

Contextualizing Classics

Ideology, Performance, Dialogue

Essays in Honor of John J. Peradotto

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Platonic Mimesis

Mitchell Miller

I read Plato's dialogues as a philosopher, with primarily philosophical interests orienting my interpretive work. But I have found from the beginning that the dialogues open up, disclosing otherwise concealed depths, if I read them as a distinctive kind of Greek drama.¹ The key

1. In recent years there has been a welcome surge of interest among Plato scholars in the literary dimension of the dialogues, with increasing recognition of its essential relation to their philosophical content. See, for example, Howland 1998; Nehamas 1998; Kahn 1996; Hyland 1995; Nightingale 1995; Rutherford 1995; Sayre 1995. Four recent anthologies are in varying degrees motivated by this interest: Gill and McCabe, eds., 1996; Gonzalez, ed., 1995; Press, ed., 1993; Griswold, ed., 1988. With this fresh attention to the dialogues as literature (in a sense, however, that is rightly tempered by our growing appreciation of the orality that is still crucial to the status of fourth century texts—see Robb 1994), the topic of Platonic and Socratic irony has also gained increased attention. For earlier exegeses exemplary for their appreciation of the importance of irony, see, for example, Rosen 1987 [1968] and 1983; Griswold 1986; Gadamer 1980; Klein 1965. Nonetheless, specifically mimetic irony and Plato's use of it to mediate his "reader's" self-knowledge—the type of irony that I will discuss in the next section—has received little analytic treatment; the single best discussion I know is still the seminal 1941 essay by Schaerer. Dialogue structure, in turn, has gone largely undiscussed—and so, necessarily, has the interplay of mimetic irony with what I shall call the Parmenidean structure or trajectory of the dialogues. The exception that proves the rule in English-language scholarship is Ketchum 1980, but this, unfortunately, is unpublished. The most stimulating published analyses of dialogue structure that I know are the now nearly forgotten Schaerer 1969 [1938] and 1955; see also Gundert 1971; Goldschmidt 1947; Festugière 1936. All of this work has its roots in the seminal insistence on the unity of the form and content of the dialogues by Schleiermacher 1973 [1836]. (For an interpretation of the history of Plato interpretation that is particularly interesting on its ancient past, see Tigerstedt 1977.) A recent addition to the literature, received too late for me

notion is *mimesis*, the way in which, on Plato's view, tragedy especially provides an emotionally charged impersonation of paradigmatic cultural figures, inviting its massed audiences to identify with these figures, "shaping and molding themselves according to [their] patterns" (*Republic* 396b) so as to share in their basic dispositions and understandings of the world. In taking up and giving the genre of *Sokratikoi Logoi*, "Socratic discourses," his own distinctive shape,² Plato both withdraws from and, in the new experiential space he reaches by this withdrawal, reappropriates, with a crucial difference, the *mimesis* in tragedy. I want to speak briefly about aspects of each of these three moments—the withdrawal, the reappropriation, and the difference.

The Withdrawal: Reaching a New Experiential Space

In *Republic X* Plato has Socrates stress the powerful appeal of tragedy to the nonrational elements of the soul. Plato's chief concern, I think, is that the spectators, a mass audience in festival spirits, may be swept away by the evocative power of the drama, so caught up in the pleasures of identification that they lose, both in the moment of watching and, as an insidious long-term consequence, in their own lives, the capacity for deliberation and critical judgment.³ This concern goes a long way to explain why, in designing the *mimesis* of the dialogues, Plato departs from tragedy in these four basic ways:

1. The dialogues are not to be actually performed with actors, costumes and masks, and music. Rather, their drama must be imaginatively created in the mind's eye; it becomes a more inward and—with each hearer responsible for the "staging" he "sees"—self-reflective experience.

2. The hearer is removed not only from the actual theater but also, more specifically, from the mass audience—a "huge mob" (*Gorgias* 502b), "thirty thousand strong" (*Symposium* 175e)—that gathered there to watch the tragedies; thus the hearer is freed from the social pressures and

to consider in writing this essay, is Weiss 1998, a thought-provoking study of the *Crito*.

2. On the *Sokratikoi Logoi* see Clay 1994. Also see Havelock 1983.

3. See τῷ Βουλευέσθαι, *Republic* 605c5, and τὸ Βέλτιστον, which refers to τὸ λογιστικόν, the part of the soul capable of φρόνησις. For an acute statement of Plato's concern, see Nehamas 1988: 214-34.



pleasures that membership in such a mass involves. It seems most probable that "publication" of the dialogues took the form of readings-aloud in groups as small as the pair, Euclides and Terpsion, who are portrayed arranging for a slave to read Euclides' account of Socrates' conversation with Theaetetus or, again, as the seven or so who gathered to hear a reading of Zeno's treatise in the *Parmenides*.⁴ It also seems probable that, as is portrayed in the *Parmenides*, the readings were followed by critical conversation. The audience for the dialogues, then, is a self-selected few who are interested from the outset in the critical and intellectual activity for which the readings were the occasion.⁵

3. Most obviously, in their content the dialogues subordinate the elements of action and character to that of inquiry. Every dialogue begins by presenting, directly or through a narrative frame, some concrete social situation in which Plato's philosophical protagonist, most often Socrates, finds himself engaged with various non-philosophers; this situation and the persons involved in it are usually very richly sketched.⁶ The first major structural division in every dialogue comes when the protagonist steps back from the situation and raises a fundamental question, asking his companions, in a way that converts the beliefs that motivate them into subjects for searching examination, how they understand some principle or issue that is basic to the situation. From this point on, the real "action" of the drama consists in the pursuit of—and, in many dialogues, the non-philosopher's flight from—this question.

4. This suggestion, proposed by Ryle 1966: 23ff., is very sensibly developed by Robb 1984: 233-39.

5. Robb argues that (at least some of) the dialogues were meant to be read in the Academy; note especially his interpretation of *Laws* 811d-e, in Robb 1984: 236-39. See also Baltes 1993: 17-18. This view fits well with the idea that the readings were followed by—even, perhaps, interrupted by—critical discussion. Indeed, that a group of Academicians could leave a reading of, say, the *Parmenides* or the *Theaetetus* or the *Sophist* without discussion is as hard to imagine as that the youthful Socrates, in the *Parmenides*, could have left the reading of Zeno's treatise without raising questions.

6. Apparent exceptions are the *Meno* and the *Philebus*. But in the case of the *Meno*, the precipitous way the dialogue begins with Meno's question to Socrates seems playfully to echo and display Meno's own impetuosity and obliviousness to context, hence to function as a dramatic setting by the very way it displaces the distinct presentation of one. As for the *Philebus*, it is part of its very structure that it fails to present both its beginning (the initial debate between Philebus and Socrates from which Philebus has sulkily withdrawn) and its ending (the completion of the argument by Socrates, for which Protarchus calls in the closing passage).

4. Finally, in presenting this pursuit, Plato "moderates," as it were, both the language and the *dramatis personae* of tragedy in essential ways. To say the obvious: in place of the "music and rhythm and meter" (*Gorgias* 502c) that make tragedy at once so "stately and marvelous" (502b) and so deeply enthralling, the dialogues reproduce the familiar rhythms of conversation. And in place of the great figures of epic whom tragedy makes its *personae*, the dialogues give us the nearly contemporary, much less exalted cast of characters with whom (again, for the most part) Socrates kept company a generation earlier. By their status as the subjects of epic, the *personae* of tragedy are both profoundly well-known and yet remote from, indeed larger than, everyday life; if the Athenian spectators found in them expressions of their own deepest passions and callings, they found these archetypally expressed.⁷ In the dialogues, by contrast, Plato gives his hearers *personae* who are, as Martha Nussbaum points out (1986: 129), "ordinary and close to us," "figures very much like us."

Reappropriation: The Delphic-Socratic Character of *Mimesis* in the Dialogues

For the same reason that Plato, shaping his new dramatic genre, drops or moderates some of the potentially enthralling aspects of tragic *mimesis*, he preserves *mimesis* itself: the first goal of the dialogue genre, in his hands, is to occasion self-knowledge.

We see *mimesis* serving this end *within* the dialogues in a number of well-known passages. Consider, for purposes of illustration, *Crito* 50a.⁸

7. There is a complementary kind of remoteness in the *personae* of comedy. Familiar persons and types are represented with a burlesque excess that, even while in one sense deflating, in another sense lifts them out of the ordinary and gives them, too, the status of archetypes.

8. Other vivid instances are (1) the interlude with the slave boy in the *Meno*, in which Socrates manipulates the boy to put before Meno a representation of the latter's own aporia in the main conversation (see 84a-d, especially the hilarious b11-c1); (2) Socrates' "report" in the *Symposium* of how Diotima first introduced him to the mysteries of *eros*, in which, speaking to Agathon, he portrays himself as having suffered at her hands the same refutation and exposure of ignorance as that which Agathon has just suffered at his; (3) Socrates' ostensibly autobiographical account in the *Phaedo* of his early education into "physics," in which, by describing his passage from youthful enthusiasm to critical disillusion with

When Crito first appeals to Socrates to flee his prison cell and execution, he speaks with the passion and certainty of a decent Athenian Everyman who, when a friend has been wronged, knows the only honorable course is to join forces against their common enemies.⁹ Socrates, as always, responds with questions. Does Crito still affirm the two commitments that have sealed their friendship in the past, to value the reason of the wise few over the opinions of the many and living virtuously over merely staying alive? If so, then does not reason show that to live virtuously entails living justly, and does not this, in turn, entail never doing injury to another, not even in return for an injury received? Socrates thus marshals, in *Crito*, the latter's Socratic commitments against his Everyman's values. When, at 50a, Socrates brings the inner conflict to a head, asking Crito whether fleeing prison, the only honorable and sensible option to Crito-Everyman, is not doing an injury to the city, a course of action that, it seems, Crito-the-Socratic must reject, Crito breaks down in *aporia*. "I cannot answer your questions, Socrates. I do not know." It is at this point that Socrates resorts to *mimesis*, setting up, in effect, a play-within-the-play for Crito. He himself takes on Crito's Everyman perspective, pretending that they have agreed to flee prison, and he introduces, to give voice to his own perspective and cross-examine Crito's, the *quasi*-person of "The Laws." Crito is thus taken off the hot seat, released from the immediate pressure of having to respond to Socrates; he can instead sit back, watching with the relative detachment of the spectator as the Everyman-within-him, now mimed by Socrates, undergoes refutation and reorientation by the Socrates-within-him, now represented by the figure of The Laws.

In the same way that, *within the Crito*, Socrates mediates Crito's relation to himself by his play-within-the-play, Plato, by the *Crito* itself and, I would argue, every other dialogue,¹⁰ mediates his hearer's relation to himself. To put ourselves in historical context, remember that it was

the teachings of Anaxagoras, he gives to Cebes an orienting representation of the advance from physicalism to metaphysics that is now Cebes' task to undertake.

9. He thus displays the deeply conventional notion of justice that Plato has Polemarchus articulate in *Republic* I: justice is giving to each what is due, and this means helping one's friends and harming one's enemies. The paradigmatic context is that of "wars and alliances" (332e), in which one helps one's friends to do harm to their common enemies.

10. This point is easiest to see in the dialogues in which Socrates is the philosophical protagonist. But it holds just well for dialogues like the *Parmenides* and the *Statesman* in which, interestingly, Plato introduces other protagonists and gives Socrates a secondary role. I have explored the *mimesis* in two of these dialogues in Miller 1980 and Miller 1986.

only a generation earlier that a closely divided (*Apology* 36a) jury of "our" fellow citizens voted to condemn Socrates.¹¹ The non-philosophical *personae* in the dialogues, in turn, are mimetic representations to "us" of various currents in "our" Athenian culture—of "our" politics and rhetoric, "our" religion, "our" poetic arts, above all, "our" education. In these "figures very much like us" whom Plato puts before "us" on the imaginary stages of the dialogues, "we" are given embodiments of "ourselves" in a host of "our" own, most basic possibilities. In effect, even as he subjects "us" to the pressure of Socratic examination, reawakening in "us" the split between "our" attachment to familiar life courses and values and a Socratic awareness of their limitations, he also mediates the conflict, putting us in position to respond thoughtfully. As in the drama of *Crito* 50a ff., so by the *mimesis* of the dialogues themselves he takes "us" off the hot seat, giving "us" the relative detachment of spectators and allowing "us" to watch as "our" positions, embodied in the various non-philosophical *personae*, undergo refutation and reorientation by the dramatic reincarnation of "our" old examiner Socrates. Whether this experience will be a healing one or will only deepen the division within "us" depends, finally, on "our" response to the challenge it poses. As for the *persona* *Crito*, so for the real Athenian "us," the dialogues provide a manifold opportunity for self-recognition and—if, choosing not to flee, we prove able to stay with and think through Socrates' lines of inquiry¹²—for both a knowledge of "our" ignorance and an introduction to paths beyond it.

11. I shall use single quotes to signal the effort to hear the dialogues as if we were among the early and mid-fourth century Athenians to whom Plato addresses them.

12. That the experience need not be healing is itself illustrated by a number of *personae*. Consider, to cite the most famous case, the deeply divided Alcibiades in the *Symposium*. There are also *personae* designed, it seems, to show that choosing the Socratic course does not mean that one will be able to take it; consider Apollodorus, also in the *Symposium*, or *Crito* in the *Phaedo*. The many varieties of failure embodied by the *personae* seem to function as negative provocation and guidance; they show 'us' ways *not* to respond.

. . . With a Difference: The Parmenidean Trajectory of the Dialogues

If I am right, Plato's basic worry about *mimesis* in tragedy is that the spectators may lose themselves, surrendering their critical powers in the emotionally and aesthetically enthralling experience of its characters. How, then, could he best reverse this, turning his hearer's experience of the *mimesis* of the dialogues into a liberation of her critical powers and, so, a finding of herself? We come now to what I earlier called the "difference" with which Plato appropriates *mimesis*. This consists in the distinctive rhythm or structure¹³—apparently taken over from Parmenides' poem—by which he orders almost every dialogue.¹⁴ Let me offer brief interpretive sketches of this structure first as it appears in Parmenides' poem, then as Plato adopts it for the dialogues. I shall continue to use the *Crito* as my specimen dialogue. These sketches will position us to see how, in functioning together with *mimesis* to produce the distinctive dynamic of the dialogues, the Parmenidean structure allows the dialogues to work as occasions for critical awakening and self-discovery.

Parmenides' poem—or, more to the point, the trajectory of thought it traces—moves through four major moments. These we might title (1) elicitation of the best human insight, (2) disclosure of its limitedness and, then, (3) of the divine truth that surpasses it, and (4) a return to human opinion. (1) In the proem, recall, a "youth" finds himself undergoing a revelatory process in which demonic escorts,¹⁵ after first placing him "upon the informative route of the goddess that carries through all cities the man who knows" (1.2-3), then bear him off to "the gateway of the paths of Night and Day" (1.11), presided over by "much punishing Justice," who "holds the keys of recompense" (1.14). With its motifs of "the man who knows" and the "informative route . . . through all cities," the

13. The initial discovery of this structure is Jonathan Ketchum's, developed in the late 1960s in a series of seminars (in which I was fortunate to participate) and later articulated in Ketchum 1980.

14. I except from this claim dialogues that are really monologues, in particular the *Apology*, the *Menexenus*, and the *Timaeus*. And I make no claims regarding the structure of the *Laws*. See note 21.

15. These appear to undergo transformation in the course of the very journey they lead: initially "mares" (1.1), they become "much-discerning mares" (1.4), an echo, presumably, of *Iliad* 9. Next, "maidens" turn out to be guiding the chariot (1.5), and they are then identified as "daughters of the Sun" (1.8). On the motif of the "youth" (κοῦρος) see Cosgrove 1974.



poem allusively calls to mind Odysseus and his wide-ranging experiential knowledge of "many cities of men" and "their minds" (*Odyssey* 1.3).¹⁶ With the motifs, in turn, of the gateway and retributive Justice, the poem calls up the cosmogonies and cosmological insights of Hesiod and Anaximander; the gateway symbolizes the conjunction of opposites that, as is confirmed by fragments 8.53ff. and 9 in the final part of the poem, the so-called *Doxa*, the wisest mortals take to be basic to the fluxing world. Thus the poem traces the movement from an *extensive* knowledge of the plurality of human ways ("all cities") to the *intensive* grasp of the order fundamental to the cosmos; the symbol of the gateway marks the deepest and most universal structure that thought can reach.¹⁷ (2) Or, rather, that *human* thought can reach. As the poem reveals, the elicitation of the best human insight is only the indispensable first moment in the complex process of transcending it. The second moment, the disclosure that this apparently ultimate insight is, rather, a limited opinion, the poem symbolizes by having the demonic escorts persuade Justice to let the gates swing open to reveal a way beyond. To the traveler, this is at first an experience of profound *aporia*; having been committed to the ultimacy of the opposites, now to look beyond them is to see only their absence, only the "yawning chasm" (1.18) of the empty gateway itself. But precisely this experience of the absence of the familiar opens him up, for the first time, to the deeper order that its presence has until now concealed. (3) This is why it is now "right" (1.28) that the goddess receive him and teach him "the steadfast heart of well-rounded truth" (1.29). In this, the third moment of the poem's trajectory, the so-called Truth section (fragments 1.21-8.49), the goddess drops all talk of the opposites and turns, instead, to the very "being," as such, in which they are at one. Keying from the unthinkability of the negation of this "being,"¹⁸ in

16. Havelock 1958. On Parmenides' allusions to Homer and Hesiod, see Coxon 1986.

17. For a distinct but kindred view of the gateway, see Furley 1973.

18. Or, more carefully but also more obscurely put, the incompleteness of the thought of the nullity of being. When at 9.4 the goddess declares that "to neither" of the two forms, light and night, which as causes are responsible for "all" else (9.1, 9.3), "belongs any share of nothingness" (οὐδετέψυ μετα μηδέν), she sets [μηδέν] over against the two, as the nullity or void of both. But on this account, the very effort to think [μηδέν] leads back to the two forms, for it is the [μηδέν] of them. It does not, however, lead back to them as thought first encountered them, a pair arrayed in their differences; rather, it reveals them in their unity (cf. "[a] one of them," [τῶν μίκν], 8.54), for [μηδέν] is the nullity of both together, without reference to their differences, in their very "being." Thus the effort to think the [μηδέν] of the two leads, instead, to the disclosure of "being."

unprecedentedly abstract and logically ordered language she shows how “being” must also transcend the fundamental characters—above all, genesis and perishing, qualitative contrast, and change—to which all the things in the fluxing world of human experience are subject. (4) Given their ultimacy, it is remarkable that the goddess does not end with these disclosures. At 8.50ff., she announces the fourth major moment of the trajectory of the poem, a return to human opinion. “Here I end my trustworthy speech . . . concerning truth,” she tells the traveler, and warning him to “pay heed to the deceitful order of my words,” she gives him a reasoned presentation of “the opinions of mortals.” This, the so-called Doxa section of the poem (fragments 8.50ff. - 19), seems to have a double purpose. On the one hand, because it is the goddess, speaking in light of the truth, who now descends to the human standpoint, the traveler gets the best possible account, within the limits of opinion, of the order of things. Thus the goddess, even as she once again takes as ultimate “two forms, . . . opposites . . . [with their] signs apart from each other” (8.53, 8.55, 8.56), also denies to either “any share of nothingness” (9.4). By thus modeling each opposite after “being,” she gives the account the status of the closest possible approximation by mortals to the truth.¹⁹ On the other hand, with the gift of this account she also converts her initial warning into a challenge: can the traveler discern, in its words, “the deceitful order”? That is, can we recognize the way in which, in reproducing the ignorance that first allowed the gateway of the opposites to appear, the deepest and most fundamental order of things, the account falls short of the divine truth?²⁰

Obviously, it far outstrips the space and time of this presentation to try to show how these four moments structure almost all the dialogues. Allow me to defer that work to other times²¹ and restrict myself to the

For argument supporting this interpretation of the passage through the gateway and the sense of the “is” or “being” for which, as it is first spoken by the goddess in the Truth section of the poem, the experience of passing through the gateway prepares the traveler, see Miller 1979.

19. Hence she says she reveals “the order as it seems likely” and says that “no opinion of mortals shall ever overtake” the one who affirms it (8.60-61).

20. The richest study of the ambiguity of the Doxa section is still Mourelatos 1970, especially chaps. 8 and 9.

21. See my studies, oriented by the interplay of *mimesis* and the Parmenidean trajectory, of the *Statesman* (Miller 1979) and of the *Parmenides* (Miller 1986). For more narrowly focused analysis that exhibits the same basic orientation, see my essays on the central passages of the *Republic* (Miller 1985), on the closing phase of the *Theaetetus* (Miller 1992), and on The Laws’ speech in the *Crito* (Miller 1996).

much narrower task of illustrating how, when the Parmenidean trajectory is combined with the *mimesis* of the dialogues, it gives them their distinctively liberating power.

Consider, again, the *Crito*. The *persona* Crito, as I have argued, is a decent Athenian Everyman. Hearing the dialogue read, "we" build an image of him, and in this image we surely find much in "our" own Athenian selves expressed. Crito's anxiety at his dearest friend's impending death, his impatience and desire to act without further reflection, the very human concerns he invokes or dismisses in his appeal to Socrates—concerns for reputation, for money and property, for Socrates' children—even his indignation at Socrates' apparent complicity in the injustice his enemies are inflicting on him,²² all make him deeply sympathetic, a "figure very much like us." When, therefore, Socrates guides him through the first three moments of the Parmenidean trajectory, the dialogue addresses "us," offering "us" an occasion to recognize and begin to overcome in "ourselves" the limitations exposed in *Crito*. Consider each moment in turn. (1) When Socrates responds to Crito's passionate appeal by reminding him of their shared commitments to the reason of the wise few and to living virtuously, and when he invokes these commitments to insist that, proceeding solely by reason, they focus exclusively on the question of what the *just* course of action would be, setting aside as concerns of the many all questions of "money, reputation, [and] the upbringing of children" (48c), it is "our" "best insight," not just Crito's, that is "elicited." (2) Likewise, when Socrates shows that the many's view of justice must be rejected because it condones answering one injustice with another (49c), it is the "limitedness" of "our" deeply ingrained Athenian view of justice that the argument "discloses." (3) Finally, when Socrates introduces—if not a goddess, then, in the context of the *Crito*, the next best thing—the *quasi*-person of The Laws to make the complex case for resisting the destructive action of fleeing execution, *Plato* shows "us" how to put to work, in place of "our" Athenian view, the difficult Socratic "truth" that goes beyond it.

So far, so good. But there is a troubling question to acknowledge. By his distinctive appropriation of *mimesis*, *Plato*, I have been arguing,

22. I noted earlier Crito's conventional notion of justice. It is this notion that Crito presupposes in his indignation at Socrates, for he objects to the way Socrates seems both to harm his friends, not only depriving them of himself but also damaging their reputation for courage and friendship (45e-46a), and to help his enemies, making himself by his conduct throughout the judicial process an easy target for them (45e).

sought for his hearer a liberation of her critical powers and, so, a finding of herself. Granted that Socrates' (1) elicitation, (2) refutation, and (3) reorientation of Crito move "us" to turn against the Crito-Everyman within "ourselves," what keeps "us," as "we" open up to The Laws, from an *uncritical* adoption of *their* "truth"? This would be for "us," rather than finding "ourselves," simply to lose "ourselves" in a new way. Of course, because this is finally a matter of the hearer's own free response, the deep yet trivial answer must be that there is nothing to prevent it. But Plato's incorporation of the fourth moment of Parmenides' trajectory, the "return to opinion," seems designed to resist it. For consider. (4) In the first two-thirds of The Laws' speech (50a-53a), the passage corresponding to the goddess's "disclosure of the truth" in Parmenides' poem, Socrates has The Laws focus on issues of justice, objecting to flight from prison because it would be destructive of the rule of law and because it would seem to violate the basic conditions of citizenship. Then at 53a-54b, moving seamlessly, without any acknowledgment of the change in the level of discourse, he has The Laws raise a flurry of arguments showing that escape would make Socrates a "laughingstock," would put his friends' property at risk, and would do nothing to further his children's education. These, however, are precisely the issues of "money, reputation, [and] the upbringing of children" (48c) that Socrates, earlier in "eliciting" Crito's "best insight," pointedly set aside as concerns of the many. Why this "return" to the level of Crito's initial opinions? Moreover, why is there no acknowledgment of this "return," neither from The Laws, who, remember, were introduced to represent Socrates' perspective, nor from the Socrates whom they address, who represents Crito's perspective, nor from Crito himself, *who, watching the play-within-the-play, represents "us" who are watching the play as a whole?* My Parmenidean suggestion is this: Plato tests "us," challenging "us," in effect, to hear "the deceitful order" of his words. Just as, by the image of an *un-hearing* Crito that Socrates gives Crito in the play-within-the-play, Socrates challenges him to object and so transcend himself, so by the image of a Crito who fails this challenge and does not object, Plato challenges "us" to object and, now by "our" own initiative transcending the Crito in "ourselves," to reascend to the level of the "truth"-section of the dialogue with its exclusive focus on justice. If, listening passively like Crito, "we" fail this challenge, then "we" emerge from the dialogue in the thrall of The Laws; in Parmenidean terms, "we" have a well-oriented *doxa*, a "best possible account, within the limits of opinion." If, however, "we" hear the "deceitful order" of Plato's words, then, *by this very hear-*

ing "we" will have already begun, in "ourselves" and for "ourselves," to take a critical stance towards The Laws' speech. Do they, "we" will ask, compromise the Socratic perspective they represent when they pass from issues of justice to the concerns of the many? What is more, does the very seamlessness of this transition indicate limitations in their representation of the Socratic perspective on justice? How deeply, in truth, have they made the case for the injustice of fleeing prison? With these questions, now liberated both by and from the dialogue itself, "we" turn back to its deepest arguments, taking them up as claims to be examined, hence as points of departure, in our own independent Socratic inquiry.²³

23. I break off here, for the point of these reflections is not to explore the implicit content of the *Crito* but, rather, to show how Plato, by tempering *mimesis* and adapting the Parmenidean trajectory to structure its unfolding, achieves the distinctively Socratic power of the dialogues. Just insofar as "we" find "ourselves" turning back to the deepest arguments of the *Crito* with the quickened and oriented desire to examine them critically, the drama of the dialogue has succeeded in its philosophical purpose. Let me just note in closing that this examination is potentially explosive: as I have argued elsewhere (Miller 1996), if "we" ask how adequate The Laws' arguments are to the radical notion of justice that Socrates invoked against the view of the many at 49b-e (note especially 49d), "we" will discover difficulties. Consider just these four: (i) Were Socrates to escape and so "destroy" the authority of the laws of Athens, laws that give power to the many, would he be doing the city a retaliatory "injury" (49c-d), as The Laws, never actually arguing the point, let Crito presume, or, quite the contrary, would he be doing a kind of surgery (recall the figure of the doctor, 47b), "destroying" for the sake of health or justice? (Indeed, does Socrates' choice to remain constitute just such an act of therapeutic destruction?) (ii) On what conception of justice can it be "much more" impious (51c) to do violence to one's country than to one's parents? Is the continuum that this relativity implies consistent with the categorical prohibition against doing injustice that Socrates asserted against the view of the many at 49b-e—or does this continuum imply the many's view of justice? (iii) Does Socrates' lifelong choice never to leave Athens necessarily imply that he is "satisfied" with the city and its laws, much less that, as The Laws argue, these are "congenial" and "exceedingly pleasing" (52b, also 52e-53a) to him—or does he, on the contrary, choose to remain precisely in order to criticize and change them for the better? The Laws' inference may well apply to Crito and the many—does it apply, however, to Socrates? (iv) Analogously, does the citizen's agreement to persuade or obey the city (52a) justly obligate Socrates—or, if Socrates is right that there is "no common ground" between the positions of the many and of the few regarding justice and that they "inevitably despise each other's views" (49d), is the option to "persuade," and, so, the agreement as a whole, fraudulent? In one way or another, each of these questions—not raised, much less answered, by The Laws—requires further inquiry into justice and what it exacts of the thoughtful citizen. Thus the *Crito* opens into the *Republic*.

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