

THE *PHAEDO* AS AN ALTERNATIVE TO TRAGEDY

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TO THE EXTENT THAT we view Socrates as a sort of philosophical hero, it is neither because of the details of his arguments nor simply because he is a sort of philosophical martyr. It is in large part because Plato presented Socrates as a moral exemplar, one whose exemplary status comes from his complete dedication to, and excellence in, philosophy. The *Phaedo*, as the story of the last day of Socrates' life, plays a special role in this portrayal of Socrates. I argue here that Plato wrote it so that we would see Socrates as a philosophical hero, a replacement for traditional heroes such as Theseus and Heracles. The dialogue is a story of how this new hero faces death. It repeatedly alludes to tragedy, but is in several ways antithetical to tragedy, as understood by Plato: it highlights how pity and lamentation are inappropriate, and how *tuchē* (chance) does not play an important role in our hero's happiness. A true hero is someone like Socrates, self-sufficient and genuinely courageous in the face of death. The truly good and divine activities are inquiry and philosophical argumentation, not fighting and trickery. Socrates is the one close to the divine and so worth emulating. The *Phaedo* is a story of how this new sort of hero, rather than dwelling on his imminent death, uses philosophical argumentation to help his companions overcome their fear of death and maintain their search for truth.

Plato thinks that tragedy, at least as it existed in his time, brings with it a number of commitments that are deeply mistaken. Scholars debate whether Plato completely rejects tragedy or instead attempts to reform it, to create a good kind that avoids its problems.¹ I argue here that the *Phaedo* takes a middle path. It rejects general features of tragedy more than is accepted by those who think that Plato embraces a reformed tragedy. But it adopts the broad framework of tragedy more than is recognized by those who think that Socrates simply rejects tragedy.² Surprisingly little has been written on the *Phaedo*'s overall relation to tragedy, although commentators have drawn specific connections.³ D. D. Raphael and

1. Nussbaum ([1986] 2001) argues that Plato rejects tragedy, replacing it with what she calls "anti-tragedy." Her critics typically argue that Plato adopts and reworks more features of tragedy than Nussbaum accepts. See, e.g., Roochnik 1990; Hyland 1993; Trivigno 2009. Modern interest in Plato's relation to tragedy goes back to Nietzsche's *Die Geburt der Tragödie aus dem Geiste der Musik* ([1872] 2015).

2. In different ways, Halliwell (1984; 1999) and Nightingale (1995) also take such a middle path.

3. Dorter (1982), Rowe (1993), and Ebert (2004) draw specific connections. Earlier commentators, such as Burnet (1911) and Hackforth (1955), are much more interested in possible references to Pythagorean and Orphic views.

Stephen Halliwell are among the few who have provided overall accounts of the *Phaedo*'s relation to tragedy, and their treatments are rather brief.⁴ I agree with them that the dialogue somehow reworks tragedy, but one must examine the details to understand the concrete alternative that the *Phaedo* provides. This is what I do here.

My approach is to develop in four stages the case that the *Phaedo* is written as an alternative to tragedy and, in so doing, to fill out this alternative.⁵ First, I show that the beginning of the dialogue rejects key features of tragedy, as understood by Plato (section 1). On its own, rejecting these would be compatible with it simply being written in a completely different genre; instead, like a tragedy, it tells a story about a hero, but a new sort of hero (section 2). Recognizing this allows for a new way to understand how Plato has composed an alternative to tragedy: the *Phaedo* meets each requirement in *Republic* Books 2–3 for a properly told story about the heroes, gods, and the underworld—the broad category to which tragedy belongs (section 3). The *Phaedo* is an alternative to tragedy, then, in the sense that it belongs to the same broad category as tragedy, but then rejects key features of it and instead tells a new sort of story about the death of a hero. Once this framework is established, I turn to the story told within it. In the face of death, Socrates' arguments help his companions overcome their fear of death and help them avoid the threat highlighted at the middle of the dialogue, the threat of misology (hatred of theories and arguments), which would undermine their ability to be philosophers devoted to truth (section 4). In laying out this story, I show how the *Phaedo* can be seen as adopting and adapting formal elements from tragic plays.

Plato may well have thought that all his dialogues were importantly different from tragedy and thus an alternative to it in a minimal sense. My claim is that the *Phaedo* is an alternative in a much more robust sense: (i) the beginning of the dialogue draws attention to how it rejects tragedy, (ii) it identifies Socrates as a new sort of hero, (iii) it positively meets every requirement presented in *Republic* Books 2–3, and (iv) it adopts and adapts formal elements from tragic plays to tell a new sort of story of a hero's death. Perhaps some other Platonic dialogue is also an alternative to tragedy of this sort, but most are not.

Recognizing this literary structure highlights philosophical views that commentators have passed over. For example, it clarifies how Socrates' theological views are important for his ethical views: his view that the divine is always beneficial, never harmful, is closely connected to his view that he has control over his own happiness, rather than being at the mercy of chance (τύχη). It also highlights how Socrates' account of inquiry—including his theory of recollection—is important for explaining our self-sufficiency in searching for wisdom and happiness.⁶ But a reading of the *Phaedo* is not merely valuable to the extent that it clarifies the philosophical ideas within it. Independent of such benefit, it is worthwhile to understand one of Plato's literary masterpieces on its own terms.

4. Raphael 1960, 82–86; Halliwell 1984, 55–58. See also Crotty 2009, chap. 3; Jansen 2013.

5. For the remainder of this essay, by “tragedy” I generally mean “tragedy, at least as actually practiced.” At the end of section 1, I discuss whether Plato thinks there can be a good type of tragedy. See also n. 8 below.

6. These are overlooked not only by more “philosophical” commentators, such as Bostock (1986), Gallop (1975), and Ebert (2004), but also by more “literary” ones, such as Dorter (1982).

1. THE PHAEDO'S ENGAGEMENT WITH TRAGEDY

While Aristotle's *Poetics* provides the first explicit theory of tragedy, Plato has a conception of tragedy that is meant to capture a general outlook on life (e.g., *Cra.* 408c), as Halliwell has argued at length.⁷ This conception of tragedy is not strictly tied to the literary genre; in this respect, it is similar to how we can describe it as a tragedy when someone dies in an accident. Plato understands the literary genre of tragedy partially in terms of this "tragic worldview," as we might call it. In *Republic* Book 10, Socrates describes Homer as the "first of the tragedians" (607a2–3), not because he came first, but because his stories best exemplify this outlook.⁸

In this section I argue that the opening of the *Phaedo* rejects three core features of tragedy identified by Plato in *Republic* Book 10, and later by Aristotle and others: pity (ἔλεος, cf. *Resp.* 606b–c), lamentation (ὄδυρμός, cf. *Resp.* 605d), and chance (τύχη, cf. *Resp.* 604d). According to this way of viewing tragedy, it involves horrible events outside a hero's control that lead the hero to pity himself and lament what has befallen him, bringing the audience to do the same. Plato thinks that the gods would not be responsible for horrible events happening to good people, that the events commonly regarded as horrible are typically not, and that one should avoid pity and lamenting to the extent possible. Tragedy brings with it views of how to live, what is valuable, and how the gods act—views rejected at the beginning of the *Phaedo*.

The very first thing *Phaedo* reports about the last day of Socrates' life is that he did not pity Socrates (58e1–e5):

Καὶ μὴν ἔγωγε θαυμάσια ἔπαθον παραγεγόμενος, οὔτε γὰρ ὡς θανάτῳ παρόντα με ἀνδρὸς ἐπιτηδείου ἔλεος εἰσήει· εὐδαίμων γάρ μοι ὁ ἀνὴρ ἐφαίνετο, ὃ Ἐχέκρατες, καὶ τοῦ τρόπου καὶ τῶν λόγων, ὡς ἀδελῶς καὶ γενναίως ἐτελεύτα . . .⁹

My own experiences when I was with him were surprising. For pity did not enter me, as you might have expected, from witnessing the death of a friend, since the man seemed to me to be happy, Echechrates, both in his behavior and in what he said, so fearlessly and nobly did he meet his end. (Trans. Sedley and Long, modified)

One might expect pity, that paradigmatic tragic emotion, since Socrates' death seems a misfortune; instead, *Phaedo* says that Socrates seemed happy and reached his end fearlessly and nobly.¹⁰ Throughout the dialogue, Socrates is portrayed as noble, admirable, and at peace with his death, rather than pitiable and distraught—straight through his calmly drinking the poison.¹¹ Directly after the

7. Halliwell 1999.

8. Similarly, Aristotle says that Euripides is found to be the *most* tragic of the poets (*Poet.* 1453a29–30). The view in the *Cratylus* and *Republic* is apparently in tension with the *Laws*, where the Athenian stranger says that the state they have produced is itself "the truest tragedy" and that they will allow the tragedians' work into the city if it is accepted by the authorities (817a–d). This notion of tragedy does not oppose the tragic to the philosophical and does not associate tragedy with pity and chance. Laks (2010) provides further arguments for thinking the treatment of tragedy in the *Laws* is different from that in the *Republic*. In saying that the *Phaedo* is an alternative to tragedy, I mean the notion of tragedy discussed in the *Republic* and elsewhere, not that of the *Laws*. The text of the *Republic* is from Slings' (2003) edition.

9. Strachan's text in Duke et al. 1995.

10. As noted by Raphael (1960, 84–85) and Nussbaum (2001, 131).

11. In Plato's dialogues, there is not as close of a connection between tragedy and fear as in Aristotle. But Plato may nonetheless have connected them; if so, Socrates' fearlessness would be another way in which he differs from a normal tragic hero.

passage quoted above, Phaedo repeats that he did not feel pity for Socrates and then says that instead he and the others felt a strange mixture of pleasure and pain (59a). This prepares us for a story that will affect us in an unusual way. It is not only that Socrates does not think that what has happened to him is tragic, but also that Phaedo, one of his companions, does not view it this way. Since Phaedo is telling the story, there is reason to expect that we will be similarly affected.¹²

Tragedy involves the hero and the audience not merely pitying, but also being overcome by grief and lamentation (see esp. *Resp.* 604b–606c). These responses are also marked as inappropriate in the opening of the *Phaedo*: when Socrates' companions first enter his cell, they hear Xanthippe crying out, bemoaning not her own loss, but rather the fact that this will be Socrates' last chance to speak with his friends (60a). Since Socrates views philosophy as the most valuable activity, if anything is worth lamenting, it would be this. But Socrates immediately tells Crito to take her home; when some of his people do, she cries out again and strikes herself in grief. In three sentences, the *Phaedo* dramatizes lamenting—even using words connected to lamenting in the *Republic* (βοῶν, 604c9; κόπτεσθαι, 605d2)—and sets it aside as inappropriate. Socrates is in pain from his bonds, but rather than complain, once Xanthippe leaves, he uses his pain as an opportunity for detached reflection on the peculiar nature of pleasure and pain (60b–c), beginning a philosophical conversation that lasts for most of the day. At the end of the dialogue, in the death scene, the companions burst into tears and lament, for which Socrates chastises them (117d–e)—a brief reminder that this is an inappropriate response.

As Halliwell and Martha Nussbaum have discussed at length, an important theme of tragedy is that one is at the mercy of events outside one's own control—what Plato calls *tuchē* (chance).¹³ In the opening of the dialogue, *tuchē* and the verb *tuchein* are used several times in succession (twice in 58a6, 58b8, 58c3): it was *tuchē* that it took so long for Socrates to be put to death, *tuchē* that Theseus' ship was sent immediately before Socrates was convicted, and *tuchē* that the ship took a long time to arrive. In the ordinary way of viewing the world, for the ancient Greeks just as for us, much of what is valuable falls outside of our control. But in the ensuing dialogue Socrates provides a portrait of how happiness can be within one's control. Socrates is calm, lighthearted, and genuinely happy (εὐδαίμων, 58e3), despite the injustice done to him, straight through his drinking the poison. Moreover, as we shall see, he argues for theories that explain how this is possible.

These passing mentions of *tuchē* in the opening of the dialogue might seem insignificant, but they fit with a broader feature of the opening: it refers to a number of ordinary ideas that contrast with extraordinary alternatives developed later. In explaining why Socrates died long after the trial, Phaedo reports that the Athenians vowed to Apollo that they would send an embassy to Delos every year if the famous “twice seven” were saved, which they were by Theseus (58a–c).

12. So Rowe 1993, 111, n. *ad* 58e1. Phaedo's reference to laughter alludes to comedy. In my view, the *Phaedo*'s relation to tragedy is more important for understanding the literary structure of the dialogue; I leave for another occasion how the *Phaedo* engages with comedy. According to the end of the *Symposium*, Socrates argued that it belongs to the same person to compose tragedy and comedy (223d). This makes it easier to see how someone could write something that draws on both.

13. Halliwell 1984; Nussbaum 2001.

According to Athenian law, while the embassy is away the city should be kept pure and so no one should be put to death. Since, by chance, the ship carrying the embassy was delayed, Socrates' execution was too, keeping him in prison. Almost every element of this story contrasts with an extraordinary alternative developed later in the dialogue. Socrates goes on to argue that the prison they should be concerned with is the body, which uses bodily desires to trap us until we are released by philosophy (82d–e, cf. 62b). He argues that death, rather than causing pollution, is our only chance to be pure, a view he defends with his own account of purity (see esp. 67c–d). Rather than trying to avoid death, the true philosopher desires nothing but being dead (64a). Moreover, Socrates describes a very different way to honor Apollo: he says that he is, along with the swans, a slave of Apollo, sacred to the same god, and has a gift of prophecy from his master no less than they do (85b). His prophecy comes from argument: he can tell through reasoning that he will have a good fate after death. He is sacred to Apollo by philosophizing, thereby preparing for death, rather than by avoiding death like the Athenians.

The four references to *tuchē* at the beginning set up a contrast with the extraordinary alternative Socrates argues for later: that chance plays a minor role in living a good life. There is sometimes a tendency to leave out Socrates' philosophical views when considering his literary portrayal, but one of the most striking features of Socrates is how well he lives up to his articulated beliefs.¹⁴ He argues that happiness comes from knowledge (80d–81a), which we acquire on our own, separated from the senses (e.g., 65e–66a, 82e–83b). Companions are useful for this inquiry, but Socrates never suggests that they are necessary. Instead, he repeatedly emphasizes that the soul must inquire on its own. In the recollection argument (73c–76e), he defends the view that each person has knowledge within oneself that one can recover—making us resilient against *tuchē*. Moreover, heroes traditionally have divine lineage. Not to be born with such lineage is, from the beginning, a sort of bad *tuchē* that condemns most people never to achieve true greatness. Socrates argues that one need not be born of special parents to be divine; we all are akin to the divine (78b–80b). A central message of the dialogue is that we have within ourselves the resources needed to fulfill our divine nature and be happy.

This is not to say that Socrates defends the Stoic view that the outside world cannot in any way undermine our wisdom and happiness.¹⁵ He says that the philosopher cannot acquire the knowledge he desires so long as he is embodied (66e–67a, 68a–b).¹⁶ Moreover, intense pleasures and pains are the greatest evil, because they *force* us to believe things to be most true that are not (83c). But even in these cases Socrates emphasizes what we can control. While the philosopher cannot have truth and wisdom so long as he is embodied, he only happens to be in human form at the moment. There is good hope that he can acquire knowledge after death,

14. Indeed, I follow Blondell (2002) in being skeptical that one can cleanly separate the philosophical and literary aspects of the dialogues.

15. As I argue at greater length in Ebrey 2017.

16. I refer to the philosopher as “he” throughout this article, since (unfortunately) Socrates consistently assumes in the *Phaedo* that philosophers are male. Forms of *άνήρ* are used to discuss the actual or aspiring philosopher at 63e9, 67d12, 68b8, 76b5, 78a4, and 85c7. Socrates also refers to the philosophical man (*φιλόσοφος άνήρ*) at 64d2, 84a2–3, and 95c1.

so long as he properly prepares himself (67e–68b). If he does so, he can escape reincarnation and live in eternal happiness with the gods (81a). Moreover, the true philosopher avoids pleasures and pains to the extent possible, allowing him to prepare properly for death (83b–c). In short, Socrates argues that we have significant control over our situation, which provides good hope (67b–c, 68a–b) that we can spend life after death eternally with the gods.¹⁷

I have argued that the opening of the dialogue rejects pity and lamentation, and that its several references to ordinary *tuchē* set up a contrast with the extraordinary new role of *tuchē* developed later in the dialogue. We can now see why I claimed in the introduction that the *Phaedo* rejects general features of tragedy to a greater degree than is typically accepted by those who see Plato as reforming tragedy. Consider Franco Trivigno's reading of the *Gorgias*.¹⁸ According to Trivigno, Socrates in the *Gorgias* is committed to the necessity of having conversational partners to make philosophical progress and be happy. Trivigno argues that Socrates is committed to the "fragility of argument": we cannot be certain that our arguments are without fault; they are likely to be shown to be faulty; and, even if they are not shown to be faulty, we cannot verify that they are correct, so we cannot succeed in acquiring wisdom. Socrates' values are substituted for the ordinary values found in a tragedy, but otherwise the dialogue reflects a new sort of tragic worldview: we are dependent on others for our happiness, there is a good chance that things will fall apart, and we cannot acquire what we ultimately seek. On my reading of the *Phaedo*, Socrates does not accept such fragility of argument or the strict need for conversational partners, and so there is much less scope for *tuchē* in the dialogue's outlook. Trivigno may be correct about the *Gorgias* and I about the *Phaedo*. My point is simply that the *Phaedo* is not the sort of reformed tragedy that Trivigno finds in the *Gorgias*.¹⁹

Sarah Jansen argues that the *Phaedo* is a sort of tragedy, but one in which the action and the story are about Socrates' companions, not Socrates himself.²⁰ The companions have to deal with the *tuchē* of losing their leader and guide, Socrates. In my view, the greatest difficulty with this reading is that the *Phaedo* is first and foremost a story about Socrates: his arguments, his ideas, how he lived the last day of his life.²¹ Socrates is the hero who rises above *tuchē*, happy despite being unjustly put to death. As evidence that the action is about the companions, Jansen notes that when Socrates drinks the poison, Phaedo says that he cried not for Socrates but for his own *tuchē*—that is, for his own misfortune (117c–d). This is a complicated moment, which I discuss further in the next section. I understand it as capturing the emotional states of someone who admires Socrates and wants to be like him, but has fallen short of Socrates' own ideals. Phaedo continues to

17. For a similar point, see Halliwell 1984, 54.

18. Trivigno 2009.

19. My reading of the *Phaedo* is, in a way, closer to Nightingale's (1995, 67–92) reading of the *Gorgias*. She sees the dialogue as criticizing tragedy—in particular by adapting *Antiope*—while imitating its themes and structure, thereby helping to distinguish philosophy from tragedy. Unlike Nightingale's account of the *Gorgias*, my account of the *Phaedo* sees it as positively telling the sort of story that should be told about how a hero faces death.

20. Jansen 2013. For example, she says "the 'drama' of the *Phaedo* revolves around the plight of Socrates' companions" (p. 5). Similarly, she argues that we are meant to pity the companions (p. 15).

21. This said, I agree that the companions' actions are important to the dialogue's overall story. But this story is about how Socrates helps his companions while facing his own death, as described in section 4 below.

hold on to some elements of the tragic worldview that Socrates shows us how to reject. To the extent that we, as readers, are in *Phaedo*'s position, we can both feel our admiration for Socrates and see if we fall short of his ideals.

Should we consider the *Phaedo* an improved kind of tragedy, or does it reject so many characteristic features of tragedy that it should simply be considered a different kind of story? In *Republic* Book 10, Plato seems to treat grief, lamenting, and *tuchē* as definitive of tragedy (see esp. 604b–606c). If they are, then the *Phaedo* is not any kind of tragedy. But in *Laws* Book 7, Plato seems to embrace the idea that there could be a good kind of tragedy (817a–d).²² Determining whether Plato would have thought of the *Phaedo* as a good kind of tragedy would require determining whether (i) Plato has a consistent position on whether there is such a thing, and (ii) if so, whether the *Phaedo* meets the requirements for being such a tragedy. This would take us well beyond the *Phaedo* and so cannot be settled here. Either way, the *Phaedo* rejects central features of existing tragedy, as understood by Plato. The dialogue is written to be a new sort of story, an alternative to existing tragedy.

2. SOCRATES AS A TRUE HERO

On its own, the *Phaedo*'s rejection of central features of tragedy would be compatible with its belonging to a very different genre; indeed, Nussbaum has argued that all of Plato's dialogues belong to an entirely different genre.²³ I will argue, instead, that the *Phaedo* opposes the tragic worldview by telling a story that belongs to the same broad category as tragedy: a story about heroes, gods, and the underworld. My first step is to show that the *Phaedo* identifies Socrates as a hero. This is important for understanding not only the category of story to which the dialogue belongs, but also how Socrates is set up in the *Phaedo* as a new sort of moral exemplar. To identify people as heroes in the ancient Greek world is to identify them as having both human and divine lineage. Clearly this means that they are exceptional; but, for Plato, it also means that they must be good. In the *Republic*, Socrates emphasizes that a hero's actions are sympathized with and praised by those who listen to the story, which means that if the hero is portrayed as bad, the portrayal will license bad behavior (*Resp.* 390c–391e, cf. 605c–e). The *Phaedo* identifies Socrates as a new sort of hero with a new sort of relationship with the divine, and so as a new sort of person to admire.

The *Phaedo* continues the story of the *Apology* (referred to at 63b and 69e), so it is worth briefly recalling that in the *Apology* Socrates compares his disregard for death to that of the heroes who died at Troy, in particular Achilles (28b–d).²⁴ Socrates is there arguing that his actions are not shameful if they lead to his own death. The beginning of the *Phaedo* reminds us of this attitude, when *Phaedo* says that Socrates seemed happy, “so fearlessly and nobly did he meet his end” (58e4–5). In the *Apology* there is no need for Socrates to distinguish himself from Achilles to make his point. But it will turn out that Achilles would not fare well by the *Phaedo*'s lights.

22. See n. 8 above.

23. Nussbaum 2001.

24. See Hobbs 2000, 178–86, as well as her discussion of the *Crito*'s reference to fertile Phthia at 186.

As we will see, Socrates is compared to a hero at the beginning, middle, and end of the *Phaedo*. Moreover, in the first half of the dialogue Socrates defends theories that explain why only a philosopher could be a hero. My case for identifying Socrates as a hero will extend into the next section, where I argue that the *Phaedo* portrays Socrates in a way that meets every requirement in *Republic* Book 3 for how to portray heroes.

As noted earlier, in *Phaedo*'s explanation of why Socrates' death was delayed, *Phaedo* mentions several ordinary ideas that contrast with the extraordinary alternatives developed later in the dialogue. Theseus plays an important role in this explanation: he, traditionally the great Athenian hero, contrasts with Socrates, the extraordinary new one. After *Phaedo* mentions Theseus and says that he did not pity Socrates, *Phaedo* adds that Socrates likely went to Hades with divine benefaction (58e)—just as one expects of a hero.²⁵ Then, as Kenneth Dorter notes, while *Phaedo* is clear that there were more people at Socrates' death, exactly fourteen people are named, making Socrates someone who is leading his own "twice seven," just as Theseus did on his mission to Crete.²⁶ Despite Crito's importance later in the dialogue, he is not named here, only referred to indirectly as Critobulus' father (59c). Unlike Crito, who is roughly Socrates' age, each named companion is significantly younger—the fourteen youths saved by Socrates. But instead of saving them from death, as Theseus did for his twice seven, Socrates prepares them for his own death and provides an exhortation to philosophy, which he says is nothing but practice for dying and for being dead (64a).²⁷

Near the middle of the dialogue, at 89b–c, *Phaedo* compares Socrates to Heracles, directly after he says that he had never admired Socrates so much as when Socrates responded to the companions' beginning to lose confidence that *logoi* can help them discover the truth (88c–89a). This comparison of Socrates with Heracles is particularly apt, since Heracles is said to have avoided the normal fate after death, instead living eternally with the gods. Socrates has recently argued that he, as a philosopher, will do the same (81a). But Socrates' feats are radically different from Heracles' or any other traditional hero's. *Phaedo* compares Socrates' "combat to defeat the arguments of Simmias and Cebes" (89c3–4) to Heracles' second labor; Socrates later says that he should come into "close Homeric quarters" (95b7–8), that is, engage in close combat with Cebes, to test what the latter is saying. Philosophy and argumentation take the place of physical combat as the hero's activity.

Socrates is again compared to a hero at the end of the dialogue (115a). He there jokes that, when he says that he is called by destiny, he is speaking as a hero would in a tragedy. He then takes a bath—the ritual cleansing of a hero about to die—but insists on making it insignificant, saying that he is bathing now in order

25. So Rowe 1993, 111–12, n. ad 58e3. Perhaps this divine benefaction is the sort described at the end of the *Meno*: true opinions that guide one's actions well but fall short of knowledge (99b–d). Socrates denies having knowledge throughout the *Phaedo* and yet has reasoned beliefs. These beliefs could be viewed as a divine gift that lead him toward true happiness.

26. Dorter 1982, 5–9.

27. Ebert (2004, 99 n. 12) is skeptical that Socrates is supposed to parallel Theseus, since this parallel does not arise later in the dialogue. However, as described below, Socrates is compared to Heracles (89b–c) and later to a tragic hero (115a), which strengthens the case that Socrates is being compared to a hero here as well.

not to burden the women who would wash the corpse.²⁸ Socrates is his soul, which will continue to exist after death; the corpse is simply an insignificant vestige of embodied life—in fact, his body had been the source of most of his problems. In making fun of himself for speaking like a tragic hero, Socrates punctures the air of solemnity around a hero's death, emphasizing its insignificance. He refuses to delay his execution (116e–117a). He rejects the horribleness of death as represented in tragedy. Plato continues to draw our attention to tragedy while showing that Socrates is not acting as a tragic hero would. Socrates' contrast between himself and a tragic hero marks the beginning of his death scene, one of the most moving scenes in ancient Greek literature. But it does not fill us with anguish. There is no hopelessness, and so no despair; there is no suffering, and so no pity. Socrates is not at the mercy of horrible forces beyond his control. Instead, while sad, his death is at the same time inspiring—an unusual mixture of pleasure and pain, as Phaedo said at the beginning (59a).²⁹

The views that Socrates argues for in the first half of the dialogue help explain why it is appropriate to see him as a new sort of hero. Socrates argues that the non-philosopher's courage is absurd because it overcomes the fear of death through a sort of fear and cowardice (68d); this so-called courage is fit for slaves, a sort of illusory painting (*σκιαγραφία*) with nothing sound or true (69b–c). Only philosophers have the heroic virtue of courage, since only they are ruled by wisdom. Socrates explicitly mentions honor-lovers as having the absurd nonphilosophical courage (68b–c); thus Homeric heroes such as Achilles cannot be true heroes, since they are honor-lovers.

Next, a proper hero should be related to the divine. Of course, Socrates does not have divine lineage, as is supposedly true of traditional heroes. Instead, Socrates argues in the affinity argument that every soul is akin to the divine (79a–80b) and so we all can count the divine as our kin. In this way, the *Phaedo* rejects a traditional division between mortals and immortals; indeed, in arguing that our souls are immortal, Socrates argues that every one of us has a mark of the divine.³⁰ But this does not mean that everyone is equally related to the divine. Another divine mark of heroes such as Theseus and Heracles is that they are said to live with the gods after death. Socrates argues that only philosophers are pure enough to do so (69c–e, 80e–81a, 114c). After Heracles died, Zeus supposedly decided that Heracles could live with the gods. The fate of Socrates' soul will not rely on such a decision; instead, if he can live among the gods, it will be because of how he has lived and how this fits with the nature of the soul (78b–84d).

We know from *Republic* Book 3 that Plato thinks there is something wrong with how his fellow Greeks represented heroes. Socrates is not a new version of Theseus, Heracles, or some other traditional hero; he is Socrates, a new hero.

28. Rowe 1993, 290, n. *ad* 115a6. Edmonds (2004, 182–83) argues that this feature of Greek tragedy treats the hero as already among the dead.

29. For a discussion of how Socrates is portrayed in the death scene as living in line with the ideals set out in the dialogue, see Ebrey 2023, chap. 12.

30. See Long 2019, chaps. 1–2 for how Plato's discussion of immortality should be understood against this traditional division. See Ebrey 2023, chap. 10 for a discussion of how the final argument, in arguing that our souls are immortal, shows that we have a feature of the divine.

In the next section, I further fill in this portrayal of Socrates by arguing he has every feature that, according to *Republic* Book 3, a hero should have.

3. THE *PHAEDO* AS A STORY ABOUT GODS, HEROES, AND THE UNDERWORLD

How, according to Plato, should one replace the sort of stories told in existing tragedy? *Republic* Books 2–3 (377d–392c) provide a partial answer, since they present a number of requirements for any story in the broad category to which tragedy belongs—namely, stories about gods, heroes, and the underworld. I argue here that the *Phaedo* is written in a way that meets each requirement in *Republic* Books 2–3 for stories of this sort. Stories about gods and heroes are especially important to Plato since they involve the divine, which people normally—and, Plato thinks, rightly—admire. Socrates says in the *Republic* that misrepresenting gods and heroes is the first and foremost problem with existing stories (377d–e). The *Phaedo* does not simply avoid this misrepresentation; it positively portrays both the gods and its hero as having the features that the *Republic* says they should have. This interpretation does not require a stance on which dialogue came first; I am simply claiming that these two dialogues reflect the same view about how to tell a story about heroes, gods, and the underworld—as we shall see, down to some very specific details.³¹ Of course, many stories could meet the *Republic*'s restrictions without providing an alternative to tragedy. But I have already argued (section 1 above) that the *Phaedo* draws attention to core features of tragedy and rejects them; moreover, as we have begun to see, it offers a different sort of story of the hero's death (as will be further discussed in section 4 below). My claim, then, is that the *Phaedo* belongs to the same broad type of story as tragedy, but then rejects tragedy and tells a different sort of story of how a hero faces death. Recognizing this clarifies the sort of story that the *Phaedo* presents, as well as filling in Socrates' portrayal as a hero and providing a new framework for thinking about Socrates' interaction with the gods and his account of the underworld in the *Phaedo*.

I argue here that (i) Socrates' theory in the *Phaedo* and (ii) the way his character is portrayed in the dialogue fit with (iii) the constraints presented in the *Republic*. While any given correlation might be a coincidence, the consistent fit—down to some very specific details—among these three provides strong evidence that the *Phaedo* was written to be the sort of story that meets the *Republic*'s constraints. It also fleshes out Socrates' character by showing how, throughout the dialogue, his actions are in line with his theory.

Before presenting my case, let me address a few reasons why one might think that the *Republic*'s restrictions would not apply to the *Phaedo*. First, most of Socrates' examples of passages to remove are from Homer, and so the restrictions may not seem intended for a story like the *Phaedo*. But Socrates is clear that they apply to any story that involves gods and heroes, and he provides examples from tragic drama as well. Second, these restrictions may seem intended to be only for the young (e.g., 377b), and so not for the audience of the *Phaedo*. However, Socrates

31. That said, stylistic evidence suggests that the *Republic* is in a second group of dialogues, after the *Phaedo* but before the late dialogues. See Kahn 2002.

is clear that they are valuable for adults as well (e.g., 387b). Third, the *Republic's* restrictions are intended for the guardians and so, again, may not seem to apply to the audience of the *Phaedo*; however, they are based on general principles that apply equally to non-guardians. Finally, while one might think that the restrictions are limited to stories told in verse, Socrates never says this.³² In short, so long as Plato accepts the account in *Republic* Books 2–3, he has every reason to apply these same strictures to composing the *Phaedo*. Of course, the *Phaedo* was written not for a *kallipolis*, but for the Greek world of Plato's time, where tragedy was widespread and well known. This is part of why Plato draws regular contrasts with tragedy in the *Phaedo*.

I will discuss the *Republic's* restrictions in the order that they are presented, beginning with Socrates' claims in Book 2 about how to represent the gods. He argues that the gods must not be represented as taking revenge or as otherwise doing any serious injustice (377e–378e); that they should only be represented as good, hence as responsible only for good things, not harm (379b–380c); that they do not change their form to deceive us (380c–381e); and, finally, that they are wholly truthful in everything they say and do (381e–383c). These restrictions fit with Socrates' own way of treating the gods in the *Phaedo*. He is confident that his dream is trying to communicate something beneficial to him (60e–61b). He takes it as an obvious interpretive constraint, in interpreting his dream and in discussing Apollo, that the gods never deceive him. He says that he is a servant of Apollo, and as such, speaks the truth about the future (84e–85b). Throughout he treats the gods as good and truthful.

Moreover, Socrates' way of interacting with the gods in the *Phaedo* fits with his theoretical description of them there and in the *Republic*. In the *Phaedo's* defense speech, Socrates says that the gods are good and wise masters and that he will be with them after death (e.g., 69d–e). In the affinity argument (78b–80b), he argues that there are two sorts of things, one seen and mortal, the other unseen and divine. *Republic* Book 2's account of why the gods are good and do not deceive closely matches Socrates' description of the divine in the affinity argument. In the *Republic*, Socrates argues that the nature of the gods is simple; thus, they are least likely to depart from their proper form (380d). In the affinity argument, the divine things are said to be incomposite and uniform (78c–d, 80b). Both the *Phaedo* and the *Republic* emphasize that the divine does not change, using the same terms: μεταβολήν (78d4, 381b2) and ἀλλοιοῦται (78d7, 380e–381c passim).

Tragedies frequently involve divine forces outside the hero's control that make the hero miserable. One problem, of course, lies with how the heroes react to these forces, and Plato thinks we need a new sort of hero. But another problem lies with how the gods and fate play with the heroes' lives. Socrates' view that the gods are only beneficial, never harmful, is an important part of the *Phaedo's* overall optimism about our ability to bring about our own wisdom and happiness, both here and in the afterlife.

Republic Book 3 turns to the portrayal of heroes. Socrates first claims that the guardians should hear things that make them least afraid of death, in order to cultivate their courage (386a–b). As we have seen, *Phaedo* reports at the beginning of

32. So also Jansen 2013, 2–3.

the dialogue that Socrates was fearless on the day he died. Moreover, Socrates' entire argument over the course of the *Phaedo* is that those who have lived well should not fear death (e.g., 63b–c, 69d–e, 81a, 84b, 114c). Only the wicked should fear it, since they have not taken care of their souls (107c). In the *Republic* Socrates says that in order for people not to fear death, the storytellers should not disparage unqualifiedly (ἀπλῶς, 386b10) the things in Hades as full of terrors (386b–387b). In the *Phaedo* he argues that he will go on to live among wise masters, and that the true Hades is divine, noble, pure, and unseen (80d). In a broader sense of “Hades,” everyone who dies goes there, but this too is not to be disparaged unqualifiedly; whether or not it is bad depends on the sort of soul one has when one dies (107c–d). One of the main points of the eschatological account at the end of the *Phaedo* is that the state of one's soul determines where one goes in the afterlife.³³

Socrates' next topic in the *Republic* is grief and lamentation, which, as discussed in section 1 above, play an important role in tragedy and are marked as inappropriate at the beginning of the *Phaedo*. The *Republic* gives two reasons for removing passages where famous men grieve and lament. First, “a decent man doesn't think that for a decent man, whose friend he also is, death is a terrible thing” (387d5–6). Socrates' companions in the *Phaedo* meet this requirement: Phaedo says that everyone was pretty much in the same state that he was in, not pitying or grieving for Socrates (58e, cf. 117c–d). Second, in the *Republic* Socrates says that because a good person is most self-sufficient and excels beyond all others, he grieves least when any misfortune befalls him, bearing it in the most even-tempered way (387d–e). Socrates is presented as not thinking that a misfortune has befallen him and as being completely even-tempered. But Simmias and Cebes (84d) and Phaedo do view the loss of Socrates as a misfortune and ultimately do not bear it in the most even-tempered way (117c–d). While the companions meet some of the *Republic*'s requirements for being a hero, Socrates is the one who is truly heroic.

Perhaps most strikingly, in the *Republic* Socrates says that they “will be justified in taking out the scenes where famous men wail, and give them to women, so long as they're not women of a superior sort, along with bad men, so that the people we claim to be bringing up to guard the country will turn up their noses at behaving as people like that do” (387e10–388a3). Xanthippe, as someone who cries out and beats herself in grief rather than philosophizing (60a–b), is represented as a woman not of a superior sort.³⁴ At the end of the dialogue, when the companions start crying, Socrates says that he sent away the women in order to avoid such behavior (117d–e). Lamenting is brought up in the *Phaedo* only briefly to show that it is inappropriate to the situation and not something that the best sort of person engages in.

33. For a discussion, see Ebrey 2023, chap. 11. In the *Republic*, Socrates says that they should also get rid of frightening and dreadful names for such things as Cocytus and Styx (387b–c). In the myth at the end of the *Phaedo*, Socrates uses the names “Cocytus” and “Styx” (113c) for the places where murderers and the worst of those who are curable go (113d–114b). I suggest that in the *Republic* Socrates is saying that we should not refer to the underworld *simply* as “Cocytus” or “Styx.” Socrates has just quoted passages from Homer where the underworld is presented as an awful place for everyone, or practically everyone (386c–387b). These should be expunged in order not *simply* to disparage the underworld. Similarly, the *Republic*'s myth of Er mentions “Tartarus”—another name that inspires dread—but reserves it for where the incurable tyrants are thrown (616a).

34. As noted by Nussbaum (1992, 126).

Returning to the *Republic*'s restrictions: after briefly mentioning that young people must not be made overly fond of laughter (388e–389a), Socrates says that they must put a high value on truth (389b–d). In the *Phaedo*, Socrates places the pursuit of truth and philosophy above all else. He spends the last day of his life philosophizing with his companions, admires Cebes for being difficult to convince (63a), says that Simmias and Cebes should challenge his views (84d–85b), and tells them to give little thought to Socrates and much more to the truth (91b–c). And, at a theoretical level, Socrates says that the philosopher's goal is grasping the truth (e.g., 66b) and the greatest evils are those things that bring us to accept falsehoods (83b–c, 89d).

In the *Republic*, Socrates turns next to moderation, saying that the chief features of moderate people are “being obedient to their rulers, and being rulers of themselves in relation to things like drink and sex and the pleasures of food” (389e1–2). Socrates is portrayed in the *Phaedo* as loyal and obedient to the gods (e.g., 61a–b) and to the orders from the Athenian Eleven (e.g., 85b). He argues that he will have good rulers in the afterlife (63b–c, 69e). In the *Republic*, Socrates says that poets should not represent heroes, much less the gods, as having an overwhelming desire for sex, as Homer does with Zeus (390b–c). At the end of the *Phaedo*, Crito suggests that before Socrates drinks the poison he can do what most people do: dine and drink well and have sex with whomever he happens to desire (116e). Socrates responds that these people act this way with good reason, thinking they will benefit from having done them, and that he also has good reason not to do these things, since he does not see them as beneficial (116e–117a). His behavior, again, fits with his theoretical account: in the defense speech and after the affinity argument he argues that philosophers shun the pleasures of drink, food, and sex (e.g., 64d, 81b) and only they have true moderation (69a–c).

Socrates ends the discussion of heroes in the *Republic* by arguing that good men must be presented neither as corruptible by bribes nor as only willing to do the right thing when provided with money, nor can they have a sense of superiority over the gods, nor act impiously in any way (390e–391e). Socrates is portrayed as a deeply pious person of sterling integrity, actively seeking to understand his dream and to do what he thinks the gods want him to do. He has good hope that after death he will have the gods as his good and wise masters, and views himself as a slave of Apollo (85b). Moreover, he thinks that philosophers in general can hope to have these good and wise masters (69c–d) and that they would not be bribable, since they are not money-lovers (68c).

At the end of the discussion of gods and heroes in the *Republic*, Socrates briefly turns to how to represent humans (392a–c). He says that the just should be happy and the unjust wretched and, further, that there should be no profit in injustice, not even if concealed (392b). *Phaedo* says at the beginning that Socrates seemed to be happy (*eudaimōn*, 58e3), and the dialogue ends with him saying that Socrates was the wisest and the most just person they knew (118a). Moreover, Socrates is represented throughout as tranquil and content. He also puts forward the view that only philosophers can have true justice (69b–c) and that only they can become close enough to the divine to live among the gods (69a–e), where they will be eternally happy (81a). Here, too, his character is in harmony with his theory, and both fit with the restrictions in the *Republic*: only the just are truly happy.

In sum, the *Phaedo* has precisely the elements for a properly told story about gods, heroes, and the underworld as described in *Republic* Books 2–3, right down to the detail that lamentation only being given to women who are “not of a superior sort.” Socrates is presented not simply as having theoretical views about the gods, but also as interacting with them, interpreting their messages, and viewing himself as their slave. Seemingly offhand comments, such as Socrates saying that he is not interested in food or sex, show that Socrates meets every one of the *Republic*’s requirements for being a proper hero.

4. THE ACTION OF THE DIALOGUE AND TRAGIC DRAMA

I have argued that the *Phaedo* presents Socrates as a new sort of hero in a story that belongs to the same broad category as tragedy—one about gods, heroes, and the underworld—but that from the beginning rejects key elements of tragedy, as Plato understands these. Our task now is to understand the dialogue’s action within this framework; doing so will involve drawing on many details that were mentioned earlier. I show here how these details contribute to the overall arc of the dialogue, telling a new sort of story of how a hero faces death. I also argue that some elements of this story can be seen as adapting formal elements of tragic drama.

The *Phaedo* is a story of Socrates, on the last day of his life, approaching death as a philosopher. The action of the dialogue is driven by Socrates and his companions philosophizing together about the soul and death.³⁵ One of the most remarkable features of the *Phaedo* is that Socrates does not dwell on his own death, despite being about to die; instead, he spends the day using philosophical arguments to help his companions cultivate the right attitude toward death. But Socrates does not treat this attitude as the most important thing to develop; instead, he treats it as far more important for his companions to become better philosophers, firmly dedicated to the search for truth. Philosophy’s value is far greater than simply as an aid in overcoming the fear of death. The *Phaedo* is the story of Socrates calmly transcending his unjust circumstances to help his companions overcome their fear of death—but, most importantly, to stay committed to philosophy once he is gone.

The opening of the dialogue was discussed at length in section 1 above, so I will be very brief here. Socrates is presented as an alternative to Theseus, an extraordinary new sort of hero who is nearly unaffected by *tuchē*. He should not be pitied, nor should one lament his situation despite his being unjustly put to death. He is courageous, noble, and happy, someone who went to Hades with divine dispensation, if anyone has. In interpreting his dream (60d–61b), Socrates shows due humility toward the gods and belief in their beneficence.

Socrates and his companions are quickly engaged in close argumentation. In the defense speech (63c–69e) he argues that being a philosopher involves not merely reasoning well, but taking on an entirely different way of life and approach to death. The true philosopher desires nothing but being dead (64a). In Cebes’

35. Nussbaum (2001) claims that the action of the dialogue is the “committed pursuit of the truth about the soul”; Nussbaum (1992) claims that the drama of the dialogue is the “drama of argumentation, to be pursued by the intellect alone.” These formulations overlook the repeated emphasis on how Socrates helps his companions, as described below.

challenge (69e–70b), which structures the main arguments of the dialogue, Cebes says that many people fear death because they fear that the soul will be dispersed upon death and so he asks Socrates to provide some confidence and reassurance not to fear this. Socrates responds with a series of arguments that are meant not merely to show that the soul exists after death, but to ensure that their fears are addressed (see, e.g., 77d–e), thus providing genuine, trustworthy reassurance.

In arguing that the true philosopher desires to be dead and that the soul is not destroyed upon death, Socrates develops theories that explain why it is appropriate to view the philosopher as the true hero. In the defense speech, he argues that only the philosopher can be courageous (68b–69e). The recollection argument (73c–77d) argues that the philosopher can rely on the resources in his own soul to acquire knowledge; hence, he is much less at the mercy of *tuchē* than one might expect. The affinity argument (78b–80b) develops the view that all souls are akin to the unchanging and uniform divine; it is how we live—rather than chance features of our birth—that can make us a hero. Socrates' further defense of his ethical views (80d–84b) provides a new account of Hades, explaining why the philosopher, and only the philosopher, will spend the rest of time among the gods (81a)—just as was said of Heracles, to whom Socrates is compared soon thereafter (89b–c).

In the first half of the dialogue, Simmias and Cebes' questions, objections, and challenges drive the discussion (61d, 62c–e, 69e–70b, 72e–73a, 77a–78a), creating unexpected twists and turns—as is fitting for a philosophical drama. Providing objections and challenging people's views is at the heart of Socratic philosophizing, and Socrates praises Cebes for always scrutinizing arguments and for refusing to be immediately convinced (63a). Simmias and Cebes' objections to the affinity argument (85b–86d, 86e–88b) are the culmination of this critical activity, while at the same time set the main agenda for the second half of the dialogue. Simmias and Cebes raise no further objections or challenges until the end of the final immortality argument (that is, there are none from 88c–107b). It is thus apt for Phaedo to treat Socrates' lengthy fight against these objections as a heroic labor (89c).

But what Phaedo describes as most admirable is not how Socrates vanquishes these objections, but how he responds to the companions' incipient misology (88e–89a). Socrates' rapid series of arguments and Simmias' and Cebes' objections had led Simmias and Cebes to change their minds several times (72d, 77c, 80b–c, 85b–88b). After these objections, Phaedo reports that all of the companions became dispirited and started to doubt not only Socrates' current *logos*, but also all *logoi* that might be given in the future (88c). This leads Socrates to warn them not to become misologists (89d). Misology, he says, arises when one repeatedly puts one's trust in a *logos* and then loses it, eventually coming to hate *logoi* entirely (90b–c). Misology threatens one's ability to live a philosophical life; this is supposedly why Socrates calls it the greatest evil (89d). Helping his companions avoid misology is Socrates' most heroic deed; if he failed in this task, no matter how good the arguments he gives, they would not benefit his companions. For philosophy to help the companions overcome their fear of death, they must stay devoted to it. But Socrates says that they should be careful lest he inadvertently deceive them about the soul's existence after death; he says that they should care much more about the truth than about Socrates (90e–91c).

Socrates thinks it is most important to help them become better, more devoted philosophers.

Socrates' discussion of misology occurs immediately after Echecrates breaks into the discussion, returning the reader to the outer frame. The *Phaedo* is unique among Plato's dialogues in having an outer frame that opens the dialogue (57a–59c) and then repeatedly breaks back into the inner dialogue (88c–89a, 102a, 118a).³⁶ In this outer frame, Phaedo and Echecrates comment on and react to events as they occur in the main dialogue, just as the chorus does in a tragic play.³⁷ Echecrates breaks in, chorus-like, at crucial moments in the action, thereby emphasizing the significance of what has happened and offering an opportunity to reflect on the events. Moreover, the chorus can function as a sort of ordinary observer of the heroic events that unfold within the play; similarly, Echecrates and Phaedo's discussion responds to significant moments in the dialogue from the standpoint of people outside its central action. Phaedo and Echecrates are "present" as observers during the action of the dialogue—Phaedo literally, Echecrates through the report—whereas the main characters are not present during Phaedo and Echecrates' interludes; again, this is how a chorus functions in tragic drama.³⁸ In addition to interrupting just before the discussion of misology, Echecrates interrupts again to say how clear Socrates' exposition has been, once Socrates finishes explaining the method of hypothesis (102a). Although this is not the place to argue for this, there are good reasons to accept David Sedley's idea that the method of hypothesis is meant to help avoid misology.³⁹ Echecrates' enthusiastic interruption, then, highlights that Socrates has responded to the problem he drew attention to in his initial interruption, as well as that Socrates has provided a firm foundation for his triumphant final argument (102a–107b).

Of course, the chorus interacts with the main characters in a tragedy, whereas Echecrates and Phaedo cannot, since their conversation happens after the fact. Nonetheless, Phaedo plays a significant role in the inner dialogue as Socrates' main interlocutor in the discussion of misology (89b–91c). Here again Phaedo's involvement is chorus-like, since it is not part of the primary action—the arguments of the dialogue—but rather involves how others, including onlookers such as Echecrates and ourselves, react to it. From Phaedo's opening claim that he did not pity Socrates, through the discussion of misology, all the way up to the final line of the dialogue—where Phaedo says that Socrates was the wisest and most

36. The closest parallel is in the *Euthydemus*, when Crito interrupts Socrates' narration (290e–293b). Unlike in the *Phaedo*, in the *Euthydemus* Socrates is both narrator in the outer frame and primary interlocutor in the inner frame. Crito also does not focus on how the argument affected him in the way that Echecrates and Phaedo do. Moreover, there is only one such interruption in the *Euthydemus*, whereas the *Phaedo* has two, in addition to the opening discussion and the final words.

37. So Raphael 1960, 82–83. Rowe (1993, 1) describes Phaedo and Echecrates as "chorus-like."

38. It is sometimes claimed that the number of people at Socrates' death is fifteen, the number of members in a standard Greek chorus (Crotty 2009, 66; Jansen 2013, 1). This involves taking the fourteen people mentioned by name in the *Phaedo* and adding Crito, who was simply referred to as the father of Critobulus (59b). However, Phaedo says that there were also "some other locals" (59b9–10). So in fact there were more than fifteen people at Socrates' death. I find it hard to believe that Plato intended for us to remember, at the end of the dialogue, the number of people referred to either by name or indirectly at the beginning and to consider it significant, but to consider insignificant the other locals mentioned. This would also require Plato to set up two different, overlapping groups as replacement choruses: Phaedo and Echecrates on the one hand, and Socrates' companions on the other.

39. Sedley 1995, followed by Jansen 2013, Delcomminette 2018, Sedley 2021, and Ebrey 2023, chap. 9.

just person they knew—Phaedo provides a guide to how to view the last day of Socrates' life, not from the ideal perspective of someone who would not cry at his death, but from the perspective of someone who admires Socrates and so aspires to be like him.⁴⁰

Again, for Plato tragedy is not specifically tragic plays; my central claim is that the *Phaedo* is an alternative to the broad sort of tragedy that includes Homer. But once we see Phaedo and Echecrates as chorus-like, it is natural to ask if there are other formal elements of tragic drama mirrored by the dialogue's structure. It takes place within a single circuit of the sun, as Aristotle says that a tragedy should (*Poet.* 1449b12–13). While no Platonic dialogue lasts for longer than a day, the *Phaedo* draws attention to how it begins at dawn (59d–e) and ends just before sunset (116e). The servant of the Eleven acts like a messenger, coming in near the end of the action (116b–d). Unlike a play, the main dialogue uses reported speech, rather than direct dialogue. But this is natural, given Plato's way of treating Phaedo and Echecrates as a chorus. There is not a prologue in the dramatic sense, since the dialogue opens with the chorus. However, the dialogue's opening serves the typical function of a prologue since it sets the scene and establishes the relevant background needed to understand the events, before the proper action begins.⁴¹ Simmias' and Cebes' objections, along with the concern about misology, can be seen as a sort of tragic reversal: until they raise these objections, Simmias and Cebes become increasingly convinced of Socrates' claims, and then suddenly the very use of reason to address such questions is thrown into doubt, bringing with it the threat that Socrates' companions will come to hate *logoi*, thereby suffering the greatest evil. The second half responds to this reversal. At the end, Phaedo and Echecrates provide a brief exodus. While any of these parallels could be doubted, it seems likely that the *Phaedo* purposefully alludes to and adapts at least some formal elements of tragic drama.

After highlighting the danger of misology, Socrates shows how reason can provide the sort of persuasion that they can trust. Socrates' response to Simmias' objection convinces both Simmias and Cebes (92c–e, 95a–b) and his response to Cebes' objection ultimately leads to the final immortality argument, which in turn convinces Cebes (107a). Simmias says that he needs more time to remove any lingering doubts in his mind, and Socrates says that Simmias is right to say so—that he should not rush into trusting the argument, but rather analyze the hypotheses further (107b). Socrates' final argument builds upon the method of hypothesis, which he develops in his so-called autobiography (at 100a–102a). As noted earlier, this method can be seen as offering a way to avoid the dangers of misology. Hence, in the face of his own death, Socrates not only argues that none of them should fear death; he also helps his companions approach *logoi* in the right way, thereby helping them pursue philosophy, and so a happy life, rather than letting them head in the opposite direction by becoming misologists.

After the final argument, Socrates properly represents daemons and the underworld, as one should in a story about “gods, heroes, daemons, and things in

40. For a similar idea, see Jansen 2013, 17.

41. So Raphael 1960, 82.

Hades” (*Resp.* 392a4–6).⁴² Near the beginning of his account, Socrates argues that Aeschylus has Telephus present the wrong account of the journey to the underworld (107e–108a);⁴³ he argues instead for an account that fits with the philosophical constraints developed over the course of the dialogue.⁴⁴ At the end of his myth, Socrates says that it would be foolish to insist upon its details, but it is worth believing that something like it is right (114d). Socrates’ myth fills in a picture of the sort of life he thinks is reasonable to expect after death: one where those who have been unjust pay the penalty, those who are holy are rewarded, and the best possible life is reserved for philosophers.

At the beginning of Socrates’ death scene, there is another reference to tragedy: Socrates pokes fun at himself for sounding like a tragic hero, then goes off to bathe himself (115a). This sets the scene for a very different sort of heroic death. There is nothing special about his body; no ritual is required for Socrates to journey well into the afterlife, nor is there any reason for him to prolong his life. In the midst of the somber and moving death scene, Socrates reminds us not to lament his death. He dies at peace.⁴⁵

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42. Edmonds (2004, chap. 4) argues that this part of the *Phaedo* fits within the genre of a journey to the underworld, which is not only Homeric, but also is found in tragic plays and Orphic writings. Ebrey (2023, chap. 11) discusses how gods’ goodness is compatible with Socrates’ claim that souls are harmed in the afterlife (107d).

43. Socrates is typically taken to be referring to Aeschylus’ *Telephus*, but Telephus was also the main character in the *Mysians* and I have not seen any reason to attribute it to one play rather than the other.

44. See, e.g., Kamtekar 2016 for how Plato’s accounts of the afterlife work within the constraints set by the dialogue.

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