* we are far from certain about its accuracy. The most well-known defense of this accuracy is offered by Thomas C. Brickhouse and Nicholas D. Smith,⁷ who defend the accuracy of the *Apology* as an avenue to the thought of the historical Socrates. Their approach has a long tradition in Plato scholarship reaching back to such scholars as John Burnett.⁸ Regarding the trial of Socrates, Plato underscores his own attendance at 34a and 38b (where he is one of those who stand surety for the thirty minae fine). Wm. Blake Tyrrell emphasized that it is a misreading to see Plato's mention of his own presence as evidence of a historical detail. He writes, "Plato's use of himself as a character [in the *Apology*] has no import on the accuracy of his text in a modern historical sense."⁹ This issue is even more pronounced in the case of the *Phaedo*. There, as we have seen, Phaedo states flatly that "Plato was sick I think" (59b) and therefore not present in the prison. Phaedo, whose prodigious power of recall is on display in the rest of the dialogue, is surprisingly uncertain on this detail. This provides a further challenge to any claim about the historical accuracy of the *Phaedo*. Tyrrell has offered a different approach when he explains that "Scholars have interpreted these notices autobiographically, wondering in the case of 59b whether Plato was actually sick. John Burnet responds in the same vein: '[Plato] must have known whether he was ill or not. True, but it does not follow that Phaedo was equally well informed, and he, not Plato, is the speaker of 59b.' " Tyrrell continues along these lines, emphasizing the role of license inherent in Plato's position as narrator of the event.

Plato is the narrator, and as narrator he is not restrained by historical

fact. For the purpose of the story, Plato the narrator can have Phaedo say whatever he likes. Phaedo's "I think" and Plato's illness add detail to each figure qua character. The function and contribution of the characters may be analyzed in literary terms for literary effects but not historically because of the lack of corroborating or disconfirming evidence. The fact or nature of Plato's illness lies outside the text, does not bear on it beyond its inferable function to explain the character Plato's absence, and is of no matter for it.¹⁰

Tyrrell's point here helps to clarify that when it comes to the *Phaedo* we are presented with two elements: the event that occurred in 399 BCE when Socrates died (the details of which we have no extra-textual access) and the report about that event in the text in a dramatic dialogue form in the *Phaedo*. One way to take Phaedo's odd speculation about Plato's absence at 59b is to see it as a reference to a historical fact that cannot be verified. This is heightened when Phaedo emphatically attests to his own presence at the event. Echecrates asks, "You yourself Phaedo [αὐτός, ὃ Φαίδων] Phaedo—were you present with Socrates on that day when he drank the potion in the prison, or did you hear it from somebody else?" "I myself, Echecrates," [αὐτός, ὃ Ἐχέκρατες] Phaedo responds. Echecrates reports that no stranger has arrived from Athens in Phlius in a long time "who could report anything for sure to us about it—except, of course, that he drank the potion and died" (57a). One wonders how the event itself relates to the report that Phaedo gives about it. Is it plausible, then, to believe that the *Phaedo* presents a replication of an event in the way that an artist might attempt to fashion an exact copy of the person he is sketching? Should the death scene be taken as a replica of a historical moment? If we cannot, for the reasons identified, take it as such, then how might we take it? The best suggestion seems to be as a likeness. An important term that is translated commonly as "likeness" is εἰκών, which might also be rendered as "fitting image." But what sort of εἰκών is it and what is it a likeness of? As we will see, this question sets us once again on a search for the very significance of sacrifice in the *Phaedo*.

Let us take it, then, that the *Phaedo* is a likeness (an εἰκών) of an event and not an attempt to fashion a copy of one. Is it possible to be even more specific about this likeness? *Logoi* concerning likenesses, and likenesses themselves, abound in the dialogues of Plato. Sara Brill has noted that describing the soul, as is done in *Phaedo*, involves considering Plato's critique of images, and this critique ... must take into account his efforts to render evident the limits of his images, to make their potentially distorting character explicit. What is

distinctive about Plato's rich image-making faculty, I submit, is that his very critique of images occurs by way of the frictive interaction between images; that is, he constructs his images in such a way as to make their limits visible and to invite their critique, a critique which itself often proceeds by way of images. The result is a critical iconography of remarkable subtlety and depth.¹¹

We might, therefore, gather up some of their occurrences and dwell for a moment on them. In his discourse with Socrates in the *Meno*, Meno reaches a moment of perplexity in the attempt to define virtue. He likens Socrates to a broad stingray because he has numbed him. "Indeed, if a joke is in order, you seem, in appearance and in every other way to be like the broad torpedo fish ..." (80b). At 80c, Socrates replies by deflecting what he perceives to be Meno's attempt to get him to engage in an exchange of flattery. He says, "I know why you drew this image of me." Socrates continues saying that Meno, and all other handsome people, wish only to have drawn an image of themselves in return since "it is to their advantage, for I think that the images (αἱ εἰκόνες) of beautiful people are also beautiful, but I draw no image of you in turn" (80c).¹² We might notice here that Plato uses the term εἰκόνες, the plural of εἰκών. One might well translate it as "image" as is done here; yet, we know that Greek also offers the word φάντασμα (*phantasm*), which is not used here. *Phantasm* typically means an appearance or an image presented to the mind.¹³ Because this is not what Socrates is concerned with here we might consider other possibilities more closely related to the phenomenon he is contemplating drawing. Such a possibility can best be captured by the term "likeness" for several reasons. In the *Phaedo* as well, the word εἰκών and its variants appear in a number of places including 87b, 87d, 99e, and 100a. At 87b, Cebes attempts to put into words his own worries about the arguments that have been given for the soul's undyingness. Yet, even if the soul does outlast the body, he too falls into perplexity wondering what will keep it from wearing out. Cebes continues, "And it seems I too need some sort of likeness (εἰκόνας), just as Simmias did." Cebes continues with the comparison of the soul to a weaver who outlives many, but not all, of his cloaks. He concludes, "Now, I think soul in relation to body would admit of the same likeness (εἰκόνα) ..." (87d). Here too Cebes has made use of a "likeness" or a "figure," and we shall see in [chapter 4](#) how this term plays an important role in passages related to the autobiography of Socrates (99e and 100a). *Cratylus* 432b2–c6 offers a well-known treatment of εἰκών.

SOCRATES: On the contrary, it absolutely must not completely replicate that of which it is an image, if it is to be a likeness. Think on

this. Would there be two things, Cratylus and the likeness of Cratylus (οἷον Κρατύλος καὶ Κρατύλου εἰκὼν), if some god represented, as a painter would, not only your complexion and shape, but also made everything within like your innards and reproduced the same softness and warmth and endowed them with the same motion and soul and intelligence as are in you and, basically, replicated every quality that you have and plonked the replica down next to you? Would there be Cratylus and a likeness of Cratylus, or two Cratyluses? (πότερον Κρατύλος ἄνκαὶ εἰκὼν Κρατύλου τότε εἴη τὸ τοιοῦτον, ἢ δύο Κρατύλοι;).

CRATYLUS: I think there would be two Cratyluses, Socrates (432b2–c6).¹⁴

If the god had wished to duplicate Cratylus both in his inner and outer aspects, then the result would be two Cratyluses. But the artist, on the other hand, wishes to provide an εἰκὼν, a “likeness” or a “fitting image.” Whereas the god only uses similarity in his work, the artist provides a mixture of both similarity and difference. By mixing similarity and difference it is possible to provide a portrait of Cratylus. This mixing of similarity and difference is in play in the *Phaedo* as well. Just before 74a, Socrates discusses the interplay between similarity and difference in the art of sketching. Whereas a sketch of a boy’s cloak might cause one to recollect the boy, it is also the case that a sketch of Simmias might cause one to recollect Cebes. On the basis of this, Socrates asks Simmias “Then doesn’t it follow from all this that recollection stems from similar things and also from dissimilar?” (74a). Socrates continues, “But at least whenever somebody’s recollecting something from similar things, isn’t it necessary for him to undergo this as well: to note whether or not, with respect to similarity, this thing somehow falls short of what he’s recollected.” This, of course, leads Socrates to his first articulation of the undying things like the Equal Itself. Yet, what is noteworthy here is that in the *Phaedo* there is mixing of sameness and difference that lead to the establishment of εἰκονες. As is well known, the means of Socrates’s death was a potent mixture known as the *pharmakon*.

Let us then see how such a mixture might be taken and given at the death of Socrates in the *Phaedo*. It seems that Plato is not merely using the dialogue to provide a replica of the event that happened in the prison cell in 399 BCE. On the other hand, it does seem that the *Phaedo* offers a likeness (εἰκὼν) of something. Moreover, as we are beginning to notice, the likeness will have both

similarities to and key differences from the thing it is a likeness of. In her excellent book *Likeness and Likelihood in the Presocratics and Plato*, Jenny Bryan draws on Xenophanes and Parmenides to set the stage for a reading of Plato's *Timaeus*. In that dialogue, Timaeus converses with Socrates, Hermogenes, and Critias and voices a depiction of the cosmos. Bryan explains that this depiction can be likened to a portrait and the work of its painter. She writes, "A portrait is not deficient because it fails to replicate its sitter, for, if it succeeded, it would no longer be a portrait. This cosmic εἰκὼν is like a very good portrait, insofar as it can represent its model, but is never intended as an exact reproduction."¹⁵ As we saw in the case of the *Cratylus* 432b2–c6 and *Phaedo* 74a, an artist makes a likeness of his subject in the sense that he mixes both similarities to and differences from the subject and in this way makes a fitting image. As Bryan puts it, "For a portrait to be like its sitter is not for it to fall short, but rather to represent them whilst being different from them."¹⁶ Thus, if Timaeus's depiction of the cosmos is to be fitting then it is fitting to the cosmos itself (the thing that the demiurge created) by mixing together sameness and difference. If it did not do this it would be another cosmos. In a similar way, might not the *Phaedo*'s depiction of Socrates at his death not provide a simple replication of Socrates's death, an exact reproduction? Rather, perhaps it is an εἰκὼν of something other than itself—a third thing that it sets the conditions for the manifestation of—just as the depiction of Timaeus sets the stage for the manifestation of the cosmos itself. If this is true, then I would suggest that the portrait of Socrates that Plato paints in the *Phaedo* creates the conditions for the manifestation of the death of the philosopher. By "philosopher" here I do not mean just Socrates, although he is important, but also any philosopher at all. Thus, in the case of Plato's *Phaedo*, the depiction of Socrates's death is more than a replica of an event that happened in 399 BCE. Instead, it draws on the elements of that event and mixes those elements with different elements to offer an εἰκὼν of the death of the philosopher.

How then should we receive this εἰκὼν? If the *Phaedo* is to be received as being like a portrait, then is it possible for interpreters of the *Phaedo* to provide better or worse descriptions of it. Bryan draws on Christopher Rowe's reading of the *Timaeus* to explain this. Rowe writes, "If I make a drawing of a person, then it seems just as possible to give an accurate and truthful account of the drawing, as it does of the subject of the drawing."¹⁷ Returning to the analogy of drawing (or painting) a portrait, the artist does not provide a replica of what he sees when he looks at the person. Instead, the artist mixes elements of sameness and difference to provide a likeness of the person himself or herself. Just as we can

describe a portrait's coloring, we too can accurately name certain elements of sameness and difference in the portrait of the death of the philosopher. Thus, Plato's *Phaedo*, seen as a portrait of Socrates at his death, offers the conditions for the possibility of the manifestation of the death of the philosopher. Certain receptions of this manifestation will be more fitting than others insofar as they receive these conditions of sameness and difference. As I have been suggesting, those conditions are most obvious in the similarities and differences from a Greek sacrificial ritual. It is by means of this εἰκῶν that the beholder of the death scene is offered the gift of the undyingness of the soul of the philosopher.

In this book, I will pass the distaff through the *Phaedo* five different times as it weaves and unweaves the fabric of sacrifice. The first pass marks the similarities between the death of Socrates as it appears in the *Phaedo* and a Greek sacrificial ritual. A Greek sacrificial ritual enacts and sets forth a fitting relationship between gods and men. This relationship obtains in the life of the *polis* and is part of its formation. However, the proper relationship between gods and men that governs their lives together is assumed by all sacrificial exchanges that are based on reciprocity. Thus, in [chapter 2](#) I provide a description of a Greek sacrificial ritual. Drawing on recent scholarship concerning Greek sacrificial practice, I conclude that the most significant feature of animal sacrifice was that it maintained a fitting relationship between gods and men. Whereas men made sacrifice to the gods to sustain them in their place of honor, the gods provided days of leisure and rest for men. These days were dedicated to making sacrifices. Interaction between gods and men would have been deeply interwoven with the day-to-day life of the *polis*.

In the second pass, I suggest that we watch vigilantly and look on at Socrates in the *Phaedo* to see how it enacts and sets forth a relationship between gods and men in the death scene that obtains in the life of the *polis*. This scene is a form of philosophic *mimesis* indebted to actual practices of ancient Greek sacrifice. In the death scene, Socrates appears throughout as an ideal sacrificial animal going to his death, and this provides many of the similarities between his death and a traditional sacrifice. Yet, there are subtle ways in which Socrates's death deviates decisively from a traditional sacrifice. This deviation provides a difference that, I suggest, when mixed together with the sameness provides an εἰκῶν, a fitting likeness, of the death of the philosopher. It is by means of this εἰκῶν that the beholder of the death scene is offered the gift of the undyingness of the soul of the philosopher. Thus, [chapter 3](#) demonstrates that the entire *mise-en-scène* of the death scene of the *Phaedo* has "the look" of a Greek sacrificial ritual. This look shows forth an εἰκῶν that is a mixture of sameness and difference such that it manifests the conditions for the possibility of the death of

the philosopher.

The third pass concerns the significance of this εἰκὼν in other moments of the *Phaedo*. As Socrates relates his philosophical autobiography beginning at 95e, he both draws attention to his own existential situation and seeks to explain a cause for its proper fit. In this way, the *Phaedo* shows itself to be a search for causes of a fitting relationship between the life and death of the philosopher. Here, Socrates describes a method for searching for causes of generation and destruction as a whole. This search proceeds in a way that is appropriate for human beings who are aware of their limitations and their place with respect to the gods. Socrates demonstrates how this occurs most fruitfully through a method of *logoi* that he describes in the passage 99d–100a. In [chapter 4](#) I contrast Socrates’s method of *logoi*, insofar as it is an approach to Greek knowledge, to the approach that is taken by Greek tragedy, in particular that of the *Agamemnon* of Aeschylus. Aeschylean tragedy is well known for incorporating themes of sacrifice into its plot, and I argue that the use made of sacrifice in *Agamemnon* functions to show “suffering into knowledge” as an alternative to the archaic ratio of “seeing as knowing.” I conclude that although the death of Socrates in the *Phaedo* unfolds according to sacrificial themes it is not a tragedy, for its goal is to restore a version of the archaic ratio that is now appropriate for mortals who, after Socrates’s self-sacrifice, are aware of their limitations. In other words, in witnessing the death of the philosopher in the *Phaedo* one is offered an εἰκὼν of a fitting relationship between gods and men that appears as one that might have been witnessed at a Greek sacrificial ritual. Because of the self-sacrifice, humans receive back a gift from the gods, the gift of embodiment that can best be taken as vigil. Such a search allows a mortal to see the possibility of the whole while maintaining his or her proper and limited position with respect to the gods. From this perspective it is possible to reflect critically on the claim that the death of Socrates is most fittingly described as an execution and that Socrates is a tragic figure. Although I do not deny that certain elements of the *Phaedo* are similar to an execution or a tragedy, these are only some of the elements of this mixture.

The fourth pass begins by allowing the Greek terms translated as “fitting” to drift toward a suggestion of “proportion.” After examining how the figure of Socrates enacts a proportionate likeness of the philosopher going to death, we turn to the earlier sections of the *Phaedo*, specifically those in which Socrates speaks in the name of and with the voice of so-called “genuine philosophers” (61d–70b). Rather than unveiling a *logos* of death and the soul that takes account of the fitting relationship between gods and men, this speech *expresses a disproportion between body and soul*. Such a way of proceeding leads to a

“sacrifice of the body” that, when compared with the embodied Socrates, appears disproportionate. Moreover, this disproportion is seen in the discussion of suicide in the *Phaedo*. These genuine philosophers who are given voice by Socrates himself appear comic. Such a description of life and death is similar to what one might find in a comedy like Aristophanes’s *Clouds*. The comic spectacle, however, causes those who are serious about inquiring into the relationship between life and death to deepen their own understanding of ultimate matters and to search for a *logos* of the soul that acts *as if* the soul can know itself as a fitting whole. Thus, [chapter 5](#) explores the discussion of the soul and its relationship to the body in the *Phaedo*. An examination of the section in which Socrates calls death “nothing but a separation of the soul from the body” reveals that such a *logos* is really disproportionate and comic. Against this view, I argue that Socrates presents, in his response to Simmias’s counter-example of the lyre, a *logos* of the soul that can act “as if” it is other than itself. In this way, the soul engages in a kind of self-sorting that enables it to reconstitute itself as proportional. This yearning for and enacting of proportionality is also disclosed in Socrates’s consideration of *anamnesis* (recollection) and is borne witness to by the depiction of the embodied Socrates in this dialogue.

The final pass will unweave a well-known interpretation of the death of Socrates by Friedrich Nietzsche in his *The Gay Science* and *The Twilight of the Idols*. Nietzsche interprets the *Phaedo* as setting forth Socrates as a pessimist, one who sees death as a healing from the disease of life and the tyranny of reason. Although my interpretation of the death of Socrates as sacrifice also sees his death as a kind of healing, it differs from Nietzsche’s understanding since the *Phaedo*’s concern is with fittingness proper to man, not an escape from human suffering. As such, the death of Socrates provides an εἰκὼν through which philosophical aspirants can behold the gift of the self-sacrifice of Socrates. This gift is a proper mixture, a portrait that manifests the fitting way in which a philosopher goes to his death. In beholding this εἰκὼν, a way is opened for living that can be expressed as vigilance. I suggest that vigilance is the appropriate way to understand the undyingness (immortality) of the soul in Plato’s *Phaedo* and is the responsibility of those who behold it as a gift. Thus, in [chapter 6](#) I point out the differences between my interpretation of the *Phaedo* and Nietzsche’s. Although Nietzsche sees the death of Socrates as enacting a pessimistic view of embodiment, I contend that Socrates’s death—seen as a sacrifice—serves to highlight the way in which philosophers are to witness the death of Socrates as an εἰκὼν of the death of the philosopher. Such an εἰκὼν makes visible liminal experiences like life and death, that is, of generation and destruction as a whole. The embodied Socrates himself offers a gift of an εἰκὼν,

and in beholding it the aspiring philosopher receives the gift of the undyingness of this *logos*. This *logos* may in turn be linked to a notion of *triage*, a medical practice that proposes “sorting” as a way of vigilance without reserve. Drawing on Derrida’s text entitled “The Night Watch,”¹⁸ I suggest that this experience of triage would seem to call for the giver of the *pharmakōn* to act with great vigilance and care because any action or course of treatment undertaken will never be sufficient because of limitations on resources. Here, under the watchful care of the giver of the *pharmakōn*, living bodies are inescapable and cannot be culled from the rest. This calls for constant vigilance and watchful care.

The scholarship on Plato’s *Phaedo* and the subject of the death of Socrates is vast, and no brief treatment of it can do it justice. Here I simply provide a short survey of scholarship as it relates directly to the topic of sacrifice in the *Phaedo*. I first offer examples of contemporary Plato scholars from Continental and Anglo-American perspectives who emphasize the importance of a religious dimension in Plato studies. I then offer a short overview of the interpretation of the death scene in three recent book-length studies of the *Phaedo*. These studies are by Kenneth Dorter, Ronna Burger, and Peter J. Ahrensdoerf.¹⁹ Although their treatments mention some of the religious aspects of the dialogue, particularly those relating to Orphism and Pythagoreanism, they do not emphasize sacrificial ritual. I conclude with a brief discussion of the work of Catherine Pickstock, a scholar who takes sacrifice most fully into account in her interpretation of the *Phaedo*.

Scholars from both Continental and Anglo-American perspectives have called for greater attention to the role that Greek religion, especially ritual, can play in scholarship on Plato’s dialogues. From an Anglo-American perspective, scholars such as Michael Morgan, Michael McPherran, Thomas Brickhouse, and Nicholas Smith have carefully treated Greek religion in relationship to Socrates,²⁰ whereas a Continental approach to the topic has been offered by Adriaan Pepperzak, among others.

In his approach to the dialogues, Pepperzak writes that “Although enough learned studies on ‘Plato’s religion’ have been published, it is still uncommon to state that the religious dimension is fundamental for an adequate interpretation of the Platonic corpus.”²¹ Pepperzak suggests that although there has been interest in treating what some scholars call Plato’s “religion” or “theology” in the dialogues, it has been far less common to attend to how elements of Greek religious practices actually shape the dialogues themselves. Pepperzak draws attention to issues like purification in the *Phaedo* and advocates for such an approach in contemporary scholarship.

A renewal of Platonic studies cannot be complete—it cannot even be fundamental—if it avoids or neglects the religious dimension of the dialogues or treats it with the well-known arrogance of modern and post-modern believers in autonomy and autarky. ... The studies in this book may be read as preparations for an unsecularized and nonautonomous but more radical and existential transformation of the Platonic heritage than the modern ones.²²

My study, then, can be understood as an attempt to engage and develop Pepperzak's claim that a religious dimension is fundamental for an adequate interpretation of the Platonic corpus. I do this by limiting my scope to one aspect of the religious dimension—sacrificial ritual—and one dialogue from the corpus—the *Phaedo*.

I should mention three book-length studies of the *Phaedo* here. First, Kenneth Dorter attends to both the arguments and the dramatic setting of the *Phaedo*. Dorter does not draw attention to any references to sacrificial ritual at the death scene, a dimension of the death scene that I shall argue is essential to appreciate. Nevertheless, he does attend to many of the connections between Orphism and purification at the moment in the death scene when Socrates turns to take his bath (115a). "There is no need to review here this Orphic-Pythagorean conception in its many recurrences through the dialogue but its multiple presences in this final scene is worth noting."²³ Ronna Burger's *The Phaedo: A Platonic Labyrinth* carefully analyzes the connection between *logos* (word) and *ergon* (deed) in the dialogue, and this is an approach that I will follow here. She also makes excellent use of references to the *mythos*, collected in Plutarch, of Theseus and the Minotaur. She carefully shows how this *mythos* underlies and in many ways shapes the *logos* of the dialogue. Like Dorter, Burger draws attention to the multiple presences in the *Phaedo* to Orphic and Pythagorean purification rites. Even her commentary on Socrates's final words makes this connection. Burger explains Socrates's proposal to offer a cock to Asclepius in terms of purification. "Socrates marks his success in the practice of dying by remembering the god of healing; he believes it necessary, apparently, to supplement the hymn to Apollo he claims to have produced as a rite of purification."²⁴ Nevertheless, I would emphasize that although purification was a part of a sacrificial ritual (and in some cases may have been the purpose of it) there were other significant elements to the ritual itself that should be considered. I expand on Burger's reading by drawing attention to the significance of animal sacrifice at the death of Socrates.

Burger notices the simultaneous concealing and revealing character of Socrates's act of drinking the *pharmakon*.

Despite Socrates's will to maintain control over the act of dying, his transformation from an agent carrying out his own intentions to a motionless corpse will be fittingly accomplished as a mechanical result of the self-acting poison. Socrates's painful recognition of this fact is both concealed and revealed by Phaedo's account of his response when handed the cup of poison. Interrupting his narrative to address himself to Echecrates—as if to relive as closely as possible the intense pathē of that moment—Phaedo describes how Socrates took the cup gently, without trembling or changing color or expression.²⁵

Here, Burger's description carefully reveals the way in which Socrates's deed is simultaneously congruent with a ritual action and disruptive of it. In addition, Burger offers an interpretation of Socrates's look. At the moment that Socrates drank the *pharmakon* Phaedo reports that Socrates looked at the man who had brought him the cup “with that bull's look that was so usual with him” (117b). Burger interprets this as follows: “For this brief moment, perhaps, Socrates succumbs to the fear of death, or at least he presents that appearance to his audience.”²⁶ As I will suggest in [chapter 3](#), I do not think that this “look” indicates that Socrates has succumbed to the fear of death. Rather, I will suggest that this “look” conveys the significance of sacrifice to those who behold that look. It may even bestow the gift of an εἰκών upon those who are open to its reception.

A third detailed study of the *Phaedo* is Peter J. Ahrens Dorf's *The Death of Socrates and the Life of Philosophy*. Ahrens Dorf quite helpfully approaches the *Phaedo* from the perspective of the emotional concerns of Socrates's interlocutors in the dialogue, particularly Simmias and Cebes. This approach allows Ahrens Dorf to see that many of Socrates's comments about death and the afterlife are meant “ironically.” By this term, Ahrens Dorf means that at times Socrates “deliberately conceals the truth from his interlocutors.”²⁷ Ahrens Dorf explains that this is not a surprising strategy for Socrates and finds evidence for it in other parts of the Platonic corpus. Why would Socrates say what he did not mean in the *Phaedo*? It seems now to be a common belief among Plato scholars that the so-called arguments (*logoi*) for the immortality of the soul in the *Phaedo* fail to establish that the individual soul is immortal. This would suggest that this

was not Socrates's goal.²⁸

Ahrensdoerf emphasizes that an important theme in the *Phaedo* is the goodness of the philosophical life. An *apologia* for such a life must be understood in relationship to the charge of impiety for which Socrates is on trial. Since philosophy was not common as a profession at the time of Socrates it was quite likely that philosophers were suspicious in the eyes of the *polis*. In addition, philosophical figures such as Pythagoras, Anaxagoras, and their associates were either persecuted or killed.

Although it is true, then, that the *Phaedo*'s dramatic presentation of Socrates's death invites us to admire the philosopher, its presentation of both the impiety charge against Socrates and his defense against that charge encourages us to challenge, to doubt, and to question for ourselves the goodness of the philosophic life. It encourages us to take seriously the possibility that the human being who devotes his life to the pursuit of wisdom through reason alone is, in truth, an unwise, unjust, and impious human being. It encourages us to wonder whether Socrates was not justly condemned by the Athenians and even whether he will not be justly condemned by the gods or God in an afterlife. Yet, by doing this, the *Phaedo* may not diminish but rather enhance our admiration for the philosophic way of life.²⁹

Thus, Socrates's treatment of the question of the soul's immortality was a way of engaging the value of the philosophical life from within the existential concerns of his friends who were already beginning to mourn his passing and to fear what their lives as philosophers might come to in his absence. Ahrensdoerf points out that they present themselves as being in interstices, "a kind of twilight state," since they were devoted to finding truth in this life wherever it led but also "secretly longing for everlasting happiness in the afterlife."³⁰ Socrates's goal, then, was to draw out their presuppositions about death, through the *logos*, and to lead them to recognize in him a pious man. For Ahrensdoerf, this would gainsay any charges of impiety while simultaneously portraying a worthy exemplar.

I am in agreement with much of Ahrensdoerf's approach and find his evidence convincing. In particular his insight that the emotional life of the interlocutors is important for understanding the dialogue is quite valuable. Moreover, his attentive observation that the interlocutors find themselves in the dialogue in "a kind of twilight state" is suggestive of the setting of the death scene, which occurs at twilight. In the final chapter of this book I will turn once

again to this moment of twilight, suggesting that twilight calls for vigilance that ultimately is found in the practice of triage and self-sorting. It is this stance in the interstices that provides for hope of immortality.

As I have indicated, one aim of this book is to provide a more thorough reading of what Pepperzak has called “the religious dimension” of the dialogue. Therefore, I will explore the deeper roots of Ahrens Dorf’s concern with “piety” in the *Phaedo* by emphasizing orthopraxy rather than orthodoxy, ethnology rather than theology. That is, my focus will be on what the Greeks and Socrates *did* rather than on what they *believed*. Thus, rather than focusing on the outwardly pious attitudes of Socrates in the *Phaedo* I focus more closely on the specific display of acts that express an exchange of gifts between gods and men. In short, my reading expands on the three treatments I have examined—Dorter, Burger, and Ahrens Dorf. Although they treat many of the religious aspects of the dialogue, particularly those relating to Orphism and Pythagoreanism, they do not emphasize sacrificial ritual as I do in this book.

In closing this introductory chapter, I briefly consider Catherine Pickstock’s reading of the *Phaedo*. Her article “The Soul in Plato” explicitly engages sacrifice in interpreting the *Phaedo*.³¹ Pickstock does not see the *Phaedo*’s discussion of soul and body as a dualism between the psychic and physical life. Instead, she thinks that the way in which Socrates is depicted in the dialogue as a philosopher “appears to suggest an order of sacrifice whereby *life itself*—the living of one’s life—*becomes* the sacrifice one offers, which one *receives back* non-identically as the soul’s immortality, or release from metempsychotic bondage.”³² She also notes that there are many references to “the protocols of antique sacrifice,” which suggests that “Socrates is proposing a new order of non-bloody sacrifice which itself forms a *critique* of the model it displaces.”³³ For Pickstock, then, Plato draws on the Pythagoreans by suggesting a new model of sacrifice that must be seen as a journey or transition or passage on the way to new insight. “Socrates is seen as dying on behalf of the vision of the Good which he is not prepared to relinquish, or, on behalf of the life which he has refused to live as anything but a sacrifice-with-return.”³⁴ In this way, Pickstock also emphasizes the importance of viewing Socrates’s statements about the body in the *Phaedo* as part of an economy of sacrifice in what I will call in [chapter 5](#) “the sacrifice of the body.”

In the end, my analysis of the significance of the sacrifice of Socrates in the *Phaedo* will in large part be in agreement with Pickstock’s and an expansion of her thesis. One of my contributions will be to provide a thorough analysis of sacrificial ritual in relation to the death scene. However, I will expand on

Pickstock's reading by considering the sense in which, by relating the *logoi* and *mythoi* of the *Phaedo* to the deed (*ergon*) of Socrates, an εἰκών is made visible. This fitting image manifests the conditions for the possibility of the death of the philosopher. As we will see in the next chapter, one of these conditions is similarity to a ritual sacrifice, and it is that thread that we now take up.

TWO

A DESCRIPTION OF GREEK SACRIFICIAL RITUAL

In [chapter 1](#), we began to consider how the death of Socrates in the *Phaedo* might be seen as a sacrifice. In [chapter 3](#), I will enumerate several ways in which his death indeed looks like one but also how it deviates decisively from one. This mixture of sameness and difference offers an εἰκὼν of the death of the philosopher. Before moving to the *Phaedo*, however, it is necessary to look, as clearly as is possible from our great remove of time and place, at how such a sacrificial ritual was enacted among the Greeks, particularly in Athens in the days of Socrates and Plato.¹ In this chapter, I will describe in detail a traditional Greek sacrifice. From the state of current physical evidence it is difficult to establish the degree to which such practice was embedded in Greek religious life. Nevertheless, descriptions of sacrificial practice are ubiquitous in Attic tragedy, Old and New Comedy, and of course in the epic poems of Homer. Thus, I will draw on many of these sources while relying on physical evidence to balance any descriptions that may have been exaggerated when based solely on the literary evidence. The scholarly treatment of Greek sacrifice is vast, thus this description will by necessity leave out discussions about some details; nevertheless, by the end of this chapter a relatively clear and accurate picture of the ritual will emerge.

The study of sacrifice is developing as one of the most interdisciplinary in all of the humanities and social sciences because it draws from such diverse fields as sociology of religion, anthropology, archaeology, and literary theory.² The contemporary field of sacrificial studies of the Greeks is in large part

influenced by the work of Walter Burkert, Jean-Pierre Vernant, and René Girard, three scholars who developed “the great theories,” as Fritz Graf called them.³ Because these theories will inevitably inform my treatment of sacrifice, I acknowledge the caution of more recent scholars who point out that these theories relied on primarily literary evidence and sometimes overlooked crucial physical evidence. Moreover, these theories sometimes relied on a theory of religion that traced the genesis of sacrifice to a founding act of violence or that suppressed and sublimated human aggression. Although provocative, these assumptions are difficult to justify. For this reason, their work must be supplemented by scholars whose own work provides a view of sacrifice that, although less broad and less capable of generating explanations of the reason for sacrifice among the Greeks, is also able to provide specific details from sources of evidence that are frequently overlooked, such as faunal remains and architecture. Some observers of details like these are Dennis Hughes, Ingivild Saelid Gilhus, Jan Bremmer, Jon Mikalson, and others.⁴

This chapter unfolds as follows, first, we will consider various approaches to sacrifice, not only those of Burkert, Girard, and Vernant but also briefly those of Bataille and Derrida. Although all of these approaches add to our understanding of sacrifice, I will suggest that for the purposes of understanding the similarity between the *Phaedo* and Greek sacrificial ritual, a very minimal notion of reciprocity is all that is required and may, in fact, have been the only understanding with which Socrates and Plato were familiar. Next, we will examine evidence for human and animal sacrifice both from literary and nonliterary sources. Finally, I provide the needed description of a sacrificial ritual that will prepare us to follow the thread of sacrifice in the *Phaedo* and especially in the death scene of the *Phaedo*, where the theme of sacrifice is most prevalent.

Many theories of sacrifice have arisen in helping to understand animal sacrifice among the Greeks. Much of the difference between these theories can be traced, so a recent article from Jan Bremmer argues, to different assumptions about the origin of sacrifice and the need of human beings have for it. The answer to the question of origins has in many ways led to a reductionism that holds only one cause to be the reason that sacrifice happens among the Greeks when it is likely that there was a plurality (Hughes, 121, and Bremmer, 141–143). First, there is the theory of Walter Burkert, which is developed in his well-known *Homo Necans: The Anthropology of Ancient Greek Sacrificial Ritual and Myth*, which first appeared in German in 1972 and which he later developed in *Creation of the Sacred: Tracks of Biology in Early Religions* and also in *Greek*

Religion. Burkert's theory traces the genesis of Greek sacrifice to the hunt. Because the primal experience of human beings is the common hunt, there would have been, so Burkert argues, an operative ambivalence concerning the killing of another living being. Moreover, this ambivalence is traceable to sociobiological evidence that suggests the human need to suppress aggression. Here Burkert draws on the work of Konrad Lorenz. Because humans wish further to restrain their aggression toward one another, the ritual sacrifice of animals arises as a cultural tradition. Thus, a theory of religion emerges for Burkert that places sacrifice at its center.⁵

A second theory is that of René Girard, who is well known in literary studies, as well as in philosophy and theology, for his idea of the "scapegoat mechanism." Girard's earliest work, *La violence et le sacré*, first appeared in English in 1977 as *Violence and the Sacred*. More recent anthologies of his work have made it even more widely accessible.⁶ Girard holds that there is a universal tendency to make scapegoats out of others, a tendency to project blame for the ills that afflict a community onto the other. This tends to operate through a structure of mimetic rivalry. Human beings are the sorts of beings who are bound to imitate one another, and mimesis is "a kind of nonconscious imitation of others." However, the imitative act must be linked, according to Girard, to the act of appropriation or acquisition (1996, 290). If A tries to appropriate an object and B imitates A, then B must reach for the same object. In this way, "They become rivals for that object" (1996, 9). Because this tendency is present in both A and B, they will push back and forth against each other in an attempt to gain the object, but now they must try to remove *each other* because they have become obstacles in one another's path to the desired object. Girard explains that "our predicament—is that of trying to beat one's rival at his own game" (1996, 268). Mimesis now generates violence as A, the subject, and B, his rival, endeavors to keep each other from appropriating the desired object by resorting to physical means. In contrast to theories that trace the cause of human violence to innate aggression or to a scarcity of goods, Girard is convinced that the imitative tendency of human beings is the cause. He even suggests that mimesis might be biologically based (1996, 268).

As Girard continues his analysis, he takes account of the role of sacrifice. He notes that if mimesis were allowed to run unchecked, chaos would reign in human communities. Rivalries would engender other rivalries and lead to a downward spiral of violence. In archaic societies, religious rituals, taboos, and cosmological myths provided an outlet for mimesis, an outlet for rivalry. He writes, "Rituals confirm, I believe, that primitive societies are obsessed with the

undifferentiation or conflictual reciprocity that must result from the spread of mimetic rivalry” (1996, 10). Moreover, the chaotic state, with which many creation myths begin, provides an outlet for mimesis. Girard observes that the conclusions of many rituals and myths contain a sacrifice. He writes, “Sacrifice stands in the same relationship to the ritual crisis that precedes it as the death or expulsion of the hero to the undifferentiated chaos that prevails at the beginning of many myths” (1996, 11). Sacrifice is also a collective, communal action that brings about a sense of wholeness at the expense of the sacrificial victim. It reunifies the community because it thereby frees itself of the contagion of mimetic rivalry. As Girard explains, “Sacrifice is the resolution and conclusion of ritual because a collective murder or expulsion resolves the mimetic crisis that ritual mimics” (1996, 11).

This periodic action of sacrifice is what Girard refers to as “the scapegoat effect,” which he describes as the process “through which two or more people are reconciled at the expense of a third party who appears guilty or responsible for whatever ails, disturbs, or frightens the scapegoaters” (1996, 12). The old adage that “nothing unifies like a common enemy” clarifies his meaning. Through the sacrifice, the peace and tranquility of the community has been purchased, at least for a time. Girard’s key insight, however, is that now the community is hooked on sacrifice. Because the sacrifice has successfully expelled mimesis, the community now has “a single purpose, which is to prevent the scapegoat from harming them, by expelling and destroying him” (1996, 12). Scapegoating, in effect, substitutes for mimesis, and now the community must keep itself supplied with victims to expel. A further reason that scapegoating can substitute for mimesis so well is because “scapegoat effects are mimetic effects; they are generated by mimetic rivalry itself, when it reaches a certain degree of intensity” (1996, 12). As Girard makes clear, the initial mimetic feud between two rivals for an object induces other members of the community to join in and desire the same object; they thereby transform themselves into a mob. In this way, the scapegoat becomes the object of desire for the mob, and this heightened sense of mimetic rivalry can only be expelled by the death of the scapegoat. Girard employs his skill as a literary critic to explain how the mechanism operates in texts ranging from the Bible to Greek tragedy. He concludes that the scapegoat mechanism is uncovered and exposed in the Gospel. Although his theory of sacrifice does not significantly influence my interpretation of *Phaedo*, Girard was nevertheless prescient when he wrote the following in *Things Hidden Since the Foundation of the World*: It must be admitted that ... no one has ever attempted to read Plato in the light of ethnology. Aside from the pre-Socratics, to whom Heidegger and contemporary Heideggerian thought return, there is only

religion, and one must understand religion in order to understand philosophy. Since the attempt to understand religion on the basis of philosophy has failed, we ought to try the reverse method and read philosophy in the light of religion.⁷

Thus, the project of this book may also be understood as an attempt to read the religious dimension of Plato in the light of ethnology and to provide a philosophical reflection that takes the ethnology of the death scene into account. Another important theorist of sacrifice is Jean-Pierre Vernant.

Vernant's work has appeared in, among other places, *The Cuisine of Sacrifice Among the Greeks*, an edited collection with Marcel Detienne. These theorists take a different approach to sacrifice altogether and argue that the function of ritual sacrificial killing among the Greeks was primarily so that humans might eat. If Girard counted on sacrifice to unite the community through the mimetic operation of the scapegoat effect, Vernant held that the unification came from the sharing of a high-protein meat meal. Communication with the gods was also a function because the gods received important offerings from the smoke from the roasting (*knisa*). As Graf points out, Vernant's theory finds its precedent in Hesiod's *Theogony*, whose story of Prometheus not only explains the role of animal sacrifice "but also human civilization in its dependence on fire, and the social role of the genders."⁸

Although scholars have been influenced by these great theories, many now call for caution in using them. Bremmer, for example, claims that the great theorists cannot accept that sacrifice was the Greeks' way of communicating with the gods because they tended to think it too primitive, and therefore, each successive theory has imposed a single "function" for sacrifice that leads to reductionism. For Burkert and Girard, as we have seen, sacrifice led to the founding and continuation of a community. For French structuralists like Vernant and Detienne, the purpose of sacrifice was killing to eat. Bremmer challenges future scholars to remain aware of the multivalence of sacrifice without falling into reductionism (144). Graf takes Bremmer's warning one step further. He examines recent archaeological findings and draws some general conclusions concerning the degree to which these great theories fit this evidence. He concludes that there are some important limitations of these theories and that there has not been a new theory of sacrifice to replace it, perhaps showing the overall impracticality of a grand theory of sacrifice. Graf restates an important argument by J.Z. Smith as follows: Animal sacrifice almost always concerns domesticated animals alone, and its performers understand it as a gift for the gods; gift giving presupposes undisputed individual ownership of the thing that is given away. This led Smith to his own "highly tentative" theory, as he himself

says: sacrifice is a ritual meditation on the domestication of animals.⁹

Before concluding our treatment of theories of sacrifice, it is important to note that the Continental tradition offers many more approaches to sacrifice, including those of Bataille and Derrida. Further work in this area would call for a more thorough examination of the death of Socrates as sacrifice in light of this work. Although I will not treat these theories in detail, a few points can be made. Bataille's work on sacrifice preceded the theories of Burkert, Vernant, and Detienne. Along with Caillois, Bataille operated under a general assumption that Bruce Lincoln articulates as follows: Although there came to be sharp differences between the two on certain points, both understood the normal functioning of society as characterized by sustained processes of production and accumulation, such that groups could choke on their own surpluses as these became an obstacle to further growth, change, or creative action. In traditional societies, they believed this problem was typically resolved via festivals, where surpluses were purged in a frenzy of sacrificial destruction and orgiastic consumption.¹⁰

It is easy to recognize the echoes of Nietzsche's emphasis on Dionysianism in this account. In his early philological work as well as in *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche focused on this state of rapture.¹¹ In fact, Bataille attempts to use festivals to set free the dominating parts of his own self and to further lead to the process of self-discovery. According to Lincoln, Bataille found too few opportunities in modern society for such release. It is difficult to fit Bataille's theory with sacrifice in the *Phaedo* for several reasons.

First, Greek terms for sacrifice are certainly not equivalent with our own and certainly quite distant from Christianized notions of it. As Henrichs explains, "Whereas most modern European languages have a simple noun that denotes ritual slaughter, the Greeks could choose from more than half a dozen terms, depending on the type of sacrifice and the desired emphasis on sacrificial violence."¹² Moreover, the two most common terms were *thuein* and *sphrazein*. Again according to Henrichs, *thuein* means literally "to go up in smoke" and "epitomizes the sacrificial process as a whole," whereas *sphrazein* is "the marked term that refers to the cutting of the animal's throat and evokes connotations of violence and bloodshed, exploited by all three tragedians."¹³ Although the death scene of the *Phaedo* makes no use of either of these terms, *thuein*'s derivative *thusia* does appear at 61a, and *thusion* is used at 108a. At 108a, just before Socrates relates the myth of the true earth, he refers to the rites (*ton thusion*). Moreover, at 61a, Socrates is describing his reasons for writing "popular music," and he says that his dream now means this and not just to

practice philosophy. What has inspired Socrates is “the festival [*thusia*] of the god,” which indicates the whole process, the festival. As we shall see in the next chapter, the whole death scene itself unfolds as a ritual, a *thusia*. Thus, the word choice in the *Phaedo* surrounding sacrifice—limited as it may be—refers more to a sacrificial process and less to a single violent action, which *sphrazein* connotes. This suggests that we should be cautious in making a connection between sacrifice in the *Phaedo* and sacrifice in the sense of Dionysian bloodletting favored by Bataille. Therefore, although the emphasis that Bataille places on consumption of excess and release of the ecstatic continues to be a powerful and vivid attraction of his approach, purely as an explanation for sacrifice in the *Phaedo* it is limited. As we shall see, the emphasis on providing a gift of a fitting image, an εἰκῶν, will be central to my reading, and, as I will suggest, more fitting.

The notion of sacrifice as a gift plays a central role in Jacques Derrida’s treatment of sacrifice. His most complete treatment is found in his work *The Gift of Death*, published in French in 1990. Derrida stages a reading of Czech philosopher Jan Patoc̣ka’s essay “Is Technological Civilization Decadent, and Why?” which is contained in Patoc̣ka’s *Heretical Essays in the Philosophy of History*. Derrida develops an understanding of what he calls “Platonic responsibility.”

The incorporation by means of which Platonic responsibility triumphs over orgiastic mystery is the movement by which the immortality of the individual soul is affirmed—it is also the death given to Socrates, the death that he is given and that he accepts, in other words the death that he gives himself when in the *Phaedo* he develops a whole discourse to give significance to his death as he takes the responsibility for it upon himself.¹⁴

This experience of responsibility for one’s death is a condition for the coming into being of what the West has understood as “the individual soul.” As we shall see, it is by means of the reception of the gift of the εἰκῶν of the death of the philosopher that responsibility too comes into being.

A key conclusion of Naiden is that sacrificial ritual depended on a notion of reciprocity between humans and gods that established a certain right relation between them. He explains, “The human and divine intercourse accompanying sacrifice suits the notion of sacrifice as a gift, and so it might imply that this gift should be valuable. Yet it would also suit the notion of sacrifice as an act of thanksgiving or atonement, and so it might imply that sacrifice should be

frequent.”¹⁵ There is no conclusive evidence that sacrifice was a frequent affair, but the key point remains—it involved a notion of reciprocity. This point is supported by a recent study of sacrifice in Socrates’s theology by Anna Lännström.¹⁶ Lännström highlights the fact that Athenian sacrificial practice presupposed a principle of reciprocity between humans and gods. She notes that this is the *do ut des* principle (I give that you may give). Some scholars have argued that Socrates can be seen to abandon the principle of reciprocity when he insists in the *Euthyphro*, for example, that humans should not attempt to buy the gods’ favor because the gods are interested only in our state of mind.¹⁷ Against this, Lännström suggests that sacrifices still might have held intrinsic importance for Socrates, or at the very least he would not be willing to dismiss them as unimportant. She explains, “Given Socrates’s constant expressions of ignorance about such matters [the mind of the gods], I find it difficult to believe that he would make such claims, especially since the oracle at Delphi continually reaffirmed the importance of the sacrifices.”¹⁸ Thus, there is every reason to believe that a principle of reciprocity between humans and gods was presupposed by Socrates’s and Plato’s experience of the practice of ritual sacrifice. A clearer picture of what this reciprocity might have entailed can be seen by considering *the central significance of the temporal setting and the reciprocity of sacrifice*. Such significance will help as we consider the meaning that sacrifice had for the Greeks in terms of offering and gift. As we shall see, reciprocity between humans and gods was important as well.

Michael Morgan points out that “perhaps as many as half of the days of the Athenian year involved festivals and their processions, sacrifices, dancing, hymns, and competitions.”¹⁹ Additionally, recent scholarship concerning Greek calendars and sacrificial rituals is helpful in understanding the issues surrounding the set occasions on which sacrifice took place. In fact, from its beginning the Greek calendar “... was essentially a collection of rules to refer to the religious ceremonies to be performed during that period of the year.”²⁰ Many factors were involved in deciding which occasions would be honored with a festival. Obviously, the role of the stars and luminaries connect to time, with each *polis* having its own lunar-solar calendar, and various festivals were scheduled to coincide with certain celestial events. For example, the Olympic festival took place four times a year, coinciding with the second full moon (Davidson, 204–205). The occurrence of Greek festivals was stabilized with regard to celestial events, and calendars were used to set down the time for certain festivals. Examining the works of Plato and Aristotle as a whole, we can see that festival life had an important role in the societies that they plan. As

Mikalson explains, “When we look to the societies that Plato and Aristotle create, we find that sacrifices have a major role and that these sacrifices are often performed in the context of religious festivals (*heortai*)” (79).

From our contemporary perspective, this great number of festivals and their accompanying sacrifices might seem oddly excessive, yet our own regular observance of the weekend shows how common such practice still is. The frequency of sacrifice seems to reflect Greek assumptions about the relationship between gods and human beings, especially the human comportment toward time. James Davidson offers a generalization that may help us to appreciate sacrificial time. He claims that through its many myths and practices Greek religion “constructs a vivid sense of ongoing process and sequence” (217). Sacrifice itself is a dramatization of the process of converting raw elements, such as flesh, into consumable ones through “the processing of a sacrificial victim from slaughter to butchery to roasting to boiling to consumption” (217). This emphasis on process helps us to see, Davidson points out, how the Greeks viewed the gods in relation to time. Gods were depicted as inhabiting the regular time of human beings, although they sometimes did things to disrupt it (205–206), yet the gods were also commonly believed to be, in a certain sense, beyond time as immortal and ageless. In addition to these characteristics the gods were “*situated* beyond time.”

... [They were] *maintained* as immortal and ageless through regular application of nectar and ambrosia, which was sometimes seen as embodied in the smoky essence of the parts of the victim which were burned for the gods on the altar. Sacrifice therefore not only marked distance, it helped to maintain distance, to keep the gods gods, an exchange which did not just take place in an ongoing present, but helped to maintain that present, to sustain the ongoing Age of Zeus. (Davidson, 217–218) The maintenance of the gods in their relationship to humans, and in their location in the beyond, was accomplished through the actions of a sacrificial ritual. With this understanding of the place of the gods, it is also possible to see how the practice of sacrifice gave a certain depth to the present sense of time. The present was the time in which the gods were sustained through sacrifice.

In the *Laws*, a dialogue deeply concerned with religious practice, the Athenian Stranger suggests a similar understanding of sacrifice, but in this case from the perspective of human beings. The Athenian Stranger points out that, as

part of holidays and festivals, sacrifices provide a time in which the gods give human beings rest from their labors. “They [the gods] have given as fellow celebrants the Muses, with their leader Apollo, and Dionysus—in order that these divinities might set humans right again. Thus men are sustained by their holidays in the company of gods” (653d).²¹ Commenting on the centrality of leisure (*scholē*) to human culture, Josef Pieper cites this passage from *Laws* as an example of how the gods relate to human beings through festivals.²² Mikalson explains that in Magnesia, the city being founded in *Laws*, there are to be 365 sacrifices, which means that a continual daily sacrifice on behalf of the city is performed (79). Sacrifice then seems to have a unique capacity: the gods give human beings sacrificial festivals in order to sustain them. Conversely, human beings maintain and sustain the gods by making sacrifices to them. Such a closely knit, almost symbiotic, reciprocal relationship must have had a strong place in Greek cultural sensibility and would have likely supported the institution of Greek sacrifice and expressed the *do ut des* principle.

As this book unfolds, it will be important to recognize that such an arrangement between gods and human beings reflected a sense of what is best and fitting. The entire life of the Greeks seems to have been largely structured by such a fitting relationship between the sacrifices of men and the leisure and festival days granted them by the gods. This is evident in the setting of Plato’s dialogue *Timaeus*, which likely took place during the Greater Panathenaea, the celebration of Athena’s birth every four years. As Timaeus, Hermocrates, and Critias prepare to offer to Socrates their account of the story that Solon told, Critias explains that the telling of these things “would be fitting (*eikos*) for us to remember now, so as to render our debt of thanks to you [Socrates] and at the same time to praise the goddess on her feast-day by singing, as it were, in a manner both just and true” (21a).²³ This indicates not only Plato’s awareness of the importance of sacrificial feasts but also his acknowledgement that certain ways of remembering the feast are fitting and proper. This notion of fittingness in the *Phaedo* will be developed in greater detail in [chapter 4](#).

The way in which this notion of fittingness is understood has become an important issue for some Plato scholars who examine the religious background of the Greeks. An important element of this is sacrifice. The issue follows from the fact that this relationship between gods and men can appear as a sacrificial economy. If it is an economy then it follows that a notion of reciprocity underlies what we have called a *do ut des* approach to sacrifice. Human beings make sacrifices to the gods so that the gods will in turn grant them some favor. The issue applies to Socrates because certain scholars have claimed that his

approach to sacrifice undermined the temple economy that depended on such cultic practices to ensure it. Socrates's practice undermined the temple economy by discouraging his followers from participating in it. This led to Socrates's disfavor among the priests and poets, who eventually accused him of not believing in the gods that the city believed in—the famous charge of impiety.²⁴ The argument holds that Socrates tended to downplay the effects that lavish sacrifices had on the gods and that he held that the gods were more affected by moral behavior and philosophy.

As I will explain in [chapter 5](#), this is the “new content” that Nancy finds in Socrates's practice, and it shows how philosophy offers a more fitting way of relating to the gods than blood sacrifice. Indeed, Socrates seemed to think that the gods were honored best through philosophy because it is both better and more fitting. At this point, I simply note that it is *inaccurate* to say that the Greeks only made sacrifices to the gods in order to gain favors from them, as if they thought (and indeed as if Socrates thought) they could bribe the gods into giving them what they want. Lännström points out that, in any case, Socrates would not have believed that the gods, who are just, could be persuaded to do something unjust through a sacrificial bribe. Instead, at least part of what the Greeks may have believed themselves to gain from offering sacrifices can be gleaned from a fragment of Theophrastus.

... there are three reasons one ought to sacrifice to the gods: either on account of honor or on account of gratitude or on account of a want of things. For just as with good men, so also with these (the gods) we think that offerings of first-fruits should be made to them. We honor the gods either because we seek to deflect evils or to acquire goods for ourselves, or because we have first been treated well or simply to do great honour to their good character.²⁵

Theophrastus probably gets to the heart of the matter with how this listing of reasons for sacrifice—both gratitude and petition—played a role although, sometimes a person might have sacrificed for a particular reason. Lännström writes the following of sacrifice, providing a helpful summary: It seems reasonable to assume that the motivations of people for sacrificing were just as varied as the written dedications on the votive offerings and just as varied as people's motivation for attending church are today. Some people were surely trying to bribe the gods. Others perhaps sacrificed out of a sense of deep gratitude. The few real atheists in town may have performed sacrifices even though they thought it was silly, figuring that refusing would get them in trouble.

Others may have sacrificed because they respected tradition or because they saw sacrifices as a useful way of binding people together. The occasional glutton may have performed sacrifices simply because they gave him a chance to eat lots of roasted meat.²⁶

More importantly, however, this summary expresses the close-knit relationship between the gods and human beings, showing how it is both established and sustained. The question of how a sacrificial economy (as expressed in the *do ut des* approach to sacrifice) relates to this notion of fittingness is of great importance in understanding the significance of sacrifice in the *Phaedo*. At the root of sacrificial cult is a notion of finding a fitting place in the cosmos.

Based on this exploration of sacrifice we might ask what was the degree of *Socrates's and Plato's familiarity with animal sacrifice*? There is much evidence that Plato was familiar with animal sacrifice. First, it is possible that he would have been acquainted with religious practices such as animal sacrifice from Socrates. Socrates is depicted in Xenophon's *Memorabilia* as a man who frequently made sacrifices. Xenophon explains this charge against Socrates, that he worshipped strange gods: For he [Socrates] visibly sacrificed often at home and often at the common altars of the city; and it was not difficult to see him using divination. For it had been widely bandied about that Socrates said that the divine thing gave him signs; and, in my opinion, it is especially for this reason that they accused him of bringing in new divine things.²⁷

Xenophon provides further insight into Socrates's own views about the meaning of his sacrifice. "He did not believe that, by performing small sacrifices from his small possessions, he fell short of those performing many and large sacrifices from their many and large possessions."²⁸ Thus, if Xenophon's description of Socrates is historically accurate in this matter, then Socrates himself engaged in the making of sacrifices that, although they were small, were also frequent, and this may have influenced Plato's evaluation of their importance.

Second, Plato's own further familiarity with sacrifice and his belief in its importance is well attested in other dialogues besides the *Phaedo*, such as the *Republic* and the *Laws*. For example, in the *Republic* Socrates explains how the function of founding temples and making sacrifices in the *kalipolis* belongs to the cult of Apollo of Delphi.

Foundings of temples, sacrifices, and whatever else belongs to the care of the gods, demons, and heroes; and further, burial of the

dead. ... For such things as these we neither know ourselves, nor in founding a city shall we be persuaded by any other man, if we are intelligent, nor shall we make use of any interpreter other than the ancestral one. Now this god is doubtless the ancestral interpreter of such things for all humans, and he sits in the middle of the earth at its navel and delivers his interpretations. (427c)²⁹

In the *Laws*, the Athenian Stranger explains how young children are to be brought up to believe in the gods by listening to the prayers of their parents and by watching them make sacrifices.

Let us understand that from these observations there follows a principle of the following sort (the noblest and truest of all principles, I believe): for the good man it is very noble, very good, and most efficacious for a happy life, as well as preeminently fitting, if he sacrifices to and always communes with the gods—through prayers, votive offerings, and every sort of service to the gods. (4.716d–e)³⁰

We can see that both texts revere ritual sacrifice of animals. It is likely, then, that he would have observed and participated in it as a common cultural practice. Plato may have even witnessed Socrates himself offering sacrifice. As Josef Pieper once pointed out, sacrifice would have been part of daily life in Plato's Academy because one of the offices of the academy was that of "sacrifice-maker."³¹ Thus, although it is not definitive, it is likely that Plato had firsthand familiarity with Greek sacrificial ritual.

With this work before us, we may now ask: *what is the evidence of human and animal sacrifice?* If the death of Socrates looks like a sacrifice, then does it look like *human* sacrifice? For the moment, I suggest withholding an answer to this question in order to briefly consider an antecedent one: Did the Greeks at the time of Socrates and Plato know firsthand how a human sacrifice even looked? In other words, did the Greeks know of the practice of sacrificing human beings and did they accept it, and, more importantly, did they practice such sacrifice?

Although depictions of human sacrifice in Greek literature abound, it is unlikely that such sacrifices really took place. The issue is treated in detail by Hughes, who concludes that the evidence for human sacrifice is lacking. After examining the existing archaeological evidence, he is skeptical about the likelihood that ritual killing of human victims was common in Greece even several hundred years before Plato. The studies of various excavations that Hughes examines fail to provide solid evidence for the conclusion that human

sacrifice was a frequent occurrence, which suggests that although they existed they were not common. Most of the sites that have been excavated come from funerary settings, making it difficult to identify much detail in the remains (Hughes, 192). Hughes nonetheless holds that it cannot be denied that “many of the ancients themselves believed that human sacrifices had been performed on Greek soil in the past, and clearly human sacrifice enjoyed a thriving existence *as an idea* throughout antiquity” (185). Hughes concludes that the cause of this belief is not a long tradition of *human* sacrifice but rather the frequency of *animal* sacrifice. How frequent then was animal sacrifice?

In a recent study of the evidence for animal sacrifice, F.S. Naiden explains that although scholars such as Detienne and Vernant held that the purpose of a sacrifice of an animal was to provide meat for a communal meal, the physical evidence shows that the proceeds of a sacrifice would have been far from sufficient for this purpose. At most there was enough meat to feed the priests and their assistants (the parasites). Naiden writes, “In Greek sacrifice (by which I mean sacrifice of the Archaic through Hellenistic Periods, the termini for this essay), the parasite and his fellows received their deserts.”³² Further examination of osteological evidence, the study of bones, from places like Delos, where supposedly many large sacrifices were offered at the Panathenaea, suggest that there was hardly enough to feed a large number. “The Athenians did not wish to provide feasting at the expense of other practices. Nor did the Athenians make the best use of the meat they had.”³³

In addition to this type of physical evidence, art historian Richard Neer has argued on the basis of Athenian architecture and sculpture that there is little reason to believe that ritual sacrifice of animals was even a central part of Athenian religious life. Excavations of the temple of Hephaestus do not reveal that there was an altar there or at the Parthenon.

The point is that we have here the two most important pieces of sacred architecture in Classical Athens, one of which is arguably the most important piece of Greek sacred architecture *tout court*, and blood sacrifice is conspicuously absent from both. If we judge people’s priorities by what they actually do, as opposed to what they say—*erga* not *logoi*—then even the mightiest of hecatombs pale in comparison to colossal buildings made of vastly expensive stone, requiring teams of workers decades to complete. Just because the Parthenon is pretty and well known does not mean that it was not actually the most important element of Athenian religious life.³⁴

Neer helpfully points out that even if animal sacrifice was not common in the most prominent temples of Athenian Greece it nevertheless seemed to provide for a way to think about the relationship between humans and gods. “The chief interest was—and to some extent may still be—not in the animal sacrifice but in everything that went on around animal sacrifice, the discourse that surrounds it or enfolds it, like a textile.”³⁵

Of course foremost among the surviving discourses are Epic, Tragedy, and Comedy, what I have called the literary evidence for sacrifice. From Homer’s *Iliad* and *Odyssey* the three passages that are usually considered are 1) the *Iliad* 23, Achilles’s sacrifices at the funeral of Patroclus; 2) the *Odyssey* 3, Nestor’s sacrifice in honor of Athena upon the occasion of the arrival of Telemachus in Pylos; and 3) the *Odyssey* 11, Odysseus’s sacrifice in summoning the dead. Scholars disagree, however, about the degree to which the passages from the Homeric poems, particularly the *Iliad* 23, depict human sacrifice. In that text, the poet describes the funeral of Patroclus, in which Achilles is reported to have selected twelve Trojan warriors, slain them, and burned them on the pyre of Patroclus. Hughes’s examination of the evidence leads him to conclude that the incident is not properly speaking a sacrifice but rather a case of ritual revenge (Hughes, 65–70). The other two texts from *Odyssey* 3 and 11 provide a fairly clear presentation of a sacrificial ritual, which we will treat below.

Although depictions of sacrifice are present in Homer, they are also a central part of Greek tragedy. Although some scholars like Walter Benjamin have postulated sacrificial antecedents for tragedy, Henrichs draws attention to the different view of other scholars like Seaford and Zeitlin.

... [Seaford and Zeitlin] are no longer concerned with hypothetical ritual antecedents of Greek tragedy, but with the numerous rituals so conspicuously embedded and dramatized in the actual plays. The roster of rituals verbally reenacted in Greek tragedy includes prayers and curses, the consultation of oracles and seers, supplication, lament, initiation rituals, libations and with uncanny frequency, “sacrifice,” that is the ritual killing of animals and humans for the express purpose of pleasing or propitiating the gods, who with few exceptions are the imagined recipients of such blood offerings.³⁶

Although the range of rituals is vast, Henrichs draws attention to the fact that “sacrificial animals in tragedy have a tendency to conjure up, or turn into, human victims.”³⁷ This insight echoes Hughes, who concludes “I do not think it will be inaccurate to say that human sacrifice flourished nowhere in ancient

Greece so much as in Athens, upon the tragic stage.”³⁸ There is a complicated relationship between the treatment of sacrifice in Greek tragedy and in religious practice. Henrichs recently argued that there are decisive limitations involved in using Greek tragedy as a source for religious practice.

One may divide a ritual sacrifice into three phases: the pre-kill, the kill, and the post-kill. It is noteworthy, then, that Aeschylus’s *Agamemnon*, understood as a perverted sacrifice, places most focus on the actual kill, as Henrichs points out.

... the tragedians are preoccupied with sacrificial violence and bloodshed. To complicate matters, tragedians undermine, subvert, and manipulate the ritual conventions of animal sacrifice to the point where in their plays the performance of sacrifice becomes seriously flawed, entire sacrifices fail, or human victims are substituted for animal victims. The abnormal sacrifice is the ritual and dramatic norm in tragedy, and any attempt to come to grips with idiosyncrasies of the tragic sacrifice must start with a consideration of the perverted sacrifice.³⁹

Thus, we have good reason to believe that sacrifice as portrayed in tragedy tends toward a complex relationship. As Henrichs concludes, “Animal sacrifice is systematically problematized in Attic tragedy, and its problems continue to produce repercussions in modern scholarship.”⁴⁰ Treating the theme of sacrifice in a Platonic dialogue will provide a further complication for our scholarship, as we see in [chapter 4](#). Finally, the ancient literary genre of comedy also depicted sacrifice. Here we draw attention to the fact that it emphasized the post-kill rather than the pre-kill and kill (which is what Tragedy did). This allowed it to privilege the food aspect, the feasting, and the communal meal. Greek depictions of sacrifice on vase paintings seem to be similar to comedy in as much as they are less concerned with the kill than with the post-kill engagement with the dead animal. I will examine the place of sacrifice in Greek comedy in greater detail in [chapter 5](#).

With this background in place it is now necessary to make a *description of a Greek sacrificial ritual*. What then are the elements that best describe an animal sacrificial ritual? They are 1. the kind of animal selected; 2. the condition of the animal; 3. the means of killing and the persons involved in it (the implements used, the amount of bloodshed, and the various roles of sacrificers); 4. the preparatory ritual actions, the kill itself, the sonic ambiance, and the libation pouring; 5. the “processing” of the sacrificed animal; and finally 6. the necessity of obtaining “assent” from the animal.

The first element to consider is *the kind of animal selected*. Animal sacrifice demanded that one species, humans, sacrifice many different species of animals to gods, who are not human. Gods and animals, then, have in common that humans define themselves in relation to them (Gilhus, 10). Thus, the various characteristics that might determine the role that is played by gods and animals in sacrificial ritual are largely determined by the needs of human beings. The scholarship concerning why one species of animal was selected as opposed to another is growing. In general, animals that were to be sacrificed had to be domesticated. Various reasons for this have been given. Detienne emphasizes that sacrifice is a means of providing a meat meal for the community; however, his analysis depends on a strong assumption about the importance of a distinction between agriculture and hunting. According to Detienne, wild animals encountered in hunting were constrained to the realm of warfare, and for the Greeks warfare was associated with violence. Detienne's overriding concern is that sacrifice has to be as far removed from violence as possible. "The nature of the victim, which must be a domestic animal, poses first of all the problem of the relation of sacrifice to hunting on the one hand and agriculture on the other. The blood flowing from the slaughtered animal raises the problem of warfare and the symbolisms engendered by violence" (5).

Whether or not the Greeks had such a concern with the depiction of violence is debatable. Bremmer provides a counterexample when he points out that vase paintings frequently depict sacrificial victims spilling blood (143). Nevertheless, there is probably some truth to the assumption that the Greeks desired to delineate the religious sphere of sacrifice from that of hunting rituals, although the reason for this is not clear. One reason could have been that an undomesticated animal might have put up a fight before the ritual could even commence. It could, thereby, not serve well as a sacrificial animal because it might cause a disturbance. Another likely reason for preferring domesticated animals was that such a sacrifice would have come from one's own store or property, which would have thereby caused it to have a greater symbolic value than if it had been taken freely in the hunt. Burkert attributes the process of animal selection to a factor that he calls "nobility," but he does not precisely specify what made one species nobler than another for the Greeks (55).

Which species of domesticated animals was normally selected? The detailed scene in the *Odyssey* 3 shows Nestor sacrificing a cow, which is "the largest domesticated animal available and the predominant victim in literature and art" (Bremmer, 133). In practice, however, by the fourth century the cow was deemed too expensive to sacrifice in most of Greece. In Athens, however, the sacrifice of cattle remained of symbolic significance, and certain colonies

and allies of the city were under an obligation to supply sacrificial cows for the Panathenaea as tribute. Witnessing the sacrifice of a cow would not have been common, but in Athens at the time of Plato and Socrates it would have certainly been something that was seen on special occasions (Bremmer, 133). As we shall see, in the *Timaeus*, Plato even refers to the Panathenaea, the celebration of Athena's birth.

The Greeks considered the ox, especially the bull, to be the most noble (Burkert, 55). Mikalson points out that in the *Critias* there is a description of the founding of Atlantis, in which Poseidon is the benefactor of the land. In gratitude for his work, Mikalson explains, "Every fifth or sixth year the ten kings of Atlantis gathered there and with special rituals selected a bull, sacrificed it, and poured its blood over the stele" (226). A portion of the passage in the *Critias* that Mikalson refers to reads as follows: In the sacred precincts of Poseidon there were bulls at large; and the ten princes, being alone by themselves, after praying to the God that they might capture a victim well-pleasing unto him, hunted after the bulls with staves and nooses but with no weapon of iron; and whatsoever bull they captured they led up to the pillar and cut its throat over the top of the pillar, raining down blood on the inscription. (119d–e)⁴¹

As far as I know, this is the most detailed descriptions of an animal sacrificial ritual in the Platonic corpus.

After cows and oxen comes the pig. Although the pig was a source of plentiful meat, its use as a sacrificial animal was probably less common due to its propensity to scavenge human waste (Bremmer, 133). Bremmer points out further that pig remains are not found in many important sanctuaries and that few among the gods, except for Hestia, Demeter, and Dionysus, were ever associated with it. The piglet was a very common sacrificial animal and was very cheap. In plentiful supply and not a very good source of meat, piglets were burned whole and were also commonly used in purification rituals (Burkert, 55).

By far the most common sacrificial victims were goats and sheep. As Bremmer explains, the bones of these two species are difficult to distinguish. Different shrines would have preferred different sexes and ages of animals as well as other aspects of appearance like size and color. Poultry were also commonly sacrificed. As we shall see, Socrates himself requests the sacrifice of a cock (ἀλεκτρούονα), and there are reports that this animal was a part of Mystery Cults.⁴² Other birds such as geese or pigeons (and I assume doves) were rare (Burkert, 55). In his *Memorabilia*, Xenophon depicts Socrates as frequently sacrificing birds and as being highly skilled at augury. Xenophon provides a justification for Socrates's engagement in this practice.

He [Socrates] was no more bringing in anything strange than are other believers in divination, who rely on augury, oracles, coincidences and sacrifices. For these men's belief is not that the birds or the folk met by accident know what profits the inquirer, but that they are the instruments by which the gods make this known; and that was Socrates's belief too.⁴³

It is noteworthy that, although he sacrificed birds, he still considered swans to be sacred possessions of the gods and endowed with a prophetic gift, as we see in the *Phaedo* 84e–85a. Despite this reverence for certain kinds of birds, Plato still insists on supporting animal sacrifice, in contrast to his successors such as Theophrastus. In addition, due to their belief in metempsychosis, certain followers of Pythagoras and of Empedocles did not support the practice (Mikalson, 70). Lastly, sacrifices frequently involved “bloodless offerings such as honey-cakes, incense, and hymns” (Mikalson, 179).

Second, a few details can be added to our description of Greek sacrificial ritual concerning the element of *the condition of the animal to be sacrificed*. Burkert claims that the animal must be “unblemished” in order to emphasize the importance of the sacrifice for the community and so that the gods would not reject the gift as being unworthy (56). Interestingly, castrated animals were not always considered damaged. Bremmer reports the discovery of the remains of castrated oxen at Kalapodi as well as at Didyma (134). This suggests that in the Greek imagination there may well have been an ability to assign animals to categories that did not correspond to their visible physical attributes when it served a more important purpose in the sacrificial ritual. Apparently, considerations of orthopraxy sometimes trumped the evidence of natural observation. Bremmer provides a reasonable justification for this. “This mental operation must have been facilitated by the fact that castration improves the size of animals and the quality of their meat” (134). This suggests that when it came to sacrificial ritual for the Greeks, domesticated animals provided an even easier convertibility with humans. In preparation, the animal is commonly adorned with ribbons and garlands, and in the *Odyssey* 3 Nestor requires that the horns of the sacrificial cow be gilded.

In addition to being unblemished, the animal had to have the appearance of being free. Although it was known to be domesticated, and therefore not wild, Detienne explains that it nevertheless must roam freely. He writes, “It is the custom in Greece to allow animals consecrated to the gods to wander freely within the temple enclosures. Thus the animal is designated *aphetos*, ‘at large.’ It

is free of all bonds and obviously does not labor for man” (9). This insistence is relevant to the issue of “fabricated assent” that we will develop later, but at this point it is helpful to imagine the domesticated animal freely wandering about without bonds. The victim selected, the Greeks prepared it to die.

The third element to consider is *the means of killing and the persons involved in it*. They commonly used the knife and the axe. Obviously, the size of the animal affected the instrument to be used and the method used for wielding it. In the account in the *Odyssey* 3, in which a large cow is to be killed, Nestor’s son, Thrasymedes, deals the first blow. “Prayers said, the scattering barley strewn, suddenly Nestor’s son impetuous Thrasymedes strode up close and struck—the ax (πέλεκυν) chopped the neck tendons through—and the blow stunned the heifer’s strength. ... Then, hoisting up the victim’s head from the trampled earth, they held her fast as the captain of men Pisistratus slashed her throat” (3.502–510). Next the men cut into the cow and began butchering her with a knife.

Other depictions of sacrifice involved only a knife and not an axe. Vase paintings of the sacrifice of pigs, for example, show the live animal being held by one person while another cuts its throat with a knife (Detienne and Vernant, 110). Because bowls displayed in vase paintings are depicted as resting on the altars and catching the blood of the animal as further offerings to the gods, Bremmer points out that “great care was taken not to spill the blood of the victim on the ground” (137). Apparently, the entire animal, including the blood, was considered to be part of the sacrifice, and great care was taken to perform the rituals so as not to waste any part of the animal.

There is a figure involved in Greek sacrificial ritual whose significance affects our understanding of it. He is called the *mageiros*, the one who presided over the sacrifice, and he occurs in many places in Greek literature. For example, Euripides has Odysseus characterize Polyphemus, the Cyclops, as a “*mageiros*” (Durand, 121). Gilhus helps us to understand his role. In lower classes, sacrifice could be a rather raucous affair in which before the kill animals might be dragged about, causing a disturbance for all. The upper classes, however, most often attended sacrifices that were performed at established temples and at festivals. In these venues, priests conducted the sacrificial ritual. Although there seems to have been no official hierarchy involved, there were in fact paid professionals whose skill at this *praxis* contributed to the creation of an atmosphere of silence and reverence.

The main role in this ritual was performed by the *mageiros*. Gilhus writes, “In Greece, the *mageiros*, a sort of butcher *cum* cook, was the hired sacrificial specialist who consecrated the animals and led the ritual” (116). Gilhus further

emphasizes that the *mageiros* exercised control over the situation and the proceedings. The role of this man is important for both Burkert's and Detienne's description of sacrifice. Burkert writes that "in his awe of the divine he [the *mageiros*, although Burkert does not use this term] also demonstrates his own power, a power which although it brings in reality only death, appears *e contrario* to embrace life as well" (59). In this power Burkert sees the *mageiros* as instituting order through the action. As far as I know, Burkert says nothing about the concealing of the identity of the *mageiros*, yet the role that he plays in imposing order would seem to make his identity known. Detienne insists, on the other hand, that in the exercise of violence the identity of *mageiros* had to be concealed.

When the *mageiros* is present at a sacrifice, one can never state that he is the one who has dealt the fatal blow. The blurring of the distinctions here is fundamental. For what is hidden in this way is the naked act of violence, as if the features, the distinct face of the one who strikes and kills with the ax or knife were best left shrouded in darkness. (11) Detienne, who follows Vernant in this, emphasizes the anxiety and the unease that accompanied animal sacrifice and acts of violence among the Greeks. Earlier in this description, we saw this same anxiety in the practice of using domesticated animals. Thus, there would be a need to mask the *mageiros* (much as later-day executioners were masked).

For Detienne, a question arises whether the identity of the *mageiros* was known. A related question is whether he was masked or unmasked. These questions may reveal an assumption about Greek sacrifice that is specific to Detienne. As I said at the beginning of this section, in the study of sacrifice, sometimes scholars make assumptions about the etiology of it that influences other aspects of their interpretation. In this case Detienne assumes that the Greeks wished to conceal violence, and this seems to affect his belief that the identity of the *mageiros* must remain concealed. In contrast to Detienne, Gilhus points out that while on vase paintings "it was unusual to depict the killing itself, and the actual violence done to the sacrificial beast is seldom shown ... although this act of violence was absolutely necessary, it was not necessarily deeply meaningful." He suggests, therefore, that some modern academics who overemphasize the absence of violence reveal their own unfamiliarity with it (118–119).

Moreover, Detienne's claim that the identity of the *mageiros* must have

remained concealed runs counter to the passage cited above from the *Odyssey* 3. There, Homer explicitly provides the proper names of those who carry out the sacrifice and does not conceal their identity. There, the role and tasks of the *mageiros* is divided among Nestor (who cuts the first hairs of the animal), Thrasymedes (who strikes it with an axe), and Peisistratus (who cuts its throat). Bremmer points out that by showing these men engaged in a religious ritual, the poet impresses their piety on the hearer (139).

This same emphasis on piety is apparent in the *Laws*. There Plato has the Athenian Stranger emphasize that priests and priestesses played a small role in most sacrifices. Sacrificial ritual was largely the province of individuals within families and a collective expression of piety (Mikalson, 102). Although it is impossible to decide the issue of the identity of the *mageiros*, it is important to note at this point that the same issue will appear when we examine the *Phaedo*. In the *Phaedo*, the identity of the *mageiros*, the one I call the *pharmakodōtes*, seems to be concealed insofar as he is not given a proper name. Presumably, he is the same man who is called “the servant of the Eleven” (ὁ τῶν ἑνδεκά ὑπηρέτης) at 116b, yet the man is referred to at both 63d and again at 117a as “the one who is to give the potion” (*pharmakodōtes*).

We now turn to the fourth element—a description of *the preparatory ritual actions, their setting, and the kill itself*. Hughes helpfully provides a definition of ritual as “demonstrative acts performed in a prescribed manner and on set occasions” (2). What were these “demonstrative acts” in a sacrifice and what was the manner that was prescribed for their performance by the ritual? Before discussing the kill, I first consider those acts that were preparatory. For human participants, preparation might well have included bathing and putting on white clothes and wreaths woven from twigs. Moreover, vase paintings always depict those involved in sacrificial processions without shoes (Burkert, 135).

Obviously bathing would have had connections with purification. In [chapter 3](#), I will examine purification as a central part of the Orphic ritual that is referred to in the *Phaedo* in connection to Socrates’s bath (116a–b). According to some sources the sacrificial animal too was bathed. Cold water was poured over the animal until it was drenched. The purpose of this action was not so much a matter of insuring the purity of the animal as it was to induce it into shaking and trembling before the god.

Once the procession has arrived at the sacred spot, a circle is marked out which includes the site of sacrifice, the animal, and the participants: as the sacrificial basket and water vessel are borne around in a circle, the sacred is delimited from the profane. All stand

around the altar. As a first communal action water is poured from the jug over the hands of each participant in turn: this is to begin, *archesthai*. The animal too is sprinkled with water, causing it to jerk its head, which is interpreted as the animal nodding its assent. (Burkert, 56) Later we will have occasion to examine Burkert's assumptions about the issue of assent, but for now I merely emphasize that the sacrificial ritual commences with lustration.

As is evident from the above quotation, Burkert provides engaging and provocative descriptions of Greek sacrificial ritual. Although provocative, this description of Burkert's may well reflect an unfounded assumption about Greek sacrifice. For example, it is possible that Burkert overstates the need for delimitation of the sacred from the profane by emphasizing the enclosure of a circular space for the sacrifice. Bremmer agrees with Burkert that there would have been a sacred space around the altar, but he points out that "the topography of the ancient temple indicates that they must have stood in a semi-circle between the altar and the temple, with the temple at their back" (135). The architectural form may have determined, or at least affected, the sacred space that centered on the altar.

These initial preparatory acts were followed by a procession (*pompē*). Indeed, such preparatory acts would have been part of any procession. Processions were a common part of Greek life and were used to commence significant events such as the launching of the first ship of the year as part of the opening of sailing season or the beginning of a dramatic festival. The order of the procession was also important. It was led by an innocent girl of high birth (*kanēphoros*) bearing a basket (Burkert, 56). It is also worth noting that the sex of the *kanēphoros* could be either male or female, although youthfulness was a required condition. For example, in the *Odyssey* 3, Nestor's son, Aretus, carries the basket. The poet reports, "Aretus, coming up from the storeroom, brought them lustral water filling a flower-braided bowl, in his other hand, the barley in a basket" (3.491–493). The basket contained barley groats or other grain that was then sprinkled or hurled over the head of the animal. Also inside of the basket, covered in barley, was the sacrificial knife (ἡ δορίς). The purpose of hurling the grain seems to have been to force the animal to raise its head, offering its neck for the kill.

An important aspect of the setting of the sacrificial ritual was what I call "the sonic ambiance" or the attitude taken to sounds such as cries of mourning, prayers, and music. Bremmer emphasizes the centrality of music at some sacrificial festivals: "Male adolescents led the victim along, and a male or female

piper played music to dictate the walking rhythm. Depending on the occasion, there could be various pipers and (exclusively male) players of stringed instruments. The great Panathenaic procession may even have known as many as sixteen musicians: the largest orchestra known from classical Greece” (135). Scholars disagree concerning the purpose of music at a ritual. Burkert holds that music was a means of covering up any sound that might come from the animal or any other participant as a need to shield participants from violence either during or before the kill. Bremmer, on the other hand, emphasizes that music was merely part of the festal occasion and had no purpose connected to the kill. Moreover, while it is unlikely that the procession took place in silence, silence would have been called for before the prayers that accompanied the actual killing, thus marking the contrast between noise and quiet, creating an ambiance of reverence. Mikalson reinforces this point, noting the importance of *euphemia* or “good speech” for Plato. Good speech in this case is related to speaking words that are reverent and refraining from uttering those that are not; it “was the use of appropriate language by those attending religious rituals, or, conversely, the avoidance of inauspicious language. The latter was most easily achieved by silence, and the command ‘*euphete*’ on a religious occasion was often tantamount to an order to ‘keep quiet.’ ” (59–60).

Related to *euphemia* at Greek ritual sacrifice is the restriction on the expression of grief in Greek funeral culture. Daniel Ogden describes how numerous features of the Greek funeral were controlled, including “the number of mourners one might have, the length of time for which mourning might be undertaken, the degree of squalor of the mourners’ dress, the degrees to which the mourners might lacerate themselves, the splendor of sacrifices, and the splendor of the grave gifts that might accompany the dead man.”⁴⁴ Although women were excluded from these for political reasons, these restrictions affected them more, as they were generally responsible for expressing grief. Ogden emphasizes, however, that the main reason for such restrictions was fear that the dead would return to life in the form of a ghost. “The only thing to be dreaded more than the loss of a loved one is that loved one’s return,”⁴⁵ and thus control over the sonic ambiance at a sacrificial ritual would have had a parallel in Greek funerary practices. The reasons for the control would have varied, and the Greek imagination would likely have perceived these practices as similar.

An additional part of the preparation of a sacrifice was the pouring of a libation. Bremmer points out that “Athenian vases often portray the sacrificer pouring a libation from a cup in his right hand, while he extends his left hand in a gesture of prayer” (138). As we shall see at *Phaedo* 117b, Socrates makes a

request to pour a libation before he himself drinks the *pharmakon*.

In the *Odyssey* 3, Nestor is depicted as sprinkling wine over the flames that roast the meat. Burkert emphasizes that in symposia this highly ritualized action followed a set sequence of drinking from kraters, vases used for the mixing of water and wine: "... from the first krater a libation is made to Zeus and the Olympians, from the second to the heroes, and from the third and last to Zeus Teleios, the Finisher; or alternatively, from the first to the Agathos Daimon and from the third to Hermes. Each participant is free to invoke a god with further libations" (70–71). The libations that began the sacrifice were therefore a part of the invocation of the gods.

Libations were also used *to conclude a sacrifice*, and Burkert explains these in relation to the bloodguilt of the sacrifice. He writes, "The libation consequently stands in a certain polarity to the blood sacrifice which precedes it" (71). He considers the libation to end hostilities. Yet, as we shall see later, Burkert's assumptions about bloodguilt may unduly affect his interpretation here.

A final preparation was the so-called "first fruits" offering. Burkert describes it as follows: "The sacrificer grasps the knife, and concealing the weapon, strides up to the victim: he cuts some hairs from its forehead and throws them on the fire. This hair sacrifice is once more and for the last time a beginning, *aparchesthai*. No blood has flowed, but the victim is no longer inviolate" (56). This action of first fruits offering is also evident in the description of the *Odyssey* 3, where King Nestor makes the same gesture as he begins the sacrificial rite. "Now Nestor the old charioteer began the rite. ... He lifted up the ardent prayers to Pallas Athena, launching the sacrifice, flinging onto the fire the first tufts of hair from the victim's head" (3.500–501). In addition, Bremmer notes that vase paintings depicting Iphigenia at Aulis "show us the sacrificer cutting a lock of her hair, rather than the actual murder" (136).

After the killing of the victim the "*processing*" of the sacrificed animal would take place. This element included skinning the carcass, dividing the meat, and making burnt offerings. There are three major reasons for this process. First, some sacrifices were done to examine the entrails of the victim. Earlier Homeric accounts typically emphasize the importance of this. Second, according to Detienne and Burkert, the reason for the sacrifice was to provide a meat meal for the community. Finally, the sacrifice provided a gift of praise and/or supplication to the gods. The smoke, arising from the roasting flesh of the offerings of the sacrificial animal, ascended to the gods as incense.

Yet, out of all of these reasons Gilhus explains that the climax of the ritual was not so much the killing itself as it was the opening of the carcass. As

Burkert explains: This was the moment of truth that revealed whether the gods accepted the sacrifice or not. At this point the animal was changed into a medium of communication between gods and humans. It was transformed into a “natural text” on which meaning was inscribed by the gods, by destiny or by the hidden correspondences of the cosmos and was thus made into an object for the divinator’s scrutinizing gaze. (118–119) This practice of divination is an important one for an understanding of Greek sacrificial ritual. Burkert suggests that the laying out of the carcass as it occurs in Homer is a “symbolic reconstitution of the body” (57). Detienne provides a detailed description of this process, emphasizing the opposition of the internal organs to the rest of the meat (10). Although Ogden does not discuss the examination of entrails specifically, he provides a helpful discussion of other forms of divination such as the practice of relying on young boys to make observations of things like liquid in a bowl or of shadows or images of flame of a lamp (lychnomancy) or of images from a glittering or distorted mirror (catoptromancy).⁴⁶ I will not make much of this in the case of Socrates other than to point out that his corpse, like an animal carcass, is laid out and his body symbolically reconstituted, so to speak, when Crito arranges his countenance after he has died (118a). It is also worth noting that as Socrates is dying the *pharmakodōtes* manipulates his body in a way that strongly resembles the way an animal carcass was manipulated in divination.⁴⁷

Second, the provision of meat for the community is an important part of the sacrifice. Burkert calls animal sacrifice “ritualized slaughter followed by a meat meal” (57). Bremmer does well to point out that vase paintings show meat hanging in trees and that the Greeks took great satisfaction in displaying the meat from the sacrifice. Boiling the meat was also part of the process, but the division of it among the members of the community was especially important. Bremmer explains well that there are many issues that accompany a hierarchical division of meat. Although the meat was supposed to be divided equally, given the varying quality of meat cuts, this ideal could only be maintained at the level of a fiction, especially in Homer. Monoson discusses some of the class tension that arose from public sacrifice, as the wealthy were required to pay for liturgies and tributes while others enjoyed the meat meal.⁴⁸

A different practice that was related to the meat meal of sacrifice was vegetarianism. Detienne cites evidence that vegetarianism was intentionally practiced by Orphics and Pythagoreans as a way of rejecting sacrificial practice and perhaps of the theology it implied (Detienne, 5–6). He contrasts this with what he calls “Dionysianism,” the eating of raw meat, which also rejected the ritual of sacrifice (8). One problem with an overemphasis on the role of eating in

describing sacrificial ritual is that it tends to downplay the role of the gods. Gilhus quotes Einar Thomassen, who explains that the approach of Vernant and Detienne makes the animal sacrifice appear “more like a dinner party than ritual murder” (123). Burkert, too, emphasizes the role of “open commensality” between men and gods in the sharing of a meat meal. Such a ritual of eating together ensured good relations. Bremmer acknowledges how little we know about how the meat was really consumed at the so-called “dinner party.” The fact is that in Greek literature “consumption is hardly ever mentioned” and vase paintings “never show anyone eating” (138).

One might anticipate the objection that to describe Socrates’s death as a sacrifice must imply that someone should eat. It is possible, however, to reply to this objection by pointing out that the Greeks found it uninteresting to depict human beings eating. Yet, the gods did receive their portion, which was usually in the form of the smoke from roasted meat (*knisa*) wrapped around spits. The *Odyssey* 3 provides a vivid description of this process of dismemberment of a heifer.

Dark blood gushed forth, life ebbed from her [the heifer’s] limbs—they quartered her quickly, cut the thighbones out and all according to custom wrapped them round in fat, a double fold sliced clean and topped with strips of flesh. And the old king burned these over dried split wood and over the fire poured out glistening wine while young men at his side held five-pronged forks. Once they’d burned the bones and tasted the organs, they sliced the rest into pieces, spitted them on skewers and raising points to the fire, broiled all the meats. (3.510–520) This description, heavily influenced by tradition, suggests how the share of the meat for the gods was delineated from the share for humans. Vernant writes, “Man’s share of the sacrificed animal is the dead, corruptible meat; the gods’ share is the smoke from the charred bones, the smell of perfumes, and incorruptible spices” (135). The ritual, therefore, was an important way to communicate with the gods. As Gilhus points out, “Rituals function above all to establish and confirm the reality of the gods. Killing animals in honour of them and offering them part of the meat from the sacrifice was one way in which their reality was established” (1). The maintenance of the gods through the smoky essence of parts of burned victims was considered as applying nectar and ambrosia to the gods, sustaining them in the Age of Zeus. As we shall see, the sacrificial ritual was strongly influenced by a view of the relationship

of the gods to human time.

As I noted at the beginning of this description, another element is *the need to obtain the “assent” of the sacrificial animal*. At issue is whether or not the sacrificial victim was required, by the constraints of the ritual, to indicate its willingness to be sacrificed and the degree to which such consent could be fabricated or fictionalized. In the background of this is the phenomenon of bloodguilt, the guilt acquired from shedding the blood of a sacrificial victim. As tragedies such as Aeschylus’s *Orestia* attest, bloodguilt was an important concern for the Greeks in Athens, and Detienne explains that in sacrificial ritual itself there was great fear of incurring it (9). Burkert is one interpreter whose assumption about bloodguilt influences his understanding of sacrifice. Burkert follows Meuli, who argued that the Greeks experienced “angst” at having to kill a living creature. This was traceable to attitudes about hunting.

Historically, this ritual of the sacrificial meal may be traced to the situation of man before the discovery of agriculture: hunting, especially big game hunting for cattle and horses, was the prime task of the male, and the principal source of food for the family. Killing to eat was an unalterable commandment, and yet the bloody act must always have been attended with a double danger and a double fear: that the weapon might be turned against a fellow hunter, and that the death of the prey might signal an end with no future, while man must always eat and so must always hunt. (58) Burkert interprets other elements of the sacrificial ritual on the basis of this assumption that sacrifice is traceable to hunting. For instance, as the animal is brought forward to the altar, Burkert contends that water was poured over its head in order to make it jerk or nod its head, which was interpreted by those present at the sacrifice as the victim giving its assent. Assent was needed from the victim in order to assuage the anxieties of the sacrificing party. This was done by creating a semblance of assent, even though it was clear that the victim did not really give it (56). Detienne writes that “the animal selected as victim is led without apparent constraint in a procession to the altar at the same pace as the future diners, and the ritual takes care to obtain the animal’s consent by a sign of the head” (9).

As Bremmer points out, a certain “comedy of innocence,” pervades an interpretation of sacrificial ritual like Detienne’s. This is nicely summed up in

the small Greek drama “Who killed the ox?” “The knife” is the response that is offered. Detienne makes explicit reference to this drama (12). However, evidence is lacking that when the Greeks sacrificed animals they feared contagion, felt guilty, or needed to differentiate sacrifice from murder. For example, Bremmer points out, “Attic vases constantly connect sacrifice with ideas of festivity, celebrations, and blessings” (142). Moreover, the Euboeans even named a month in honor of sacrificing animals—a festival called “*Bouphonia*,” which means “Ox-Killing,” was celebrated. Thus, it seems that the Greeks not only could tolerate but also were quite comfortable with such violence being displayed.

Detienne explains, “The exegetes of Delphi went so far as to read in the victim’s shudders proof that it was pure, healthy, and whole ‘in soul as well as body’ ” (9). Gilhus encourages those who would follow the interpretations of Burkert and Detienne to show restraint regarding this issue of consent. “The idea that animals were always willing to be sacrificed must not be taken at face value. Images from archaic and classical times in Greece show that animals were often restrained by ropes, and an ox could be dragged down on its knees as a sign of voluntary participation” (120). According to Gilhus, it was less important for the animal to appear to give formal consent than it was to avoid having it break loose and flee, which was considered unlucky. Thus, Burkert and Detienne may make too much of this issue. One might simply say that the sacrificial animal needed *to have the look* of being free in order to count as a fitting offering to the gods. It is also likely that there was a belief that the gods required free gifts, and a gift that was pure had to offer its own consent. It had to go freely. Appearing to go freely may not have been so much a function of avoiding blame for those in the sacrificing party or even a matter of wanting to attribute agency to the victim. Rather, it may have been simply a matter of the victim appearing suitable to the gods. Detienne, in fact, alludes to such a possibility with his understanding of the double meaning of the term *hupokuptein*, which he points out can mean both to give consent as well as to supplicate and bend beneath the yoke. It is plausible, then that the jerking motion of the animal was needed in order to supplicate the gods.⁴⁹

We have now seen the elements that best describe what an animal sacrificial ritual looked like. They were 1. the kind of animal selected; 2. the condition of the animal; 3. the means of killing and the persons involved in it (the implements used, the amount of blood involved, and the various roles of the sacrificers); 4. the preparatory ritual actions, the kill itself, the sonic ambiance, and the libation pouring; 5. the “processing” of the sacrificed animal; and finally 6. the necessity of obtaining “assent” from the animal.

To summarize, a Greek sacrificial ritual was of large-to medium-sized domesticated animals, in an atmosphere of reverence and festivity, carried out according to established rubrics that probably changed and adapted over time. Its purpose was, in part, the maintenance of the gods who were seen as existing beyond time and was performed on specific occasions and dates set according to a lunar-solar calendar. Sacrifices probably partially sustained the community by providing it with a meat meal as well as by maintaining the gods by an offering. An offering took the form of smoke from roasted meat (*knisa*) that was part of their maintenance. There were as many reasons for such offerings as there were occasions on which they might be made. The victim for the sacrifice might have preferably appeared to go willingly, although to at least some who were present it would likely have appeared that the circumstances of the situation had forced this on the victim. Thus, a fictional imaginative element seems involved in ritual sacrifice, although the extent to which all participants in the ritual recognized it is uncertain. In addition, it is best to begin by acknowledging that what we know about Greek sacrifice is mostly an understanding of orthopraxy rather than orthodoxy. That is, we know much more about what they did than we do about what they believed.

It is also important to recognize that a festival culture was in place in Athens in which a proper fit between gods and men was rather strongly sustained by frequent witnessing of and participation in sacrificial ritual. It is that fit, as we shall see, that the death of Socrates provides a *mimesis* of in the *Phaedo* and which is ultimately ruptured and reestablished in the embodied Socrates. As we shall see in the next chapter, the death of Socrates has “the look” of a Greek sacrificial ritual. It is impossible to know for certain which of the foregoing sources Plato actually drew upon to shape his own understanding of animal sacrifice, whether tragedy, comedy, or actual firsthand experience of animal sacrifice. It would seem that he was able to mix them together in a fitting way in painting the portrait of the death of Socrates, which he provided as an εἰκών that presupposes a notion of reciprocity between gods and men.

THREE

SACRIFICING SOCRATES

The *Mise-en-Scène* of the Death Scene of the *Phaedo* In the introduction to their translation of the *Phaedo*, Brann, Kalkavage and Salem quote Herodotus's *Inquiries*.

Herodotus relates how Solon once counseled a Lydian tyrant as follows: "Look to the end if you want to know whether a human life has really been blessed or happy" (1). As they point out, this lesson can be applied to the *Phaedo* as a whole because it is the end of the life of Socrates. Yet we might consider how it also applies to the very last moments of the dialogue itself—the death scene.

Moreover, we might also wonder what "to look to the end" means in the *Phaedo*. After all, this very activity—looking—is emphasized from the very start of the dialogue when we learn that the delay in Socrates's execution occurred because of the *theoríoi* who had been dispatched to Delos on the day before the trial. As the term suggests, these observers were sent *to look* with wonder upon the various sacrificial activities connected with the festival held there.

In *The Ontology of Socratic Questioning in Plato's Early Dialogues*, Sean D. Kirkland develops the thesis that there is a proto-phenomenological project in Plato's early dialogues such as the *Apology*, *Euthyphro*, *Laches*, and *Meno*. Kirkland shows that far from seeking to establish an objective truth, these dialogues engage in an uncovering of virtue that is already present in the world. He also explains that in the middle period dialogues like the *Phaedo* the apparent concern to establish a theory of *idea/eidos* is in fact an attempt to establish phenomenal being rather than objective reality. He explains, "Striking should be the fact that, according to Plato's middle-period ontology as it is traditionally understood, what is most of all, the *idea/eidos*, belongs emphatically to the movement of coming into appearance, to *phenomenality*."¹ If we were to search, then, for evidence of the Socratic philosophizing from the early dialogues in the middle ones like the *Phaedo*, then, Kirkland suggests, we would seek for evidence of a "Socratic ontology of excess and distance."² As we look to the end of the *Phaedo* then, it is the look of excess and distance that we hope to see.

The previous chapter described a Greek sacrificial ritual in detail. With this task accomplished, then, it is now time to turn to the death scene in the *Phaedo* in order to see in what way it has the look of Greek sacrificial ritual. It is my contention that the entire *mise-en-scène* of the death scene of the *Phaedo* has such a look.³ I intentionally use the term "look" here for the following three reasons.

First, the suggestion of "the look of a sacrificial ritual" conveys the notion of excess and remainder. To say that the death of Socrates has the look of a sacrificial ritual means that it looks like one and something other than one. Although it is true that a fitting relationship between gods and human beings is established through sacrificial ritual, there is also more to the death of Socrates than a mere *mimesis* of a Greek sacrificial ritual. The *mimesis* exceeds any attempt to close this fitting relationship into an economy. As Nancy points out, the *Phaedo* requires "the gestures of this mimetic rupture."⁴ Against the background of the ancient sacrifice we see the embodied Socrates pull away from it as he brings the cup to his lips "without the least tremor" (117b). With this mixture of sameness and difference the fitting image, the εἰκών, of the phenomenal being of the philosopher is disclosed.

Second, the term "look" offers a way of attending to the unfolding drama of the death scene as a *mise-en-scène*. The possibility of understanding the death scene as sacrificial ritual is inspired by Douglas J. Stewart's "Socrates' Last Bath." Stewart writes, "Indeed the whole *mise-en-scène* of the *Phaedo* is a *teletē*, a ritual of initiation and purification practiced by the people history has come to

call Orphics.”⁵ Although Stewart focused on Orphism, I focus on sacrificial ritual, but I borrow from him his use of the term *mise-en-scène*. The term appears in film criticism and draws attention to how phenomenal beings disclose themselves before the camera. Manifest beings include not merely people or objects but also light, shadows, gestures, and movements. Thus, the look of the death scene has a certain visual arrangement when held in the imagination that reveals a sacrifice. Because it is offered in written form, it must unfold diachronically—as a sequence of events—but it can also appear synchronically in an instant—a singular look.

Third, the language of looking and seeing connects with several other references in the *Phaedo*. For example, the very beginning of the dialogue begins with a reference to *theorein*—to seeing. Andrea Nightingale explores the importance of this term in relationship to Plato’s philosophy.⁶ Her comments about the *Phaedo* support the insight that the “embassy” (*theoreos*) that had gone to Delos were in fact there to behold a religious ritual such as sacrifice. These *theoreoi* went to Delos, in other words, to see, to bear witness. Bearing of witness, of what one has seen as an eyewitness, is further played out in the very first line. “You yourself, Phaedo?” is the question put by Echecrates. “Did you witness the death of Socrates yourself or did you hear about it from another?” (57a). Phaedo replies that he is indeed an eyewitness to the event, saying to Echecrates “I myself.” Additionally, there are other looks that occur in the dialogue. We hear how Socrates “looks” at the man who brings him the *pharmakon* and how he looks at Crito. Thus, to catch the look of a sacrifice means more than mere vision. It also means to take responsibility for receiving it as a gift that exceeds an economy and provides, as we shall see, proper perspective on it.

In proceeding with my description, I will offer a reading of the death scene that attends to the translation of specific Greek terms and that parallels between the dramatic movements of the scene and a sacrificial ritual. I begin by describing eight such parallels that convey the look of sacrifice: 1. the bath, 2. the appearance of Socrates’s body, 3. the procession of the best, 4. the “bull’s look” with which Socrates regards the servant of the Eleven, 5. Socrates’s proposal to offer a libation and his own prayers to the gods, 6. the sonic ambiance of the death scene, 7. Socrates’s final instruction to Crito to offer a cock to Asclepius, and 8. the examination of Socrates’s corpse.

These parallels reveal eight ways in which the death scene of the *Phaedo* provides a *mimesis* of a Greek sacrificial ritual. After examining them, I will turn to the significance of the temporal setting, “the dramatic timing,” as it were, of

the *Phaedo*.

The first parallel I examine is the moment at 115a when Socrates announces his intention *to go to the bath*. The bath, placed as it is just before he drinks the *pharmakon* and goes to his death, resembles the part of the sacrificial ritual in which the animal is doused with water. As we saw in [chapter 1](#), animals were frequently lustrated in sacrificial rituals. During the preparations for a sacrifice, water was poured over the animal, not exclusively for the purposes of purification but so as to induce it to tremble before the god. Socrates does not tremble—a fact that the dialogue makes clear (117b), but this action of lustration through the bath, coming as it does at the beginning of the death scene, enacts a parallel. Socrates breaks off a speech of encouragement that he is giving to Simmias and Cebes to pursue philosophy in order to initiate the action that will lead to his death saying, “‘But my Destiny calls anon’ as a man in a tragedy might declaim, and the hour for me to turn to the bath is nearly come” (115a).⁷ In what follows, I will provide a brief examination of three terms—καλεῖ (calls), τραπεῖσθαι (to turn toward), and πράγματα (disgraceful business) that appear in this passage that will support this interpretation.

Socrates’s use of the term καλεῖ (calls) makes it clear that in going to the bath he is obeying the calling of the gods rather than human beings. καλεῖ of course is from καλέω, meaning “to call” or “to summon.” It is also frequently used to invoke the gods, as it seems to be here.⁸ In his statement, Socrates refers to Greek tragedy by saying that his turn to the bath is in response to the call of his destiny (τύχη). As we have seen, when Agamemnon goes to the bath in Aeschylus’s play by that name, he acquiesces to the demands of Clytemnestra, his wife, who insists that he go inside the palace so she can kill him. It is Cassandra, the prophetess, who mentions the bath as she predicts how Clytemnestra will kill Agamemnon. “So cruel then, that you can do this thing? The husband of your own bed to bathe bright with water—how shall I speak the end?”⁹ This and other details, as we saw in the first chapter, offer a look of sacrificial ritual.¹⁰

This parallel with tragedy and its perverted sacrifice has an interesting parallel to *Odyssey* 3. In [chapter 2](#), I mentioned Nestor’s sacrifice in honor of Athena on the occasion of the arrival of Telemachus in Pylos as an important literary source for sacrifice. Immediately after the depiction of the sacrifice, the poet mentions a bath.

During the ritual lovely Polycaste, youngest daughter of Nestor,
Neleus’ son, had bathed Telemachus. Rinsing him off now, rubbing

him down with oil, she drew a shirt and handsome cape around him. Out of his bath he stepped, glistening like a god, strode in and sat by the old commander Nestor. (3.521–526) Are we to imagine, then, that Socrates going to the bath appears more like Agamemnon, a butchered animal, or Telemachus, glistening like a god? This is yet to be determined. In [chapter 4](#) I will examine in greater detail the relationship between sacrifice in Aeschylus's *Agamemnon* and in Platonic dialogue, the *Phaedo* in particular. At this juncture, I simply note the parallel between Socrates's statement here and the *Agamemnon*. Moreover, Socrates differs from a tragic figure insofar as the call to the sacrifice to which *he* responds comes from the gods—from destiny and not from human beings as Agamemnon's does. That is, Socrates is aware that he is going to be sacrificed and even gives his consent while Agamemnon does not.

Another term from this passage that calls to mind sacrifice is *τραπέσθαι*. This term is usually translated as “to turn to something.”¹¹ It is also used in reference to turning to one's work (*ergon*). The implicit invocation of *ergon* here is a relevant parallel because sacrifice is frequently referred to as an *ergon*, a work as in “the work of sacrifice.” The bath, then, appears as part of the work of sacrifice, a beginning stage in the preparations. My emphasis on the connection of the bath with sacrificial ritual receives support from other scholarly work as well. In a discussion of the role of the bath in the *Phaedo*, Stewart sees the bath as part of a ritual of initiation and purification that would have been practiced by the Orphics. I agree with Stewart's claim that there are many Orphic, as well as Pythagorean, references to purification in the *Phaedo*. On balance, however, the death scene has as many parallels with the common animal sacrificial practices of *polis* religion as it does with mystery cults. Mikalson, who shows that Plato's use of religious imagery draws from both mystery cults and the religion of the *polis*, takes the most convincing position on this matter.¹²

Finally, the reason that Socrates gives for taking the bath before drinking the *pharmakon*, as he says, is because it is better “not to give the women the trouble of bathing a corpse” (115a).¹³ A customary Greek burial ritual included several stages, the first of which was the *prothesis* or the “laying out” of the corpse. In this stage, “women would wash the body, anoint it, dress it by wrapping it in cloth, and lay it on a bier for the family to perform the traditional lament and pay last respects.”¹⁴ The Greeks had a general concern with pollution, but it is not clear that Socrates's statement here refers to it. The term

translated here as “trouble” is πράγματα. Although it can mean “a disgraceful business” and can have a connection with one’s “fortune” or “fate,” no indication of ritual contamination seems present here.¹⁵ Although some scholars argue that the Greeks did not, in general, understand the concept of contamination, they may, nevertheless, have been concerned with hauntings and other disturbances from ghosts that would have made the preparation of the corpse a “troublesome business.”¹⁶ Socrates may also have simply wanted to avoid giving the women the difficult task of bathing a heavy, lifeless corpse.

It is noteworthy that in her discussion of the way in which he dies, Emily Wilson claims that Socrates shows nothing worthy of emulation.¹⁷ Yet, here Socrates displays a concerned attitude toward the women who would have to do the work of bathing his dead body. Most significant, however, in avoiding giving the women “the trouble of bathing a corpse,” Socrates highlights the freedom with which he goes to the bath. His action thereby displays the attitude of freedom with which he, *qua* sacrificial animal, will go to the sacrifice. This differs from that of a man in a tragedy, such as Agamemnon who goes under duress.

Another noteworthy parallel concerning the bath of Socrates is the *Odyssey* 23. There, Odysseus emerges from his bath and is met by the surprised Penelope, who questions him in order to establish his identity. She, too, bursts into tears brought on by the joy of finding Odysseus alive. Of course other parallels of sacrificial victims in Greek tragedy are to Iphigenia and Alcestis, and I will discuss those parallels later in this chapter. Thus, we see in this passage how Socrates’s death has similarities to ancient sacrificial customs and literary antecedents.

This consideration of the bath brings our attention to the second parallel with Greek sacrificial ritual—the *appearance of Socrates’s body*. The body of Socrates appears throughout the dialogue without blemish. Except for the anticipated pain that comes from wearing heavy bonds (60b), no blemish or ailment of his body is ever mentioned, a rather surprising fact for one who is already seventy years of age. This detail about Socrates’s body is not in itself remarkable, but when taken within the context of the Platonic corpus an interesting perspective emerges. For example, when the appearance of Socrates’s body is referred to at the *Theaetetus* 143e and the *Symposium* 215a–c, 216c–d, 221e it is described as disproportionate, even ugly. One would think that here at the moment of death Socrates’s body would appear most ugly and unseemly. Yet, throughout the *Phaedo* his physical appearance is as well suited and as fitting as the most highly prized and worthy sacrificial animal. This appearance

is further emphasized by the mention of his wife and progeny. A man of his age with a wife young enough to bear a young son (see 60a, παῖδιον is the diminutive of παῖς) might well cause him to appear to the Greek sensibility as a very vital, vigorous, and well-proportioned man indeed! This connection between the practice of philosophy and vitality was apparently lost on Callicles. In the *Gorgias*, Callicles tells Socrates that philosophy is “a pleasant pastime, if one engages in it with moderation, at the right time of life; but if one pursues it further than one should it will bring ruin however naturally gifted a person may be, if he studies philosophy beyond a suitable age he will not have acquired the necessary experience to be thought a gentlemen and a person worthy of respect” (484c).¹⁸ Callicles indicates that philosophy makes a person unaware and ill-equipped with the things that would make for having “a good figure (εὐδόκιμον) in the world” (484d). The translation here leads to an understanding of proportion. According to Callicles then, philosophy causes a person to be out of proportion. Heard at the moment of Socrates’s death, Callicles’s speech seems perversely prophetic. Yet, by contrast Socrates appears as a fitting εἰκὼν, as noble and well proportioned.

David Krell draws attention to the significance of the appearance of Socrates’s body. “We can scarcely appreciate the profound anomaly presented in Socrates’s body in the light of Greek—and also Socratic—ideas on beauty.”¹⁹ Rather than settling for a merely ironic interpretation of his appearance, Krell connects the look of Socrates’s body to the *Symposium* which, as he says ... testifies that Socrates was much more at home in his body than the Platonic tradition would have it. Rather than escaping from his body *de bonne heure*, perhaps Socrates, by force of his mind’s dedication to wisdom, has appropriated and affirmed his embodied existence. Rather than splitting into two unfriendly Orphic opposites, perhaps Socrates has become more one. Perhaps his body is the image of integration: let the inner and outer man be at one, let the practice of philosophy bestow inner and outer rewards ... Might the major reward for the practice of philosophy be a more fully embodied humanity rather than the elusive, free-floating *Geist* tradition has assumed it to be?

Krell also draws attention to the “descensional movements” in the dialogues that suggest that “Plato’s Socrates always takes his body with him.”²⁰

A third parallel concerns what appears to be a *sacrificial procession of the best enacted in the death scene*. In [chapter 2](#) we explained that a Greek sacrificial ritual was an occasion for a gathering together of the best that human beings had to offer to the gods—the finest of animals, grains, ribbons, and

garlands. In addition, the “first fruits” of the sacrificial animals were offered to the gods. The gods might discover when something better had been withheld from them and would accept only what they knew to be the absolute best. By this sacrificial logic, the testimony of the one who, for convenience of identification I have referred to as the “*pharmakodōtes*,” takes on a special significance. “But as for you, during this time, I’ve come to recognize you as the noblest and gentlest and best man among those who’ve ever arrived here ...” (116c). His recognition of Socrates as best of men may simply be heard as a friendly appellation. Heard otherwise, from the perspective of sacrifice, it resonates as an affidavit to the gods that Socrates is the best that the city has to offer to them, the wisest as we learn from Chairephon’s journey to Delphi (*Apology*, 21a).

Also, in [chapter 2](#), I described how the ritual procession (the *pompē*) proceeded to the place of sacrifice. There, we saw how the procession was led by a blameless maiden bearing on her head the basket in which the sacrificial knife is concealed. When Socrates has at last persuaded Crito that the time to drink the *pharmakon* has arrived, Crito sends the boy (παῖς) to fetch it (117a). That it is a boy, and not a girl, is not a problem for this comparison, as long as it is a youth. In the *Odyssey* a boy bears the basket that contains the knife for Nestor’s sacrifice (3:502–520). Many interpreters of the *Phaedo* emphasize the dialogue’s connection with the legend of Theseus and the Minotaur, suggesting that it provides an underlying *mythos* of the dialogue. Jacob Klein, for example, develops the dialogue’s connection to the story in his interpretation of the *Phaedo*.²¹ Following this, we see that in the *Phaedo* itself, male figures are frequently substituted for female ones. It follows from this that if there were a strict correspondence between the underlying *mythos* of Theseus and the Minotaur and the dramatic movements of the *Phaedo* then the list of those who were present at Socrates’s death should have also included women (59b–c). Instead, the women are sent away, and the men are the only ones who remain at the death scene. In addition, Burger’s suggestion that Phaedo acts as Ariadne by lending the thread of the *logos* supports this.²² At 117a, then, we see the boy return at the head of a procession, as it were, “bringing the one who is to give the potion, which he carried, already concocted in a cup” (117a).²³ We might note, too, that just as the sacrificial knife was concealed within the basket, we see here the *pharmakon* “already concocted,” concealed, as it were, within the cup.

The fourth parallel concerns “*that bull’s look*” with which Socrates regards the one who is to give him the *pharmakon*. At 117b, another strong resemblance between Socrates and a sacrificial animal is enacted as Socrates

takes the *pharmakon* from the hands of the *pharmakodōtes*. Phaedo describes how Socrates looked up (ὕποβλέψας) from under his brows at the *pharmakodōtes* “with that bull’s look that was so usual with him.”²⁴ As we saw earlier, the bull (ταῦρος) was among the most prized sacrificial animals, and it was a bull that, in some reports, King Minos refused to give away in sacrifice to the god. Ritual sacrifice appears to be invoked at this moment. Ronna Burger interprets the bull-like look as follows: “Socrates suddenly turns into an image of the Minotaur, the mythical monster symbolizing the fear of death.”²⁵ Burger does well to indicate that this detail is connected to death because the Minotaur symbolizes it; yet, it calls one to wonder if the reference to Socrates as having the look of a bull is only about death. As we shall see, the parallel with sacrifice makes room for a richer interpretation of the symbol.

Quite strikingly, in the *Agamemnon* Cassandra envisions Agamemnon as a sacrificial bull (1125), and the chorus of Argive elders refers to Iphigenia a heifer, not yet put to the bull (1415–18). This parallel with a sacrificial animal is even in play from the very beginning of the *Phaedo*. At 59e we learn from Phaedo, as he tells Echecrates, that when he and the other companions were allowed to enter the prison they encountered Socrates being freed from his bonds. Phaedo quotes the doorkeeper: “For the Eleven,” he said, “... are releasing Socrates from his bonds and giving the word that he is to meet his end on this day.” Phaedo continues, describing how upon entering they “... caught Socrates just freed from his bonds” (60a). One might wonder why Socrates would have needed to be freed from his bonds at all. His friends’ frequent visits would have already afforded him many opportunities to escape, and because he did not escape, the doorkeeper would have likely grown to trust him. Moreover, we are told that Socrates has affected the emotions of the *pharmakodōtes* so well that he bursts into tears just before he gives him the *pharmakon* (116d). If Socrates had affected him so sympathetically it is possible that he would have had a similar effect on the doorkeeper, especially since the doorkeeper also seemed to have frequent contact with Socrates and his companions. After all, we learn from Phaedo at 59e that this doorkeeper was the same person as the one “who usually answered” (ὅσπερ εἰώθει ὑπακούειν). Given the likelihood of a strong emotional bond between them, it is improbable that he would have kept Socrates in uncomfortable bonds when it was not required and when he had the power to remove them. Socrates’s action of rubbing his leg with his hand after the bonds have been removed is evidence that they were uncomfortable. The experience gives rise to Socrates’s first reflections of the dialogue about the strangeness of the proximity and connection of pain and pleasure (see 60b).

Although it is not decisive, a parallel of sacrifice may be found in the release of Socrates from his bonds.

As I noted in [chapter 2](#), before an animal was sacrificed he was seen as *aphetos*, that is, “at large.” As part of the procession and preparations for the sacrifice the animal was seen to roam freely within the temple enclosure. It is remarkable, therefore, that the very first appearance of Socrates’s body in the *Phaedo* enacts a parallel with a sacrificial animal. He appears as maintained within the enclosure of the prison yet free to wander about, free to stretch, to move, and to attend to a living body reflecting the living *logos*, which he would enact on that last day.

With this detail explored, I return to *Phaedo*’s description of the “bull’s look” with which Socrates regards the *pharmakodōtes*. Ogden points to the significance of the direction of Odysseus’s gaze at the moment of sacrifice in the *Odyssey* 11.

As Odysseus’s sheep are jugulated, their heads are forced down toward the underworld (in Olympian sacrifice, a victim’s head would be held upward toward heaven), while Odysseus holds his gaze back toward the river of Ocean. Clearly at the moment of sacrifice the gaze creates a devotional bond with its object, so that Odysseus must look back to the land of the living if he wishes to return to it.²⁶

Just like a sacrificial animal in an Olympian sacrifice, Socrates looks up, perhaps demonstrating a devotional bond to the gods. Yet, it is also possible that his bond was with the *pharmakodōtes*. The effect of the look, then, is to scramble our assumptions about sacrifice. Who is it that truly takes the *pharmakon*? Is it Socrates who takes it or is it the man who gives it? Who is sacrificing whom? Looking on from the wings of the stage, as it were, we are unable to discern a precise meaning of this look, but it does reveal to us another subtle way in which the deed of Socrates is pulling away from a standard sacrificial ritual. One wonders, then, what the bond might be between Socrates and the *pharmakodōtes* as Socrates looks up at him and suggests offering a libation.

This issue is developed further in the fifth parallel to a sacrificial ritual—*Socrates’s proposal to offer a libation and his own prayers to the gods*. Before drinking the *pharmakon*, Socrates suggests, “What do you say to pouring somebody a libation from this drink? Is it allowed, or not?” (117b). Glenn Most contends that this statement is a kind of joke that serves “to break the tension and heighten the dramatic Pathos,”²⁷ yet, Socrates’s gesture also enacts a parallel

with sacrificial ritual. As we saw in [chapter 2](#), sacrifices frequently began when libations were poured to the gods and offered to spirits, as vase paintings of the time depict. In the *Odyssey*, Odysseus pours libations of milk, honey, mellow wine, and water to the dead (11.29–31). Socrates is thus shown here offering to make a libation, yet we also hear from the *pharmakodōtes* that such a gesture is not possible because “we concoct only so much as we think is the right dose to drink” (τρίβομεν ὅσον οἰόμεθα μέτριον εἶναι πειν) (117b). The Greek term translated as “right dose” is μέτριον. Although the term can mean a “moderate” dose it also has the meaning of “proportionate” or “fitting.” Thus, there is a sense at play in the words that giving a libation of the *pharmakon* to the gods would not be fitting. Such a notion will be explored in [chapter 4](#).

The words of the *pharmakodōtes* may allow us to see that the gods do not need this libation or that to give it to them would be out of proportion. Thus, because of the enforced economy and surrounding propriety of the *pharmakon*, the gesture is not fulfilled. Nevertheless, Socrates does make his prayer to the gods—something he supposes he is “allowed to do” and “indeed should” (ἔξεστί τε καὶ χρή). “‘I understand,’ said he, ‘but I suppose I am allowed to, and indeed should, pray to the gods that my emigration from here to There may turn out to be a fortunate one. That’s just what I’m praying for—and may it be so!’ ” (117c). The word translated as “allowed” is ἔξεστί, which has the sense of “religious lawfulness,” as Socrates is using his prayer to supplicate the gods for a fortunate passage. Libations also functioned in sacrificial ritual as a way of ending any hostilities that might remain. That Socrates makes this request concerning the libation to the *pharmakodōtes*, the man who has earlier expressed a concern that Socrates will be angry (116c), further strengthens the sacrificial parallel. After the offering of a prayer, then, Socrates drinks: “And with these words he put the cup to his lips and downed it with great readiness and relish” (καὶ ἅμ’ εἰπὼν ταῦτα ἐπισχόμενος καὶ μάλα εὐχερῶς καὶ εὐκόλως ἐξέπειν) (117c). As a worthy and proportionate sacrificial animal, then, Socrates goes to his own death only after an offering has been made to the gods. This gesture further indicates the subtle pulling away from the similarity to a sacrificial ritual. The careful mixing of difference in similarity begins to allow an εἰκὼν of the death of the philosopher to come into view.

Thus far, I have developed five parallels to a sacrificial ritual: 1) the bath, 2) the appearance of Socrates’s body, 3) the procession of the best, 4) the “bull’s look” with which Socrates regards the servant of the Eleven, and 5) Socrates’s proposal to offer a libation and his own prayers to the gods. Three other parallels are also important: 6) the sonic ambiance of the death scene, 7) Socrates’s final instruction to Crito to offer a cock to Asclepius, and 8) the examination of

Socrates's corpse.

A sixth parallel is between the *sonic ambiance of the death scene* and common Greek sacrificial rituals. As we saw in [chapter 2](#), these were accompanied by music, festivity, and even screaming. At 60a Socrates sends away Xanthippe, his wife, when she cries out. Socrates does something similar at 117d when the males who were present, especially Apollodorus, begin to weep loudly. Phaedo reports, "But Apollodorus, who hadn't stopped weeping even during the whole time before, at that moment really let loose with such a storm of wailing and fussing that there wasn't a single one of those present whom he didn't break up—except of course, Socrates himself." Socrates takes this occasion to chastise them saying, "What are you doing, you wonders! Surely this wasn't the least of my reasons for sending the women away—so they wouldn't strike such false notes! For I've heard too that one should meet one's end in propitious silence. So be still and control yourselves!"

Emily Wilson takes issue with Socrates's negative response to what are obviously natural expressions of grief and connects it to two further issues—his apparent lack of concern for his family and his apparent misogyny. "When Socrates chose to risk death by the practice of his philosophy, and when he chose to submit to the death sentence, he was condemning his wife and young children to a life of poverty and social humiliation. From this perspective, his willingness to die starts to seem not brave but irresponsible."²⁸ Because we do not know the specific details of the financial arrangements that may have obtained in this case, we can only speculate on the plausibility of Wilson's censure.

Based on the text, it seems more plausible that Crito would be the one to take responsibility for their care (115b). Interestingly, Wilson's concern echoes Crito's own uneasiness when he counsels Socrates as follows: In addition to these things, you seem to me at least to be betraying your own sons, too, whom you will leave and abandon, although it is possible for you to nurture and educate them. As far as it lies in you, they will do whatever they happen to do by chance, and chance will bring them, as is likely, just the sorts of things that usually happen to orphans. (45c–d)²⁹

Wilson, however, extends her critique of Socrates's decision to send his family and close friends away to a more general indictment of him as someone who is lacking in genuine feeling suggesting that this disqualifies him as an admirable moral figure. Such an apparent lack, she contends, is troubling. "I wonder whether it is really admirable to die so calmly, so painlessly and, above all, so talkatively."³⁰ Referring to his decision to send away the mourners,

Wilson concludes by charging Socrates with a further moral failure. “In the *Phaedo*, Socrates denies the value of such work [the work of mourning]. He robs the survivors of their desire for funeral rites.”³¹

Scholars have sometimes connected this concern to the issue of an apparently impoverished role played by the emotions, in contrast to the intellect, in Socrates’s account of the soul in the *Phaedo*. For example, in *The Fragility of Goodness*, Martha Nussbaum argues that although Greek tragedy calls forth all aspects of the human person including emotions, sensory perceptions, and feelings, Plato’s vision “explicitly argues that ethical learning must proceed by separating the intellect from other merely human parts.”³² Thus Nussbaum, employs her interpretation of the death scene as a basis for a larger criticism that there is an impoverished role played by the emotions in the *Phaedo*. Socrates does not appear to be capable of the range of feelings that would allow for a proper attitude toward death because his concern is only a cognitive ascent to the so-called forms.

Other evidence in the dialogue, however, suggests that Socrates was at least tolerant of, although by no means encouraging of, expressions of grief. For example, at 116d the *pharmakodōtes* begins crying, and Socrates does not chastise him: “And bursting into tears as he turned around, he began to walk away.” In addition, *Phaedo* reports, that he himself began crying, as did Crito (117d). It is interesting that *Phaedo* reports that he walked away. If he had actually gone far then he could not have heard Socrates call for silence because he was absent from the scene. This might have an interesting parallel with Plato’s absence as well. It would indicate that we have a dialogue written by Plato that is told by *Phaedo*. At the end of the dialogue, there is a scene that *Phaedo* reports but could not have witnessed due to his own absence! Socrates’s approach to expressions of grief, then, seems to be more proportionate than scholars like Nussbaum and Wilson claim. Moreover, examining the context of execution and sacrifice in which the drama of the death scene unfolds helps to better evaluate these claims. Socrates himself does not cry out as an animal might; instead, he maintains a fitting stance and appropriate composure.

At 117e, Socrates explains that “hearsay” (ἀκήκοα) was his reason for attempting to moderate outward expressions of grief. We might recall that he said, “Surely this wasn’t the least of my reasons for sending the women away—so they wouldn’t strike such false notes! For I’ve heard (ἀκήκοα) too that one should meet one’s end in propitious silence.” What was the source of this hearsay? The first possibility is that it is part of the culture of execution. We shall examine this more fully in [chapter 4](#). Danielle Allen points out that

Athenians generally took their punishment in silence because breaking silence was a tacit admission that one was not worthy of citizenship. This was unique in the ancient world. “If a punished wrongdoer were to break the silence about his body, he would simultaneously be admitting to his own failure to be worthy of citizenship.”³³ There was an implicit exchange involved here, an economy of silence even: “The citizen who was punished according to the terms of peace received protection for his body but only, to some degree, in return for his silent acquiescence in his punishment.”³⁴ In exchange for his silence, the condemned might be allowed to have his family bury him, for example. It is possible that Socrates is simply trying to maintain his own composure out of a desire to be thought worthy of citizenship and to earn good will of the state.

A parallel with sacrificial ritual provides a second possible source of the hearsay. The translation of the term *propitious silence* at 117e is ἐν εὐφημίᾳ. It might seem that this call for silence would indicate dissimilarity with sacrificial ritual, which was normally a raucous and noisy affair, yet as we saw in [chapter 1](#), in other dialogues like the *Laws* Plato insists on reverence in the city. There he directly refers to and praises the practice of sacrificial ritual, and so it is likely that Socrates is calling for a similar reverence here. The term ἐν εὐφημίᾳ actually means “solemn silence in religious rites,” indicating a connection with sacrificial ritual.³⁵ Seen against the background of a sacrificial ritual, then, Socrates’s concern to maintain silence and his apparent suppressions of the grief of others can actually be seen as a desire to maintain a solemn, reverent, and proportionate ambiance, a setting that would have been most appropriate and fitting for a sacrifice.

The seventh parallel concerns *Socrates’s final instruction to Crito to offer a cock to Asclepius*. At 118, Socrates utters his well-known last words: “Crito, we owe a cock to Asclepius. So pay the debt and don’t be careless.” Asclepius was the son of the god Apollo and a mortal woman named Coronis. He was associated with healing from illness or injury and was even reputed to have raised people from the dead. Asclepius is mentioned at the *Republic* 406b–408c as well, and there Socrates discusses the medical art of Asclepius at length (408c).³⁶ Nancy examines a number of possible interpretations of this passage [from the *Phaedo*] and concludes, “Interpretation here is doomed—by the text itself—to a significant ambiguity. ...”³⁷ Yet, he concludes that by means of the gesture, Socrates is performing a *mimesis* of the “old sacrifice.”

In an insightful treatment of the passage, classicist Glenn Most made some interesting suggestions. He points out that it is very difficult to know with any certainty what Socrates himself might have meant by his gesture to Asclepius. It

is unlikely that the offering is because Socrates has been healed from life, from death, or from the distress of a life of embodiment, an interpretation offered by Nietzsche, as we will see in [chapter 6](#). Most points out that this would imply that Socrates is grateful to Asclepius for his death. Because Socrates is not yet dead, however, such an offering would be truly impious.³⁸ Because offerings to Asclepius were usually in gratitude for life being restored, not for death, it is more likely that the offering was in gratitude for the healing of someone whose health was important to the group of companions gathered there in the prison. As I have pointed out in [chapter 1](#), in the *Phaedo* we learn that Plato was not present due to illness (59b). From this, and other evidence, Most concludes that Socrates's offering to Asclepius is for the healing of Plato and might even be a dramatic gesture that would have served to establish Plato as Socrates's philosophical heir, assuring his followers that Socrates does not die without one.³⁹

Concerning sacrificial parallels, we can simply notice that Socrates was offering a standard sacrifice of poultry to a well-known god. Most's analysis supports this by pointing out that Socrates's final offering bookends the offering that began the dialogue—the Athenians' fulfillment of their vow to Apollo to send an embassy (θεωρίας) to Delos.⁴⁰

The issue of the status of Asclepius in the Athenian pantheon is also worth noting. Nickolas Pappas points out that just as Plato frames the opening of the *Republic* around the worship of a newly introduced goddess—Bendis—so too the mention of Asclepius at *Phaedo* 118a serves to remind Plato's audience of the sad irony that even though Socrates is accused of introducing new gods, “the city had introduced its share of new deities” as well.⁴¹ Thus I suggest that Socrates appears as an ordinary Athenian observing a standard ritual practice. His concern for the sacrifice to Asclepius might even express a desire to provide for a further meeting or gathering of his companions in order that they might properly sacrifice to the gods, a practice that was observed in Plato's Academy itself. In the last chapter we will treat this final gesture in greater detail.

An eighth parallel connects sacrificial ritual with *the examination of Socrates's corpse* at 117e–118. We saw in [chapter 2](#) that part of the role of the *mageiros* was to “lay out” the animal after it had been sacrificed. At 117e, Socrates walks around and then, in response to the instructions of the *pharmakodōtes*, he lies down. Thus, just as a *mageiros* would lay out the corpse, Socrates here does so in response to the directions of the man in charge. *Phaedo* reports that the *pharmakodōtes* then ... laid hold of [Socrates's body] and, after letting some time elapse, began examining (ἐπεσκόπει) his feet and legs, and

then gave his foot a hard pinch and asked him if he sensed it—he said ‘no’—and again, after that, his thighs. And going upward in this way, he showed us (ἡμῖν ἔπεδείκνυτο) that he was growing cold and stiff. And he himself (αὐτὸς) touched him and said that when it came to his heart, at that point he’d be gone. (117e) Here, the *pharmakodōtes*, like a *mageiros*, enacts an inspection of the sacrificed body of Socrates. Thus, the careful scrutiny of the sacrificial animal’s body is paralleled here. He looks at and examines the body of Socrates as a *mageiros* might examine an animal’s entrails in determining the propriety of, the proportionality of, a sacrificial ritual. The text also uses the term σκοπεύω, a term used for “inspecting entrails” and that emphasizes attention to particulars rather than universals.⁴² Moreover, the *pharmakodōtes* takes special care to “show” or to “display” the propriety or fittingness of the sacrifice. This is evident when Phaedo reports that he “showed us that he was growing cold and stiff.”⁴³ The term translated here as “show” is ἔπεδείκνυτο, which is closely related to ἀπόδειξις, meaning “to show,” “to point out,” or “to display,” a demonstration that makes use of the senses.⁴⁴ This term is also used in *Phaedo* 73a–77a that treats the doctrine of ἀναμνησίς (recollection). As in that passage, a demonstration requires the utilization of the senses. Said otherwise, then, we know that the sacrifice has been performed according to the proper proportions by means of what is shown to and observed by the senses.

A key passage in the Platonic corpus that reflects on the art of butchery is *Phaedrus* 265e. There, Socrates draws a comparison between the art of rhetoric and of butchery. He praises the method that divides things “according to its natural joints.”⁴⁵ Butchery is an art (*technē*) of dividing parts. Sissa and Detienne point out when a *mageiros* divided the meat at a sacrifice he could follow two different methods of division. The first was one based on the natural joints of the animal and required more skill and care. This method was used at a sacrifice when the political rights and status of each individual was being respected. Better parts went to people with higher status. The use of this method revealed “the structures of the social body.”⁴⁶ The second was to give the meat out in equal portions to the remaining participants. It was a method that did not require much skill and treated the sacrifice as a homogeneous whole. The first method was more in line with what follows from the aristocratic structure of the Homeric poems such that “the equality is more geometrical than arithmetical: the most prized pieces, the thighs and the filets, were first set aside for the gods or for the most important figures present as guests or officiating at the sacrifice.”⁴⁷

As we shall see in the next chapter, questions of fitting relationships are

important for reading the *Phaedo*. We can see at this point, however, that Plato was aware of differing methods in the art of butchery and that he was willing to apply it to rhetoric. The art of butchery is also used as a reference in the *Statesman* in the discussion of *diairesis*. In the search for an appropriate method for dividing off the statesman from its rivals, the Visitor from Elea and Young Socrates agree that “if we can’t divide them [the statesman and its rivals], then let’s treat them like a sacrificial carcass and carve them at their joints, because we have to produce as few subsections as possible, whatever we’re dividing” (287c).⁴⁸ Their attempt to divide “at the joints” (διαίρωμεθα) refers to a natural, elegant, and fitting way of proceeding.

A similar gesture is made when Crito covers and uncovers the head of Socrates. Crito himself makes a gesture that reveals that the ritual has been properly followed, bringing the sacrifice to a fitting close. After the *pharmakodōtes* observed that Socrates had nothing more to say, he “uncovered him, and he’d composed his countenance; and when Crito saw this, he closed his mouth and his eyes” (118). Even here the term translated as “composed” implies a fitting relationship since ἵστημι, the word from which it is derived, connotes placing men in an array.⁴⁹

We know from an earlier passage that Crito is the one who is ultimately charged with the care of Socrates’s corpse. Socrates had told him not to worry about how he will dispose of his corpse. Crito asked, “But in what way shall we bury you?” “However you want to, he [Socrates] said, “if, that is, you catch me and I don’t get away from you” (115c). According to Allen, refusal of burial to a criminal was a common punishment. “There were thus three options for the disposal of the body: it could be given back to the family for burial; it could be expelled without memorialization; or the disappearance of the body of the condemned could itself be memorialized.”⁵⁰ Nevertheless, we hear nothing definite about how Socrates’s body will be buried, and so no effort is made to fix a place to memorialize him in the *Phaedo*.⁵¹ A ritual sacrifice involved the total offering and consumption of the sacrificial animal, yet in the case of Socrates there is much that remains. Our last look at him is through the eyes of his friend Crito, who sees that “he had closed his mouth and his eyes” (118). Crito sees (ἰδὼν) Socrates composed and at his best. This look reveals a key similarity with Greek sacrificial ritual.

There is also a gesture toward memorialization in the final words (*logoi*) of the dialogue spoken by Phaedo. “This was the end, Echecrates, of our comrade, as it came to pass—a man, as we may say, who was among those of that time we’d come up against, the best and, yes, the most thoughtful and the most just”

(118). Andrea Nightingale characterizes the final words of the *Phaedo* as a short eulogy or encomium delivered by Phaedo.⁵² A Greek sacrificial ritual was an occasion for a gathering together of the best that human beings had to offer to the gods—the finest of animals, grains, ribbons, garlands. In addition, the “first fruits” of the sacrificial animals were offered to the gods. The gods might discover when something better had been withheld from them and would accept only what they knew was the best. By this sacrificial logic, Phaedo’s eulogy of Socrates connects back to the words of the *pharmakodōtes* that we discussed earlier. “But as for you [Socrates], during this time, I’ve come to recognize you as the noblest and gentlest and best man among those who’ve ever arrived here ...” (116c). His recognition of Socrates as best of men (καὶ ἄριστον ἄνδρα ὄντα) is more than a friendly appellation. It resonates as an affidavit to the gods, spoken by a trained sacrificial specialist, skilled at a geometrical art and an eye for what is fitting, that Socrates is the best that the city has to offer. The description of Socrates as “the best” provides an interesting connection to the myth of Theseus. Earlier I noted the role this plays in Jacob Klein’s interpretation of the *Phaedo*. One of Plutarch’s versions of this *mythos* claims that Minos refused to sacrifice his white bull to the gods even after they requested it. This bull was the best and finest of his herd. Thus, by identifying Socrates as “the best,” the *Phaedo* implicitly critiques the very *mythos* upon which it is founded and thereby corrects the *hubris* that led to the creation of the Minotaur.⁵³

Just as Socrates gathered together the beautiful locks of hair on the back of Phaedo’s neck (89b), we have now finished gathering together the various similarities of this comparison, allowing to emerge the ways in which the death scene of the *Phaedo* has the look of a Greek sacrificial ritual.⁵⁴ In this gathering, we have also treated three other moments that invoke the theme of sacrifice at the death scene: the sonic ambience, Socrates’s offering of the cock to Asclepius, and the proportionate arrangement of the dying body and corpse of Socrates. In addition, we have observed other similarities including the bath, the bull’s look of Socrates, the procession, and libations and prayers to the gods. It remains, now, to treat one further issue—the central significance of the temporal setting, “the dramatic timing,” as it were, of the dialogue. The temporal setting of the *Phaedo* creates the space of sacrifice.

The *Phaedo* creates a temporality of sacrifice that would have allowed it to fit with the sacrificial self-understanding of the polis. At the same time, Socrates’s own self-sacrifice disrupts the smooth operation of an economy of sacrifice, exceeding it in such a way as to present an εἰκὼν of the death of the

philosopher. As I have noted, at the start of the this dialogue, Phaedo reports to Echecrates that Socrates died so long after the trial because every year the Athenians send an embassy (θεωρίας) to the shrine of Apollo at Delos. This ship was sent the day before the trial took place but had yet to return. The reason for the custom is related to the underlying *mythos*—it is in thanksgiving to Apollo for the assistance that he gave to Theseus in slaying the Minotaur. The Athenians “made a vow to Apollo that if they were saved, an embassy (θεωρίας) would be dispatched to Delos every year” (58b). Phaedo prefaces his explanation by saying, “A bit of chance came to his aid, Echecrates. For by chance the prow of the vessel that the Athenians send to Delos was crowned on the day before the trial” (58a). At 61a, Socrates reports that while in prison he has made poems to Apollo, “the god whose sacrifice was at hand” (εἰς τὸν θεὸν ἐποίησα οὗ ἧν ἡ παροῦσα θυσία) (61b). As Bettany Hughes points out, “Because of the ritual delay, the Delian festivities, Socrates has a full month of life ahead of him. When he walks in through the guarded doors of the prison his purpose is to wait.”⁵⁵

There were several yearly festivals celebrated in Athens, many for Apollo, and all were occasions for offering sacrifice.

The enormous bulk of the acts of worship were sacrificial, offerings brought to ask divine favor or to show gratitude for it. The Athenian in the final decades of the fifth century would have participated in hundreds of sacrifices and anointments in the course of a year, many small and private, involving an ancestral deity or a guardian divinity, but some performed by the Athenian demos as a whole, for example the sacrifices conducted before the Sicilian expedition.⁵⁶

It should come as no surprise then that the festival mentioned by Socrates at 61b would be one of these. Of the likely candidates the most plausible one seems to be the *Thargelia*. This took place during the month of *Thargelion* (on the seventh day of the month) and was one of the most important of all the festivals. In addition, one of the days of the festival was believed to be Apollo’s birthday.

A key aspect of the *Thargelia* was that it carried out the ritual purification of Athens. As Robin Waterfield has pointed out, it was impossible to adequately deal with all sources of pollution (*miasma*) that might affect the city. The *Thargelia*, which happened once a year and lasted for two days, was a festival of purification to make up for all that might be lacking.⁵⁷ Erika Simon notes that the purification entailed the expulsion of two men called *pharmakoi* after they

had been fed at the city's expense. She writes, "With the expulsion of the *pharmakoi* from the town all evil was believed to be eliminated from the populace and from the ripening crops."⁵⁸ Purification was also important for the success of agriculture, the care and feeding of the city. Waterfield adds that because Apollo was the god of disease, the ritual probably started as an attempt to cure the city of disease.⁵⁹

Earlier I pointed out that the embassy that sailed to the shrine of Apollo at Delos was part of a festival known as Apollo Delius. This is the one that Phaedo refers to at 58b. It is likely, then, that the *Thargelia* and the festival of Apollo Delius were the same. Bremmer has provided more evidence to support this possibility.

Since the Thargelia was a festival for Apollo, we may expect that the god also shows a connection with seasonal renewal. Such a connection seems indeed to exist. In a hitherto neglected text, Athenaeus (10.424–425) informs us that the Thargelia in Athens was the festival of Apollo Delius. Although the epithet was most likely added after the Athenians concerned themselves with Delos in 425 BC (Thuc. 3.104), it seems reasonable to assume that they must have seen a connection between Apollo Delius and the Apollo of the Thargelia.⁶⁰

This evidence invokes another possibility suggested by Jacques Derrida. After noting that the exclusion of the *pharmakoi* happened every year in Athens up through the fifth century, Derrida writes, Aristophanes and Lysias clearly allude to it. Plato could not have been unaware of it. The date of the ceremony is noteworthy: the sixth day of the Thargelia. That was the day of the birth of him whose death—and not only because a *pharmakon* was its direct cause—resembles a *pharmakos* from the inside: Socrates.⁶¹

Derrida cites Laertius, who writes that "He [Socrates] was born on the sixth day of Thargelion, the day when the Athenians purify the city."⁶² This possibility suggests that Socrates was born on the same day that he also died. Moreover, Socrates himself drank the *pharmakon* on the same day on which the *pharmakoi* were traditionally expelled from the city. How much more, then, would his death resemble a *pharmakos*, as Derrida suggests?⁶³ Thus, there are elements in the *temporal setting* of the dialogue that identify Socrates explicitly with the fitting practice of Greek sacrificial ritual.

The cycle between the contraries of birth and death occupy an important place in the *Phaedo*. In response to Cebes's anxiety about the survival of the soul after death, Socrates appeals to the behavior of contraries contained in an ancient account (70c). Just as being asleep comes from being awake, so being alive comes from being dead, so Socrates says (71d). Although much might be made of this account, scholars have pointed out that what it demonstrates is the necessity of embodied life, which strangely drops out of the account itself. As Sara Brill puts it, "Conspicuously absent from this traditional account of becoming is any reference to body and to that generation of living beings wrought by erotic engagement. ... This silence with respect to the body in generative and degenerative activity becomes even more pronounced as the conversation continues... ." ⁶⁴ In the same way, the conspicuous coincidence of Socrates's birthday and death day draw attention to the embodied life, and death, of the philosopher.

Waterfield adds to this the suggestion that at the time of Socrates "all Athenians were constantly being reminded of the importance of self-sacrifice for the good of the city." ⁶⁵ He further points out a frieze on the Parthenon that was completed in 438 BCE that refers to a founding myth of Athens that held that King Erechtheus was forced to sacrifice one of his three daughters in order to save the city. In addition, in Attic tragedy, there are frequent allusions to the sacrifice on the part of women for the salvation of the city.

Two prominent female examples of these are found in Euripides's tragedies. In *Iphigenia at Aulis*, Iphigenia dies for the sake of the war effort, and in *Alcestis*, Alcestis dies in place of her husband Admetus. Thus, Socrates's death might best be compared to the death of these women in that like them he dies willingly. Throughout the death scene of the *Phaedo*, Socrates exercises initiative, an indication, as I have claimed, that suggests a rupture or a pulling away from ancient sacrifice. He is the one who initiates the movement toward the bath. He is the one who calls for the cup to be brought in with the *pharmakon* already concocted, and he is the one who takes the cup from the extended hand of the *pharmakodōtes* "without the least tremor and without any falling off in his color or expression." Finally, he is the one who "put the cup to his lips and downed it with great readiness and relish" (117d). In making this self-sacrifice, Socrates appears as one who accepts the gods' will. As he nods his approval of the sacrifice, Socrates appears as the ideal sacrificial animal freely giving his own consent, yet his consent is by no means fabricated or fictionalized. The key difference is that while the women die for the sake of the city, it is the city itself that puts Socrates to death as a criminal.

There are further differences between the death of Socrates and sacrificial deaths in tragedies. For example, in some additions to *Iphigenia at Aulis*, at the moment of death there is a substitution of a deer for the maiden, meaning that no human being is actually sacrificed. In the *Alcestis* we hear from the chorus about how Alcestis was sacrificed, but there is no representation of the actual event on the stage.⁶⁶ Thus, at first glance, the death of Socrates might look like one of these tragedies, and might have in fact recalled them to the imagination, yet I would argue that in Greek tragedy human sacrifices either fail or the violence never takes place on the stage.

In the case of Socrates, however, we see the full unfolding of a sacrificial ritual. Thus, perhaps Socrates saw himself in a similar position? As Socrates refused to leave the city, however, as we learn in the *Crito*, the most likely portrayal of his death would have been sacrificial ritual, not tragedy. Waterfield's conclusion lends support. Socrates, who failed "to see his vision for Athens become a reality," might have decided that rather than escape he would "let himself be killed" as a kind of "voluntary scapegoat."⁶⁷ Moreover, perhaps Plato, noting that there was "a bit of chance that came to his aide" that delayed the execution, could not pass over the power of this coincidence with the coincidental cause of his trial. Plato makes a fitting image, an εἰκὼν, out of these chance occurrences, and his effort is facilitated by Socrates himself, whose very action of consenting to die may have provided a crucial difference for the εἰκὼν and provided a unique twist to the fate that seemed to have befallen him when the jurors happened to convict him by a mere thirty votes. Socrates's ritualized waiting, which he consecrates to Apollo by composing hymns to him, creates a fitting sacrificial space within which readers of the *Phaedo* may gain a proper perspective on the death of the philosopher. Otherwise stated, the space offers a place that has been opened up by the dramatic timing of the *Phaedo* where the final words of Socrates may unfold in *logos* against the background of the εἰκὼν of the death of the philosopher. The hearing begins the moment the doors to the prison are opened and the watchmen (*theoríoi*) who have stood guard as sentinels are admitted. In this ritualized waiting we will hear the last words of Socrates and may receive them as an εἰκὼν.

FOUR

THE SEARCH FOR THE MOST FITTING CAUSE

There are nine moments in the *Phaedo* where either Socrates himself or another character in the dialogue refers directly to Socrates's impending death (70c, 76b, 78a, 80d, 84c, 89b, 91a–c, 98e–99a, and 115b).¹ Yet even before the first moment, Cebes issues a challenge to Socrates to make his account of life and death fitting to the real and present circumstances of his life (62e). To Cebes, Socrates is going to his death without resistance, and because “it’s fitting (πρέπει) for the thoughtful to make a fuss when they die and for the thoughtless to rejoice,” Cebes charges Socrates with abandoning the gods, his betters, who have not forced him to die.² This challenge suggests that the speech that Socrates has just made about why he does not fear death is out of proportion or “not fitting” (οὐ πρέπει). A study of the term πρέπει shows that it is derived from “πρέπω.” The term covers a wide range of meanings that include “being conspicuous and manifest” and “to become, beseem, suit” and connects it specifically to the sense that mortal things *beseem* mortal men.³ Simmias immediately boosts Cebes’s accusation by arguing, “For why would men who are truly wise want to flee from masters who are their betters and readily get free of them? And I think Cebes is aiming his argument (τὸν λόγον) at you [Socrates], because you’re so ready to abandon us and the gods, who, as you yourself agree, are good rulers” (63a).

As a response to the charge that he is abandoning the gods, we would expect Socratic *logos* to respond by offering an account about how Socrates’s approach to life and death is in fact fitting or seemly for mortal men.⁴ This is

precisely the kind of response that Socrates gives when he describes his method of *logoi*, which he describes as using hypotheses to “put down [whatever account I judge to be mightiest] as being true, both about cause and about all the rest, while what isn’t, I put down as not true” (100a). This is a method appropriate or fitting for mortals. Yet, at the same time, the *logos* that he gives earlier in the *Phaedo* concerning the genuine philosophers fails to be fitting and therefore appears comic, out of proportion, and unseemly, as we shall see in [chapter 5](#). At this point in the dialogue, however, as Socrates prepares to make his defense (ἀπολογήσασθαι) about his beliefs concerning life and death, he invites Simmias, Cebes, and ostensibly all who are present in the prison cell to be the judges (τοὺς δικαστάς) of this very *logos*. “Well then,” said he, “I’d better try to give a more persuasive defense before you than I did before my judges” (63b). Already in *Apology* Socrates indicated the importance of providing a fitting *logos* in his courtroom speech.⁵ He explained that it would not be fitting (πρέπει) for a man of his age, “as it might be for a young man, to toy with words when I appear before you” (17c). The vocabulary of “fittingness” occurs also in *Apology* 36d, as Socrates explains to the jurors that because of his status as a benefactor of the city, one who encourages it to practice virtue, *the most fitting* punishment would be that he be housed and fed in the Prytaneum, the place where the Olympic victors were lodged. This expresses Socrates’s vision of a kind of “afterlife” that is fitting for the philosopher who is a beneficiary of the god’s gift of wisdom and is therefore able to be a benefactor of the *polis*. In the course of the *Phaedo*, we see in other places that for a *logos* to be persuasive in these matters it will also need to be a fitting and seemly one (πρέπει) (86e, 90b, 99a).

Simmias’s intervention brings to light two further aspects of Socratic *logos* about life and death. First, the philosopher’s capacity to give a fitting *logos* about life and death is relevant not only for genuine philosophers but for all who are willing to be present in the prison with him.

“So then, Socrates,” said Simmias, “are you of a mind to go off and keep this thought to yourself, or would you give us a share of it too? To me at least this good surely seems to be a common one that belongs to us as well; and at the same time it will be your defense—if, that is, you persuade us by what you say.” (63c–d) This common good has to do with the greatest matters—with life and death expressed concretely in flesh, in bones, and in sinews—and not merely as abstract phenomena. This *logos* that is set forth in this dialogue concerns the life and death of the philosopher himself.

Whether or not it is fitting is a matter of concern for all mortals who aspire to give such an account.

Second, Simmias's intervention and Socrates's response reveal that the Socratic *logos* about life and death is characterized by a duality of reception. In other words, there are two ways that one can take this *logos*. The first way is to take it as an εἰκὼν providing an image that is fitting for mortals to view the death of the philosopher. The second way is to take the Socratic *logos* as a defense of his *ergon*, of his deed, and this deed is his own assent to the sacrifice of himself in the ritualized way of the death scene—a way that both is and is otherwise than sacrifice. It is this deed that is crucial for understanding the significance of sacrifice in the *Phaedo*, and it is this deed that enacts the εἰκὼν. In light of the conclusion of [chapter 3](#) that the death of Socrates has the look of a Greek sacrificial ritual that is itself fitting, it is likely that the nine places in the *Phaedo* where there is mention of his death would also contain an enactment of the εἰκὼν. Moreover, this enactment, or deed, might well be woven together with the account of life and death that is given by the Socratic *logos*. Of the nine places, the one most often treated by scholars is the second sailing passage that begins at 98e and continues to 99a. Hans-Georg Gadamer called this section “the highpoint of the whole dialogue.”⁶ We should expect to see such an enactment there. After some preliminary comments, I will turn to that central section of the *Phaedo*. Having analyzed that section, I will consider the phenomena of *mythologia*, execution, and tragedy. As we shall see, it is the ability of the *Phaedo* to show forth a mixture of similarity and difference as an εἰκὼν of the death of the philosopher that makes it possible to accurately understand these phenomena as they relate to the death of Socrates.

In the section of the dialogue that precedes the second sailing passage, Socrates provides the details of his own intellectual autobiography and specifies the way in which Anaxagoras's view about causation as *nous* failed to help him distinguish between “the best” and “the worse” (98b). Socrates says, And again, as regards my conversing with you, he [Anaxagoras] might assign other causes of this sort, holding voices and air and sounds and a thousand other such things responsible, and not taking care to assign the true causes—that since Athenians judged it better to condemn me, so I for my part have judged it better to sit here and more just to stay put and endure whatever penalty they order. Since—by the Dog!—these sinews and bones of mine would, I think, long ago have been in Megara or Boeotia, swept off by an opinion about what's best, if I didn't think it more just and more beautiful, rather than fleeing and playing the runaway, to endure whatever penalty the city should order. (98d–99a) Here we see Socrates

attempting to understand his judgment that it is better to remain in Athens—rather than fleeing from the city—as fitting and appropriate. βέλτιον is the term translated twice in this passage as “better.” It is used first to refer to the judgment made by the Athenians and then to the judgment made by Socrates himself. The term can also have the meaning of “fitting.”⁷ Thus, for Socrates, the Athenians—the *polis* itself—have judged their condemnation of him to be fitting. Furthermore, Socrates himself has judged it fitting to remain in prison and to consent to die rather than to flee. As we continue, we see that this understanding involves a search for the true cause of this fit.

This passage, 99a, occurs within Socrates’s *search* for “the cause concerning generation and destruction *as a whole*” (ὅλως γὰρ δεῖ περὶ γενέσεως καὶ φθορᾶς τὴν αἰτίαν) (95e). In the *Phaedo*, Socrates tells the story of his own intellectual autobiography in response to a perplexity (*aporia*) that arose in response to Cebes’s weaver analogy. Socrates employs an unsettling image to restate the position. He explains that the soul’s entrance into “a human body was like a disease, the beginning of her perishing” (καὶ αὐτὸ τὸ εἰς ἀνθρώπου σῶμα ἐλθεῖν ἀρχὴ ἣν αὐτῇ ὀλέθρου, ὥσπερ νόσος) (95e). Health suggests balance and a fit between the parts that compose the body, whereas disease suggests that they are out of balance and not fitting. Disease (νόσος) can also be rendered as “disorder.” Such disorder, for our purposes here, is best understood in the following sense. On Cebes’s account, the entrance of the soul into the body was not fitting, suggesting that perishing or destruction starts when things are not proper or fit. Conversely, we might well expect that things will be caused to come into being whenever a fitting relationship is manifest.⁸

In response to this, we see Socrates pause for a long time and begin considering something “within himself” (95e). Such inward contemplation leads him to recall and recount his own intellectual autobiography. This was a *search* for the “cause concerning generation and destruction *as a whole*” (ὅλως γὰρ δεῖ περὶ γενέσεως καὶ φθορᾶς τὴν αἰτίαν). Some translators render this passage as “it calls for a thorough inquiry into the whole question of the reason for coming-to-be and destruction”⁹ or “the cause of generation and decay must be completely investigated.”¹⁰ Both Fowler and Gallop translate ὅλως as “thorough” or “completely” and take it as modifying “investigation.” Yet the translation of Brann, Kalkavage, and Salem suggests a different reading that I follow here. For them ὅλως modifies “the process of generation and destruction *as a whole*” (italics added). Translated in this way, we see an important further point concerning Socrates’s intellectual autobiography—at this crucial moment in his development as a philosopher his search turned *toward the whole*. This

might suggest that Socrates's search aspired to something that might well be beyond mortals, since knowledge of the cause of the whole is most fit for the gods. Yet, in her reading of the *Timaeus*, Jenny Bryan points out that the kind of account of the cosmos that Timaeus gives is precisely the kind that Socrates longs for in this section of the *Phaedo*. It is an account that, as she describes, is characterized as an *eikos mythos*—or a fitting story.¹¹ Socrates continues by describing the sought-after wisdom as follows: “Listen then and I shall tell you. For I, Cebes,” he said, “as a young man was wondrously desirous of what wisdom they called ‘inquiry into nature.’ This wisdom seemed to me grandiose (wondrous)—to know the causes of each thing; why each thing comes to be and why it perishes and why it *is*.” (96a) The wisdom Socrates seeks is knowledge of “the causes of each thing; why each thing comes to be and why it perishes and why it *is*.” In other words, as a young man Socrates searched for the wisdom of the whole and this cause seemed to him to be wondrous (θαυμαστός). This is of course a crucial term at *Theaetetus* 155d, where “wonder” is identified with the beginning of philosophy.

In following this thread of the implications of Socrates's search and applying it to his current situation as he faces death, one can grasp that to search for the cause of the whole is to search for that which gathers the parts together and causes them to stand forth, to shine forth, as a whole. To say that something is the cause of a whole is to say that it is responsible for the parts standing forth, being set forth so that they manifest “what is best” (βέλτιον). Pondering Socrates's current situation, one might ask the following: What is it that *causes* the Athenians to condemn Socrates, to find it fitting to do so? What is it that *causes* Socrates to judge that it is better—more fitting—to sit in the prison and die rather than to flee to another *polis* such as Megara or Boeotia? Stated otherwise, one might wonder what it is that *causes* all of these parts to stand forth as a whole?

In his autobiographical account, Socrates prefigures this tentative understanding of causation—bringing parts to stand forth as a whole. As a result of searching for the cause of the whole, Socrates reports that he became “so intensely blinded by this ‘looking’ that I unlearned even what I thought I knew before about many other things and about why a human being grows” (96c). In his initial search, Socrates did not look at the parts as set forth as a whole; in other words, he did not see them as gathered and manifesting a whole. In terms of generation in general, he explains that his former understanding of generation did not proceed by means of a whole.

Before I used to think this was clear to everybody: that a human being

grows because of eating and drinking. For when, from the food he eats, amounts of flesh are attached to flesh and amounts of bone to bones, and so in this way by the same account what's congenial (οἰκεῖα) to his other parts get attached to them, then the bulk that's little has later become a lot and in this way the small human being becomes big. That's what I used to think then. Don't I seem sensible (μετρίως) to you? (96c–d) The term μετρίως or “sensible” is important to note here. This term appears at *Theaetetus* 191a, where it means “measured.” Of course the term also implies being moderate or within measure, and Liddell and Scott offer the possibility of “in due proportion.”¹² Thus, although translating μετρίως as “sensible” is acceptable, “measured” is even more precise. It suggests that something is within measure, and it also implies that some measure or proportion should be applied to it. We will see in [chapter 5](#) the possibility of translating it even as “proportionate.” In the passage cited above, Socrates seems to be asking Cebes whether or not this way of understanding generation is proportionate. “Don't I seem sensible (μετρίως) to you?” It is relevant, therefore, that Cebes responds, “To me you do, yes” (ἔμοιγε) and to recall the connection between Simmias and Cebes and the Pythagoreans. As Gadamer has shown, Simmias and Cebes were not part of the original Pythagorean sect and seem, on account of their lack of sure knowledge of the teaching of Philolaus, revealed at 61d to be members of “a group of scholars and scientists” instead.¹³ If this is brought into play, then it appears that Socrates is asking someone who had an association with Pythagoreans to validate whether or not he is giving a proportionate account, yet Cebes's apparent emphasis on the subjectivity of his own knowledge of the matter—“To me you do, yes”—might indicate that Socrates's account may well not be proportionate at all! We might, therefore, take this comment in the way of an εἰκὼν. Because εἰκονες must be both similar to and also dissimilar from the thing of which it is a likeness in a way that is suitable and fitting, it is important to view the rest of Socrates's account of his intellectual autobiography against this Pythagorean horizon.

As a young man, Socrates thought he understood how generation and destruction occurred, by means of parts being added to other parts, as amounts of flesh attaching to other amounts of flesh and being taken away from them. The significance of this account is underscored by the use of the term οἰκεῖα at 96d.

This term is translated as “congenial” when Socrates describes the process of generation or growth of a human being. A human being grows when “what’s congenial to his other parts gets attached to them” (τοῖς ἄλλοις τὰ αὐτῶν οἰκεῖα ἐκάστοις προσγένηται) (96d). οἰκεῖα can mean “of the same household or of the same kind.”¹⁴ An account of generation that proceeds on the basis of parts being attached that are “congenial” is very different from an account that concerns a whole that contains similarity and difference. Although it is true that οἰκεῖα conveys a natural (*kata physein*) sense of suitability, appropriateness, or fittedness, it should be distinguished from one that gathers parts in a fitting way. This account of generation may be contrasted in the *Phaedo* with another account that is available in the dialogue in this same passage. Socrates gives voice to it whenever he makes use of the term βέλτιον, “for the best.” As we saw above, at 98d Socrates desired an account of causation that could explain why he judged it *better* to sit there in prison rather than to flee to another city; such an account would gather parts by providing an account of a whole by saying how the parts stand forth together.

Thus, there are two accounts of generation in this section of the *Phaedo*. The first account pertains to how parts fit together insofar as they come from other parts, whereas the second concerns how parts stand forth together in the whole. The first account concerns the cause of the parts merely as parts, whereas the second concerns the cause of the parts as a whole. Finally, the first account is only concerned with generation and destruction by adding and subtracting parts from other like parts, whereas the second concerns “generation and destruction *as a whole*” insofar as the parts (whether like or unlike) stand forth together and thereby cause the whole to come to be.

These two accounts of causation are also evident in the example that Socrates gives concerning mathematics. Socrates recounts how he used to think that “whenever a big fellow appeared standing next to a small one, he was larger by just this, a head, and that one horse was bigger than another for the same reason” (96d–e). The account of generation here relies on a notion of adding like parts—a head in this case—to another part. Socrates continues in the same vein: “And to mention things even more lucid, it seemed to me that ten things were more than eight because two were added to the eight; and it seemed to me that a two-foot length was larger than a one-foot length because it exceeded it by half of itself” (96e). As we will see, Socrates voices disappointment with this kind of account because it does not show why things are for the best, yet it is important to point out that mathematical examples cannot have a cause that would account for generation as a whole. His first example of growth at 96d presumed the possibility of “adding a head” to another head. Congeniality was possible here,

but when Socrates finally turns to the case of numbers at 97a–b he finds that, because there is no materiality in play, an account of generation based on congeniality is not possible. He will eventually turn to Anaxagoras to provide an account based on proportion, “of the best,” yet, as his narrative proceeds he describes the moment when he realized that this account of generation as addition of parts to other parts did not provide him with a way of accounting for the whole. Socrates’s realization that he did not know the cause of generation afforded him an awareness not only of the limitations of his knowledge of parts adding to parts but of his entire approach to causation. One might even suggest that the progress of Socrates’s own philosophical search, the growth of Socratic *logos*, becomes progressively ever more fitting as it is able to account for the conditions for the manifestation of the whole of life and death. As such, a Socratic *logos* is better fitted to the cyclical structure of the life of the city as we saw in [chapter 3](#) in the discussion of cyclic nature of Socrates’s own birth and death.

As Socrates continues his autobiographical reflections, he suggests that he does not have a way of knowing “why a one comes to be nor why, in a word, anything else comes to be or perishes or *is* by this way of proceeding. Instead, I’ve randomly smushed together another way myself, and that former one I don’t tolerate at all” (97b). This way of congeniality cannot provide him with a satisfactory account of causation, and this is why he turns to Anaxagoras, the philosopher from Clazomenae whose book he read. Instead of providing an account of cause on the basis of parts generated from other parts—what I have called the method of congeniality—Anaxagoras promised, so Socrates thought, to look at parts in relationship to a whole, that is, as in relationship to what is *best*. Although Anaxagoras’s approach did not offer an account of the whole, it nevertheless led Socrates to the possibility of such an account and showed him how it would have to be made in terms of the best that is possible or the most fitting relationship.

Before proceeding with an examination of how this happens in the rest of the second sailing passage (97c–99d) it is important to portray more clearly the picture about causation. Returning to the parallels between the death of Socrates and a Greek sacrificial ritual, the look of sacrifice, it is apparent that knowing the cause of this whole that is under consideration would be like knowing the cause of the *polis*’s religious practices as a whole. With such knowledge, one would know that which is responsible for the right relationship between gods and men in the city. To know the cause of generation and destruction as a whole would be akin to knowing the cause of the more or less cyclical process that regulates the collective lives of gods and men in the *polis*. Stated otherwise, it would be like

knowing the cause of sacrifice itself, not merely the various elements that constitute it—the carefully selected and prepared victim, the procession, the bath, the sonic ambiance, or the examination of the corpse—but the cause of the whole, the cause that sets its parts forth in a whole. In the words of Socrates, it would entail being able to “assign the true causes—that since Athenians judged it better to condemn me, so I for my part have judged it better to sit here and more just to stay put and endure whatever penalty they order” (98e). Such knowledge is much more wonderful than just the mere fact that, as he says, “I’m now sitting here because my body’s composed of bones and sinews, and because bones are solid and have joints keeping them separate from one another, while sinews are such as to tense and relax and also wrap the bones all around along with the flesh and skin that holds them together” and so on (98c–d). In other words, if one knew the “true causes,” then one would know the causes of birth and death, of generation and corruption, as a whole. This is just the sort of knowledge to which mortals at their best may aspire. We can see, then, just how wonderful the knowledge is that is at stake in Socrates’s search for true causes. Nevertheless, searching for such wonders involves a risky process, and, as we shall see, in the *Phaedo* this process is articulated as Socrates warns about soul-blindness (τὴν ψυχὴν τυφλωθεῖν) and in the lines just before it (99d–e).

This discussion occurs shortly after Socrates details his own disappointment with Anaxagoras’s attempt to provide an account of causation as a whole. The disappointment was because Socrates wanted an account of “the Good-and-Binding that truly binds and holds things together” (καὶ ὡς ἀληθῶς τὸ ἀγαθὸν καὶ δέον συνδεῖν καὶ συνέχειν οὐδὲν οἶονται) (99c). Although Fowler translates this passage as “and in truth they give no thought to the good, which must embrace and hold together all things,”¹⁵ the translation of Brann, Kalkavage, and Salem places the emphasis on a fitting bond, allowing us to see that something that fails to bind in this way must bind through a way of congeniality instead. A bond that is merely congenial, however, can always come apart, unravel even, as parts can be cut off if they are not held together in a fitting way. For example, parts may be tethered together as yoked pairs, as in the case of the Aesopian-inspired *mythos* about the strange creatures who were attached to one another at their heads (60b–c); however, parts can only be “truly bound” by “the Good and Binding” insofar as the parts stand together for the best, expressing a fitting whole. When Socrates first alluded to the kind of cause that would make such a fitting whole manifest he invoked the figure of Atlas.

And this is also why one man makes the earth stay put under the heaven by placing a vortex around the earth, and why another props it

up on a pedestal of air, as though it were on a wide kneading-trough. But as for the power of placing things as they are now situated—in the best way possible—this power they don’t search for, nor do they think it’s got any superhuman strength; but they believe that someday they’ll discover an Atlas stronger and more deathless than this one, one who’d do a better job of holding all things together. (99b–c) We might observe two things about this passage. First, Socrates is concerned to find the power that places things “in the best way possible” (βέλτιστα). Earlier we saw how the term βέλτιον can be translated to emphasize something that is fitting and for the best, and thus this concern seems to be in play here as well. Second, it is also important to notice Socrates’s invocation of Atlas in this passage. Atlas, a Titan, holds things together “by strength.” That is, he holds parts together by means of power.¹⁶ This way, however, is not the way that things stand forth together in terms of the good as being placed “in the best way possible.”

To learn of this “best way” is what Socrates desired as a youth, and he now remarks, “Now for that sort of cause—how it works—it’d be a pleasure to become anybody’s student” (99c). Socrates has just recounted to Cebes that as a student of Anaxagoras he was deprived of this knowledge. Nevertheless, he continued pursuing it on his own, and he now offers to “make a display” (ἐπίδειξιν ποιήσωμαι) “of the way by which I’ve busied myself with the second sailing in search of the cause” (ἐπὶ τὴν τῆς αἰτίας ζήτησιν ἢ πεπραγμάτευμαι) (99d). Unfortunately Fowler translates ἐπίδειξιν as “account” (a term better reserved to translate *logos*), but Socrates is clearly stating that it is not an account that he is offering. Rather, it is a demonstration, a showing forth of the fitting whole. We may expect, then, that what Socrates will “show forth” or “display” is how he investigated the question of the cause of generation and destruction as a whole. In other words, he will display to us how he investigated the cause of things standing together as a whole. His investigation will be an investigation into the cause of the fitting whole itself. He explains now how this search required him to be cautious about soul-blindness: ... since I had had it with this looking into beings, it seemed to me I had to be on my guard so as not to suffer the very thing those people do who behold and look at the sun during an eclipse. For surely some of them have their eyes destroyed if they don’t look at the sun’s likeness in water or in some other such thing. I thought this sort of thing over and feared I might be totally soul-blinded if I looked at things with my eyes and attempted to grasp them by each of the senses. So it seemed to me

that I should take refuge in accounts and look in them for the truth of beings. (99e) Socrates has set out on a search for the cause of generation and destruction in a way that avoids soul-blindness by providing a proper distance so as to receive the εἰκὼν of the manifestation of the death of the philosopher.

To be soul-blind is to be unable to know in a way that is appropriate or fitting for mortals. A way that would protect them from this risk involves, so Socrates explains, the well-known method of *logoi* that proceeds by setting out *hypotheses* concerning “whatever logos I judge to be mightiest” (100a). It is this way of proceeding that Socrates follows in the balance of the *Phaedo*, and I will return to it at the end of this chapter. For now, however, there are three further phenomena that require treatment: *mythologia*, execution, and tragedy. As we shall see, it is the ability of the *Phaedo* to show forth a mixture of similarity and difference that makes it possible to understand these phenomena better and to view them in the right proportion.

In *Plato On The Limits of Human Life*, Sara Brill points out that the mortality of *logos* itself is emphasized throughout the *Phaedo*. This occurs at 89b–c in the first interlude when Socrates gathers up the hair on Phaedo’s neck and promises to cut his own hair if they cannot bring the *logos* back to life. It occurs as well in his account of misology (89d–91c) and in the expression of fear by his interlocutors that the *logos* will die with Socrates (76b, 91a–c).¹⁷ Moreover, there is a deep connection between life and *logos* that, as we saw, is evident in Socrates’s own search for the most fitting cause. Brill notes further that within the *Phaedo*, there is a mutual interdependence between *mythos* and *logos* that arises precisely because the dialogue is concerned with the subject matter of the soul. She notes that what have been taken to be the main philosophical contributions of the dialogue—the argument from contraries, the argument from recollection, the argument from affinity, and the argument from causes—are all replete with mythic references and imagery. In addition to these, Brill emphasizes the need to read the *Phaedo* in light of the myth of the true earth, the dominant story that Socrates tells toward the end of the dialogue (107b–115a).¹⁸ She writes, While the four *logoi* about the soul’s immortality involve a critical engagement with mathematical, religious, and poetic conceptions of the soul, they ultimately fail to be fully persuasive because they rely upon an incomplete conception of the relationship between body and soul, a conception that denies them meaningful reference to the lives and deaths of embodied beings. The myth of the true earth provides ... a necessary complement to these *logoi* by offering a critical engagement with the very perspective from which Socrates and his interlocutors assess these

conceptions... ¹⁹

Given this interdependence of *logos* and *mythos* in the *Phaedo*, one might wonder how the dialogue expresses their connection. As we shall see in this brief examination, Socrates himself is the one who engages in a process of mixing together *logos* with *mythos* in the *Phaedo*, although he, quite remarkably, claims to not be someone who does this. At 61b, he claims that he is not a storyteller (*mythologicos*). It is my suggestion that just as the *Phaedo* carefully mixes similarities and differences concerning sacrificial ritual to provide a fitting likeness, an εἰκῶν that provides a fitting likeness of the death of the philosopher, so too a careful mixture of *mythos* and *logos* concerning body and soul is also at play in the dialogue. Moreover, given the centrality of the *pharmakodōtes* to the central deed of the dialogue—the taking of the *pharmakon*—it is helpful to note that mixing and combining are central to its preparation. It is no wonder, then, that Socrates himself engages in such mixing at the very outset of the *Phaedo*.

At 60b–c, as he is released from his chains in the prison, Socrates rubs his leg with his hand and exclaims as follows: How absurd (ἄτοπον) a thing this seems to be, gentlemen, which human beings called pleasant! How wondrously related it is by nature to its seeming contrary—the Painful—in that they’re both willing to be present with a human being at the same time but if somebody chases the one and catches it, he’s pretty much compelled always to catch the other one too, just as if the pair of them—although they’re two—were fastened by one head!

Socrates continues this delightful interlude by saying that had Aesop noticed it, he would have composed a story (μῦθον) about it. Aesop’s supposed *mythos*, so Socrates conjectures, would have been about how the god would desire to reconcile these two contraries—Pleasure and Pain—but, unable to do it, he attached their heads together.

Socrates’s Aesopian *mythos* seeks to explain the true cause of a given phenomenon. What is significant, however, is that this *mythos*, or at least the impetus to tell it, is engendered by Socrates’s *own bodily experience*. In addition, this account that he seeks is of the whole. It is not merely sufficient to explain his bodily experience based on parts. He is not concerned about describing how it came to pass that his body experienced pleasure at being released from the chains. Rather, Socrates looks for an explanation of the cause of the whole of embodied experience, the whole of the cyclical movement from pleasure to pain and back again. Once again, Socrates is concerned with a

structured whole. In addition, his experience of bodily pain, as well as pleasure in being released from pain, comes into being in part from his account of the relation between pleasure and pain. This provides an example of how the *logos* he gives of that pleasure becomes a part of the experience of an embodied, living being—the philosopher himself.

From our interpretation of the section of the *Phaedo* immediately preceding the second sailing passage, we can now see how this section was foreshadowed by Socrates's Aesopian *mythos*. We saw earlier that Socrates's desire for an explanation of a cause of “generation and destruction as a whole” was necessitated by his own bodily experience. He wanted to explain the true causes of why his body is present in the prison and not elsewhere, why, that is, he is consenting to be sacrificed. However, the knowledge of such an account of the whole, we must remember, is not necessarily appropriate or proportional to man. To seek for such knowledge might well be *hubris* and risk the charge of impiety. This is the reason that such knowledge both takes the form of a *mythos* and is also engendered by—tethered directly to—the embodied experience of Socrates. The philosopher's earthly embodiment is the precise counterpoint to a comic, distorted, and detached escape to the eternal verities that we will see depicted in his account of the genuine philosophers. This will be the subject of [chapter 5](#).

The necessity, then, of an account of bodily experience cannot proceed merely on the basis of a congeniality of parts, of familiar parts generating other parts. Rather, an account of the whole, of why things stand forth as being for the best is what is required. What Socrates searches for is a way of giving an account (*logos*) of generation and destruction as a whole that remains appropriate to the limitations of man but that is also more than *logos*. Socrates's search for “the cause of generation and destruction as a whole” seeks a way of expressing a proportion that also exceeds *logos*. It is noteworthy, then, that Socrates's own practice in the *Phaedo* is one of mixing together *mythos* and *logos*, and in many other central places of other dialogues as well. Yet he himself gainsays this very practice when he explains to Cebes how he had been spending his time in prison.

So first I made a poem to the god whose day of sacrifice was at hand. And taking note that a poet, if he's to be a poet, has to make stories, not arguments, and that I myself was not a storyteller (καὶ αὐτὸς οὐκ ἦ μυθολογικός), therefore after the god I turned to the stories of Aesop, the ones I had at hand and knew—whichever I chanced on first—and made them into poetry. (61b) Whatever Socrates in fact

intends by his disclaimer that he is not a *mythologicos*, it is certainly the case that he engages in mixing of *mythos* and *logos* throughout the *Phaedo*. In some ways, the *logoi* of the *Phaedo* suffer from being too close to what they express, especially in the cases of life and death and of the soul. As we will see in [chapter 5](#), a *logos* of death creates distortion and does not provide the proper distance from the phenomenon. *Mythoi*, on the one hand, seem to promote precisely the proper distance needed. On the other hand, *mythoi* need to be proximate to embodied experience, as we see in Socrates's story. *Mythoi* then exceed the grasp of *logos* and provide excess. This mixture of *mythos* and *logos* travels with Phaedo out across the Peloponnese over the mountains to Phlius, where the dialogue with Echechrates, who listens to Phaedo with pleasure, is set (57a).²⁰ After considering the role of *mythos* and *logos* as mixture in the *Phaedo*, it is now possible to treat a further question about the death of Socrates. Are we to take it merely as an execution and not as self-sacrifice?

One might wonder whether our observations thus far might be challenged by the objection that *the death of Socrates is merely an execution and not a sacrifice*. After all, one might claim that although there are references to sacrifice in the dialogue, these are only incidental dramatic elements of the text. They do not make any difference, philosophically speaking, in what we are to understand from the *Phaedo*. Moreover, it is clear that throughout the *Phaedo* Plato is depicting the death of Socrates as an execution. Therefore, although it is appropriate to point out some of these parallels, the further conclusion that it has the look of sacrificial ritual and that this look would have philosophical import is unwarranted. It is an execution, and so it has the look of one.

Yet, as we have seen, his death certainly looks like a sacrifice. A first consideration that contests this objection follows from a brief examination of the Greek terms used in *Apology* and *Phaedo* and by other ancient authors to characterize the death of Socrates. This reveals that the textual evidence for the position that it is merely an execution is not strong. A second consideration concerns the term that is used to characterize the one who brings the *pharmakon* to Socrates. Rather than using the term *demokoinos* (executioner) for the one who carries out the order to execute, the *Phaedo* refers to him as *pharmakodōtes*. After presenting this evidence, I then provide a further argument for why it is best to see the death of Socrates as a self-sacrifice—one that mixes together fittingly elements of ritual sacrificial and other elements to display an εἰκὼν of the death of the philosopher.

The term usually translated as “to execute” is ἀποκτείνω. Forms of this term occur twice in the *Apology* 30c–d as Socrates is talking to his judges about the means of his execution. Although it is indisputable that the death of Socrates takes place within the context of an execution sponsored by the city-state of Athens, it is surprising how infrequently the *Phaedo* uses terms that describe an execution.

Forms of ἀποκτείνω appear only twice in the entirety of the Fowler translation of the *Phaedo*.²¹ The first occurs at 58b, where Phaedo is explaining to Echecrates the reason for the delay of Socrates’s death. The beginning of the festival of Apollo Delius occurred the day before the trial, which commenced with the sending of the vessel containing the embassy (*theoreoi*) to Delos. Echecrates reports, “Now once they’ve begun the embassy, it’s their custom to keep the city pure during that time and to *execute* (ἀποκτεινύναι) no one publicly until the vessel has arrived in Delos and come back here” (58b, italics added). The term ἀποκτείνω means “to slay” or “to condemn to death”²²; however, here Phaedo uses it to describe the practices of the Athenians. Although it occurs in the context of a discussion about the way in which Socrates is to die, it nevertheless does not directly refer to his death. It seems then that by avoiding the term ἀποκτείνω, a subtle distancing from an understanding of Socrates’s death as merely an execution takes place. This opens the space for a different look, the look of a sacrificial ritual.

The second instance occurs in the *Phaedo* at 61a, as Socrates gives an explanation to Cebes about how it came to pass that he spent his time in prison making music. Socrates has been discussing a dream that told him to “make music and work at it!” (μουσικὴν ποίει καὶ ἐργάζου) (60e). He then offers a justification for taking the dream in a literal sense by actually composing music rather than practicing philosophy, as was his custom. “But now, after the trial and while the festival of the god delayed my *execution*, I thought, in case the repeated dream really meant to tell me to make this which is ordinarily called music, I ought to do so and not to disobey” (italics added) (61a). The term translated as execution is αποθνήσκειν, a passive form of ἀποκτείνω.²³ For this reason, many translators render this passage to emphasize *the fact of the death of Socrates* rather than the *means of it*. For example, Brann, Kalkavage, and Salem render 61a as “the festival of the god prevented me from dying,” and Gallop renders it as “the festival of the god was preventing my death”²⁴ instead of in terms that emphasize the means of his death, namely execution. Moreover, although Socrates’s use of this term indicates the means, the fact that he is speaking of it from the perspective of the Athenians may shape his choice of

terms. Finally, when at 57b Echecrates reports that Socrates “drank the potion and died,” the term ἀποθάνειν, which means simply “to die,” is used. Echecrates, then—speaking at some distance from the drama itself—is shown as emphasizing *the fact* of Socrates’s death rather than its means—execution.

Finally, other ancient commentators do not use ἀποκτείνω to describe the death of Socrates at all. Although one must take care in using this source, around 200 BCE, Diogenes Laertius wrote of Socrates: “He was the first person who really talked about human life; and he was also the first philosopher who was condemned to death and executed” (ετελεύτα).²⁵ One translator of Laertius renders “ετελεύτα” as “executed,” but the term—an aorist of τελέω—can also be rendered as “to fulfill” or “to come to one’s end.”²⁶ However, in a discussion of the death of Anaxagoras, which appears slightly earlier in Laertius’s *Lives*, Laertius uses the term ἀποκτείνω to describe the proposed means of killing Anaxagoras.²⁷ One wonders, then, why Laertius does not use the same term to describe the death of Socrates as an execution because he used it to describe the death of Anaxagoras.

Although the Athenians appear to believe that what they were doing to Socrates was an execution, in certain places in the *Phaedo* when the term ἀποκτείνω, which means execution, could be used, Socrates does not speak of it as such. Thus, if Plato had intended to foster an interpretation of the death of Socrates that allowed only for this single understanding of Socrates’s death, then he would have had Socrates and the others use terms that more definitely and precisely described his death as an execution. The language used in the *Phaedo* is not this restrictive. John Sallis pointed out that “nothing is accidental in Platonic dialogue.”²⁸ In this case, it is appropriate to observe that the appearance of Socrates’s death was *not merely as an execution*. The significance of this death in the *Phaedo*, then, exceeds that of an execution, and that is not merely accidental.

A further piece of evidence to be considered is the extant sources on Greek punishment. Allen provides a thorough discussion of execution practices in sixth-century Athens. The usual method of execution involved the use of a board (*apotoumpanismos*) in a kind of crucifixion that led to asphyxiation. Rather than having hands and feet nailed to a piece of wood, iron collars were fastened to the criminal’s wrists, ankles, and neck. This was similar to being placed in the stocks (*podokakke*).²⁹ The Athenians also used other forms of capital punishment. In the military context, these included stoning and slaying by sword. In terms of punishment, a kind of economy of exchange prevailed. According to this economy, the amount of punishment must always exceed the

amount of disorder that resulted from the original crime. Sometimes a criminal was refused burial or his house was razed to increase the amount of punishment within the economy.³⁰ As for hemlock, Allen clarifies, “Execution by hemlock was introduced only at the end of the fifth century, but the death of Socrates in 399 is the last death by hemlock in the city that we hear about from *Athenian* sources.”³¹ The reason for the delayed introduction of hemlock as a means of execution was that it was difficult to acquire and expensive, but by the time of Socrates’s death, technical advances made its use more widely spread. Unfortunately, grounds for further comparison in this regard are lacking because surviving descriptions of executions in Athens are scarce. In fact, the only one that survives of which we have detailed evidence was carried out by an Athenian, but it took place outside of Athens during wartime and used the board.³²

For our purposes here, however, it is important to emphasize that the term that is used to describe the man who brings the *pharmakon* does not even refer to the practice of execution. Allen explains that “The Eleven prison keepers and their subordinate, a slave executioner called the *demokoinos*, supervised executions that resulted from a trial,” yet usually citizens “had to execute their own punishments.”³³ Presumably, he is the same man who is called “the servant of the Eleven” (ὁ τῶν ἑνδεκά ὑπηρέτης) at 116b, yet as we have noted, the man is referred to at both 63d and again at 117a as “the one who is to give the potion” (*pharmakodōtes*). Nowhere in the *Phaedo* is he ever called “executioner” (*demokoinos*). He does not himself kill Socrates but only gives him the means by which he may carry out his own death. Thus, although the death of Socrates resembles a public execution in Athens, the textual evidence does not support a restriction that it be seen only that way. Moreover, as I have shown, we have far more descriptions of sacrificial ritual with which to compare the death of Socrates. This allows the look of a sacrificial ritual to reveal itself.

One last potential objection connected to understanding the death of Socrates as a self-sacrifice concerns the question of piety. It is possible that Plato either believed that the execution of Socrates was just or he believed that it was unjust. Sacrifices offered to the gods are pious activities and therefore constitute a just act. If Plato believed that the execution of Socrates was unjust, then he would not have intentionally depicted it as a sacrifice—a just and pious act. The evidence that Plato believed that the Athenians’ decision to execute Socrates was unjust is quite strong. Therefore, even if the death of Socrates does resemble a sacrifice, it is unintentional on the part of Plato. In addition, there is no strong evidence for the claim that Plato intentionally shaped it to resemble one in his

description of the death of Socrates.

One way to respond to this dilemma is to argue that although Plato thought the execution of Socrates was unjust, he nevertheless intentionally presented it as a just act, as a sacrificial ritual. I would nonetheless argue that Plato's presentation of Socrates's death is not merely as just but more importantly *as fitting*, that the look with which Plato endows the death of Socrates is not one of justice but it *is* one that provides a fitting likeness, an εἰκών, of the death of the philosopher.

To create this likeness, it is necessary to present a mixture of elements of sacrificial ritual while also deviating from it. Such a mixture allows the death of the philosopher to stand forth as a whole. If it is merely an execution, then one runs the risk of not achieving the proper distance from the deed. In other words, seen only as an execution, Socrates begins to appear as merely a good citizen obedient to the Laws of the city (much as he does in *Crito*). Yet, what is at stake here in the *Phaedo* is the death of the philosopher, and for this reason he must also be shown to deviate from the execution, which he can only do by taking the *pharmakon* “without the least tremor” in a way opposed to how one would be sacrificed.

A final piece of evidence for seeing the death of Socrates as self-sacrifice, rather than as merely an execution, comes from a contemporary source—the work of Giorgio Agamben on sacrifice. Agamben analyzes state-sponsored killings, such as those done on prisoners in attempts to find a vaccine for malaria at the University of Chicago in the 1940s as part of the effort to win World War II. Although the prisoners had been sentenced to death, it was nevertheless important to the state that display their willingness to die, and so the participants in the experiment had to sign a document that declared the “explicit and voluntary consent on the part of the subject who was to be submitted to the experiment.”³⁴ This approach to creating the appearance of consent was crucial to the state's justification. Such participants obtained the status of bare life, in which they occupied a liminal position between life and death and thereby became *homo sacer*—man who could be sacrificed. One might wonder then if Socrates's assent expressed through his gesture of drinking “without the least tremor” might be one way of showing the liceity of a state-sponsored execution. Yet, we should notice that it is Socrates himself—not the Athenians—who freely expresses his consent by drinking. Although far removed in time from the 1940s, Socrates's gesture and deed should not be considered under the guise of manufactured consent by the state. Rather, his death calls into question any Athenian claim to justice in their judicial decision by showing that Socrates's self-sacrifice cannot be completely aligned with and subordinated to an ancient

sacrificial ritual. By providing a *mimesis* of such a ritual—and then deviating decisively from it—the claim to justice is disrupted. As such, the death of Socrates provides an εἰκὼν through which philosophical aspirants can receive the gift of the self-sacrifice of Socrates. This gift is a proper mixture, a portrait that manifests the fitting way in which a philosopher goes to his death in a way that seeing it as a mere execution never could. Besides providing a mixture of *mythos* and *logos* and besides deviating decisively from an execution, the death of Socrates in the *Phaedo* also differs from a Greek tragedy.³⁵ My purpose here is only to sketch one way this happens, in the *Phaedo*, through a further comparison with the *Agamemnon*.

As we have seen, Plato could have shaped the death of Socrates in such a way that it would appear tragic and fated. In the *Phaedo*, there are of course various allusions to τύχη, a word frequently translated as “fate” or “chance.”³⁶ For example, we know that it was only “by some chance” that Socrates’s death was delayed. Indeed, the very *mythos* that is invoked in the *Phaedo* is of this sort. In [chapter 3](#), I recounted the significance of the myth of Theseus and the Minotaur for interpretations of the *Phaedo* and noted how, at 58a, Phaedo reported to Echecrates that Socrates’s death was delayed because the tribute ship sent annually to Delos had sailed on the day before the trial. This ship is sent in commemoration of the annual human sacrifices made for the sake of Athens on Crete, a sacrificial debt that ended when Theseus sailed to Crete, entered the labyrinth, and slew the Minotaur.³⁷ We can see now why it is significant that Plato adapted this particular *mythos* in his dialogue. In using this *mythos*, Plato adapts an existing myth to explain a present phenomenon, the delay of Socrates’s death.

In addition, there are moments in the *Phaedo* in which Socrates himself refers to tragedy. At 115a he refers, for example, to the bath and to destiny (τύχη).³⁸ “‘But my destiny calls anon,’ as a man in a tragedy might declaim, and the hour for me to turn to the bath is nearly come.” Earlier I discussed how this moment parallels Greek sacrificial ritual (115a), but it is important to note here that Socrates imitates a genre, tragedy, that his death does not fit thus calling into question the very notion of fate. As we saw, Socrates’s self-sacrifice is characterized by consent as well. This consent appears as a rupture within the smooth operation of a traditional Greek sacrificial ritual and achieves a distance from an execution.

For the Greeks in the fifth century, *mythoi* became increasingly adapted into drama, particularly Greek tragedy. Sacrifice as a theme was a key part of them. Scholars of Greek tragedy point out that tragic dramatists like Aeschylus

sought to undercut a view of human knowledge that they received from archaic poets like Homer.³⁹ An “archaic ratio” holds that humans have the following epistemological capacity: seeing as knowing. “Seeing as knowing” implies that human beings can know wholes by simply looking directly at them. William Wians explains, “At the base of Aeschylus’s epistemology is the commonsense core of the archaic view of knowledge that seeing is believing. Direct personal experience is taken—by the characters at least—to be veridical.”⁴⁰

However, although divinities may know a whole directly without error and without mediation, mortals are error-prone and must proceed by knowing how parts fit into the whole. This is what is known by the chorus and is indicated by the fact that “the old men of the chorus had doubted that Clytemnestra’s signal fires were a true sign of the fall of Troy.”⁴¹ Human experience is limited, and this is shown, according to Wians, by the contrast between human characters and others like the godlike Sun, “who enjoys a perspective and therefore a knowledge that human beings lack.”⁴²

The limited knowledge of humans is especially in play when it comes to knowing the justice of Zeus. For example, Wians points out that although the chorus knows that when Iphigenia is brought forth to the sacrifice the prediction of Calches the Seer is being fulfilled, they do not know “why this terrible thing had to happen.” Instead, the chorus can only repeat its “faith in a larger purpose behind the events, pronouncing here what I have called the motto of Greek tragedy: justice so moves that those only learn who suffer” (see line 250 of *Agamemnon*).⁴³ Thus, rather than simply relying on the archaic ratio, in an Aeschylean tragedy like *Agamemnon* the gods teach humans lessons that are necessarily painful if they are to be fruitful. This is the source of one of the central themes of the *Agamemnon*—“suffering into knowledge.”

As we saw with Socrates’s allusion to Aesop, Platonic drama also adapts *mythoi* into dramas, but I would suggest that with regard to “the archaic ratio” the *Phaedo* is both similar and quite different from the *Agamemnon*. It is similar in that it seeks to circumscribe human knowing in such a way that it does not fall back on the archaic ratio and so builds a limit into it. Yet, the *Phaedo* also differs by enacting a restoration of seeing as knowledge, of seeing not merely parts added to other parts but as a fitting whole. Said otherwise, by using the sacrificial theme, the *Phaedo* achieves a look, a standing forth such that a certain εἶκων or likeness presents the look of a fitting whole while also maintaining a distance such that human beings remain aware of their own limitations. Human beings do not suffer into knowledge; instead, they undergo a distancing from what has passed for knowledge before. This distance allows for the operation of

deeper epistemological capacities. Although it is true that Socrates recognizes the incompleteness of human claims to knowledge, it is rare for a scholar to consider that Socrates has a tragic view of life. Instead, the portrayal of Socrates in the *Phaedo* causes him to appear decisively different than a tragic figure. As Paul Stern has put it, “We see a laughing philosopher, moved by his desire for wisdom, appreciative of the pleasure brought by progress in understanding, unconvinced that there exists the need to choose between life and wisdom.”⁴⁴ Martha K. Woodruff also acknowledges the subtle difference between the *Phaedo* and tragedy when she notes that “through his moving description of Socrates’s last words and dying body, Plato turns his mentor into a new kind of tragic hero,” and she adds that “in taking artistic liberties with Socrates, Plato gives himself the space to reclaim the tragi-comic dimension of philosophy.”⁴⁵ We shall see more of this comic dimension in [chapter 5](#).

In concluding this chapter, we will take one last glimpse at the method that Socrates suggests we follow in continuing the search for wisdom after he is gone. This is the well-known method of *logoi* that he describes from 99e–100e. At 99d, Socrates compares looking into beings (τὰ ὄντα σκοπῶν) and looking at the sun directly during an eclipse (θεωροῦντες καὶ σκοπούμενοι). The comparison indicates a way to avoid “soul-blindness” when one looks into beings that is similar to the one used by those who look at the sun in an eclipse. Those who manage this look at the “sun’s likeness in water or in some other such thing” (99e). The term translating “likeness” here is τὴν εἰκόνα, which we have been translating as “likeness.”

As we saw earlier, such a likeness is accomplished not by providing a precise replica of the thing of which it is a likeness. An εἰκόνα must succeed in mixing not only sameness but also difference in a fitting way in order to manifest the being in question. Such a likeness, however, is only revealed—only stands forth—when one receives the likeness as a fitting whole as a proper mixture of parts. That is, looking at beings directly has the same effect as looking at the parts directly: they blind one to the possibility of a fitting whole. Such looking only provides knowledge of beings as individual parts, as an assemblage of parts. It does not disclose them as a fitting whole. It leads, then, to an experience of blindness, such as Socrates experienced as a youth, because the parts appear without structure. On the other hand, to truly see this order “of generation and destruction as a whole” would be too grandiose, too wondrous, and would lead to *hubris*. It would be, if one thought in terms of the archaic ratio, to see in a way that is like the way the gods see and to know in a way that is too great for mortals. It would result in the same experience of those who look

directly at the sun without a mediating likeness.

In order to avoid this, we learn that Socrates, therefore, “takes refuge in accounts.” That is, he turns to *logoi*, which are themselves a likeness of the beings without necessarily being too great for mortals. *Logoi* can be “put down” as hypotheses so that they can still mediate between mortals and being. These proportionate likenesses as εἰκόνες are not merely copies of the beings to be contemplated but give the cause of these beings by showing how the parts are made to stand out in a fitting relationship that expresses the whole through similarity and difference.

We learn, then, that this is how Socrates “set out” and stands forth. He continues, “On each occasion I put down as hypothesis whatever account I judge to be mightiest; and whatever seems to be *consonant* with this, I put down as being true, both about cause and about all the rest, while what isn’t, I put down as not true” (99a) (ὃ μὲν ἄν μοι δοκῇ τούτῳ συμφωνεῖν τίθημι ὡς ἀληθῆ ὄντα). The term translated by Brann, Kalkavage, and Salem as “consonant with” is συμφωνεῖν, meaning “to sound together,” although to sound together with something means that it must be in harmony with it.⁴⁶ Things that are in harmony with one another are in proportion to one another because of proper mixture of sameness and difference. Socrates continues with his description of his method at 99b to the uncomprehending Cebes. In other words, receiving εἰκόνες requires the hypothesizing or the putting down in advance of something that is fitting or harmonious.

Socrates himself explicitly calls into question his comparison between taking refuge in *logoi* when looking into beings and looking into beings with the eyes and attempting to grasp them with each of the senses. He states, “Now perhaps in a certain way it isn’t quite like what I’m likening it to. For I don’t at all concede that somebody who looks into beings in accounts (*logoi*) looks at them in likenesses (ἐν εἰκόσι) to a greater extent than one who does so in actions” (ἐν τοῖς ἔργοις)” (100a). The term translated by Brann, Kalkavage, and Salem here as “actions” is *ergoi*. It can mean “deeds” or “actions” that are typically expressed through a person’s soul.⁴⁷ What would it mean to look into beings in *ergois*? We might think of the *ergon* or action that is once again before us, the deed that has just been subjected to scrutiny a few lines before when Socrates tried to understand the true cause of why he is sitting in prison.

To know the cause of this deed would be to see a likeness of it as a whole, and if we see a man’s soul through his deeds then we would expect that we might also see Socrates’s soul through this deed. If this deed, the death of Socrates, is analogous to a Greek sacrificial ritual, as I have been arguing, then

we would see a deed that fits with the human life of the philosopher in the *polis*. Looking then, at the embodied being Socrates, we see a likeness that is composed of parts that stand forth together in a fitting whole. We see, then, how sacrifice, as a deed, as *ergon*, expresses itself as a likeness of a Greek sacrificial ritual, yet we simultaneously see Socrates pulling away from this ritual, taking the initiative and giving his own consent as he, *without the least tremor*, brings the cup to his lips and downs the *pharmakon* with “great readiness and relish” (117c).

The death of the embodied Socrates understood as self-sacrifice, then, provides the distance that is needed for the eyes of those who witness it in a way that is appropriate to Socratic *logos*. It does so by reestablishing and memorializing the proper relationship between gods and men—setting forth a proportion that is appropriate for man, giving an account of generation and destruction as a whole.

In this chapter, I provided a close reading of the second sailing passage in the *Phaedo* and argued that through it Socrates philosophizes as a means of both acknowledging the limitations of human beings while seeking to provide an account of life and death, of generation and destruction as a whole for the philosopher. Socrates demonstrates how this occurs most fruitfully through a method of *logoi* that he describes in the passage 99d–100a where *logoi* become likenesses in their manifestation of beings. I contrasted Socrates’s method of *logoi* insofar as it is an approach to Greek knowledge, to the approach to knowledge that is taken in Aeschylus’s *Agamemnon*, and I concluded that, although the death of Socrates in the *Phaedo* uses sacrificial themes, it is not a tragedy because it offers a way of knowing that is now appropriate to mortals who, by witnessing Socrates’s sacrifice, become aware of their limitations.

As we shall see in the next chapter, the soul must learn to act “as if” it is other than its desires, tempers, and terrors. Human beings do not gain knowledge so much by watching another suffer as they do by having their own presuppositions both challenged and reconstituted. Thus, the soul must learn to question the presupposition that it is “nothing but” these desires, tempers, and terrors. I will explore the *Phaedo*’s discussion of the soul and its relationship to the body. Significant topics include death as a separation of the soul from the body, the doctrine of recollection, Socrates’s response to Simmias’s lyre example, the consideration of genuine philosophers, and the depiction of the embodied Socrates. The various comic spectacles that result from the treatment of the genuine philosophers seen against the background of the εἰκόν of the embodied Socrates, who proportionate in body and soul goes with great solemnity to the sacrifice, causes those who are serious about giving a fitting

account of life and death to care about the soul.

FIVE

THE SO-CALLED GENUINE PHILOSOPHERS AND THE WORK OF SOUL

In [chapter 4](#), we examined a way of testing whether a given *logos* is able to take great matters like life and death into account. We saw that a *logos* is fitting insofar as it manifests itself in the deed (*ergon*) of the sacrifice of Socrates. Along the way, we have also seen how in the *Phaedo* this fitting account comes into being against the likeness of the embodied Socrates as shown in the death scene. We have referred to this likeness as an εἰκών, a mixture of sameness and difference, of sacrifice and its other shown in the embodied Socrates. At this point, we might consider some deeper resonances in the Greek terms εἰκών (likeness), βέλτιον, (for the best), πρέπει (fitting), and μετρίως (in due proportion). Although it is not possible to link these terms etymologically; nevertheless, by gathering them together philosophically we can see that they all convey a sense of appropriateness or fittingness in the context of the *Phaedo*. Accounts or likenesses are shown to be fitting or able to manifest something as fitting. Relationships, especially between gods (the divine) and humans (mortals), can be fitting, appropriate, or rightly ordered. Said otherwise, to say that something is “fitting” is also to say that it is “proportionate” or that the relationship “stands forth as a proportion.” After examining these connections among Greek terms, I will draw out further implications of this theme of proportionality as it relates to Greek comedy and to the question of whether or not Socrates’s death can be rightly seen as a suicide. I will then turn to an examination of the *logos* of the so-called genuine philosophers and the work of

the soul.

In [chapter 4](#), we examined the importance of the term μετρίως (in due proportion). If something is proportionate, it presents itself as fitting. In Greek, the term that is most often translated as “proportion” is ἀνάλογια (analogy). An analogy is a mathematical relation among four magnitudes (three in the case of a mean proportional). In a similar way, a *logos* or ratio is a relation between two magnitudes. In the case of the mean proportional, it is possible to articulate two magnitudes in relation to a common one. This is frequently the case when one is working with a mean structure, as in an analysis of a virtue such as Aristotle does in Book II of the *Nicomachean Ethics*. In examining a virtue, Aristotle considers a given virtue as the mean between an excess and a deficiency. For example, in the case of the virtue of courage, foolhardiness is the excess, whereas cowardice is the deficiency. Such an excess and deficiency can then be said to be a disproportion or a distortion relative to the common magnitude. Because our work here is an interpretation of a literary text, it is not possible to apply a specific mathematical sense directly to the *Phaedo*. Nevertheless, it is possible to show how the notions of excess and deficiency, thought in common as disproportionate magnitudes, might shed further light on the dialogue. Such an account would also be in the spirit of the *Phaedo*, in which a Pythagorean setting, teachings, characters and vocabulary are especially prominent. As is well known, the Pythagoreans were concerned to find a mathematical basis for reality.

At this point in my interpretation, I would like to suggest that the proportional relationship between mortals and gods at the moment of death is shown by the εἰκὼν of the embodied Socrates. As such, it is the philosopher who not only through his method of *logoi* but also through his own self-sacrifice establishes a right relation or proportionate relation between mortals and the gods. In terms of Socratic *logos* the philosopher artfully navigates between the twin disproportions of *hubris* and *logistical despair*. These disproportions may be characterized as magnitudes that when seen against the mean appear distorted. We have already seen the danger of human hubris in our discussion of tragedy, when we saw the danger of claiming too much for a *logos*. We will see it again when we examine how in the *Phaedo* a flight by the so-called genuine philosophers into the other realm of being conveys a presumption of hubris. The other disproportion, however, is that of logistical despair. This despair is seen most clearly in the *Phaedo* between 88c and 91b, where Socrates warns his companions against becoming *misologists*—people who hate the *logos*. *Phaedo* reports how Socrates spoke gently with his friends and said “But first let’s be on our guard so that we don’t undergo a certain experience.” *Phaedo* asks him to

explain this experience. Socrates replies, “So that we don’t become,” said he, “haters of argument (*logos*), as some become haters of human beings; for it’s not possible,” he said “for anybody to experience a greater evil than hating arguments and hatred of human beings comes about in the same way.” (89c–d) In the *Phaedo*, this despair appears as well when the so-called genuine philosophers apparently despair of finding meaning in the sensible world and instead flee to a distant place of the *things that are* (79a–b).

Thus, falling into logistical despair or into hubris are two ways in which a philosopher can fall short of a proportionate account by accepting distorted or disproportionate accounts. It should be emphasized, however, that these disproportions are only manifest in the presence of something that is in fact proportionate, a fitting ordering of the magnitudes. In other words, in order for one to see how parts stand forth in a disproportionate manner, one must have seen before the parts standing forth in proportion or in an appropriate fit. This proportionality is what I have been suggesting we understand as an εἰκὼν. The likeness of Socrates portrayed in the death scene manifests the death of the philosopher precisely as such an εἰκὼν. Philosophy is the greatest music, as Socrates makes clear at 61b. Thus, in coming into being, a distortion is caused by the presence of εἰκὼν as well as its others. The others take elements of the εἰκὼν, similarities and differences, and treat them excessively or deficiently. Yet Socratic proportion wards off disproportion in the greatest matters. In the previous chapter we saw how connecting the *Phaedo* too closely to tragedy could result in tying Socrates’s death too closely to a state-sponsored execution, creating a distortion of the fitting εἰκὼν of the death of the philosopher. This was taken further by seeing how Socratic proportion wards off the distortion of tragedy by warning against soul-blindness, laying down the method of *logoi*, subtly distancing itself from a tragedy, and finally by showing Socrates as decisively other than a tragic hero. In this way the despair of tragedy could be avoided. This proportion may also be expressed in the practices of *weaving* and *harmonia*.

In this chapter, we will see how the *Phaedo* wards off the other danger—the danger of hubris. Comedy is a means by which hubris can be warded off. A failure to appreciate the role of comedy in the *Phaedo* can result in a distorted vision of Socrates’s death. In this case, his death can appear as a suicide. It is only by seeing these phenomena in correct proportion that one is able to correctly behold the εἰκὼν of the death of the philosopher.¹ I will first explore this point and then turn to the depiction of the so-called genuine philosophers in the *Phaedo* who provide a hubristic *logos* that claims too much. I close the chapter by examining the question of the soul and how it enacts a proportionate

whole.

Greek comedy is traditionally divided into old, middle, and new with the central figure of Aristophanes representing Old Comedy. Before turning to Old Comedy and Aristophanes I would like to briefly explore the connections between New Comedy and Greek sacrificial ritual. Plato died in 347/348 BCE, before the flourishing of Meander, the major representative of New Comedy. Thus, it is not certain that Plato had firsthand experience of New Comedy as such, yet it is possible that the ideas that informed it may well have been expressed at the time. James Redfield has explored the place of animal sacrifice in comedy. Redfield points out that New Comedy is best representative of the sacrificial theory of Vernant, which, as we saw in [chapter 2](#), depicts sacrifice as a communal meat-meal and emphasizes that the satisfaction of appetites was its primary function, whereas other salutary effects also redounded to the community. “Animal sacrifice, as Vernant saw, placed the Greeks between beasts and gods, with aspects of both. Meat eating linked them to the earth, but properly executed, resulted in social peace. This was the theme of New Comedy.”² Thus, the possibility that sacrifice in a comedy restored peace with the gods was also a central theme. Comedies, then, actually parody sacrifice by perverting the making of smoke (*knisa*) to a means of attracting men to the feast in order to satisfy their appetites. The key term for the sacrificial offering is *knisa*, which is the smoke that is meant for the gods. Redfield explains as follows: Knisa is meat in its immaterial form, in the form of information. When a family is celebrating Amphidromia for a new born, the *knisa* transmits a message; it identifies the site of the party, as much as the wreath on the door (Ephippus fr. 3 Kock). To conduct a public festival is to fill the streets with *knisa*. (Eq. 1320; cf. Av. 1232)³

Drawing on other comic sources, Redfield explains, “In comedy animal sacrifice is not about killing, not about the ambiguities of our condition but about the joys of satisfying our appetites.”⁴ Sacrifice is depicted in many comedies, Aristophanes’s *Acharnians* for example, as a means of expressing the broader theme of “the joy that descends when the appetites are given free rein.”⁵ Yet, the omission of *knisa* from a sacrifice was the sign of a perversion or a distortion that resulted in a comedy. It is perverted because the satisfaction of human appetites becomes the focus of the sacrifice rather than the pious and reverent offerings of *knisa* to the gods. Sometimes in the comedy of Aristophanes, as Redfield points out, sacrifice is parodied by offering vegetables rather than meat to the gods. Gathering these points concerning appetite satisfaction, *knisa* and

the restoration of peace, we can now apply them to the depiction of Socrates in Aristophanes's *Clouds* and in Plato's *Phaedo*.

According to Plato's *Apology*, the most common criticism of Socrates's practices among the youth was leveled by an Aristophanic comedy that appeared some twenty-four years before the trial.⁶ At the trial itself, Socrates alludes to Aristophanes as one of his earlier accusers who "got hold of the many of you [members of the jury] from childhood, and they accused me and persuaded you ... that there is a certain Socrates, a wise man, a thinker on the things aloft ..." (18b). In *Clouds*, we see how Strepsiades wants to have his son educated by Socrates in the way of the Sophists so that he might cheat his creditors. The comedy ends, quite scandalously with a holocaust, the burning down of the "Thinking Shop" with Socrates within: CHAREPHON: Ahhh! Help! I'm suffocating!

SOCRATES: What about me? I'm going up in smoke!

STREPSIADES: It serves you right for daring to think that you could snub the gods and spy on the moon when she's all exposed. Outrageous! Chase them down, smash bash and crash them! We'll teach them a hundred lessons, but most of all never to offend the gods above! (1504–1509)⁷

It is noteworthy that Socrates and his disciples are burnt up. It appears that in *Clouds* the sacrifice of Socrates is used as a means of satisfying the violent appetites of the mob that gathers around them. The making of smoke is used to serve this end rather than as a fitting offering to the gods, creating the look of a perverted sacrifice.⁸

In the approximately twenty-four years between the appearance of the comic play and the death of Socrates, this depiction of the death of Socrates as such a perverted sacrificial holocaust might well have come to permeate Plato's imagination and affect how he told the story of the last few hours and depicted the death scene. In contrast to the undignified death shown by Aristophanes, Plato seems to have kept in place a depiction of Socrates's death as a sacrifice, although not as a perverted sacrifice as Aristophanes seems to have presented him. Instead, Plato allows the sacrifice to deviate decisively by showing him going freely with great proportion to his death. His death appears, then, as one in which there is not only a subtle pulling away from ancient sacrifice but also from a comic depiction of perverted sacrifice. Socrates is not as an unwilling victim of mob rule whose death only serves to satisfy their appetites but rather a noble

man offering himself freely.

Perversion of offering what is fitting to the gods is, then, a theme of comedy. Although we have seen the comic depiction of Socrates as a victim of mob rule and a perverted sacrifice, it is worth noting that the *Phaedo* provides a warning against a further perversion—a warning against committing suicide. We see this at 61e as Socrates endorses a teaching attributed to Philolaus. When Socrates asks Cebes what this teaching is Cebes replies, “For I’ve already heard Philolaus too, when he was staying among us, say what you said just now, and I’ve heard it from others as well: ‘One must not do this.’ But I’ve never heard anything sure about these things from anyone” (61e). The argument that follows rests on the presupposition that because the souls of humans are the property of the gods, the gods are displeased when humans take their own lives. Despite this, it is sometimes thought that Socrates, in fact, committed suicide and that the *Phaedo* shows him doing precisely this. I would first like to examine the evidence that some scholars have adduced for this possibility. A careful examination, however, reveals that this is a distorted view and that the *Phaedo* actually works against seeing it as such. The distortion of Socrates’s death appears in the case of tragedy by tying it too closely to tragedy, and a similar distortion appears when his death is tied too closely to a comedy.

Although some have argued that the death of Socrates appears merely as an execution, it has also been argued that it appears as a suicide. Xenophon’s *Apology*, for example, seems to see the death of Socrates in this way. There, Xenophon cites Hermogenes’s explanation that “Socrates’s whole concern was to keep free from any act of impiety toward the gods or any appearance of wrongdoing toward mankind; he did not think he should beseech the jury to let him escape death; instead, he believed that the time had come now for him to die.”⁹ The reason for this belief is that he welcomes the edict of death given by the jury because of his advancing age and that by dying before he gets old his death will be rendered ... to be the easiest and the least troublesome to one’s friends, and that implants in them the deepest feeling of loss for those meeting their end. For when a person leaves behind in the hearts of those attending his death nothing unseemly or disagreeable, but dies away while he still possesses a sound body and a spirit capable of showing kindness, how can he fail to be sorely missed?¹⁰

As a result, Xenophon explains that Socrates did not put up much of a defense at the trial and might have even provoked the jury to sentence him to death. Such an interpretation suggests that Socrates committed a version of *suicide by jury*.

Jennifer Michael Hecht revives Xenophon’s view by suggesting that many

deaths that we would have considered state executions were in fact considered suicides by the Greeks. In explaining Socrates's death Hecht writes, "It is easily the great suicide of ancient history, and like many suicides of the ancient world, it was enforced." She notes that "Socrates in his jail cell mused to his listeners that there might be a kind of philosopher's heaven where life's intellectual conversations and convivial drinking continue, but this afterlife is suggested as only one possible outcome" and even acknowledges the source of this view in the teaching of Pythagoras.¹¹ Hecht links her reading of the *Phaedo* together with her reading of Xenophon's *Apology* and claims that because of the "world-eschewing nature" of Plato's view he must have held it as a suicide. As we have seen throughout this book, there are strong reasons to question whether the view of death given in the *Phaedo* shows Socrates's desire to escape from this world. In a moment, we will examine in detail the view of the so-called genuine philosophers and suggest that the comedic nature of their *logos* makes such a judgment highly questionable.

R.G. Frey has argued in a similar vein as Hecht regarding the possibility of a Socratic suicide. He notes, "It is rarely, if at all, thought that Socrates committed suicide; but such was the case, or so I want to suggest."¹² Frey begins by defining "suicide" as an intentionally self-caused death and addresses counter-arguments to the position that Socrates intentionally caused his own death. Yet in his analysis, Frey relies on a quite restrictive definition of such terms as *force* and *duress* that may be challenged. Moreover, it is not at all clear that Frey is attempting to provide an interpretation of the *Phaedo* at all because he does not adduce a single passage to support his claim and overlooks the clear prohibition against suicide at 61e that Socrates endorses and attributes to Philolaus. Hecht's reading of the death of Socrates is similar. Although she does provide a helpful nuance concerning ancient suicides, she does not consider the *Phaedo* in detail. Had she done so it might be possible to see why viewing the death scene as a sacrifice provides a more fitting reading than merely as suicide.

In the *Phaedo* we should note that there is a connection between suicide and comedy. When Socrates reports that the philosopher should be encouraged to pursue death (implying the possibility of suicide), Simmias laughs. What are we to make of this connection? The suggestion about suicide is, in fact, surrounded by laughter, suggesting further that suicide for the philosopher is a distortion and is out of proportion for understanding how he would die most fittingly. In a discussion of myth and Socratic irony, Kirkland explains that their function is to "maintain a certain distance between their recipient and what they bring to light ... one should not presume to grasp what is brought to light

immediately and authoritatively, but instead should experience it as requiring questioning or investigation. Comic discourse ... should be understood as bringing its subject matter to light in something like this fashion.”¹³ Thus, comedy and suicide bring to light the proper fittingness of the εἰκὼν of Socrates. As Leo Strauss put it, “We may therefore say that the Socratic conversation and hence the Platonic dialogue is slightly more akin to comedy than to tragedy.”¹⁴ The *Phaedo*, then, seems to be a mixture of the tragic and the comedic. How then are we to understand this mixture more precisely?

In chapter 4, we saw how “suffering into knowledge” is a significant theme in an Aeschylean tragedy like *Agamemnon*. Scholars have argued that in that drama the chorus testifies to gaining knowledge of the larger purpose behind suffering by watching the figure on stage suffer. In the *Phaedo*, however, participants in the dialogue undergo a distancing from presupposed knowledge and from physical suffering itself. A therapeutic movement is enacted that provides a way of seeing the possibility of the whole that fits the capacity for knowledge of mortal human beings. Hearers and participants learn by encountering a fitting account (*logos*) and witnessing it in the deed (*ergon*) of the embodied philosopher called “Socrates” revealed as εἰκὼν. One who engages the *Phaedo* witnesses the very death of this philosopher. What the witness encounters is the way the embodied Socrates—the philosopher—dies willingly, “without the least tremor,” as he drinks the *pharmakon*. Yet there are other philosophers in the *Phaedo* as well, the ones whom Socrates called “the true-born ones,” and it is against the backdrop of the embodied Socrates that I suggest these disembodied ones are most fittingly revealed. Before proceeding, it is important to discuss three challenges that face an interpretation of the *Phaedo* that would attempt to bring both *logos* and *ergon* together.

First, there is an intrinsic challenge involved whenever human beings try to give a *logos* that takes death into account. The gods, who are undying, do not face this challenge, but for human beings, mere mortals, death is ambivalent. It is at one and the same time something that comes most naturally to us but that also opposes our mortal need to endure. Death is an interruption. Any *logos* that seeks to account for death will always fail since it must try to take the very possibility and limitation of itself into account. In a Socratic *logos*, the acknowledgment of limitation is essential.¹⁵

At the outset of the *Phaedo*, Echecrates listens as Phaedo recounts how he and the others first encountered Socrates on the day that he was to drink the *pharmakon*. “We hadn’t waited for a long time when he [the jailer] came and told us to go in. So we went in and caught (κατελαμβάνομεν) Socrates just freed

from his bonds ...” (59e–60a). κατελαμβάνομεν is derived from καταλαμβάνω, which can mean “to catch or seize hold of” but is also used in other places by Plato to mean “to comprehend” or “to seize with the mind.”¹⁶ An attempt to give a *logos* that takes account of death can be compared with an attempt to catch hold of the embodied Socrates. The *logos* may slip away from us, just like Socrates. What we may learn from the *Phaedo*’s attempt is that a *logos* that would account for death always betrays itself as incomplete.

Another challenge that the search for such a *logos* entails is that what is grasped and held tightly to is *only* a part of the whole. What this means is that a *logos* can “slip away” in different ways. There are many ways in which a *logos* may try to take death into account. One way is the way of *synecdoche*, accepting a part as responsible for the whole or the whole for one of its parts.¹⁷ This helps to explain why Socrates’s speech concerning a *logos* that takes death into account must be persuasive. Cebes and Simmias accuse Socrates of inconsistency because he is trying to serve the gods by his death and also hoping to go to a better place after he dies. Socrates says to them, “ ‘What you say is just,’ he said, ‘for I think what you’re both saying is that I should make my defense against these charges, just as in the law court’ ” (63b). The language of the law court is persuasion. Socrates continues, saying, “I’d better try to give a more persuasive defense before you than I did before my judges” (63b). Thus, at this point Socrates’s *logos* about death appears shaped primarily by a need to persuade and not necessarily to provide a fitting account. As his speech progresses it becomes apparent that Socrates’s goal is to persuade his friends not to fear death and to give them comfort at his passing.

The proper fit between life and death is something that always defies mortals. Thus, in seeking it there can be a tendency to fail to take the proper distance and to take a part as encompassing the whole. Said otherwise, this failure of distance can mean that a part will be sacrificed, as if it stands in for or represents the proportionate whole. Once this substitution takes place, an economy comes into being. Economies can be the outcome of such a fugitive *logos* and can lead to comedy, for if this occurs there can be a comic or disproportionate action that follows. For example, as we saw in our earlier analysis of sacrificial ritual in [chapter 2](#), for any sacrificial economy to be in place, mortals must act as if there is a proportion between them and the gods. In other words, mortals can only act *as if* there is some exchange between humans and gods when they simultaneously believe that there is a proportionate whole governing their lives together. This, as we saw, is a presupposition of the *do ut des* principle that sustains sacrificial ritual. The exchange does not necessarily

enact the whole but merely requires that it be assumed for its operation.

Finally, a search for a fitting *logos* that would take death into account seeks to unravel all sacrificial economies. Said otherwise, a deed (*ergon*) is the most fitting way of taking vulnerability and human limitation into account. As I will show in [chapter 6](#), the medical practice of *triage* is one example of this. The search for a proportionate whole eventually calls into question all economies that would substitute knowledge of the part for knowledge of the proportionate whole. An authentic *logos* that would take death into account, then, may *surpass* or *exceed* itself. The challenge here is to remain aware of the unraveling of sacrificial economies and to see how Platonic dialogue enacts this unraveling. What we learn from this is that an *ergon* like Socrates's, one that restores proportion, will always exceed *logos*. This deed enacts the proper fit more fully than any *logos*, unless it be a divine one, ever could. The εἰκὼν of Socrates is what is offered as a way of gaining distance and proper perspective.

These three challenges reveal that there is much at stake in the search for a *logos* that tries to account for death. The rest of this chapter proceeds as follows: First, I analyze the view of the relationship between the soul and the body in *Phaedo*. As we shall see, this view entails a *logos* of the soul that is reductionistic, treating a part as if it were the whole and holding it together by means of strength. This kind of *logos* appears in at least two other Platonic dialogues—the *Theaetetus* and the *Republic*. By observing it in those places, we can learn about the operation of this kind of *logos*. What the *Phaedo* has in common with these dialogues is that the effect of a reductionistic *logos* is to overlook the embodied Socrates, the philosopher who knows that he does not know.

Second, I examine how the *logos* of the disembodied soul of the philosopher that is given leads to a “bidding farewell” to the *polis*. In a sense, this is a farewell to the sensible world; however, one should not overemphasize this view of the sensible world. A consideration of Socrates's discussion of recollection and the search for the Equal that it engenders reveals a desire for a fitting whole. Said otherwise, the failure to find the Equal Itself in the sensible world does not necessarily show that the sensible world is inferior to the intelligible world as much as it enacts the philosopher's search and yearning for a fitting whole. The failure to find this in the sensible world should not lead the philosopher to despair or to hatred of the *logos* (to misology) but rather to acknowledge limitations and find a method for living without certain knowledge of such a whole. Socrates himself gives us an exemplar of living in such a way. That way is described between 91a and 95a in his account of the soul in response to the counterexample of the lyre offered by Simmias beginning at 86a. Such a

soul is one that has been trained to act *as if* it were part of a proportionate whole even while acknowledging the limitations of knowing itself as a whole.

Third, I point out that the reductionistic *logos* given in the *Phaedo* that leads to the appearance of the genuine philosophers might well be seen as a sacrifice of the body.¹⁸ The *Phaedo*'s depiction of these philosophers through Socrates's mimicry of them subjects the body to a sacrificial economy that the *Phaedo* itself enacts. We shall explore here how the deed of the genuine philosophers and the ascent from the body creates a comic depiction. It is possible to understand this account of the body and the soul, the "bidding farewell" as a strange "sacrifice" of the body, a comic parody of sacrifice, since the soul is depicted as ascending without the body. In other words, the body, as well as its accompanying emotions, is depicted throughout as an impediment that must be sacrificed if the soul is to attain its end. The body, then, becomes subjected to a sacrificial economy enacted by the genuine philosophers.

Fourth, I show that this enactment of sacrifice is really a *mimetic* rupture that has much in common with the death scene. This rupture calls into question the sacrificial economy of the body. By attending to the role that voice plays in this section of the dialogue, it is possible to see that this *logos*, one that takes account of death by sacrificing the body, is not one that Socrates holds and that it is strange to argue, as some interpreters have, that this is really Plato's view. I might add that Socrates's body exceeds the economy that is in place and calls us to ask whether there might be something "other than" this account. I now turn to that *logos* that would try to take death into account.

The account given in the *Phaedo* concerning death commences at 64a when Socrates begins to try to persuade Simmias and Cebes that he is justified in his belief that death is something good and not something to be feared. He says, "But now I want to render my account (τὸν λόγον) to you my judges, to tell you why it appears reasonable to me that a man who's genuinely spent his life in philosophy is confident when he's about to die and has high hopes that when he's met his end, he'll win the greatest goods There." This section continues until 70b when Cebes concludes that such an account would provide "a great hope—a beautiful hope" (ὅν εἴη ἐλπίς καὶ καλή). This also functions as an appeal to the emotional register of the other interlocutors. Cebes then asks Socrates for "more than a little persuasive talk and assurance" (ἀλλὰ τοῦτο δὴ ἴσως οὐκ ὀλίγης παραμυθίας δεῖται καὶ πίστεως). It is significant that Cebes characterizes what Socrates has said to this point as only "persuasive talk." The persuasiveness of Socrates relies on the effectiveness of a rhetorical technique that he uses here. Because both Socrates and his interlocutors agree that persuasion—and not knowledge—is the aim of this discourse, it comes as a

surprise when Socrates agrees to provide *logoi* that purport to provide knowledge of life after death. Socrates provides three accounts—from contraries (69e–72e), from recollection (*anamnesis*) (72e–77a), and from invisibility (78b–84b)—that he thinks demonstrate how a *logos* that takes death into account might appear. Here I will only examine recollection in detail.

In his account of death, Socrates tells Simmias and Cebes that those who “happen to have gotten in touch with philosophy in the right way devote themselves to nothing else but dying and being dead” (64a). This account of the practice of philosophy seems immediately strange and unnecessarily restrictive. Why should philosophy be *nothing else than* this? Human beings certainly pursue many ends, but it seems that all of them have to do with life and not death. Continuing the discourse, Socrates asks Simmias at 64c, “Do we consider that there’s such a thing as death?” Two aspects of this speech may be noted here.

First, this construction calls to mind a question that asks “what is it?” As we shall see, Socrates uses this kind of question in other dialogues when he asks questions about knowledge and justice. Socrates simply does not assume that death *is*. He could have begun by asking Simmias and Cebes, “What is Death?” Had he done this, he might have been able to follow their account through the *elenchus* and search for a definition of death. What might have been discovered is that death is not *anything*. For this reason, Socrates simply begins by eliciting the indefinite agreement of Simmias that death is *something*. This tells us that Socrates’s inquiry at this point has the same form as the question “Do we consider that there is such a thing as Justice?” The search for the answer to the question “What is Death?” in the *Phaedo*, then, resembles the search for the answer to the other things that *are*.

Second, it is important to notice how Socrates’s question is answered by Simmias. “ ‘Of course,’ said Simmias, breaking in” (πάνυ γε, ἔφη ὑπολαβὼν ὁ Σιμμίας). The term translated as “breaking in” is ὑπολαβὼν. This term can mean simply “to interrupt,” yet it is strange that Simmias interrupts at this point because he has just been conversing with Socrates. The term appears at other points in the dialogue (60c, 69e, 72e, and 73a) and is a common way of expressing a rejoinder, yet it suggests, too, that Socrates’s “What is it?” question was merely rhetorical: he presupposed an affirmative answer. Moreover, as we saw above, Socrates could have begun by simply denying that there is such a thing as death. If successful he would have quite easily demonstrated the soul’s immortality. Why would someone who endeavors to prove the undyingness of the soul so easily admit that death *is*? Thus, if the soul were undying then it would turn out that death really does not exist. Simmias’s reaction, then, may

also indicate that the relationship between death and *logos* is far from obvious. What this interchange shows, then, is that a *logos* that tries to take death into account must be interrupted, disrupted, and constantly called into question.

After gaining Simmias's agreement that death *is*, Socrates proceeds to offer an account of death that draws on the terms *body* (τὸ σῶμα) and *soul* (τῆς ψυχῆς).

“And is it [death] anything but the freeing of the soul from the body? And is this what it means to have died: for the body to have become separate, once it's freed from the soul and is itself all by itself, and for the soul to be separate, once she's freed from the body and is herself all by herself? Death couldn't be *anything other* than this—could it?” “No, just that,” he said. (*italics added*, 64c) Here, in an indefinite phrase, Socrates introduces the well-known *logos* of death as a separation of the soul from the body. This *logos* is frequently attributed to Socrates and is even held to be Plato's final word on the subject. The construction offered here—ἄρα μὴ ἄλλο τι—is translated as “anything other.” This *logos* bears close resemblance to *logoi* offered in other dialogues like *Republic* and *Theaetetus*, which I examine now.

In the *Theaetetus*, Socrates, Theodorus, and Theaetetus all seek a *logos* of “knowledge” (*episteme*). They set out on a tortuous path that explores the possibility that knowledge is perception (*aisthesis*), that knowledge is true opinion (*doxa*), and that knowledge is true opinion with an account (*logos*). The search also brings them to consider expert knowledge, or wisdom, and language. In the *Theaetetus*, Socrates first appears and expresses his concern with the virtue of the young men of Athens, and the dialogue ends when Socrates announces that he must go to court in order to meet the charges of Meletus that he draws out in *Apology*, which lead to his death sentence. Thus, one frame of the dialogue is the existential horizon of the death of Socrates.

In addition, early in the dialogue, a *logos* of knowledge is offered by Theaetetus, who has been encouraged by Socrates to “try to say whatever is knowledge, and never say you can't, for if a god's willing and you're manly, you'll be able” (151e).¹⁹ Taking up his challenge, Theaetetus responds, and, along with Socrates, we listen as he gives voice to it. “My opinion is then that whoever knows something perceives that which he knows, and as it now appears, knowledge is nothing else than perception (*aisthesis*)(151e).²⁰ We might ask, then, does perception (*aisthesis*) contain all we mean by knowledge?

As we shall see, the construction “οὐκ ἄλλο τι ἢ” (“nothing other than”) in the *Theaetetus*, given in the indicative mood, parallels the structure of the account of death offered in the *Phaedo*.

In his discussion of Theaetetus’s answer, Heidegger wonders about the character of (*aisthesis*) and suggests that it introduces the question of whether or not the one who possesses it has a relationship to beings as such. He wonders, “Does (*aisthesis*) as perceivedness fulfill the demand we make of the essence of knowledge? Do we require of knowledge nothing else besides the perceivedness of something?”²¹ Moreover, *aisthesis* is a part of the *logos* of knowledge but is far from providing a proportionate whole.

As the dialogue unfolds, we learn that Theaetetus and Theodorus are prone to an inability to take ignorance (*agnoia*) into account. This inability is heightened by the drama of the dialogue and its final deed because at the close we see that they cannot take Socrates himself into account. He leaves them to go to the court of the King Archon to answer to the charges of Meletus. “Now, however, I have to go to the porch of the king and meet the indictment of Meletus, which he’s drawn up against me. But at dawn, Theodorus, let’s come back here to meet” (210d). What the dialogue reveals, then, is that even if the discussion were to continue it would have to do so in the absence of Socrates, foreshadowing the end of the *Phaedo*. The embodied Socrates, then, has been overlooked and is not taken into account.²²

Thus, the *Theaetetus* offers an example of a *logos* that treats a part as if it were the whole and overlooks the embodied Socrates although he himself is present and listens to it. In the *Republic*, we witness as Socrates hears a *logos* with a similar construction and consequences. As is well known, this *logos* is given by Thrasymachus and is about justice. After having examined an account of justice from Cephalus and Polemarchus, Socrates listens as Thrasymachus offers his own account. He then insists that Socrates praise him for it. “ ‘Now listen,’ he said. ‘I say that justice is nothing other than the advantage of the stronger. Well, why don’t you praise me? But you won’t be willing’ (338c).²³ The construction translated as “nothing other than” is “οὐκ ἄλλο τι ἢ,” the same construction that we saw in the *Theaetetus*. Again, we observe Socrates as he listens to this account and reveals a way in which the account is partial. He shows that it does not take into account the possibility that strong rulers are vulnerable and sometimes betray ignorance of their own advantage. Rulers might “sometimes command what is bad for themselves and that it is just for the others [those who are commanded] to do these things” (340a).²⁴ As a mortal, even the strongest ruler remains subject to the limitations of human knowledge

and does not easily achieve proportionate knowledge of the whole. Thus, although Thrasymachus states his account in a way that pretends to know the whole, the construction—“nothing other than”—discloses it as incomplete and partial, substituting a mere part for the whole.

An additional aspect of this account is that, like the one given by Theaetetus, it overlooks the embodied Socrates despite the fact that he is present and listening to it. The justice of the judgment of the Athenians on Socrates at his trial seems to remain in question throughout the *Republic*. Yet, in light of Thrasymachus’s definition, one can ask whether it fits here. Justice, understood only as the advantage of the stronger, clearly prevailed when Socrates was sentenced to death, yet we are called to ask whether or not this was just. Moreover, Socrates himself, who is clearly not the stronger, is overlooked. In the *Phaedo*, when Socrates drinks the cup “without the least tremor,” one sees an εἰκὼν of an embodied philosopher acting justly, but one clearly does not see the advantage of the stronger enacted there. Although Socrates himself is standing right there with Thrasymachus, the deed (*ergon*) of the philosopher is overlooked by Thrasymachus’s account just as the philosopher and his awareness of his own ignorance is overlooked by Theaetetus in his account of knowledge. In heeding the warning of these dialogues, then, readers of the *Phaedo* must take care in attending to accounts that appear restrictive but are nevertheless offered as persuasive. In our further examination of the definition of death in the *Phaedo*, we shall see that the Socratic *logos* that takes death into account is both partial and overlooks the embodied philosopher and his sacrificial and proportionate deed.

Earlier we noted that in the *Phaedo* Socrates asks whether death could be “anything other than” (ἄρα μὴ ἄλλο τι) the *separation* of the soul from the body. In fact, Socrates suggests that such a separation (χωρῆς) implies what it means for “the body to have become separate, once it’s freed from the soul and is itself all by itself, and for the soul to be separate, once she’s freed from the body and is herself all by herself?” (64c).²⁵ Thus one part stands apart from the other—body itself, all by itself, stands apart from soul, herself all by herself. We can see already that this view presupposes something about parts. In light of our reading of the second sailing section in [chapter 4](#) and the conclusion that Socrates is seeking for a fitting cause expressed as a whole, we have good grounds for wondering about a *logos* that takes a mere aggregation of parts as its starting point. One wonders, then, if these parts—body and soul—can even stand forth as a fitting whole.

As it develops in the *Phaedo*, the view of death as separation of body from soul comes to depict philosophy as a kind of asceticism. Philosophy is

preparation for death because it, too, practices separating the soul from the body. Socrates says that this is what it means to care for the soul insofar as it separates one from caring for (servicing) the body. The ascetic practice that it leads to is purposefully restrictive. “All in all (οὐκοῦν ὅλως), doesn’t it seem to you,” he said, “that the business of such a man [the philosopher] is not with the body; instead, he stands apart from it and keeps turned toward the soul as much as he can” (64e). With the phrase “οὐκοῦν ὅλως,” which is sometimes translated as “altogether, then” or “all in all,” this description even presupposes a whole. Simmias agrees. Socrates then emphasizes that in the soul’s efforts toward “thoughtfulness” (τῆς φρονήσεως), the body is an impediment (ἐμπόδιον) to its efforts (65b), and it can be easily overlooked. Socrates suggests that knowledge that arises through the senses such as sight and hearing does not lead to anything precise (ἀκριβές) and may even lead, on the contrary, to deception. He concludes by explaining that the soul is most effective at reasoning when she is separate from the body.

And I suppose the soul reasons most beautifully when none of these things gives her pain—neither hearing nor sight, nor grief nor any pleasure—when instead, bidding farewell to the body, she comes to herself all by herself as much as possible and when, doing everything she can to avoid communing with or even being in touch with the body, she strives for what *is*. (65c) This ascetic practice of “bidding farewell” to the body will be examined in greater detail shortly. A few lines later in the *Phaedo*, Socrates explicitly connects it to the Orphic practice of purification (κάθαρσις), suggesting that philosophy and Orphism try to achieve the same end, the separation of the soul from the body in preparation for death.

And purification—doesn’t it turn out to be this, as we said way back in the argument: Isn’t it separating the soul from the body as much as possible and habituating her to gather and collect herself all by herself out of all the sites of the body and to dwell as much as possible, both in the present and in the time to come, alone by herself, released from out of the body just as from bonds? (67c) Just as the embodied Socrates, freed from his bonds, tends to slip away, so, too, the account of death just given leads to a practice that allows the embodied philosopher to escape as well. The body is precisely what is overlooked by this partial account of death.

Throughout the section 63e–69e Socrates speaks not in his own name but in the name of the people he variously calls “those who happen to have gotten in touch with philosophy in the right way” (64a), “those who truly are philosophers” (64b and 64e), “the true-born philosophers” (66b), “those who philosophize rightly” (67e and 69d), and “a genuine philosopher” (68c). The use of these strange terms, combined with the restrictive *logos* of death that has been offered—that death is nothing but the separation of the soul from the body—effectively makes the consideration of death overlook the actual situation of the embodied Socrates in the midst of his companions. John Sallis has pointed out that this section is replete with laughter, suggesting that an elaborate comedy is being staged here.²⁶ The *logos* of death requires “genuine philosophers” to speak without being bodily present, through a kind of ventriloquy. By speaking through Socrates, their speech becomes oddly appropriate because if their contention that one is most fully alive when freed from the body were true then they would not be present bodily at all! In other words, if the genuine philosophers were to make this claim with their own bodies, the claim itself would be undermined as it is spoken in a performative contradiction.

As we learn, Socrates offers the account as a rationale for not fearing death. Speaking of those who practice philosophy as a separation of the soul from the body Socrates says, “ ‘In fact, Simmias,’ he said, ‘those who philosophize rightly make dying their care, and of human beings to them least of all is being dead terrifying’” (67e). Although the statement acts as a way of soothing fears about death, the partialness of the considered account leads us to ask about the philosopher’s body.

Said otherwise, because the account overlooks and drifts away from the actual situation of the death of the embodied Socrates it sets him forth as an εἰκὼν all the more. Just at the moment that Socrates begins to offer his persuasive *logos* to Simmias and Cebes, the *pharmakodōtes* interrupts him, disrupting the *logos* with a deed, and Crito serves as his mouthpiece. Crito delivers a speech with clinical precision concerning the real effects of the potion (*pharmakon*): “He says people who do a lot of conversing get all heated up and that one mustn’t interfere in any such way with the potion” (63e). Socrates quickly dismisses the interruption and returns to the business of offering a *logos*.

As we have seen, the reductionistic definition of death that Socrates offers refers to a separation of two putative parts—soul and body. This separation entails the introduction of a subject that has not yet occurred in the dialogue—the soul that must stand and “seek to become a soul herself all by herself” (ζητεῖ δὲ αὐτὴ καθ’ αὐτὴν γίνεσθαι) (65d) away from the body. Socrates delivers his account in an indefinite mode, proceeding through interrogatives. In a sense, this

way of proceeding might suggest that the account is not fitting. Said otherwise, the account does not presuppose the possibility of the two parts standing forth as proportionate whole, and it does not grant the possibility of other parts being brought into congruence with the whole. Rather, it asserts a hypothetical whole that stands forth composed of two separate parts—body and soul. “Death couldn’t be anything other than this—could it?” (ἄρα μὴ ἄλλο τι ἢ ὁ θάνατος ἢ τοῦτο;) (64c).

In addition, Sallis points out that the resulting *logos* of the true-born philosophers presents philosophy and the philosopher as freed from *Eros*. Given what we know in the *Republic*, for example in 474c–487a, about the importance *Eros* has in the training and resulting character of a philosopher, we have reason to question this account since the philosopher is compared favorably to a lover of “looks.” In the *Republic* such a philosopher is by no means distant from *Eros*. In addition, Sallis points out that the very deed of Socrates as life-giver—the fact that as we learn early in the *Phaedo* that “the seventy year old Socrates has not only a son who is nearly grown up but also two who are still small”—causes one to wonder about this apparent distancing from *Eros* of the philosophical life of the true-born.²⁷ This depiction intensifies the appearance of a comic, disproportionate, even sterile image of the philosopher.

It is also noteworthy that this account tethers the two parts to each other by a mighty bond. By holding together parts with strength this persuasive *logos* joins the body and the soul but obviates the possibility of congruence. Recalling the *Republic* and the *Theaetetus*, we might observe how the reductionistic definitions operated by means of strength. Thrasyarchus’s definition of justice is that it is “nothing but the advantage of the stronger,” whereas Socrates praises Theaetetus’s definition for being “manly” (ἀνδρίζη). Thus, in reflecting on Socrates’s definition of death as “nothing but the separation of the soul from the body,” we might well expect to find elements of strength or power and not of proportion and congruence. In fact, at 68c Socrates explains to Simmias that courage is required for the ability to overcome fear of death by practicing the separation of the soul from the body. “Then isn’t it the case, Simmias, that what goes by the name of courage (ἀνδρεία) especially befits those in this condition?” Courage is an important characteristic of this image of the philosopher who maintains the separation of body and soul through strength, yet even in doing this the powerful account of death that the philosopher clings to must presuppose this separation.

This account is not unlike the Aesopian *mythos* offered by Socrates at 60b–c that concerned the joining together by force of the two-headed creature of pleasure and pain. In fact, this account functions in a similar way to the

Anaxagorean account of causation critiqued and called into question by Socrates in his own philosophical autobiography. We examined this account in [chapter 4](#). There we saw how parts added to parts and held together by strength, represented by the figure of Atlas, do not work as an account of causation. Here, too, we see an account that is lacking in proportionality; there is no proportionality between body and soul and no attempt to integrate them. Such an account is bound to provide a distorted image. As we watch the dialogue progress, then, we see the image of the ascetic philosopher come into being, yet the εἰκὼν of the embodied Socrates—the one with his feet on the earth and who will take the *pharmakon* without the least tremor—provides proper and fitting distance that reveals the death of the philosopher.

As we follow Socrates in this section, we witness the creation of a distorted image of a philosopher, one who shapes the soul itself by itself apart from the body. This is to be accomplished by eschewing the pleasures of food, drink, and lovemaking. It is, in the words of Socrates, a “bidding farewell to the body” (65c). Much as the genuine philosopher himself is separated from the *polis*, we see the soul separated from the body here. The rupture, the peeling away from the *polis* by the embodied Socrates, is enacted in this image of the philosopher who bids farewell to the body.

This reading of this section of the *Phaedo* may be compared to that of Jean-Luc Nancy’s in “The Unsacrificeable,” which I referred to in [chapter 1](#). Nancy sees philosophy practiced as purification as a way in which there is an “appropriative reversal of the situation by the subject Socrates.”²⁸ Nancy holds that it is the sacrifice of the subject is at stake.

The *Phaedo* proposes nothing but an appropriate reversal of the situation by the subject Socrates: he is in prison, he is going to die, and so he designates all of earthly life as a prison, from which it is fitting to liberate oneself through death. *Philosophy* thus appears, not only as the knowledge of this liberation, but as its actual enactment: “And those who have purified themselves sufficiently by philosophy live thereafter altogether without bodies etc.” And so, shortly after having pronounced these words, the philosopher himself will not hesitate to drink and drain the cup of hemlock, praying to the gods that his “removal from this world to the other may be prosperous.” (*Phaedo*, 117c)²⁹

Still, it is difficult to see this especially as a reversal because, as I have been arguing, there are good reasons to suspect that this section of the dialogue does

not present a fitting view of Socrates at all but rather of the unfit genuine philosophers. In fact, the section might be considered more appropriately as accentuating the proportionality of Socrates's own embodied life standing forth as an εἰκὼν that marks it off quite vividly from that of the genuine philosophers.

Also telling in Nancy's description is his own use of the phrase "nothing but" (*rien que*). We might have noticed how this resembles the reductionistic construction of the *Theaetetus* and the *Republic*. I have suggested that Plato intentionally resists a reductionistic definition of death in the *Phaedo* by having Socrates comically undermine it as he gives it voice under the guise "genuine philosophers." In the εἰκὼν of the embodied Socrates, the *Phaedo*, instead, proposes something other than that image of the philosopher that it surpasses.

Nancy's reading is understandable if it is seen that in the *Phaedo* the body and the philosopher's concern with the *polis* are indeed sacrificed. The εἰκὼν of Socrates appears in such a way as to allow the disproportion of such a view of philosophy to emerge, a distortion that one might even call a "sacrifice of the body." Although this might appear as a reversal, as Nancy sees it, it can only appear as such at the cost of seeing Socrates's entire life to this point as imprisonment, a position that Nietzsche holds, as we shall see in [chapter 6](#). At Socrates's death, the body, his prison, is finally put aside. However, if we emphasize Socrates's death as an intentional self-sacrifice then it is possible to affirm his life's value. In this way the εἰκὼν of the death of the philosopher, juxtaposed against the distortion of the so-called genuine philosophers, gives expression to both sameness and difference in the *Phaedo*.

With this analysis in place, we may now explore the impetus behind the search for the proportionate whole. One very clear place that this impetus appears in the *Phaedo* is in Socrates's discussion of his search for the Equal Itself by means of recollection (72e–77a). I will first provide a reading of this section that shows how the search for the Equal Itself reveals the philosopher's yearning for proportionality. Although in one way this search reveals the inferiority of the sensible world insofar as it is not proportionate, in another way it reveals the importance of the philosopher's yearning for a proportion to govern life. In other words, the argument from recollection reveals the importance of perceptual showing tethering the intelligible directly to the sensible. At 65c, Socrates tells Simmias that on his account the soul is "bidding farewell" to the body, to the sensible world, but I suggest that this movement does not show that the philosopher despairs of this sensible world and flees to another. Instead, it displays the practice of philosophy as fostering the acknowledgment of limitations, an avoidance of the hatred of *logos* (*misologia*) (88c–91b), and a search for living in proportion. It is to Socrates's treatment of recollection that I

turn.

At 73c, Socrates asks Simmias, “Whenever somebody who’s either seen or heard something—or has grasped it by some other sense (αἰσθησιν)—not only recognizes that thing but also takes note of another, the knowledge of which isn’t the same but different, don’t we justly say that he recollects that of which he grasped the notion?” From the sense impression of one thing, another thing that is different is made manifest.²⁵ We should notice the important role of the senses in this. Recollection does not begin with absolute knowledge of something like the Equal Itself but rather comes about through the senses that are embodied. At 73d, Socrates provides another example of this operation by noting how the sense impression of a lyre brings to mind the look (τὸ εἶδος) of the boy to whom it belongs. Socrates’s example at 73d creates a relation between two things, a sense impression and a look, and this relation is made manifest in *logos*. It is in the act of remembering that the relation comes forth. Because these two things are distinct from one another and because they are sufficiently close to one another to call each other to mind, the relation must be one of sameness and difference.³⁰

We should note as well the precise words that Socrates uses in putting this question to Simmias at 73c, for this sets the tone of the entire discourse. He does not flatly assert that this is how recollection operates; instead, he says, “don’t we justly say that” this is the way that recollection operates. Sallis suggests that through this way of putting things, we can infer that Socrates is explaining that it is in the “saying” of “the Equal Itself” that the relationship between it and the other things becomes manifest. The relationship becomes manifest in *logos*. Once again, we may note here that the senses are required for the Equal Itself to be made manifest and that we rely upon the body to reveal this. In fact, as we shall see later, the mere act of speaking about the Equal Itself requires a voice that is embodied. Thus, in the *Phaedo* Socrates has a view of philosophy that requires the senses and the body.

At 73e, before he discusses the Equal Itself, Socrates reflects on the process of recollection as a kind of philosophical initiation, a kind of experience (πάθη) that one undergoes. Referring to the relation between the sense impression and the look, Socrates suggests, “‘Now isn’t that sort of thing,’” said he, ‘a kind of recollection? Especially when somebody undergoes this concerning things which, from time and inattention, he’d already forgotten?’” Socrates then considers a number of other examples that bring about recollection, such as a sketched horse or a sketched lyre. In each case, Socrates remarks that when recollecting a thing from similar things one must undergo an

experience, i.e., one must note “whether or not, with respect to similarity, this thing somehow falls short of what he’s recollected” (74a). We shall see in a moment the significance of this notion of “falling short.”

After this, Socrates introduces the example of the Equal Itself (αὐτὸ τὸ ἴσον). The Equal Itself is manifest only through other things such as various sticks and stones that bring it to mind. In order to know that these sticks and stones are not equal, however, the person who makes this judgment must have seen the Equal Itself beforehand (προειδέναι). This is the case even though the various sticks and stones, known by the senses, are what reveal the Equal Itself. That is, the experience of recognizing that things in the sensible world *fall short* (ἐλλείπω) of the Equal Itself is what reveals it.

“What about this?” said he. “Do we undergo some such things as this concerning equals among sticks and the other equals we were talking about just now: Do they appear to us to be equals in just the same way as the Equal Itself, that equal that *is*. Or do they fall somewhat short of being the sort of thing the Equal is—or not at all?” (74d) Simmias agrees, replying, “They fall short by a lot” (καὶ πολὺ γε, ἔφη, ἐνδεῖ). Socrates continues, explaining that anyone who would note that something falls short would also understand that “what I’m now seeing wants to be of the same sort as something else among the things that *are*.” In seeing this he also understands that it “falls short.” Thus, there are many ways in which sensible equality falls short of the Equal Itself.³¹ To Socrates this indicates how the sensible world falls short of perfection and will appear as inferior in this respect. He says to Simmias that “... it falls short and isn’t able to be that sort of thing but is inferior ...” (74d). Nevertheless, it still aspires to the Equal Itself. Said otherwise, what is understood by the senses as equality always lapses into inequality and differs from the Equal Itself. Socrates will later state that this operation is similar in cases of things like “the Beautiful Itself and the Good Itself and the Just and the Holy ...” (75d).³² Recollection is a movement of the soul necessary for such things to become manifest.³³

For the philosopher undergoing recollection, the realization of the dependence of the sensible on the intelligible reality becomes manifest. As David Roochnik suggests, “Perhaps, then, what Socrates means is that because sensible things are made intelligible by higher realities—by Forms like the Equal itself—when someone compares the two, she ‘realizes’ the dependence of the

sensible on the Form.”³⁴ Although I think there is a sense in which sensible things are closely tied to intelligible entities in this section, I am not convinced that higher realities are the cause of sensible things becoming intelligible. Instead, the close bond between the two reminds us of the perceptual showing forth as when some insight about the Equal and the proportion that arises from it comes forth. It might seem strange to us to consider that things in the sensible world “desire” to be something, like sticks desiring to be equal; nevertheless, it is a way of expressing what one can see from the perspective of a hypothetical whole like the Equal Itself. What the philosopher realizes in recollection is that, again according to Roochnik, “Our lives are shot through with imperfection, but even in the simple act of measuring the length of two sticks an inkling of perfection shines through.”³⁵

It is possible now to view this search for the Equal Itself, and the resulting hunt for all other such things as the Beautiful Itself and the Good Itself and the Just and the Holy and “all those things upon which we set the seal ‘that which is’ ...” (περὶ πάντων οἷς ἐπισφραγιζόμεθα τὸ ‘αὐτὸ ὃ ἔστι’) (75d), in terms that we used earlier concerning the search for proportionality. Reversing our forward course for a moment, we can see how this study of sacrifice in the *Phaedo* has accomplished this. In [chapter 4](#), I pointed out that faced with his own death Socrates sought a way of doing philosophy that both acknowledged the limitations of human beings while seeking to provide an account of life and death—of generation and destruction as a whole—that is proportionate. It is proportionate insofar as it properly relates life and death such that the proper distance is disclosed through the εἰκὼν of the embodied philosopher Socrates at his death. In [chapter 3](#), I argued that the death scene of the *Phaedo* provides a *mimesis* of such proportionality and reveals the embodied Socrates as εἰκὼν. In [chapter 2](#), we saw how economies require mortals to posit a belief in a proportion between themselves and the gods in order to function, although mortals do not in fact know what this proportion is. Mortals can only act *as if* there is a fitting sacrificial exchange between them and their gods if they simultaneously believe that there is a proportion or a kind of whole that governs their lives together. Thus, at this juncture, we can now see how the insights into inequality and the lack of proportion in the sensible world initiate the philosopher by offering “the look” of the sensible that desires those things that *are*. The failure to find an account of this sensible world should not lead the philosopher to despair and hatred of the *logos* but rather to acknowledge limitations and find a way of life without direct knowledge of the whole. Such a way of proceeding, I suggest, is found in an account of the soul that Socrates

offers in the *Phaedo* 91b–95a.

So far I have said very little about the soul and the question of its individual immortality. Commentators from Cicero to Hegel to Gadamer have pointed out that Socrates’s purported arguments for this fail in the *Phaedo*.³⁶ Even the earliest editor of Plato’s works, Thrasyllus of Mendes (AD 1), did not emphasize this aspect of the dialogue. As Harold Tarrant points out, Thrasyllus saw the main purpose of the tetralogy—*Euthyphro*, *Apology*, *Crito*, and *Phaedo*—as depicting the philosophical life.³⁷ Although in his manuscripts Thrasyllus appended the subtitle “On the Soul” to *Phaedo*, he nonetheless did not choose to emphasize the fact that it was about the soul’s *immortality*. Thus, it is not clear that proving individual immortality is the primary aim of this dialogue. In fact, the term that Thrasyllus did append was *ethical*. In this sense, the question of the *ethos* of the philosophical life and the soul that it sets forth are more significant than the question of the individual soul’s immortality. Thus, if we allow the degree to which the dialogue provides proof of the immortality of the individual soul as the standard for its success and as the subject matter of the dialogue then we are sure to judge the *Phaedo* as a failure. I have deferred the topic of the soul until now in order to gain some distance from this traditional approach.

A second reason for deferring such questions is the need to bring the εἰκὼν of the death of Socrates into clear focus and to consider how the death of the philosopher is revealed in the *Phaedo*. It is now time, however, to turn to the subject of the soul. In the rest of this chapter, I argue that the *Phaedo* enacts a search for a *logos* that takes life and death into account. Such a *logos* provides in speech what the εἰκὼν of the death of Socrates provides as a vision. As we have seen, the way in which this *logos* unfolded at the beginning of the *Phaedo* was to refer to a separation of body and soul.

An account of the soul that follows from this discussion of recollection that we have already discussed would see that the philosophical soul is one that always seeks proportion in this world but also acknowledges the soul’s limitations. Such a soul, in other words, must be one that has been trained to act as if there were a proportionate whole that it is part of. It acts from a firm belief that there *is* a proportion available. Undergoing recollection is the kind of process that reveals this. Socrates himself gives us a way of living in such a way. That way is offered in his account of the soul in response to the lyre example.

In [chapter 4](#), we considered how the search for generation and corruption *as a whole* led Socrates to consider different approaches to the relationship between parts and whole in the well-known second sailing passage of the *Phaedo*. One of these was the way of proportionality. To be proportionate is to

stand forth as a whole. It is important to recall that the impetus for this search for proportionality was the objection, brought by Cebes, about the “long-lasting part” (πολυχρονιώτερόν). Before we examine what Cebes says about it, we might linger for a moment considering how the search begins in earnest for a part that is long-lasting. It is an “ancient part” or a “long-lived” part. As such it has endurance but also has undergone a number of challenges to its proportionality. This part, Cebes contends, can be represented by a likeness, just as Simmias will later offer regarding a lyre.

For what’s been said about the soul seems to me similar to what somebody might argue about an old weaver man who’d died: that the human hadn’t perished but continued to *be* somewhere, safe and sound. And he’d offer as proof of this that a cloak that fellow used to wear and which he himself had woven was safe and sound and hadn’t perished; and if somebody distrusted him, he’d ask which class was more long-lasting, that of a human or of a cloak in constant use and wear. ... (87b–d) Because Socrates appeared initially unable to answer this objection, he was, as we see, unable to respond to the charge that “as far as each of us being terrified goes, whether she enters once into a body or many times; being terrified befits anyone who doesn’t know that she’s something deathless and who can’t give an account” (προσῆκει γὰρ φοβεῖσθαι, εἰ μὴ ἀνότητος εἶη, τῷ μὴ εἰδότηι μηδὲ ἔχοντι λόγον δίδόναι) (95d). The term translated as “befits” is “προσῆκει.” This term can mean to “benefit” or to “beseem.”³⁸ Thus, for one who lacks a *logos* of the long-lasting part, fear or having a fearful part in control befits them. This implies, therefore, the opposite—that if one can give a *logos* of the long-lasting part and has knowledge of it then the part that seeks knowledge of the whole will guide the soul and not the fearing part.

In addressing matters related to the soul and to the fear surrounding it, it is helpful to move forward to the objection offered by Simmias’s lyre example (86a–d). He suggests that the soul is like an attunement.

Somebody might also give the same account about a tuning and a lyre, and its strings—that the tuning is something invisible and bodiless and something altogether beautiful and divine in the tuned lyre, but that the lyre itself and its strings are bodies and are body-like and composite, and earth-like and are akin to the death bound. Now

what if, whenever somebody either shatters the lyre or cuts and breaks the strings, somebody should insist, by the same argument you gave, that it's necessary that the tuning still *be* and not perish. (86a) Simmias continues by pointing out that the soul is in a similar way with regard to the body. Just as harmony is connected to the strings and the instrument, so too the soul is connected to the body. Simmias continues with the analogy explaining how the soul might perish.

Now what if, whenever somebody either shatters the lyre or cuts and breaks the strings, somebody should insist, by the very same argument you gave, that it's necessary that the tuning still *be* and not perish? For once the strings were broken, there'd be no trick by which the lyre and strings could still be, since they're death bound in form; and no trick by which the tuning could perish—and perish before the death bound thing—since it's naturally, similar and akin to the divine and deathless. (86a–b) A person faced with this situation would have to concede that just as the tuning is destroyed along with the lyre because it is connected to it, so too would the soul perish when the body does.

We might notice that Simmias does not make the objection about the lyre with his own voice but instead with the voice of some unnamed person. Perhaps Simmias is playing at a bit of ventriloquy just as Socrates does when he mimics the “true-born philosophers.” “Somebody might also give the same account about a tuning and a lyre and its strings” (85e). The precise identity of this “somebody” remains unclear, yet Simmias takes up his *logos* in a voice that certainly sounds like a Pythagorean's.

In addition, we may note the presence of the phrase *same account* (τὸν αὐτὸν τοῦτον λόγον). It is noteworthy here that the term αὐτὸν is used as an intensifier. The words—“You yourself Phaedo” (αὐτός)—are the very first words to appear in the dialogue (57a). The phrase also occurs in Socrates's earlier *logos* about the separation of the soul from the body. There he refers to “the body itself by itself” (αὐτὸ καθ' αὐτὸ) and the soul herself by herself (αὐτὴν καθ' αὐτὴν). Thus, this “same account” probably refers to the account given about the separation of the soul from the body. We will see in a moment how this self-same account lacks “sufficiency” (ἰκανῶς) because it lacks proportion and is merely an aggregate of parts added to or separated from other parts. Simmias seems to suggest that the same lack of proportionality with the whole can be given with the likeness of “a tuning and a lyre and its strings”

(86a). Although the likeness may differ, the *logos* leads to the same outcome—a disproportionate and distorted account.

In the earlier discussion of recollection we saw the depiction of the difference between the visible realm, which is subject to destruction, and the unseen realm, which is unchanging. As Simmias says, the lyre itself and its strings “are bodies and are body-like and composite, and earth-like and are akin to the death-bound” (86a). This is contrasted with the other realm in which the tuning resides as “something invisible and bodiless and something altogether beautiful and divine in the tuned lyre” (86c). Thus the same, or self-same, account is given about the visible and the unseen realms using the analogy of a lyre and its strings. According to Simmias, a problem occurs because of the necessity of a connection between the lyre with its strings and the tuning. As long as the lyre with its strings is tuned, then the tuning or attunement remains; however, if the lyre loses its tuning, the relationship among its strings, then the attunement disappears. In a similar way, as long as the body is, so to speak, “strung and held together by warm and cold and dry and wet and the like, our soul is, as it were, a blend and tuning of these very things, whenever, that is, they’re blended with one another in a beautiful and measured way” (86b–c). It is worth noting here that the account given of the body is that the parts are held together by opposites like warm and cold and wet and dry. Thus, the extremes of the body are congenial and held together by strength.

When Simmias accounts for the soul and the body he explains that they are “a blend and tuning of these very things” (κρᾶσιν εἶναι καὶ ἁρμονίαν αὐτῶν τούτων τὴν ψυχὴν ἡμῶν) (86c). The term κρᾶσιν, translated as “blend,” does not necessarily connote proportion.³⁹ This is relevant because a “tuning” (ἁρμονίαν) is similarly not required to have the sense of proportion. In Greek, the main meaning of this term is that of “joining” and “connecting,” but a notion of proportion is not necessarily implied in this act of joining of strings, for example.⁴⁰ Thus, the addition that Simmias makes—that “whenever, that is, they’re blended with one another in a beautiful and measured way” suggests that not all attunements are beautiful and measured (καλῶς καὶ μετρίως). The term μετρίως means not only “measured” but also “proportionate and fitting.”⁴¹ We can infer from this account of Simmias that the soul is made of the same parts as the body yet that in the soul these self-same parts are gathered in such a way that they are proportionate and fitting and measured. They could be gathered or held together in another way, but that way would not be fitting and would lack proportion. That way might be an aggregation of parts held together by strength and would not be set forth as proportionate. In fact, the very appearance of such

a whole is given voice in a comic fashion at 79d. In the same voice as the so-called genuine philosopher, Socrates explains to Cebes that there are two realms that the soul ascends to: the Visible and the Invisible.

SOCRATES: “But whenever, herself by herself (the soul), she investigates, she goes off There, to what’s pure and is always and is deathless and keeps to the same condition, and since she’s akin to this, continually comes to be with it—whenever, that is, she’s come to be herself all by herself and this is possible for her—and she’s stopped her wandering and, around those things, always keeps to the self-same condition, because she’s had contact with such things; and this state of hers has been called thoughtfulness—isn’t all this so?”

SIMMIAS REPLIES: “What you say is altogether beautiful and true, Socrates.”

John Sallis has pointed out, however, that this discourse is another elaborate comedy. He writes, “Punning on the words εἶδη, ἀειδές (invisible), and Αἰδης (Hades), Socrates plays out the comedy by telling how the purified, philosophical souls go off to the invisible place, the true Hades. ...” Yet, the other souls however fall back into the shadows.⁴²

Returning to the question about the harmony of the soul, Simmias continues to draw out the consequences of his analogy. He explains that if the body is relaxed or strained “without measure by disease and other evils, it’s a necessity that the soul perish right away, even though she’s more divine” (ἀμέτρως ἢ ἐπιταθῇ ὑπὸ νόσων καὶ ἄλλων κακῶν, τὴν μὲν ψυχὴν ἀνάγκη εὐθὺς ὑπάρχει ἀπολωλέναι, καίπερ οὕσαν θειοτάτην) (86c). Simmias’s account places the notion of proportion on the body, but the soul is always μετρίως. However, if the measure, the sufficiency, the fittedness, the proportionality of the soul is in any way contingent on the body, then it will not remain self-same if the body gets sick or “is relaxed or strained without measure by disease and other evils.” If this occurs, then the soul will by necessity perish (86c).

Thus, the difficulty with the likeness that Simmias has provided is that it reintroduces the same account of the two realms that is in play in the discussion of recollection. Although he uses a strikingly “harmonic” likeness to do so, this account, like the previous one given about the genuine philosophers, turns out to be out of proportion and out of tune. This account “doesn’t sing in accord” (92c). Something may fail to sing in accord either because it is out of tune in a way that is internal to itself or that is in relation to something external to it. Internal to

itself means to miss a note or to hit a false key. External would imply discordant to some other voice or harmonic series. It seems that the harmony that might be in play would be of the second kind. The body and the soul are harmonized together against some third thing. The body and the soul may be “blended” with one another in a beautiful way, but this assumes a body that is free from pain and pleasure. As long as the body is free from pleasure and pain—attuned, that is—then the soul can be said to remain in existence. However, as soon as pleasure or pain enters into the experience of the body, the body goes out of tune, so to speak, and the soul disperses.

If, then, the soul turns out to be some sort of tuning, it’s clear that whenever our body is relaxed or strained without measure by diseases and other evils, it’s a necessity that the soul perish right away, even though she’s most divine—just as do other ‘tunings’ in sounds and in all works of craftsmen. ... (86c) Thus, the question remains: How can Socrates offer a *logos* that conveys a rich sense of embodiment, taking into account the lived experience of the contraries of both pleasure and pain? How can he fashion an image of this that sustains philosophical reflection?

Simmias replies, “See, then, what we’ll say in response to this argument (*logos*), if somebody maintains that the soul—since she’s a blend of the elements of the body—is, in what’s called death, the first to perish” (86d). Socrates smiles, as we saw above, and considers Cebes’s objection concerning the weaver and his cloak (87c). At 94b, Socrates provides a pointed rejoinder to Simmias’s harmony objection. He indicates that on Simmias’s account the soul would always be determined by the body, or at least by the parts of the body that it shares with the soul. The image of the soul depicted in Simmias’s lyre analogy leads to an unacceptable consequence.

But didn’t we agree previously that if she [the soul] were a tuning, she could never sing out in a way that runs contrary to those things out of which she happens to be constituted—whether they were tensed or relaxed or plucked, or whatever other condition they might undergo—but she’d follow them and never govern them? (94c) Said otherwise, although the soul is constituted by the same parts that she shares with the body, it does not seem to govern these parts. On this account, instead, the soul is subjected to the disproportionate aggregation of parts that applies for in the body and has no way of

discovering its own proportionality. What is needed, then, is for the soul to exercise governance or proportional achievement in a way that is different from what we have seen before. That is, it must act in a way that does not induce the soul to flee from the body and its aggregate parts or to ascend by separating itself, as Socrates describes it in the voice of the true-born philosophers.⁴²

Thus, Socrates offers a description of the soul that takes proportionality into account. Given that it has been established that the soul can never “sing out in a way that runs contrary to those things out of which she happens to be constituted” the soul can never govern them. The soul, which is a part of them, will always be connected to them. We have seen that one way for the soul to govern the body is to be quit of it, to escape from it, as the genuine philosophers have comically done before. Now, once the problem of the contraries has been asserted again, it is clear that the soul needs to encounter them in order to govern them. “Well then, doesn’t the soul now appear to us as working in an altogether contrary way, governing all those things out of which somebody might claim she was constituted, and running contrary to just about all of them throughout all our life and being master in all ways?” (94c–d). Six points may be made about this outcome.

First, we may note that the soul shows itself, shining forth, as “working” (ἐργαζομένη) or in a deed, and thus the deed of the soul is how she shines forth, is made manifest. In the examination of the second sailing passage in [chapter 4](#) we saw how Socrates believed his soul to be one revealed in his deeds. Here too we see the working, the operating, the very deed of the soul.

Second, we can now ask more precisely: What is the deed that the soul does? What is her work such that she shines forth? Socrates says that she works in an “altogether contrary way” (πᾶν τοῦναντίον). What is this altogether contrary way? Because “altogether” (πᾶν) can function so as to intensify, it is tempting to see it as marking a difference in degree, yet it seems likely that it is marking a difference in kind. Said otherwise, the way that the soul actually “works” is “altogether contrary” to the way of attunement that Simmias has disclosed. Following the way of attunement, the soul appears as simply following afterward, as a part, as part and parcel of the desires, tempers, and terrors. The soul, in effect, accomplishes no authentic deed herself. She merely follows along after the aggregation of the other parts; however, the true work, or deed, of the soul that shines forth in Socratic *logos* is one as we see “governing all those things out of which somebody might claim she was constituted” (ἐξ ὧν φησί τις αὐτὴν εἶναι). The one who “might say this” is most likely the

hypothetical Pythagorean being voiced by Simmias. This person might claim that the soul simply *is* those parts. Thus, it is important to mark, once again, that the substance or parts out of which the soul is made is established only as hearsay. Once again, Socrates does not say with much definitiveness that the soul *is* made from these parts, *only that one might claim so*.

Third, we may understand this in light of what was said in [chapter 4](#) about the relationship of parts and wholes. It was not fitting for human beings to know the whole. Such knowledge of the whole is reserved for the gods, and human beings can only catch glimpses of it through *mythoi*. Divine *logos* as well might be suggested in the form of *mythos*, such as the one Socrates will tell of the True Earth (107b–115a).⁴³ Here, however, the hypothetical interlocutor mimicked by Simmias (and now spoken of indirectly by Socrates) makes a claim about the *soul as a whole*. Once again, such knowledge of the soul, her very composition, is too wondrous for human beings. Is it any wonder, then, that the *logos* of the soul that Socrates opposes to is one that is manifested, that shines forth, by her deed? Socratic *logos* finds a home in deed (*ergon*).

Fourth, the indefinite character of this passage needs to be emphasized. Gallop translates Socrates's claim at 94c–d that the soul now appears to us “as working in an altogether contrary way” (ἐργαζομένη, ἡγεμονεύουσά τε ἐκείνων πάντων), as “dominating all those *alleged* sources of its existence.”⁴⁴ It is important to notice how Gallop's translation uses the term *alleged*. This, too, emphasizes the indefinite character of the claim helping to show how a kind of fictive sameness is in play throughout this image. Yet, because the term is still one of domination or governance (ἡγεμονεύω), it remains striking because “domination” or “governance” is not usually the sort of thing one can be hypothetical about. The term can also be translated as “to lead the way.”⁴⁵ In this sense, one might consider who is leading the way. One might render it as “to lead the way for all those things out of which somebody might claim she was.” I would thus suggest translating it as “doesn't the soul now shine forth to us in a deed that is contrary, leading the way for all those things out of which somebody might say she was constituted” (94c–d).

Fifth, it is important to note that the term rendered “contrary” is ἐναντιόομαι. Although Gallop translates this as “opposing,” it is possible to translate it more actively as “setting oneself against.”⁴⁶ The soul sets itself against the very parts out of which one might say it is constituted. Can a part of something ever “set itself against” the thing or things out of which it is composed? If it could then would not its status as such a part be, at best, merely hearsay, a likeness, an insufficiency?

It is possible to express this by means of another perhaps more sufficient, likeness, pointing toward a proper proportion. Consider that we are all members or parts of groups of people, be it a regional group, a club, an association. Nevertheless, it is possible for the deeds of a subset of this group or even of an individual to be set against the rest of the group. In this sense, the individual opposes the whole and also opposes *itself* at the very same time. For example, I may refuse to act in the same way as a group to which I belong has always acted. This is a sense in which I oppose them but not directly. I could oppose them in a face-to-face speech, directly confronting them and saying “I am not like you.” However, this would be to deny something that I know is true (and that they would know as well). We both know this: “I am one of them. I am consanguine.” Yet if I refuse to act the same as “we as a group have always acted,” then I oppose them in a different sense, in a deed (*ergon*). Although I still affirm that I am the same as they are, I oppose or “set myself against” them by not acting as they do. In doing this, I, a part, radically change the ostensible whole. One cannot give an account of the whole group as consanguine. Moreover, if the way of acting that I pursue is actually good for the group, then the whole may be made proportionate, just, and fitting by virtue of my action.

Finally, Socrates offers two examples: gymnastics and medicine. Both of these show how the soul governs its parts. The soul becomes “master” of those things “in all ways” by “disciplining some more harshly and with pain, as do gymnastics and medicine, and others more gently, threatening some while admonishing others and talking with desires and tempers and terrors as if she were other than they and had a task other than theirs” (94d). The soul does this by installing and setting forth a proportion as a master working with the “as if.” Being master entails “disciplining” (κολάζω). Although it can be strongly translated as “chastise” or “discipline,” it may also be translated as “to keep within bounds.” Thus, there is a sense of proportionality here as well, which suggests that the part (the soul) that does the disciplining knows what the bounds are—it knows the proper proportion. We should not take this as hubris, however, since it is possible for someone to know the boundaries without knowing the whole. The important point is that the part disciplines by means of knowledge of proportion, not just by means of strength. Sometimes the soul disciplines with pain and with suffering as might be done in medicine and gymnastics, whereas at other times it may do so in a manner “more gently” as Socrates says.⁴⁷ Thus, the account of the soul given here is very different from that offered at the outset of a separation, death as the separation of body and soul. Although Socrates does not specifically mention “the body” in this account, it is clear that the things he does mention—desires, tempers, and terrors—are the same ones he mentioned in

the earlier account as being from the body. One should note that the construction is that the soul acts “as if she were other than they are.” The soul is other than the desires and tempers and terrors, and she acts “as if” she “had a task other than theirs.” What Socrates seems to be searching for is an account of the soul that acts “as if.”

It is instructive to think of this image of the soul once again in terms of the figure of Atlas, whom we saw invoked earlier in our analysis of the second sailing passage (99c). In *Theogony*, Hesiod explains that Atlas stands where no one else can stand. “And Atlas, standing at the limits of the earth, ... under strong compulsion, holds the wide sky with head and untiring arms.”⁴⁸ Although Atlas is one of us insofar as we are all parts of the cosmos, his deed (*ergon*) is to act as if he is beyond the whole. In the same way, the soul that is deathless for Socrates in this account is part of the whole—the tempers, terrors, and desires—but is also about to “stand outside of this whole” as Atlas does.

With these six considerations that follow from Socrates’s rejoinder to Simmias’s likeness of the lyre, we have seen how in the *Phaedo* Socrates offers an account of the soul that seeks proportion in this world but also acknowledges its limitations. Such a soul is one that has trained itself to act *as if* it were part of a proportionate whole even while acknowledging the limitations of knowing this whole. Like the sticks that seek for the Equal Itself, the soul yearns for knowledge of a proportionate whole.

The longing for this proportionate whole indicates a way in which the whole exceeds the aggregate of its parts. A proportionate *logos* of life also reveals a way in which the sacrifice of the body of the genuine philosophers is called into question. In the same way that Socrates’s deed at his death is a *mimetic* rupture of ancient sacrifice, this rupture calls into question the sacrificial economy of the body. The sacrificial economy seeks a way of denying the vulnerability and limitation of the embodied philosopher, of Socrates himself. Economies want self-sufficiency and protection of exchange, yet by attending to the role that voice plays in this section of the dialogue it is possible to see that this *logos* that takes account of death by sacrificing the body is not really one that Socrates holds. Also, Socrates’s treatment of the *pharmakodōtes* exceeds the economy that the *pharmakodōtes* works to keep in place. Socrates calls him forth to a stance of vigilance without reserve, a vigilance that will care for the *logos*.

In the foregoing analysis we have seen that phenomenon of voice is important in *Phaedo*. First, there is the way in which Socrates engages in ventriloquy regarding the so-called “genuine philosophers.” Second, voice is in

the background of the account of the lyre that Simmias provides.⁴⁹ The capacity to speak “as if” one is another connects with the “as if” capacity of the soul that we have discussed. The soul that functions well functions “as if” it is other than her desires, tempers, and terrors. These “voices” also refer our attention back to the embodied Socrates whose soul is in question throughout the dialogue as well as to the importance of the sonic ambiance of the death scene. As we saw, in a sacrificial ritual it was important to maintain proportion and propriety by means of reverence. Finally, we are reminded of Socrates as he appears at the beginning of the *Phaedo*. At 61b, Socrates explains that while in prison he has been making music, writing poetry “to the god whose day of sacrifice was at hand.”

Earlier, we saw how at 63d Crito conveyed the instructions of the *pharmakodōtes* and warned Socrates that because of the operation of the *pharmakon* he should talk with others as little as possible. The *pharmakodōtes* had apparently inferred from his past experience something about those to whom he gives it: “People who do a lot of conversing get all heated up” (ὅτι χρή σοι φράζειν ὥς ἐλάχιστα διαλέγεσθαι; φησὶ γὰρ θερμαίνεσθαι) (63d). Socrates responds to this warning as follows: “Let him be! Just have him prepare his potion and be ready to give it twice and, if he must, even three times” (ἀλλὰ μόνον τὸ ἑαυτοῦ παρασκευάζετω ὥς καὶ δις δώσων, ἐὰν δὲ δέῃ, καὶ τρίς) (63d). This gesture of “watching” and “waiting” and “preparing” acts against and resists the enforced economy. Sacrificial economies dislike nothing more than to have to watch, to be vigilant, and to reflect. What functions best is a prescribed ritual, a prescribed dose, a prescription that is is prescribed. Socrates is requiring of the *pharmakodōtes* that he be ready and watchful. One might say that Socrates is reserving the right to rewrite the script for the sake of the *logos*, for the sake of continuing the reflective conversation. Yet such *logoi* provide no rescue, no salvation through the sacrifice of the body.

One might even say that the greatest concern of the *Phaedo* is the possible sacrifice of the *logos*. At 89b, after Simmias and Cebes have deployed their strongest objections to the long-lasting soul, Socrates caresses the hair of Phaedo and tells him that he truly should cut off his hair in mourning, not for the death of Socrates, but for the death of the *logos* if it cannot be revived. Socrates’s concern, then, is how hatred of argument can lead to the sacrifice of the *logos*, and he challenges Phaedo by saying, “But first let’s be on our guard so we don’t undergo a certain experience” (89c). That experience is one of *misologia*, and “to be on guard” means to be able to keep vigil with a strong awareness of the vulnerability of mortals.

And so, in this first encounter with the *pharmakodōtes* we can hear what Socrates truly wants. He wants the *pharmakodōtes* to prepare a surplus, an

excess, to yearn for and aspire to a proportionate whole. Perhaps this is not only of the *pharmakon* itself but also of the *pharmakodōtes*. Socrates calls on him, and all who are present, to take a stance of watching and of waiting without reserve, of vigilance. In short, Socrates insists that this man, the enforcer of the sacrificial economy, take responsibility, not just for the ritual, but for the *logos*. In this way, what was at first an interruption of the *logos* and threatened to permanently disrupt it is made into a state of watching and of waiting, into vigilance without reserve, the vigilant tendance of thoughts embodied in *logos*. As we have seen in this chapter, this tendance wards off the twin disproportions of hubris and logistical despair, and as we shall see in the next chapter the *pharmakon* that is given and taken in the *Phaedo* provides such a means of taking responsibility. The interruption of the *pharmakon*, then, calls forth the tendance of philosophy.

SIX

ATHENS AT TWILIGHT

In [chapter 5](#), I explored the fitting and proportionate *logos* of the soul that is given by Socrates and argued that the proper proportion appears only against the background of the εἰκὼν of the embodied Socrates as it discloses the death of the philosopher. Given what we have seen of the death scene, this is best understood as self-sacrifice. In this last chapter, I turn to the question of the significance of Socrates's self-sacrifice for how those called to a philosophical life might live their own lives. As we watched the *mise-en-scène* of the death scene unfold in [chapter 3](#), I noted that a reference to sacrifice occurs at the moment when Socrates speaks his final words in which he announces his desire that his friends perform a sacrifice after he is gone: "Crito, we owe a cock to Asclepius. So pay the debt and don't be careless" (118). Here Socrates calls for an offering of a standard sacrifice of poultry to a well-known god and signals his desire for his companions to engage in the practice of ritual sacrifice following his death, a practice that was common in Athens and in Plato's Academy.¹ The god Asclepius, son of Apollo, was associated with healing from illness or injury.

Because Socrates expresses his desire for a sacrifice in response to a healing, this gesture invites further inquiry into the meaning of the *pharmakon*, which is mentioned in the *Phaedo* at 57a, 63d, 115d, 116d, and 117a. As seen in [chapter 3](#), the term may be translated in many ways, including "potion," "drug," "poison," and "remedy." Yet, because the response that Socrates calls for in response to the healing of the *pharmakon* is in fact a sacrifice, we may wonder about this *pharmakon* in light of what we have said about the significance of sacrifice in the *Phaedo*.

How, then, is the *pharmakon* to be taken? Precise prescriptions vary. Nietzsche takes it that Socrates is grateful to be rescued from the distress of a

life of embodiment by the remedy of the *pharmakon*.² Derrida seems to take it that way too.³ Pierre Hadot has written that Socrates sacrifices out of gratitude for a successful spiritual exercise attaining the region of pure thought (*theorein*).⁴ Glenn Most proposes that Socrates's offering is in gratitude for the healing of Plato, who due to illness is absent in the *Phaedo* during the events being recounted (59b),⁵ and Laurel Madison has shown that the final words of Socrates should be taken as expressing a "thank-offering to Asclepius" on the part of all who have been present in the prison cell, showing "their conscious commitment to the philosophical way of life."⁶ Rarely, it seems, do philosophers take the *pharmakon* in precisely the same way.

As we saw in [chapter 5](#), it is not only the *pharmakon* of the *Phaedo* that can be differently taken but also the sacrifice of Socrates. One way of taking the sacrifice is *as sacrifice of the body* in the form of a comic suicide which, as we saw in [chapter 5](#), is expressed in those moments of the *Phaedo* when Socrates mimics a group who he calls "true-born" or "genuine" philosophers (66b). It is in their *persona* that Socrates endorses a definition of death: "nothing but the separation of the soul from the body" (64c). Moreover, because philosophy is a preparation for death it too fosters separation of the soul from the body. This definition compels us to take Socrates's death as a sacrifice of the body. But must we take it that way? As was seen in [chapter 2](#), scholarship on Greek sacrificial ritual shows that it sustained the gods in their higher position and maintained a fitting relationship between them and human beings. Sacrifice provided a means of mediation for human beings with the gods—a mediation that related parts to the whole. Humans benefited from the sacrifice in a variety of ways, including providing a meat meal and opportunity for leisure. Moreover, sacrifice provided a map of cosmic order that some scholars believe was reflected in their own social structure. Sacrifice can be taken *as participation in the cosmic whole*, and in this book I have taken the sacrifice of Socrates in this way too, showing the many parallels and similarities that indebt his death to an ancient Greek sacrifice. Taking it like this, instead of as a sacrifice of the body, emphasizes the living and embodied philosopher at his death—Socrates as εἰκὼν—and his concern for the philosophical way of life. Let us take one last look, then, at how other philosophers—Nietzsche and Derrida—have taken it.

In "The Problem of Socrates," Nietzsche calls Socrates "ugly" (#3). "Socrates was descended from the lowest segment of society: Socrates was plebian. We know, we can still see how ugly he was. But ugliness, an objection in itself, was almost a refutation for the Greeks. Was Socrates Greek at all?" He holds reason responsible for taking on a disproportionate role in the person of

Socrates. He writes, “When people need *reason* to act as a tyrant, which was the case with Socrates, the danger cannot be small that something else might start acting as a tyrant. Rationality was seen as the *saviour*, neither Socrates nor his ‘patients’ had any choice about being rational,—it was *de rigueur*, it was their *last resort*” (#10). In his interpretation, Nietzsche surely had in mind the “true-born” or “genuine” philosophers of the *Phaedo* (66b) whose reductionist definition of death—nothing but the separation of the soul from the body (64c)—we have already heard. The role of philosophy is to separate the soul from the body. At 65c, Socrates says, And I suppose the soul reasons most beautifully when none of these things gives her pain—neither hearing, nor sight, nor grief nor any pleasure—when instead bidding farewell to the body, she comes to be herself all by herself as much as possible and when, doing everything she can to avoid communing with or even being in touch with the body, she strives for what *is*. (65c) Favoring this exercise, the “true-born philosophers” seek to escape the body, to be purified from it, even to sacrifice it. Nietzsche is perhaps right, then, to interpret this desire as an expression of “the tyranny of reason.” In *The Gay Science*, Nietzsche explains: The moralism of Greek philosophers from Plato onwards is pathologically conditioned; the same is true for the value they give to dialectics. Reason = virtue = happiness only means: you have to imitate Socrates and establish a permanent state of *daylight* against all dark desires—the daylight of reason. (#10) This *logos*, given by the genuine philosophers, is the *logos* of a permanent daylight. Because this *logos* attempts to take death into account, it seeks to make manifest to reason, to subsume under reason, what must remain partially hidden and covered in shadow because of its contingency and vulnerability.

For Nietzsche in *Twilight of the Idols* Socrates appears sick—so sick in fact that Nietzsche thinks he wanted to die. “Socrates *wanted* to die:—Athens did not give him the poisoned drink, he took it *himself*, he forced Athens to give it to him ... ‘Socrates is no doctor,’ he said quietly to himself: ‘death is the only doctor here ... Socrates was only sick for a long time ...’ ” (#12). As such, embodied life has no meaning and is only to be escaped from, fled from, delivered from, saved and rescued from. Because of illness, the body must be sacrificed, as one would amputate a gangrenous limb. By daylight, then, Socrates appears to ascend into the sunlit ether. Six years earlier when he published *The Gay Science* in 1882, Nietzsche had already taken Socrates’s sacrificial offering to Asclepius like this: I wish he [Socrates] had remained silent also in the last moments of his life—perhaps he would then belong to a still higher order of minds. Whether it was death or the poison or piety or malice—something loosened his tongue and he said: “O Crito, I owe Asclepius a

rooster.” This ridiculous and terrible “last word” means for those who have ears: “O Crito, *life is a disease*.” Is it possible that a man like him, who had lived cheerfully and like a soldier in plain view of everyone, was a pessimist?⁷

Nietzsche takes Socrates’s sacrificial offering to Asclepius as an endorsement of a desire to flee embodied life, and philosophy becomes a means to release from the body.

In “Plato’s Pharmacy,” Derrida may well take the death of Socrates in the same way as Nietzsche. Derrida explains that in the *Phaedo* the *pharmakon* exercises a transformative power on the soul. He writes that although the *pharmakon* “is presented to Socrates as a poison; yet it is transformed, through the effects of the Socratic *logos* and of the philosophical demonstration in the *Phaedo*, into a means of deliverance and a way toward salvation. The hemlock has an *ontological* effect: it initiates one into the contemplation of the *eidos* and the immortality of the soul. *That is how Socrates takes it.*”⁸ The healing that takes place through the *pharmakon* is like the one that Nietzsche sees as a healing from life. For Nietzsche, the healing results in pessimism and renunciation of life. For Derrida, it produces a similar effect, one that leads to detached contemplation and deliverance from the body, *as a sacrifice of the body*. But must we take sacrifice in the *Phaedo* like this? I would like to offer four reasons that we might take it otherwise.

First, as we saw in [chapter 5](#), the apparent efforts of the genuine philosophers in the *Phaedo* to free themselves from the body give voice to a “peculiar somatology” as John Sallis calls it.⁹ Sallis shows how these efforts are repeatedly undermined by the excessive humor of the dialogue. The laughter with which this Orphic-like purification is met makes it undecidable whether freedom from embodiment is truly the goal of Socratic *logos* in the *Phaedo*. Second, in *Plato on the Limits of Human Life*, Sara Brill showed that soul and body cannot be absolute contraries to each other. Body cannot bring death to soul and soul cannot bring life to the body, for to do this “would be to deny the possibility of living being,” which requires both.¹⁰ It is precisely this living being that we encounter in the image of Socrates at the death scene. Third, as was mentioned in [chapter 3](#), here at his death, when we might expect Socrates to appear most ugly, he appears most proportionate, most symmetrical, most beautiful and noble. David Krell has drawn attention to the significance of Plato’s depiction of the appearance of Socrates’s body in the *Phaedo*. For Krell, the body of Socrates presents perfect integration between body and soul. Moreover, the *Phaedo* commences with a lovingly detailed description that

carefully attends to Socrates's body. At 60b, Plato has Phaedo describe how Socrates "sat up on the bed, bent his leg and gave it a good rub with his hand."¹¹ Finally, this image of integration of body and soul evokes an account of sacrifice *as participation in the cosmic whole*. Both humans and gods benefit from it. This look of Socrates as an unblemished and noble animal that is prepared for the sacrifice runs counter to the somatology of the genuine philosophers who seek to escape the body.

If the sacrifice of Socrates should be taken like this then can we not retake the *pharmakon*? How should we take it then? In *The Verge of Philosophy*, Sallis refers to Derrida's work and writes "one could well imagine a companion piece to 'Plato's Pharmacy,' perhaps even one homonymous with it, yet devoted to the *pharmakon* in the *Phaedo*."¹² He explains that "as soon as one translates the word as *poison* or, in translating, identifies it as *hemlock*, one has interrupted the play of the *pharmakon*."¹³ Is there, perhaps, another way of taking the *pharmakon* that would allow for further questioning about its effects? Sallis writes further, Everything depends on how this medicinal effect is understood in relation to the dramatic development within which the *logoi* of the dialogues are contextualized. Does it suffice, as Derrida proposes, to regard the immortality of the soul as the operative antibody, as the means of deliverance that dialectically inverts and in a sense stabilizes the *pharmakon* (see D 140/123, 144f./126)? Does it suffice to call a halt to the dialogue's development at this initial, Orphic-Pythagorean threshold, especially in view of all that undoes the would-be demonstrations of the deathlessness of the soul?¹⁴

Sallis proposes that the healing of the *Phaedo*, the recovery for which a cock is owed to Asclepius, need not necessarily be "a recovery from embodiment." This double of the *pharmakon* drifts away from the sense of deliverance from the body. In the way of deliverance, followed by Nietzsche and Derrida, the soul is released and freed to migrate in the light of the day toward the heavens and the sun and, most crucially, away from the earth. But what if the double of the *pharmakon* runs counter to this way of deliverance, rescue, and salvation? What if it is allowed to drift back toward finitude, back toward embodied *logos*? Then the *Phaedo* itself is always already drifting toward embodiment and an account of living being rather than a sacrifice of the body, as Nietzsche and Derrida in "Plato's Pharmacy" seem to take it.

This return to living embodiment has important implications for an understanding of philosophy in the *Phaedo*. The sacrifice of Socrates suggests a meditation between humans and gods. The very philosophical method outlined in the *Phaedo*, in which Socrates takes refuge in *logoi*, suggests a similar

mediation. Let us take one last look, then, at how Socrates describes his philosophical way of proceeding and how he suggests that philosophy is a mediation between parts and wholes.

In any case, that's how I set out. On each occasion I put down as hypothesis whatever account I judge to be mightiest; and whatever seems to me to be consonant with this, I put down as being true, both about cause and about all the rest, while what isn't, I put down as not true. ... For I'm going to try to show you the form of the cause with which I've busied myself. And I'll go back to those much-babbled-about things and take my beginning from them, putting down as hypothesis that there's some Beautiful Itself by Itself and a Good and a Big and all the others. If you give me those and grant that they *are*, I hope, from them, to show you the cause and to discover how soul is something deathless. (100a–b) One lays down *logoi* that mediate between the things that are and the things seen here. Phenomena found here are fitted to the *hypotheses* we lay down. The *logoi* are the means by which the philosophers communally inquire into the whole and learn how the parts fit together. The philosopher thinks *as if* there are proportionate wholes, wholes in which all of the parts might stand in proportion. Yet, because the whole itself is never shown, such speech is always tentative and inadequate. The philosopher lays some of them down—"some Beautiful Itself by Itself and a Good and a Big and all the others." This method avoids directly placing body and soul into a contrary relationship, a relationship that would occlude an account of the possibility of living beings.¹⁵

We have now considered how we might take the *pharmakon*, sacrifice, and even philosophy in the *Phaedo*. But what about *giving the pharmakon*? Can it be given in such a way as to call attention to the possibility of living and embodied beings? Or must it only be given as a means of deliverance from the body or separation of the soul from the body? There are reasons to question this too. First, the *pharmakodōtes*, the giver of the *pharmakon*, is called on by Socrates at 63d to bear witness, "to be ready to give it twice and, if he must, even three times." If we follow Socrates's prescription as directed then we see that the *pharmakon* is *to be given liberally, excessively*. This approach appears again in the death scene as Socrates says to the *pharmakodōtes*, "What do you say to pouring somebody a libation from this drink? Is it allowed, or not?" (117b). Once again, Socrates wishes to resist any limitation that might be imposed on the

pharmakon. Second, we learn that the *pharmakon* is to—above all else—be given carefully, watchfully. At 117b, the *pharmakodōtes* replies to Socrates’s request saying, “We concoct only so much as we think is the right dose to drink” (117b). This suggests that the *pharmakon* is to be given carefully, with watchful vigilance. With excess and with care, then, is how the *pharmakon* is to be given.

As we saw in [chapter 5](#), the philosophical and sacrificial purpose of the death of Socrates is to ward off the twin dangers of human hubris and logistical despair. In giving the *pharmakon*, then, perhaps we should even consider that Plato himself administers it? After all, it is the *Phaedo* that is given to the reader and that gives the best hope for finding a proportionate whole that would give meaning to the unjust death of the philosopher and hope for an afterlife. Moreover, it is the very εἰκὼν of the embodied Socrates, against whose proportionate likeness the other depictions of the philosopher appear distorted. Finally, we might consider that it is Plato himself who gives and takes the *pharmakon*, providing the healing from hubris and a vaccine against logistical despair that would allow him to, in fact, drift back toward his own finitude, back toward embodied *logos*.

In some of his texts written well after “Plato’s Pharmacy,” Derrida offers a way of giving the *pharmakon* with just such careful excess. In *The Postcard*, for example, the first part contains a series of letters in which Derrida plays on the meaning of *triage* and the question of death and suicide.¹⁶ “*Je me tue*,” which can mean “I kill myself,” may also have the meaning “*Je me trie*,” or “I sort myself.” This calls back to the meaning of triage, of sorting, a practice not exhausted by death, that does not merely bring death but also calls forth an account of living being, an account of living being as is called for in a sacrifice.

Triage can be understood as a way of giving the *pharmakon*. It is the medical approach in responses to hurricanes, tsunamis, earthquakes, fires, and recently, for example, in parts of West Africa where medical personnel worked to stem the spread of the deadly Ebola virus. Yet, traditionally there have been two ways of administering, of giving, triage. In *Mountains Beyond Mountains: The Quest of Dr. Paul Farmer, A Man Who Would Cure the World*, Tracy Kidder tells the true story of Paul Farmer and of Partners in Health, the charitable medical practice that he founded. Kidder’s discussion of triage reveals two situations in which triage is given: in war and in peace.

The term comes from the fourteenth-century French *trier*, “to pick or cull,” and was first used to describe the sorting of wool according to its quality. In modern medical usage, *triage* has two different meanings, nearly opposite. In situations where doctors and nurses and

tools are limited, on battlefields, for instance, one performs triage by attending first to the severely wounded that have the best chance of survival. The aim is to save as many as possible; the others may have to die unattended. In the peacetime case, however, in well-staffed and well-stocked American emergency rooms, for example, *triage* isn't supposed to imply withholding care from anyone; rather, it's identifying the patients in gravest danger and giving them priority. Farmer has constructed his life around the second kind of triage.¹⁷

Triage calls for watchful and careful mediation between parts and wholes. The parts are the resources, the victims, the bodies, the souls, the drugs, whereas the path to the whole is guided by an overarching aim, or principle, of the practice. Moreover, to sharpen this distinction we may look at how these two kinds of triage operate under conditions of scarcity when there are not enough resources to care for all. For example, in situations of war, the guiding principle is victory on the battlefield that requires the return to the battlefield of the injured. This necessitates the treatment of those who are least injured first and the culling or sacrificing of those who are most grievously injured. These are culled from the rest, discarded, and thrown away. On the other hand, in situations of peace, the guiding principle of triage is to save those most in danger, and this calls for the treatment of the most seriously injured first. This experience of triage would seem to call for the giver of the *pharmakon* to act with great vigilance and care because any action or course of treatment undertaken will never be sufficient because of the limitation of resources. Here, under the watchful care of the giver of the *pharmakon*, the living bodies are unavoidable and cannot be culled from the rest. This calls for constant vigilance and watchful care.

In a recently translated text entitled "The Night Watch," which Derrida wrote as an introduction to his friend Jacques Trilling's book *James Joyce ou l'écriture matricide*, he turns again to triage. This extended reflection on matricide leads Derrida to try out (*tri*) the suggestion that it is impossible. "For maternity always survives, by coming back, by returning to its haunts. It has the last word and it remains vigilant, this nightlight, to use the word Trilling puts in capital letters."¹⁸ As a whole, living bodies in the *Phaedo*, I would suggest, hold a spectral status similar to maternity. Yet, one living body in particular, the living body of Socrates who is prepared for sacrifice, seems to be unavoidable and irreducible. The body of Socrates, then, haunts the *Phaedo*, and the response to it must be care and vigilance, a response that makes sacrifice (of the body) impossible. This way of giving the *pharmakon*, then, is expressed in a certain way of practicing triage.

Although Socrates has a hope for the afterlife, the approach to body and soul of the *Phaedo* as a whole need not be taken as a denial of the possibility of an account of living beings. For, like the Night Watcher, the philosopher does her work at twilight, the time when it seems that Socrates drank the *pharmakon*. We recall Crito's attempt to instruct Socrates on how to take it.

But Socrates, I think there's still sun on the mountains and it hasn't set yet. Also, I know the others drink very late, long after the order comes to them, and after they've dined and drunk very well, and even after some have had intercourse with anyone they happen to desire. So don't hurry—there's still a ways to go. (116e) Socrates does not do as these others do. It is fitting that he does not delay because he does not want to make himself an object of derision to himself, a "laughingstock in my own eyes." He wishes to avoid appearing disproportionate, ugly to himself—as Nietzsche saw him—like the so-called "genuine" philosophers of the *Phaedo* (64c). Such derision would foolishly attempt to drive away the specter of the living being, of the embodied Socrates. Instead, Socrates takes the *pharmakon* as he has given philosophy, drinking "without the least tremor" (117b), as an unblemished animal going to the sacrifice.

Turning to his final words, words that call forth a certain sacrifice to come, Socrates says with his last breath, "Crito, we owe a cock to Asclepius. Pay the debt and don't be careless" (118). Socrates here gives an opening to his companions, an opening that he himself administers as a *pharmakon*. Socrates's final words provide for an excessive and liberal gathering, a ritual event opening onto another gathering for friends of philosophy so that they might continue the dialogue about immortality, a dialogue that would be conducted with care as they recall to themselves the εἰκὼν, the living embodiment, of the genuine philosopher—Socrates himself.

This book began with an invocation of Penelope and her web. At 94b, just after Socrates has given the account of the soul that seeks proportion, he invokes Homer as well. The connection here with Penelope's web is quite fitting. In the *Odyssey* 2.100–118 we learn that she is weaving a shroud for Laertes, her father-in-law, to cover him "for that day when the deadly fate that lays us out will take him down." Penelope weaves "as if" she is weaving a shroud for Laertes. She further reports, "I dread the shame my countrywomen would heap upon me, yes, if a man of such wealth should lie in state without a shroud for cover." Thus, Penelope's weaving connects vigilance with death. She both weaves and

unweaves in a state of vigilance for Odysseus's return, but she pretends that it is a death shroud that is her handiwork (her *ergon*). Penelope's weaving, therefore, exemplifies the practice or approach of the *as if*. By day, Penelope weaves "as if" she is "one of them"—a potential bride for the suitors—but at twilight she begins her night's work, unweaving in a way that shows that she is not one of them, returning to herself.

In the *Phaedo*, Socrates has unraveled the whole cloth of sacrifice. Although the *do ut des* principle is in play throughout, it is ultimately undermined by the introduction of difference through his own assent as he takes the cup "without the least tremor." Moreover, Socrates does not sacrifice so that he might receive something back. That would, in fact, parallel the way of the genuine philosophers who hope to gain knowledge of some hereafter on account and their own asceticism. Rather he sacrifices so that his friends might receive the εἰκὼν of his embodied life. This εἰκὼν provides a means of taking proper distance from the twin dangers of hubris and logistical despair. It does this by displaying the vigilant tending of thoughts in embodied *logos*. The εἰκὼν, which we contemplate, invites us to sort and to engage in a life of philosophy and care of the soul. Socrates weaves as the statesman weaves. The true philosopher, like the true statesman, has to know how to harmonize toughness and flexibility, the warp and the woof of speech, of the soul, and of deeds. Socrates is tough with his sad and fearful friends, but he is also tender as he ministers to their all-too-human love for their teacher and concern about the ultimate fate of their own souls.

We mortals, who are creatures of the day—*ephemera*—can see only by the light of the sun. Perhaps this was the reason that, for Nietzsche, the sacrifice of Socrates was overshadowed by the tyranny of reason, making Socrates appear sick and distorted. Nonetheless, the weaving and the sacrifice of Socrates reveal another dimension to human life. This dimension is a human life that is a philosophical life, a life that the self-sacrifice of Socrates reveals as eminently worth living. A standard sacrifice is performed so that the principle of reciprocity can be upheld between gods and mortals. We give to the gods so that we might receive from them. Nevertheless, Socrates, "the ruler of life" (which his name means), gives (his life) so that others might receive. As such, his death is decisively otherwise than sacrifice. This way of receiving the death scene beholds it as a careful mixing, a careful weaving, of sameness and difference—of ritual sacrifice and its other. This, I suggest, is the significance of the sacrifice of Socrates that Plato offers us in the *Phaedo*.

NOTES

CHAPTER ONE: WEAVING AND UNWEAVING THE FABRIC OF SACRIFICE

1. *Plato's Phaedo*, translated by Eva Brann, Peter Kalkavage, and Eric Salem (1998). All citations of the *Phaedo* are from this translation, but in cases in which a better understanding of a philosophical point would arise I amend it. I have also consulted and will occasionally refer to the translations of Gallop (1996) and of Fowler (1914). References to the Greek text of the *Phaedo* are from *Platonis Opera* (1903).

2. In the *Phaedo*, Socrates himself invokes Penelope and her weaving at 84a. The connection between philosophy and weaving has been explored by many Plato scholars. For a thorough explication of this connection in relation to the *Phaedo*, see Hartle (1986, 11–83). For another insightful discussion regarding the art of weaving as “bringing to light” and further connections to philosophical activity, see McEwen (1993, 54). As it appears in relationship to the art of politics, weaving is treated in *Statesman* 279b. For a clear discussion of this connection to *Statesman* see Saxonhouse (1997, 95–114). Finally, Risser (2009, 291–298) develops the theme of weaving with regard to the *Statesman*. Risser emphasizes the difference between Penelope’s art and Platonic philosophy, whereas I will emphasize the similarities.

3. Nancy (1991, 20–38).

4. Nancy enumerates four characteristics, which are that it (1) be self-sacrifice, (2) be unique and accomplished for all, (3) unveil the truth of all sacrifices (their essence), (4) in some way transcend or sublate sacrifice. According to Nancy, the lesson to be learned from the sacrifice of these twin figures of ontotheology is that existence cannot be sacrificed (24). Yet, we might continue his inquiry by asking what he means by existence. What might that mean in the case of Socrates?

5. Hartle (1986) provides a very explicit integration of the figure of Penelope and her weaving with that of the dialogue. She writes “... the toil of Penelope can only be called useless if her task is really to accomplish the weaving. Her true task is to hold off the suitors, and at this she succeeds by deception. What the *Phaedo* seems to present us with is a weaving and unweaving of arguments, the ‘futile toil’ of philosophy, but also with complete success at the task of holding off the fear of death. We cannot help wondering whether or not there is deception at work here also” (29).

6. *The Odyssey* (1996). Hereinafter cited parenthetically.

7. Brickhouse and Smith (1990, 3) provide a list of scholars who testify to the historical accuracy of the *Apology*.

8. Burnett (1924).

9. Tyrrell (2012, 100).

10. Tyrrell (2012, 99). Tyrrell also points out that it is most likely that the *Phaedo* belongs to a time a good deal later than the publication of the *Apology* perhaps around the time of the publication of

Polycrates's *Prosecution of Socrates*, which is traceable to sometimes after 394 BCE (71).

11. Brill (2013, 4).

12. Translation of *Meno* in Grube (2002).

13. *Sophist* 264c offers a similar distinction. There, the Stranger of Elea suggests to Theaetetus that they recollect the ground they have covered in their search for the sophist, the professor of wisdom. He recounts how they divided “image-making expertise” (εἰδωλοποιική) into two kinds: “likeness-making” (εἰκαστική) and “apparition-making” (φανταστική).

14. This translation of the *Cratylus* comes from Bryan (2012, 140). For an excellent treatment of the *Cratylus* see Ewegen (2013).

15. Bryan (2012, 143).

16. Bryan (2012, 143).

17. Quoted in Bryan (2012, 117).

18. Derrida (2013, 94).

19. See Dorter (1982), Burger (1984), and Ahrens Dorf (1995).

20. See McPherran (1996) and (2002, 162–190). McPherran's approach to sacrifice has recently been critiqued by Lännström (2011, 261–274). See also Morgan (1990).

21. Pepperzak (1997, 227).

22. Pepperzak (1997, 228).

23. Dorter (1982, 177).

24. Burger (1984, 216).

25. Burger (1984, 216).

26. Burger (1984, 213).

27. Ahrens Dorf (1995, 5).

28. This approach to the arguments for the immortality of the soul in the *Phaedo* is of course a matter of disagreement among scholars. Nonetheless, I am in agreement with Brill (2013), who writes, “Amid the proliferation of logos, we also encounter four logoi about the immortality of the soul whose flaws as demonstrations have been noted by scholars spanning both decades and schools of thought” (15). Of particular note among these scholars is Gadamer (1980, 21–38).

29. Ahrens Dorf (1995, 3).

30. Ahrens Dorf (1995, 200).

31. See Pickstock (2003, 115–126).

32. Pickstock (2003, 122).

33. Pickstock (2003, 122).

34. Pickstock (2003, 123).

CHAPTER TWO: A DESCRIPTION OF GREEK SACRIFICIAL RITUAL

1. Unless otherwise specified this chapter will use the term “Greek sacrifice” to include a broad expanse of time covering the Archaic through the Hellenistic period.

2. For a very thorough philosophical survey and genealogy of theories of sacrifice, see Keenan (2005, 10–32).

3. Graf (2012, 32–51).

4. Works cited parenthetically by author name and publication date in this chapter include the following: Bremmer (2010, 132–144), Burkert (1983) and (1985), Davidson (2010, 204–218), Detienne (1989, 1–20), Durand (1989, 119–128), Gilhus (2006), Hughes (1991), Mikalson (2010), and Vernant (1980).

5. For an enlightening explanation of this see Graf (2012, 366).

6. For an accessible summary of this idea as well as Girard's other ideas, see "Mimesis and Violence" in Girard (1996, 9–19). Hereinafter this text cited parenthetically. Tyrell (2012) draws on Girard's theory to reveal Socrates as a *pharmakos* figure. His reading, however, primarily treats the dialogues that, dramatically speaking, precede the *Phaedo*.

7. Girard (1987, 15).

8. Graf (2012, 42).

9. Graf (2012, 44).

10. Lincoln (2012, 9). Bataille (1990, 9–28) and Derrida (1995). Another important perspective is that of Irigary (1985, 214–226) and (1993, 73–88).

11. See Nietzsche (1999) *The Birth of Tragedy* as well as other studies before its 1872 publication including "The Dionysian Worldview."

12. Henrichs (2012, 186).

13. Henrichs (2012, 186).

14. Derrida (1995, 11). Keenan (2005) treats Derrida, Bataille, and other theorists of sacrifice in detail. However, he does not explicitly apply their theories to the question of the sacrifice of Socrates in the *Phaedo*. See my review "The Incessant Imperative: Vigilance Without Reserve" in *Research in Phenomenology* vol. 38 (2008): pp. 437–446. For further philosophical approaches to sacrifice see Halbertal (2012) and Bubbio (2014).

15. Naiden (2012, 82).

16. Lännström (2011, 261–274).

17. Lännström (2011, 273).

18. Lännström (2011, 273). Lännström focuses on McPherran here.

19. Morgan (1992, 228). For a fuller treatment of these issues see Morgan (1990).

20. Vegetti (1995, 259).

21. *The Laws of Plato* (1980). Pieper (1998) renders the phrase "set humans right again" as "they should again stand upright and erect" (17). In light of the centrality of the posture and bodily gestures of Socrates in the *Phaedo* (see 60b) this reference to posture in *The Laws* is of interest.

22. Pieper (1998, 17).

23. πάντων δὲ ἔν μέγιστον, οὗ νῦν ἐπιμνησθεῖσιν πρέπον ἄν ἡμῖν εἴη σοὶ τε ἀποδοῦναι χάριν καὶ τὴν θεὸν ἅμα ἐν τῇ πανηγύρει δικαίως τε καὶ ἀληθῶς οἶόν περ ὑμνοῦντας ἐγκωμιάζειν. Translation from Kalkavage (2001).

24. Lännström (2011, 272).

25. Fragment 584a, trans. Fortenbaugh *et al.* cited in Bremmer (2010, 139). As Mikalson (2010) explains, the dual purpose of prayer, sacrifice, and festivals—"to honour the gods and to provide pleasure and relaxation"—were "uniformly valued" (94).

26. Lännström (2011, 268).

27. Xenophon (1994, 1.1.2).

28. Xenophon (1994, 1.3.3).

29. *The Republic of Plato* (1968).

30. *The Laws of Plato* (1980). Mikalson (2010) notes the significance of this passage as well as of *Republic* 427c (51).

31. For a description of the role of sacrifice-maker in the Academy see Pieper (2009). He writes, "... for Plato's Academy was a genuine religious association in which, for example, one of the members was explicitly appointed to prepare the sacrifice" (70).

32. Naiden (2012, 56).

33. Naiden (2012, 69).

34. Neer (2012, 101).

35. Neer (2012, 119).

36. Henrichs (2012, 181).

37. Henrichs (2012, 181).

38. Henrichs (2012, 189).
39. Henrichs (2012, 184).
40. Henrichs (2012, 192).
41. *Critias* (1914).
42. Most (1993, 110).
43. Xenophon (1994, 1.1.3).
44. Ogden (2001, 112).
45. Ogden (2001, 112).
46. Ogden (2001, 191–201).
47. For a treatment of the wider topic of divination see Bonnechere (2010, 145–160). For a perspective on divination as it connects to the usage of the Greek concept of *theoria* see McEwen (1993).
48. Monoson (2000, 99).
49. In later years, Christians interpreted the depiction of animals as marching forward in a procession to be sacrificed as a favorable analogy with martyrdom, see Gilhus (2006, 157).

CHAPTER THREE: SACRIFICING SOCRATES: THE MISE-EN-SCÈNE OF THE DEATH SCENE OF THE PHAEDO

1. Kirkland (2012, 157–158).
2. Kirkland (2012, 159).
3. In this chapter I expand on my article “Without the Least Tremor: Ritual Sacrifice as Background in the *Phaedo*” (Spring 2009, 241–248).
4. Nancy (1991, 21).
5. Stewart (July 1972, 253).
6. Nightingale (2004).
7. ἐμὲ δὲ νῦν ἤδη καλεῖ, φαίη ἄν ἄνθρωπος τραγικός, ἡ εἰμαρμένη, καὶ σχεδὸν τί μοι ὥρα τραπέσθαι πρὸς τὸ λουτρόν
8. κάλέω. Liddell, Scott, *et al.* (1843 and 1958, 866).
9. See line 1107. All citations of *Agamemnon* are from line numbers in Richard Lattimore’s translation (1991, 5–60). I have also consulted Smyth (1926) and de May (2003).
10. Scholars frequently refer to Agamemnon’s death as a perverted or corrupted sacrifice. See Zeitlin (1965, 463–508) and (1966, 645–653). For a position that understands the *Agamemnon* as a “perverted hunt” see Vidal-Naquet (1981, 150–174) and Seaford (1989, 87–95).
11. τραπέσθαι is from τρέπω. Liddell, Scott, *et al.* (1843 and 1958, 1813).
12. Mikalson (2010, 237–239).
13. μὴ πράγματα ταῖς γυναῖξι παρέχειν νεκρὸν λούειν.
14. Felton (2010, 87).
15. πράγματα is the plural of πράγμα. Liddell, Scott, *et al.* (1843 and 1958, 1457).
16. Felton (2010, 88).
17. Wilson (2007).
18. φιλοσοφία γάρ τοι ἐστίν, ὦ Σώκρατες, χάριν, ἄν τις αὐτοῦ μετρίως ἄψηται ἐν τῇ ἡλικίᾳ: ἐὰν δὲ περαιτέρω τοῦ δέοντος ἐνδιατρίψῃ, διαφθορὰ τῶν ἀνθρώπων, *Gorgias* (2004).
19. Krell (Winter 1972, 443–451).
20. See Krell (Winter 1972, 451). The theme of “descension” in the Platonic dialogues is excellently developed by Peter Warnek in his *Descent of Socrates: Self-Knowledge and Cryptic Nature in the Platonic Dialogues* (2005).
21. Klein (1985, 375–393). Another interpretation that emphasizes this is Burger (1984).

22. Burger (1984, 18–19). See also Kuperus (2007, 193–211).
23. ἦκεν ἄγων τὸν μέλλοντα δώσειν τὸ φάρμακον, ἐν κύλικι φέροντα τετριμμένον.
24. ὥσπερ εἰώθει ταυρηδὸν ὑποβλέψας πρὸς τὸν ἄνθρωπον. An earlier reference to “the look” or gaze of Socrates occurs at 86d. In response to Simmias’s argument that the soul is like a tuning, Echecrates reports, “Then, with that usual keen look of his and a smile, Socrates said, ‘What Simmias is saying is certainly just.’ ”
25. Burger (1984, 213).
26. Ogden (2001, 172).
27. Most (1993, 97).
28. Wilson (2007, 6).
29. *Crito* (1984). καὶ τοὺς ὑεῖς τοὺς σαυτοῦ ἔμοιγε δοκεῖς προδιδόναι, οὓς σοι ἐξὸν καὶ ἐκθρέψαι καὶ ἐκπαιδεῦσαι οἰκίῃ καταλιπών, καὶ τὸ σὸν μέρος ὅτι ἂν τύχῃσι τοῦτο πράξουσιν: τεύξονται δέ, ὥς τὸ εἶκός, τοιούτων οἵαπερ εἴωθεν γίνεσθαι ἐν ταῖς ὀρφανίαις περὶ τοὺς ὀρφανούς.
30. Wilson (2007, 6–7).
31. Wilson (2007, 110).
32. Nussbaum (1986, 15). Later in her book, Nussbaum writes, “The picture of moral and cognitive development in the middle dialogues is one of a progressive detachment of intellect from other parts of the personality” (216). Nussbaum goes on to connect this charge explicitly to *Phaedo* 80b writing that: “The intellect is, ideally, something pure and purely active; it has about it, at its best, no passivity or receptivity. It is ‘very similar’ to the form (*Phd.* 80b)” (216).
33. Allen (2000, 216).
34. Allen (2000, 216).
35. εὐφημία from εὐφημέω. See Liddell, Scott, *et al.* (1843 and 1958, 736).
36. *The Republic of Plato* (1968).
37. Nancy (1991, 23).
38. Most (1993, 103).
39. Most (1993, 109).
40. Most (1993, 107).
41. Pappas (1985, 20).
42. σκοπεύω. Liddell, Scott, *et al.* (1843 and 1958, 1613–1614).
43. The usual identification of the *pharmakon* is with the hemlock plant. For a treatment of the physiological factors involved in hemlock poisoning and their implications for understanding the death of Socrates, see Bloch (2002, 255–278). Bloch argues persuasively that Plato’s account of the effect of the hemlock coheres with pharmacological evidence. Rinella (2012) overlooks Bloch’s evidence when he claims that “spotted hemlock (*Conium maculatum*) poisoning consists of more than simply the ascending motor paralysis described in the passage (117e–118a)” (242).
44. ἀπόδειξις. Liddell, Scott, *et al.* (1843 and 1958, 196).
45. *Plato’s Phaedrus* (2003).
46. Sissa and Detienne (2000, 172).
47. Sissa and Detienne (2000, 171–172).
48. Translation from *Plato Statesman* (1995).
49. ἵστημι. Liddell, Scott, *et al.* (1843 and 1958, 841).
50. Allen (2000, 217).
51. The precise site of the tomb of Socrates, if there is one, has never been determined. Hughes (2011) points out that today there is a tourist attraction in the heart of Athens that features a mausoleum for Socrates, but she does not think it is authentic since it dates only to first century BCE (357–358).
52. Nightingale (2004, 131). It is noteworthy that in *Menexenus* Socrates himself delivers a funeral oration that he learned from his tutor Aspasia.
53. See also Kuperus (2007, 195).
54. Although no doubt related to a ritual of mourning, even this gesture might have a sacrificial

resonance, as hair-cutting rituals were frequently accompanied by sacrificial offerings. See Leitaio (2003, 109–129). Interestingly, Theseus, the hero on whom so much of the *Phaedo*'s mythos is based, is known to have offered his locks as a sacrifice to Apollo Delphi (123).

55. Hughes (2011, 344). For a wonderful meditation on this moment of waiting and delay see Jacques Derrida's *Athens, Still Remains: The Photographs of Jean Francois Bonhomme* (2010).

56. See Morgan (1990, 17).

57. Waterfield (2009, 203).

58. Simon (1983, 108).

59. Waterfield (2009, 203).

60. Bremmer (2000, 291–292).

61. Derrida (1981, 134).

62. Derrida (1981, 134).

63. This coincidence of birth and death also resembles the ancient account, the Orphic wheel, the doctrine of the generation of opposites discussed beginning at 70d.

64. Brill (2013, 38).

65. Waterfield (2009, 203).

66. Wilson (2007, 108) points out the similarity between the *Phaedo* and the *Alcestis*.

67. Waterfield (2009, 203).

CHAPTER FOUR: THE SEARCH FOR THE MOST FITTING CAUSE

1. This point is made by Gallop (1993) in the explanatory note to 70c in his translation of the *Phaedo*. Gallop lists these passages and writes, "As if in answer to the charge that philosophy has 'nothing to do with real life.' Plato repeatedly brings out the connection between Socrates's present inquiry and his 'real life' situation" (87).

2. For a helpful comment on this passage see Brill (2013, 20–21).

3. πρέπω. Liddell, Scott, *et al.* (1843 and 1958, 1461).

4. Here I follow Sallis (1996, 25–63) in attempting to determine what is distinctive about Socratic *logos*. Although Sallis treats this question primarily in connection with the *Apology* and with sections of the *Phaedo*, my aim is to examine Socratic *logos* in the *Phaedo* as a whole.

5. For a detailed study of rhetoric in the *Apology* see McCoy (2008, 23–55).

6. Gadamer (1980, 32).

7. βελτίων. Liddell, Scott, *et al.* (1843 and 1958, 313).

8. For a study of the relationship between Greek medicine and philosophy see Frede (1987, 225–242). See also Holmes (2010) and Wickkiser (2008). Of course one of the most important treatments of disease in the Platonic corpus is found in *Timaeus* 81e–87b where the question of order and disorder occurs in relation to it.

9. *Plato Phaedo* (1996).

10. *Plato in Twelve Volumes*, vol. 1 (1966).

11. Bryan (2012, 163).

12. Liddell, Scott, *et al.* (1843 and 1958, 1122).

13. Gadamer (1980, 32). They also seem to have been men of some means since Crito cites them as "those strangers here ready to spend money" to buy Socrates's release. He continues, "One of them, Simmias the Theban, has brought enough for this very purpose. Cebes, too, and a good many others" (44b). Brill (2013) expands on this connection noting that "... it is safe to say that Plato found in the Pythagoreanism of his day resources for positing and exploring a unity between a cosmology determined by number and a series of practiced determined by a conception of soul's immortality and

transmigration. ... This can be seen in the interest Socrates has in convincing his two mathematically inclined interlocutors that they are part of an intellectual tradition that also involves serious commitments about the nature of the soul and the afterlife, commitments about which they appear unaware” (20). See also Horkey (2013) for a further explanation of the relationship between mathematical Pythagoreanism and the *Phaedo*.

14. οικειος. Liddell, Scott, *et al.* (1843 and 1958, 1202). Sallis (1999, 86) discusses the term οικειος in the context of the genesis of the gods in the *Timaeus*.

15. *Plato in Twelve Volumes*, vol. 1 (1966).

16. Atlas, the son of Iapetos and Klymene (daughter of Okeanos) is one of the titans whose genealogy is recounted in Hesiod’s *Theogony* (1987).

17. Brill (2013, 16 and 213).

18. Sallis (2009, 365–376) offers a reading of the myth of the True Earth. Brill (2013, 64–82) expands on it.

19. Brill (2013, 18).

20. Kirkland (2012) provides an interesting reading of how *logos* and *mythos* interact in the *Apology*. He explains that at 20e Socrates seems to substitute *logos* for *mythos* in his explanation of how he received his philosophical mission from the oracle. He writes, “We should perhaps try to hear Socrates’s substitution as holding together the expected term *muthos* and the stated term *logos* in their tension, but invoking them both” (41).

21. *Plato in Twelve Volumes*, vol. 1 (1966).

22. ἀποκτείνω. Liddell, Scott, *et al.* (1843 and 1958, 205).

23. αποθνήσκω. Liddell, Scott, *et al.* (1843 and 1958, 199).

24. *Plato Phaedo* (1999).

25. Diogenes Laertius (1901, II.5.20).

26. τελέω. Liddell, Scott, *et al.* (1843 and 1958, 1771–1772).

27. Diogenes Laertius (1925, II.3.13).

28. Sallis (1996, 17).

29. Allen (2000, 200).

30. Allen (2000, 201).

31. Allen (2000, 234).

32. Allen (2000, 200).

33. Allen (2000, 201–202).

34. Agamben (1998, 157). See also Harcourt (Summer 2011, 443–478).

35. Scholars frequently seek to differentiate the way of Platonic dialogue from tragedy. See the discussion in Sallis (2004, 143–156). Here Sallis shows how in the *Republic* Socrates contrasts a character in a tragedy who is irritable, changeful, and manifold with that of one who is “fitting or reasonable.” The latter is presented by Socrates as one who is “capable of taking his distance, accepting the calamity, and recognizing that the good and the bad in such things are not manifest” (145). Sallis sees this distancing as effected in *Phaedo*’s narrative account of the death of Socrates. “It is this distancing that effects the decisive differentiation of that scene from the scene of tragedy” (154). For a different view of the relationship between Platonic dialogue and tragedy, see Nussbaum (1986, 122–135).

36. See, for example, 95b and 115a.

37. Burger (1984) emphasizes this connection.

38. The connection to the *Agamemnon* seems even more appropriate here. Socrates refers not only to destiny but also to the bath, which is where Agamemnon went when he was killed.

39. See Wians (2009, 181–198).

40. Wians (2009, 183).

41. Wians (2009, 183).

42. Wians (2009, 184).

43. Wians (2009, 190).

44. Stern (1993, 178).
45. Woodruff (2002, 171–190).
46. συμφωνεῖν. Liddell, Scott, *et al.* (1843 and 1958, 1689).
47. In his reading of the second sailing passage Sallis (1996) explains that “The *logoi* do not provide some kind of substitutes, as it were, for the beings themselves, but rather they serve to open up a way of access to beings that is appropriate to a being like man whose comportment to beings is intrinsically linked to ignorance. They let something become manifest in something like the way that a deed, itself unfolding before our eyes, makes manifest something about the soul of the man responsible for the deed” (43).

CHAPTER FIVE: THE SO-CALLED GENUINE PHILOSOPHERS AND THE WORK OF SOUL

1. The *Symposium* ends as Aristodemus recounts what he considers to have been the main point of the discussion, which was that “Socrates was compelling them to agree that the same man should know how to make comedy and tragedy; and that he who is by art a tragic poet is also a comic poet” (223d). *Plato’s Symposium*, translated by Seth Bernadete (The University of Chicago Press: Chicago and London, 2001). Thus, the mixing of tragedy and comedy is present in other dialogues.
2. Redfield (2012, 178).
3. Redfield (2012, 172).
4. Redfield (2012, 172).
5. Redfield (2012, 172).
6. Finley (1981, 71).
7. Aristophanes (2000).
8. For expansion on this theme see Tyrrell (2012, 73–90). Tyrrell refers to Socrates as “Aristophanes’s ready victim.”
9. Xenophon (2013, 681).
10. Xenophon (2013, 671–673).
11. Hecht (2013, 27–29).
12. Frey (1978, 106–108).
13. Kirkland (2012, 160).
14. Strauss (1964, 61).
15. Sallis (1996) clearly explains how a Socratic *logos* does this in *Apology*. “What does Socrates say to men in the city? He says the same thing that Apollo said to him in that saying which he had to interpret, namely, that human wisdom has its proper limits and is meager in comparison with divine wisdom. However, for the most part, he does not ‘speak this out’ but rather *shows* it through what he speaks out, i.e., by speaking with others in such a way that the meagerness of their wisdom is exhibited, made manifest” (53–54).
16. καταλαμβάνω. Liddell, Scott, *et al.* (1843 and 1958, 897).
17. Smyth (1920, 683).
18. See especially Burger (1984) and her discussion of the practice of dying. Burger suggests that “Socrates’s opening defense presents the philosopher through the mask of the pious ascetic, while the final myth explicitly separates them” (49).
19. ὥς δ’ οὐχ οἷός τ’ εἶ, μηδέποτ’ εἴπῃς. ἔαν γὰρ θεὸς ἐθέλῃ καὶ ἀνδρίζῃ, οἷός τ’ ἔσῃ. English translation is from *Plato’s Theaetetus* (1984).
20. δοκεῖ οὖν μοι ὁ ἐπιστάμενός τι αἰσθάνεσθαι τοῦτο ὃ ἐπίσταται, καὶ ὥς γε νυνὶ φαίνεται, οὐκ ἄλλο τί ἐστὶν ἐπιστήμη ἢ αἴσθησις. English translation is from *Plato’s Theaetetus* (1984).
21. Heidegger (2002, 121).

22. In the introduction to *Plato's Theaetetus* (1984), Bernardete points out that “The extreme skepticism of the *Theaetetus* proves to be a consequence of their [Theaetetus and Theodorus] lofty ignorance of such things. They face Socrates’s argument and overlook Socrates” (x).

23. ἄκουε δὴ, ἧ δ’ ὅς. φημὶ γὰρ ἐγὼ εἶναι τὸ δίκαιον οὐκ ἄλλο τι ἢ τὸ τοῦ κρείττονος συμφέρον. English translation from *The Republic of Plato* (1968).

24. τοὺς μὲν ἄρχοντας ἐνίστε ἑαυτοῖς κακὰ προστάττειν, τοῖς δὲ δίκαιον εἶναι ταῦτα ποιεῖν. These are actually the words of Polemarchus, who takes the part of Socrates in responding to an objection of Cleitophon. English translation from *The Republic of Plato* (1968).

25. See also 65d.

26. Sallis (Spring 2009, 365–376).

27. Sallis (Spring 2009, 369). For a discussion of the way in which positions toward *Eros* define philosophy, see Saxonhouse (1997).

28. Nancy (1991, 22).

29. Nancy (1991, 22).

30. Sallis (1996, 84–91) discusses how Socrates depicts the structure of recollection as bringing something to light, of making something manifest. I follow him here. Sallis (1996, 88).

31. My analysis of this section is also indebted to Roochnik (2004). See his discussion of recollection (115–119).

32. αὐτοῦ τοῦ καλοῦ καὶ αὐτοῦ τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ καὶ δικαίου καὶ ὁσίου. ... See also a similar construction at 100b.

33. Sallis (1996, 91).

34. Roochnik (2004, 118).

35. Roochnik (2004, 118).

36. Ahrens Dorf (1995, 3).

37. Tarrant (2000, 200–201).

38. προσήκω. Liddell, Scott, *et al.* (1843 and 1958, 1512–1513).

39. κρᾶσις. Liddell, Scott, *et al.* (1843 and 1958, 990).

40. ἁρμονία. Liddell, Scott, *et al.* (1843 and 1958, 244).

41. μέτριος. Liddell, Scott, *et al.* (1843 and 1958, 1122–1123).

42. Sallis (2009, 373–374).

43. There is not sufficient space to consider this important part of the *Phaedo*, but in the myth of the True Earth there are references to the “as if” structure. These references would allow for a glimpse of the proportionate whole. For example, Socrates explains “For *if* somebody should go to its surface or become winged and fly up, he’d leap up and take a look—just as fish here leap up out of the sea and see what’s here, that’s also how somebody *might* take a look at what’s there” (110d).

44. See *Plato: Phaedo* (1996), 94c–d, italics added.

45. ἡγεμονεύω. Liddell, Scott, *et al.* (1843 and 1958, 762–763).

46. ἐναντίος. Liddell, Scott, *et al.* (1843 and 1958, 554–555).

47. It would be wonderful to know what he has in mind by these more gentle ways.

48. Hesiod (1987), lines 509–519.

49. In *De anima* II.8 (1941), Aristotle explains, “Voice is a particular sound made by something with a soul; for nothing which does not have a soul has a voice, although such things may be said, by way of likeness, to have a voice, *e.g.* the pipe, lyre, and any other things which lack a soul but have variation in pitch, melody, and articulation; there is a likeness here because voice too has these properties” (420b5–10). The issue of mimicry and deception play an important role in the *Apology* as well. Seeskin (1982, 94–105) draws attention to the way in which the wolf and the dog can be mistaken for each other to great disaster. Scarry (1985) has detailed how the purpose of the torturer is to inflict pain so that the prisoner’s body splits from his voice. She writes, “The goal of the torturer is to make the one, the body, emphatically and crushingly *present* by destroying it, and to make the other, the voice, *absent* by destroying it” (48).

CHAPTER SIX: ATHENS AT TWILIGHT

1. See chapter 2, [note 31](#).
2. Nietzsche (2005). The section referred to here is “The Problem of Socrates” in *The Twilight of the Idols*. Hereinafter cited parenthetically by section number in the text.
3. Derrida (1981, 95–119).
4. Hadot (1995, 94).
5. Most (1993, 96–111).
6. Madison (2002, 421–436).
7. Nietzsche (2001, Sec. #340).
8. Derrida (1981, 126–127).
9. Sallis (Spring 2009, 365–376).
10. Brill (2013, 63).
11. I am grateful to Martha K. Woodruff for bringing this point to my attention. For a further development of these points see her “The Music-Making Socrates: Plato and Nietzsche Revisited, Philosophy and Tragedy Rejoined” (2002, 171–190).
12. Sallis (2008, 78).
13. Sallis (2008, 78).
14. Sallis (2008, 78).
15. See Brill (2013, 60–63).
16. Derrida (1987).
17. Kidder (2003, 286).
18. Derrida (2013, 94).

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In *Without the Least Tremor*, M. Ross Romero considers the death of Socrates as a sacrificial act rather than an execution, and analyzes the implications of such an understanding for the meaning of the *Phaedo*. Plato's recounting of Socrates's death fits many of the conventions of ancient Greek sacrificial ritual. Among these are the bath, the procession, Socrates's appearance as a bull, the libation, the offering of a rooster to Asclepius, the treatment of Socrates's body and corpse, and *Phaedo*'s memorialization of Socrates. Yet in a powerful moment, Socrates's death deviates from a sacrifice as he drinks the *pharmakon* "without the least tremor." Developing the themes of suffering and wisdom as they connect to this scene, Romero demonstrates how the embodied Socrates is setting forth an *eikōn* of the death of the philosopher. Drawing on comparisons with tragedy and comedy, he argues that Socrates's death is more fittingly described as self-sacrifice than merely an execution or suicide. After considering the implications of these themes for the soul's immortality and its relationship to the body, the book concludes with an exploration of the place of sacrifice within ethical life.

M. Ross Romero, SJ is Assistant Professor of Philosophy at Creighton University.

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