

Socratic *Charis*



Philosophy without the Agon

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For Elijah

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Introduction: Bronze for Gold

Walter Benjamin writes, “For every image of the past that is not recognized in the present as one of its own concerns threatens to disappear irretrievably.”^[1] Following Benjamin, I suggest that here is an image worth considering: Two Homeric warriors, one Greek, one Trojan, lay down their arms toward one another on the battlefield of Ilium and will not fight “because their grandfathers were bound by xenia.”^[2] In lieu of expectations for violence between them, Diomedes and Glaucus renew the bond of xenia, clasp hands, and exchange armor as a sign to all that they are “friends from our fathers’ days.”^[3]

The meaning of this image is usually assessed in terms of the goods or “gifts” Glaucus and Diomedes offer one another, specifically Diomedes offers his bronze armor for Glaucus’ gold armor. The commercial value of the armor passing hand to hand conveys the value of the act, and so the image says something about the economy at work between the two warriors, an exchange of gold for bronze. This is not in our vernacular a “good” or a “fair” exchange; as Homer says “but Zeus took away [Glaucus’] good sense” for he gives “the worth of one hundred oxen for nine.”^[4] Thus the image might introduce a recurring theme into this account of the fall of Troy: whether in friendship or in war “beware Greeks bearing gifts.”

At work in the Homeric image, however, is the practice of xenia, and at work in xenia is how enemies become friends. Not only does xenia supersede the expectations for battle, it takes precedence over the social orders that designate the two warriors as enemies. Between Glaucus and Diomedes, it is as if the world disappears; the proto-political or social reality that configures them in opposition to one another is replaced by another reality in which the memory of how their fathers behaved toward one another prescribes the course of their present actions. From this perspective, the exchange of armor is actually incidental to the value of a relationship xenia makes possible. That is, the exchange of armor is the result of xenia, it

is not its cause.

In part, this book explores the possibility that the cause of *xenia* is neither instrumental nor economic. Rather, contained within the image of two warriors refusing to fight one another might be a certain “lost” cause, reminiscent of a whole host of “lost” values that speak to the *ethoi* of old, archaic practices. “Humans value economy,”^[5] writes Ann Carson. Indeed, and it is because we value economy that the image of these practices has not entirely disappeared, but it is also because we value economy that some of these practices have gone unnoticed, or if they have been noticed they have settled at the peripheries of “common knowledge” like so many loose threads. I attempt to retrieve some of these practices and their values in order to expand the parameters of our “common knowledge” about them. It is not just that “the way we do things around here” can counteract serious consideration of an old idea, but that in spite of the way we do things around here *xenia* suggests a different economy.

Within the current practice of philosophy, particularly the interpretation of ancient philosophy, some ideas have more currency than others. While in general I am concerned about the economy of philosophy and its associated values, I am particularly concerned with the invention and exchange of these values, the heritable traits of the practice of *philosophia*. I ask whether it is possible that we have attributed to the ancients an economy of discourse and a whole host of values not necessarily their own. To be clear, I am not worried that we have overlooked something like “the significance” of ancient philosophers, but I do think there could be another model at work in ancient philosophy that is, in principle, resistant to the model we proscribe: the *agon*.

Today it is considered common knowledge that the ancient Greeks “recognized the *agon* (or ‘contest’) as a fundamental feature of human society.”^[6] A cursory glance at contemporary secondary literature reveals tacit agreement with Jean-Pierre Vernant’s view that the ancient Greeks manifest “an agonistic view of man.”^[7] Thereby, to be accurate or appropriate to the

“spirit of the Greeks” our interpretations of their text should reflect this view, regardless of the types of text we interpret, and regardless of the occasion of the text. We suppose that any ancient Greek practice will evince their agonal ethos, and this includes the “invention” and the practice of philosophy. To remark “the arguments and debates of the ancient philosophers” is actually unremarkable for what else is philosophia but an intellectual agon.

Explicating and examining the “pervasiveness” of the agon is the central task of chapter 1. While many scholars and thinkers referenced herein mention concepts and practices in early Greek experience that are more appropriately non-agonistic, concepts like *charis* and practices like *xenia*, the agon continues to dominate our understanding of the organization of ancient Greek social forms:

Indeed, politics too had the form of agon: an oratorical contest, a battle of arguments whose theatre was the agora, the public square, which had been a meeting place before it was a marketplace. Those who contended with words, who opposed speech with speech, became in this hierarchical society a class of equals. As Hesiod would later observe, all rivalry, all *eris*, presupposes a relationship of equality: competition can take place only among peers.^[8]

I suggest in chapter 1, however, that the agon can have no share in any comprehensive theory or substantive practice of “equality.” Contests determine winners and losers and winners and losers are never equal. Only if we believe that conflict and competition are necessary or sufficient to the human condition will we be able to think of the agon as “natural” or even “good,” but then we are implicated by this belief in practices that determine superiority and inferiority among those who, perhaps, only appear equal.

Thus the paradox, or riddle, of the agon: as a sufficient condition for equality, the agon perpetuates inequality. The difficulties with modern contests are similar to the difficulties

with ancient ones: all contests are judged, and upon judgment “victory” in a variety of material or intellectual forms is determined and awarded. Criteria for judgment vary, and questions about appropriate or “sound” criteria abound, but what characterizes the agon is its particular economy. Unlike other modern and ancient practices that perpetuate alliances and relationships to endure through time, particular agons must end. What distinguishes the agon, then, is its efficiency, its management of an otherwise unmanageable, sic “perpetual,” present.

The perspective developed in the first chapter is applied to a reconsideration of the practice of oral poetic performance—*muthos*—in chapter 2. This practice constitutes what Walter Burkert calls *theon timai*, “honours to the gods,” and I suggest that *theon timai* is as close as we can come to an understanding of ancient Greek religion on their own terms. Disentangling our preconceptions about religion from ancient Greek religious practices, however, begs a series of questions about 1) the relationships between poets and audiences in terms of, 2) how the stories of the gods are communicated, which in turn bears upon, 3) the relationship of the gods in the stories, and 4) the overall value of the practice to lived Greek experience. In an attempt to answer some of these questions, this chapter develops the idea that *theon timai*, although a “religious” practice, is essentially a narrative practice. I identify differences between agonistic and narrative practices in terms of their respective structures: while narrative is pluralistic and makes explicit mutual interdependence between characters and actions, contests are binary and make explicit mutual oppositions. The general question of chapter 2, then, is whether it is possible that early Greek religious practices reconsidered as narrative practices better explain the evolution of *isonomia* than the pervasiveness of the agon.

The emergence of *demokratia* is, and can be, explained in a variety of ways. It is at least worth considering that *muthos* plays a part, but what part, and more importantly what value do these “gifts of the Muses toward humanity” sustain in early

Greek practice? Following the vocabulary of the gift into scholarship on *xenia*, I examine our theories of gift practices in relation to ancient Greek gift friendships—*xenia*—in chapter 3. Gift practices can also speak to “relations of equality and reciprocity,” but specific to *xenia* are the persons who reciprocate: my *xenos* is a “stranger” to me and I to her. Early Greeks, like Homer’s Diomedes, can refer to such strangers as *philos xenos*, yet the social codes that hold for *philoï*—friends—are not the same that hold for *xenoi* because *xenoi* do not share a social order, and so it is difficult to ascertain what social codes might hold for them, including standard economic codes. Alongside, or perhaps in spite of, the instrumental and economic values attributed to *xenia*, I suggest that *xenoi* are willingly obligated to one another by an abiding principle of *charis*, “grace.” A difference between *charis* and *philia* can be seen in the logic that explains forms of sociality in ancient Greece. *Eris* (Strife), as Vernant tells us, cannot be thought without its complement, *Philia*. Conversely, in the absence of *philia* I suggest there is a corresponding absence of *eris*. And in the absence of both, as in *xenia*, I suggest that while there cannot be any *agon*, there is and can be *charis*.

Charis can explain how and why human beings who share nothing in common can and do establish and perpetuate “relations of equality and reciprocity” beyond the boundaries of any social order. I also suggest that into the spaces between the social and political practices that determine not only the types of relationships that are appropriate but their values and limits as well, comes the “philosopher” with questions about the good, the just, the pious, and the beautiful, questions about what “concern us all,” and what could or should constitute and comprise genuine rather than contrived sociality. Serious consideration of the value of *charis* in relation to philosophy requires that we partially abandon our understanding of it as specifically poetic and/or elitist, and this also means rethinking the standard view of our first philosophers as deliberately “unique or even superior”^[9] persons inventing or manifesting an esoteric, *sic* privatized, knowledge exclusive to a privileged

few. Comparatively, Plato goes to some lengths to present Socrates as non-elite in appearance, speech, and property, and at times Socrates behaves, or is described as behaving, in the perfect image of *charis*, “grace.” The virtue or value of *charis* designates an ethic of “reciprocal exchange . . . found in Greek literature from Homer to Euripides,”^[10] and my concern is whether and how this quality of ancient conduct, resonant as it is in practices of oral poetic performance and *xenia*, is developed in the portrayal of Athens’ “barefoot philosopher.” Chapter 4, then, considers the character of Socrates in relation to “his” claims in the *Apology* that he is both a “stranger” to the manner of speaking in the court and a “gift of the gods to the city.” The narrative tradition that allows easy recognition of appropriate behavior to strangers and the significance of the gift is, obviously, not our tradition. But this does not preclude the possibility that it has value for our own practices, specifically when one of the issues is, as I suggest it is for the *Apology*, the relationships between citizens. I read Socrates in the *Apology* as dramatically positioned by Plato “in the middle” of inquiry into what these relationships could, or should, be in *politeia*. In this way I read “what Socrates says” and what he does as indicative of a “democratic requirement.”

That also at times the character Socrates seems to articulate or embody certain aristocratic values is usually explained away as Plato’s elitist aspirations projected upon his main character. I resist, however, the temptation to read Socrates as “Plato’s mouthpiece,”^[11] and instead adhere to a reading of the character Socrates in terms appropriate to “new wave”^[12] interpretation of Plato’s dialogues. The phrase “new wave” suggests a method consistent with three interrelated principles of interpretation: 1) the dramatic and literary characteristics of Plato’s dialogues are purposeful and thereby essential for consideration; 2) the “thought” of a dialogue, that is, its insight or meaning, is most likely “something other than the traditional set of dogmas or doctrines”^[13] attributable to Plato (i.e., Platonism); and 3) the dialogues must be understood in their appropriate historical contexts, that is, as fourth-century

Athenian compositions dramatically representing fifth-century characters, settings, and events.

For some classicists and philosophers, the “new wave” troubles the historical position and philosophic purpose of Plato’s dialogues, yet I adopt and adapt new wave principles because the current state of Plato Studies calls into question both the historical position of the dialogues and Plato’s apparent purposes in writing them. The “meanings of crucial terms such as ‘philosophy’ and ‘argument’”^[14] are often imposed upon the dialogues from without, yet doing so sidesteps issues particular to Plato Studies, specifically the issue of dialogue. One of the assumptions of some classicist and historical interpretations of Plato’s dialogues is that any fourth-century Athenian text is characteristic of fourth-century Athenian culture and values. Certainly in a way this is true, but in other significant ways it may not be. Given a dialogue of Plato’s, there arise questions about the authority of the text in general. Plato’s mastery of written composition stands in relief to his criticisms of the technologies of writing and the implications of writing on the practice of philosophia. That is, writing for Plato is not a trouble-free or transparent means of communication and so preserved documents attributed to Plato cannot be read with the same frame of reference as preserved documents attributed to Xenophon, Aristotle, or Thucydides, because these authors do not trouble the fact of written media as Plato does. Any interpretation of Plato’s dialogues, then, has to remain sensitive to the values of representation and the varieties of means and methods (i.e., oratory, tragedy, comedy, lyric, epic) available to an author who portrays the philosopher as someone speaking.

With this in mind, I return to the subject of *charis* in chapter 5: how many ways is it represented in early Greek literature, and what of the tradition of *charis* that Plato inherits might have influenced his own *poeisis*? Specifically, my concern is how what Socrates says and what he does are said and done in relation to other characters. Reading Socrates in relation to other characters destabilizes the agonistic nature so often attributed to the dialogues and highlights instead their structure as

narrative and plural rather than oppositional and binary. Surprisingly, the Republic, often taken to be a model of Plato's agon in logos, offers an excellent example of how to read Plato non-agonistically for the occasion of the Republic is an occasion of *xenia*. Reiterated explicitly in *Timaeus* and *Critias*, guest-friendship frames this trilogy of dialogues, and I suggest it is worth considering whether this practice has philosophical import for Plato. Reframing the Republic in terms of *xenia* and its values allows for alternative yet nuanced readings of what are otherwise considered some of the "fixed, settled teachings"^[15] of Plato's thought, i.e., that justice is "the having and doing what is one's own," that all forms of democracy solicit a "tyranny of the majority," and that the entirety of the *kallipolis* is built upon Plato's contest with the poets. Alternatively, I read the characters Cephalus, Thrasymachus, and Glaucon as illuminating the extent and depth of Socratic *aporia* and the possible ways *aporia* functions in a pre-or noncommercial economy, that economy sustained by *charis*, and perhaps also that economy preserved in Plato's Socrates.

Many Platonists and even some philosophers who are sympathetic to a non-doctrinal reading of Plato's dialogues might object to my suggestions about the contemporary significance of dialogue, its potential for democratic practice, and/or its non-agonistic character. Still, I am not insisting that the writer Plato composed the *Apology* in direct answer to my twenty-first century concerns, nor that I have somehow "uncovered" the truth of Plato's intentions and purpose in composing dialogues as philosophy and conversely. I intentionally use the noun "trouble" as a verb in order to offset expectations that might arise from the more conventional use of "challenge" or "question." To "challenge" conventional interpretations of Plato would, of course, constitute another contest, another agon. Yet even the term "question" could suggest the need for, or promise of, a theory about how politics could work non-agonistically, or an answer to the "real" meaning of the *Apology*. Since one of the purposes of this work is to highlight some democratic possibilities of Socratic

dialogue, and then based upon these possibilities to suggest that skills like democratic competence result from philosophical dialogue, a new theory of democracy or set of propositions about the Apology that does not result from actual dialogue is, by this account, inappropriate. That is, if it is dialogue rather than any agon that proves sufficient for genuinely “good” ideas, then it must be through dialogue rather than any contest that our multiple perceptions, ideas and desires for justice, reasonableness, and democracy emerge.

I see Socratic charis, then, as a dialogical value. Some might object that as a dialogical value charis can only mimic the real value certain knowledge would yield. Yet charis is a historically appropriate and genuine interpersonal value in the ancient world. The particular import of Socratic charis might be that in a genuine democracy there is no real knowledge without dialogue, and there is no real dialogue without charis, “a willing and precious reciprocal exchange.”^[16] By this perspective it is possible that a fourth-century Athenian, one apparently holding an “agonistic view of man,” could concern himself with values other than those attributable to the contest, and with practices other than those that yield victory or gain. The real question might be whether we are willing to consider that different values and economies in differing historical eras have something to offer our present day concerns and practices, even if it is something as “nonsensical” as bronze for gold.

NOTES

1. Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*, edited with an introduction by Hannah Arendt (New York: Schocken Books, 1969), 255.
2. Gabriel Herman, *Ritualised Friendship and the Greek City* (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 1ff.
3. *The Essential Homer*, translated and edited by Stanley Lombardo (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 2000), *Iliad*, 6:240.
4. *Iliad*, 6:243.
5. Anne Carson, *Economy of the Unlost* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999), 3ff.
6. Carson, *Economy*, 55.
7. *Myth and Society in Ancient Greece*, translated by Janet Lloyd (New York: Zone

Books, 1990), 29.

8. Jean-Pierre Vernant, *The Origins of Greek Thought* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982), 46–47.

9. Louis Gernet, *The Anthropology of Ancient Greece* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981), 355ff.

10. Bonnie MacLachlan, *The Age of Grace: Charis in Early Greek Poetry* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993), 8.

11. Cf. Debra Nails, “Mouthpiece Schmouthpiece” in *Who Speaks for Plato? Studies in Platonic Anonymity*, ed. Gerald A. Press (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2000), 15–26, who successfully demonstrates how equivocating Socrates and Plato sidesteps philosophical issues in the dialogues.

12. The phrase “new wave” is used by Gerald A. Press to introduce “attempts to overcome” the divisive and fragmentary state of Plato studies in the twentieth-century. I take the three principles, or “shared beliefs,” of appropriate methodology from his “Introduction” to *Plato’s Dialogues: New Studies and Interpretations*, ed. Gerald A. Press (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1993), 1–14.

13. Press, “Introduction,” 5.

14. Press, “Introduction,” 3.

15. Press, “Introduction,” 5.

16. Quoted in Carson, *Economy*, 20.

Chapter 1

Troubling the Agon

During the nineteenth-century cultural historian Jacob Burckhardt suggested that the social dynamics of archaic Greece were best understood in terms of a competitive ethos fostered by and between aristocratic families or gene. While archaic Greece was dominated or ruled by persons we refer to as “warrior-aristocrats,”^[1] the emphasis for Burckhardt and others is on the plural, gene or groups in lieu of a singular king. The spirit or ethos that animated the gene is described as “competitive” because these “warrior-aristocrats” qualified “for kingship” or contended for authority with one another through combat or feats of physical prowess and cunning.^[2] Both the Iliad and Odyssey, for instance, show how authority is contended for by at least two rivals rather than proclaimed and appropriated as the “divine right” of one. So significant is this competitive ethos that even the gods must contend for power amongst themselves: in Hesiod’s Theogony the reign of justice begins when the Olympians defeat the Titans, and in some versions of the establishment of Olympian rule Zeus, Hades, and Poseidon contest dominion over “Heaven.”^[3]

From a proto-political perspective, the presence of contests in the records of archaic life marks a significant change from uncontested lineages of power and authority that characterize the social dynamics of historically earlier cultures, such as Indo-European “palace” cultures. As discussed below, a palace king is considered “quasi-divine,” he is the One from whom the Many derive everything that constitutes daily life, including their very sense of themselves.^[4] The cultural and social passage to a more democratically organized politeia, a system in which the Many determine the One, would seem to suggest a complete reversal of the values and practices that support a king. Burckhardt’s competitive ethos explains both why and how such a reversal could occur and sustain itself: the archaic the birth of

the agon.

The birth of the agon, however, seems to involve two inter-related ideas: the idea that there could be more than one person or group vying for what we might call “political” power and the idea that whoever is worthy of such power should be decided by contest. But the historical correlation between these two ideas does not necessitate their logical connection: the “invention” of political pluralism in archaic Greece no more entails the institutional use of the contest than the practice and presence of contests in other areas of social life demand its practice and presence in political life. That there could be more than one ruler does not mean that there should or must be only one, yet the oppositional structure of the agon distinguishes between all contenders the one who wins from the one or the many who do not win.

In this way, the divisions created by contests seem at odds with emerging practices of *demokratia*. The value accorded to the contest—the competitive ethos—is specifically aristocratic, and the practices that sustain this value are engaged in by the elite. Apparently only those of a certain status are able to compete and, thereby, only those of a certain status will prove themselves worthy of victory. Yet this agonistic ethos, so central to aristocratic practices, was not challenged or supplanted in emerging democratic practices. For instance, “Modern historians of classical Greece and Athens have maintained that the elite preserved the Greek competitive ethos well, and that the demos also subscribed to it.”^[5] I take this author to mean that the competitive ethos embedded in aristocratic practices was actually accepted and perpetuated by the demos, that is, that what was once essentially aristocratic becomes specifically democratic over time. Thus, the agon not only survives, it thrives in ancient Greek experience. By the fourth-century “that conflict was a natural, expected, and pervasive element of civilized society is a proposition known to—and accepted by—every Greek, including the Greek of classical Athens.”^[6] As a “pervasive element,” much of what we understand by the term “civilized” is attributed to the agon, for in the words of another

author the agon comes to signify the “expectation that, in Athens, democracy, justice, and competition complemented each other.”^[7]

While the birth of the agon is essentially aristocratic, its continued presence in the social dynamics of ancient Athens is apparently democratic. Yet how is it possible that the values and practices accorded to and supported by the agon are consistent to contrary types of political organization? On its surface, the movement from an aristocracy to a democracy is a movement from a general lack of consideration in terms of who is fit to rule to a collective right to ask and answer that very question. One might say the very possibility of democracy entails the ability to articulate the question in ways that are free from preclusion. Yet because the agon is delimited by social status, that is, because only those already considered superior in some way are capable of contending, not only does the agon not guarantee every citizen the right to ask or answer the question of political leadership, the specific political purpose of the agon seems to be to dissolve the possibility of the question by determining from among only those who can contend who should or will lead.

From a practical standpoint, contests are in place to provide a sense of resolution in a timely manner: the agon is, to date, our most efficient means of dissolving disputes. Yet I suggest that the agon often dissolves disputes at the cost of maintaining equality between disputants, and that this is what is most troubling about the agon and its continuing presence in our political practices as a heritable trait of “the spirit of democracy”: the idea that the agon is compatible with a robust concept and practice of equality is a highly questionable idea. “Though it has become axiomatic to think of ancient Greek society in terms of competition,”^[8] in the classical as well as the contemporary world, competition works to demonstrate how persons or groups are actually not equal. The agon proves inferiority and superiority among those who only appear equal. More generally, the agon is that practice that encourages us to determine whom, among Many, is signally One.^[9]

The purpose of this chapter, then, is to show not only the many ways the agon has come to dominate our thinking about the ancient Greeks, but to do so with continual reference to its apparent political value then as now. The initial idea is that it simply does not seem possible that the robust concept and practice of equality necessary to a democratic politeia can be preserved or subscribed to through agon. Rather, 1) there must be other values and practices at work in the archaic and Hellenic world that under-or predetermine the expectation and acceptance of competition “by every Greek,” and/or 2) there must be other values and practices that are at least as significant as the agon to the ancient Greeks. Whatever these elements, values, and practices might be, however, is often under-or unexplored in literature concerned with ancient Greek society and politeia. I have found that even when analysis focuses on a more appropriately non-agonistic practice, a practice such as xenia,^[10] it is generally interpreted through the model of the agon. In this way, the value of the agon to ancient Greek culture—at the least—remains unquestioned.^[11]

One of the reasons we rarely trouble the agon is that we have embraced Burckhardt’s idea of the competitive ethos of the archaic, aristocratic Greeks as the comprehensive ethos subscribed to by all ancient Greeks. As a comprehensive ethos, the agon denotes a principle or maxim of ancient Greek culture, characterizing the ways the ancient Greeks understood and saw themselves as well as the ways we understand and represent them. But I suggest that the agon cannot possibly do all it is supposed to do in the service of emerging politeia, specifically demokratia. This failure of the agon has led to several “myths” about the value of contests that exaggerate or mask its effectiveness: 1) all ancient Greeks believe that the kosmos is essentially agonistic, 2) so they conceive of themselves and their world in terms of the agon, 3) repeated insistence upon 1) and 2) has led to the idea that the agon is not just a feature but the fundamental feature of early Greek life, 4) thereby, agonistic practices account for the development of political practices, significantly 5) the agon accounts for and can be considered a

necessary or sufficient condition of a political democracy.^[12]

I trouble these five claims as they currently constitute common knowledge about the ancient Greeks. My concern is not that we have somehow completely misunderstood the ancient Greeks or that our reasoning has been flawed and so what passes for common knowledge about the ancient Greeks is a set of basically unwarranted claims. Rather, I trouble the facts about contests in terms of our insistence—perhaps dependence—upon the agon as the essential feature of ancient Greek society. Ancient Greek society is an agonistic society, but it is not essentially agonistic. Contests have value for social and political practices, but to award the agon exclusive value might say more about our values than it illuminates a comprehensive ethos of the early Greeks.

Since this chapter attempts to disentangle our thinking about the agon in order to make room for thinking about other ancient practices, a brief synopsis of its subsections might be useful. The “myth of the agon” compares a lesser known creation story, an “Orphic” story, with the more popularized account from Hesiod’s *Theogony*. Both stories have currency in the ancient world—they are both preserved in writing at some time—but only one story continues to be told and retold by us and is often used as an indicator of ancient Greek basic beliefs about their world and themselves. This suggests that our perspective of the ancient world is actually narrower than their perspective. Multiple versions of creation yield multiple perspectives about creation, including the very real possibility that at least some ancient Greeks did not understand creation as the result of violence and competition, so they did not also understand Eris (Strife) as “natural” to the kosmos and the human condition. What these beliefs might mean and why we might ascribe them to the ancients could be the result of our own understanding of the values of contests in terms of how we talk about the emergence of democracy from pre-classical social relationships. Pursuing this line of thought, the “politics of the agon” is a brief and general assessment of how the agon affects political practices with specific reference to the “birth” or

“invention” of “democratic” practices. The story of how democracy came to be, however, can be told in many different ways. Central to one of the most recent and influential ways is Burckhardt’s competitive ethos redressed for 21st century readers. Hence, the “history of the agon” briefly retells the story of the evolution of democracy from the collapse of a Mycenaean “palace-culture” in order to trouble again what I suggest are the only apparent virtues of the agon to this account.

THE MYTH OF THE AGON

Most contemporary literature that takes ancient Greece as its subject discusses or mentions the agon. Anglicized transliterations of ἀγών include “contest,” “argument,” and “assembly” or “public gathering,”^[13] indicating the range and extent to which agon appears in ancient Greek texts, and the range and extent to which we can and do interpret these texts as agonistic. For instance, the Iliad illustrates a variety of agon that include a polemos between Greece and Troy, a contest of authority between Achilles and Agammonon, a conflict of allegiance between gods and goddesses for or against the Achaeans or the Trojans, as well as contests between the gods themselves. Recently, the competitive ethos of the Iliad has been expanded to include some of the speech between its characters. Since the heroes of the Iliad “spend more time talking than fighting,” it has been suggested that the essential or genuine action of the epic occurs at the level of speech, particularly persuasive speech: “The discussions and disputes . . . form the action of the epic as much as the battle scenes and generate more interest and tension.”^[14] This focus upon some of the passages of the Iliad as an agon in logos transforms text, subtext, and context into a war of words. Hence, in lieu of a legend of war, or at least alongside this legend, the Iliad illustrates a contest of speech that is at least as, if not more significant than, the scenes of battle.^[15] Although the term agon and its derivatives in the Homeric epics can refer to “a variety of different contexts, from a ‘divine assembly’ and ‘place by the

ships' to the funeral games in honour of Patroclus"^[16] we now recognize the agon in any and all gatherings, and refer to the place or location of a contest as an agon itself. It seems, then, that at any time or place two or more are gathered in the ancient world there is an agon. Hence, scholarly interest can quite easily shift from war to speech and back again, reconfiguring a contest of spears as a contest of words.

The ease and skill with which we move from one type of contest to another demonstrates something like a principle of agon—that is, an axiom—at work in our interpretations of ancient Greek literature. Our adherence to this principle is usually justified in terms of what the ancient Greeks say about themselves. While scholars disagree as to whether the Greeks are the only or most competitive culture in the ancient world, others maintain “we do not have to deny their competitiveness to dispute the claim that it is superior, precisely because it is their claim.”^[17] That is, their claims about their superiority in contest suggest not only the value of the agon to their experience but also their understanding of themselves as the “kings of contest”:

In individual relationships and between families, as between one state and another, in the competitive Games, in lawsuits, in the debates of the Assemblies, and on the battlefield, the ancient Greeks recognized under various names—Polemos, Eris, Neikos—that same power of confrontation that Hesiod places at the origins of the world and Heraclitus celebrates as the father and king of the whole universe.^[18]

To the view of a poet and philosopher we can add the views of politicians, sophists, historians, and tragic and comedic playwrights to support the claim about a “power of confrontation” and a pervasive element of conflict in all early Greek experience.^[19] But it is also true that alongside the “confrontation” and ensuing violence through which Hesiod represents the birth of the kosmos, we can add a lesser known

—“Orphic”—account of the origin of things:

In the beginning was Night . . . she was a bird with black wings. Ancient Night conceived of the Wind and laid her silver Egg in the gigantic lap of Darkness. From the Egg sprang the Son of the rushing Wind, a god with golden wings. He is called Eros, the god of love; but this is only one name, the loveliest of all the names this god bore. (*italics mine*)^[20]

In lieu of Hesiod’s account of the castration of Uranus by Cronus, that “evil crafty trick” urged on by Gaia,^[21] the tale of Night and Eros represents the god of love as the “firstborn” of all the gods. This firstborn Eros is also called Phanes for “he revealed and brought into the light everything that had lay (*sic*) hidden in the silver Egg.” Hidden in the Egg was the whole world, “Up above was a void, the Sky. Down below was the Rest.” This “Rest”—down below—is not necessarily the unordered Chaos we hear about in Hesiod’s tale. C. Keryeni explains, “Our ancient language has a word for the void, ‘Chaos,’ which simply means that it ‘yawns.’ Originally there was no word meaning turmoil or confusion . . . Thus, the Rest, down below in the Egg, was not in turmoil.”^[22] Preserved for us, then, is an account of the origin of all things through conflict and an account of the origin of all things through harmony and “co-mingling.” Hence, for the Greeks, in the beginning was not only the power of confrontation, Eris, but also the power of love, Eros.

Vernant’s reference to Heraclitus’ “celebration” of the powers of confrontation as the “father” and “king” of the whole universe emphasizes one account of creation to the exclusion of the other. Yet an emphasis on Eris in lieu of Eros is not unusual in contemporary assessments of ancient sources. The poet-philosopher, Empedocles, for instance, sees the kosmos as constituted by, and comprised of, the forces or energies of Love (Eros) and Strife (Eris). The various forms the kosmos might take are explained as a process of combination and dispersion during

the “alternating stages” of these two forces. According to W. K. C. Guthrie, when Love rules “unopposed,” all elements have been combined and are fused as a single unity, “One.” During Love’s rule there are no differences or divisions between things, and thereby no categories or classifications that hold for them. Being, as such, is completely undifferentiated and whole. When Strife rules supreme, however, all elements have been dispersed and differentiated. This stage indicates a world of “Many” wherein perhaps even atoms do not combine into elements. Intriguingly, “mortal things,” like human beings, exist in an intermediate stage between the absolute rules of Love and Strife: “a universe of ‘mortal things’, such as that in which we live, is a temporary stage intermediate between the supremacy of Love and Strife, a product of the tension and conflict between them.”^[23] To my knowledge, Empedocles does not articulate the mechanism through which stages alternate, so he does not posit something like Strife between Love and Strife to explain the transitions between the worlds of Many and One. We, however, do this for him: 1) we suppose a third force or energy of “tension and conflict” to add to his original two, and/or 2) we privilege Strife at the expense of Love as an active force within the human condition. In this way, it appears that it is the Strife between Love and Strife that sustains our existence and experience.

It is not clear to me, at least, that the ancient texts warrant this type of interpretation. Alongside Heraclitus’ aphorism that, “War is the father of all, and king of all. He renders some gods, others men; he makes some slaves, others free,”^[24] we can add Fr. 41, “[He says that] the wise (thing) is a single (thing)—knowing the plan which steers all things through all things” and Fr. 50, “Not after listening to me, but listening to the account, one does wisely in agreeing that all things are one (thing).” If we expand Heraclitus’ view beyond one of the one hundred twenty-nine fragments attributed to him, we see that “war” is actually not characteristic of the real order of things, rather there is an order or a unity “underpinning” opposition that Heraclitus calls “one,” and the effects of opposition—some gods, some men,

some free, some slaves—that Heraclitus refers to in terms of “war.”

Since we can add to the view of a poet and philosopher equally viable views from other sources, or equally viable views from within the same source, whichever aphorism of Heraclitus we choose to cite, as well as whichever myth of origin we choose to allude to, must be a matter and manner of our chosen perspectives about the early Greeks. Yet our chosen perspectives about the early Greeks are rarely recognized and discussed as “chosen,” in part because our choices for how to appropriately interpret the early Greeks seem limited to what is accepted as common knowledge about them, that is, the axiom of the agon. But when we consider how common knowledge becomes “common,” it appears that the parameters of the agon have expanded beyond our grasp and assent. For instance, the idea that the ancient Greeks are the “kings of contest” has tremendous currency for our contemporary understanding of them.^[25] To provide an alternative to this idea requires challenging or supplanting existing evidence in order to reconsider or re-evaluate the judgments that account for that idea, that is, to suggest or imply that contrary to our common knowledge the ancient Greeks are actually not the “kings of contest.” The process of reconsidering or re-evaluating existing evidence requires exposing the flaws of former judgments in order to provide in their place the “right” or “true,” or more “appropriate” or “accurate” account. But since this entire process proceeds by the logic of opposition, it takes the shape or form of an agon: to contest the axiom of the agon is, basically, to contest the contest in hopes of emerging victorious by defeating the axiom, by proving it false. Victory in this instance denotes the acceptance and substitution of one idea for another, better idea, which, of course, will eventually be challenged, proven inappropriate, inaccurate, or false as the agon proceeds. And so to challenge the extent and significance of the agon is, in effect, to demonstrate its universal and necessary appeal.

Still, there are limits to every contest, even intellectual

ones, and these limits are predetermined by the binary structure of all contests. Simply put, the oppositional structure of the agon forecloses the legitimate coexistence of differing perspectives of the same idea, that is, the agon cannot both be and not be an essential feature of ancient Greek culture. But expanding the parameters within which we consider, evaluate, and interpret ancient Greek literature, including the task of troubling the agon, is not a matter of contest. To trouble the agon is to try to proceed non-agonistically, delineating and articulating another perspective alongside the ones that currently yield common knowledge. Doing so expands the parameters within which we evaluate early Greek experience in ways that validate rather than negate the multiple perspectives and versions available given “their own claims.” Ironically, perhaps, the appropriateness of this task to early Greek thinking is actually supported by the collected aphorisms of Heraclitus. Given Heraclitus’ “fascination . . . with the perspectival,”^[26] it can be said that not only did Heraclitus consider multiple perspectives necessary to genuine determinations of knowledge and experience, the yield of “perspectivalism” enriches our understanding of the processes and products of knowledges, including what passes at a given time and place as “common.” While our perspectives differ from time to time, place to place, and person to person, this does not necessarily mean that all perspectives are only subjectively true, that is, that while the road seems “up” to me and “down” to you, what the road is per simpliciter is at best relative, or at worst unknowable. If we can resist the impulse to reconcile Heraclitus’ opposites as “same” or “one” in terms of the doctrine of the “unity” or “sameness of opposites” often attributed to him, we can begin to understand the significance of perspectivalism to non-binary ways of thinking. For instance, T. M. Robinson suggests that “a road up and down is one and the same road” because all opposites or the perspectives that name or identify them are interconnected:

for Heraclitus “opposites” such a night and day are “the same” but merely in terms of a given perspective; they do

not share a common identity. Day and Night, for example, are the same from the perspective of the common substance (the world) for which they are cyclical features; so likewise are, for example, waking and sleeping from the perspective of the individual for whom they are cyclical features.^[27]

Robinson's explanation of "perspectivalism" presents us with the possibility of broadening the scope by which we consider experience and enlarging the parameters within which we have experience. Most of us are taught to think in terms of a fixed, oppositional structure, "up" or "down," "win" or "lose," and this structure describes and prescribes for our experience to the extent that the road must be either "up" or "down" because it cannot be both. Alternatively, perspectivalism maintains that "up" and "down" are equally consistent with experiences of traveling a road from different directions, at different times, or in relation to other travelers. Determinations about the road depend upon one's focus or perspective, and one's focus is contingent upon how one sees the road. Whether ideally there is one way the road "is" is not as significant as the ability to recognize the contingencies of all perspectives in relation to the bigger picture of which the road constitutes a particular part. Heraclitus' fascination with the perspectival, then, offers a way of seeing the proverbial road that does not necessarily reduce to a static, oppositional structure. Since the agon is a practice fixed in just such an oppositional structure, I suggest that Heraclitus presents us with the possibility of seeing through the agon and considering the "power of confrontation" from a perspective other than one that celebrates it as the father and king of all.

Statements to the effect, then, that "the ancient Greeks recognized the agon as a fundamental feature of human society" are neither entirely true nor false: such claims are substantiated and warranted within certain parameters, and are consistent with certain perspectives. But the reasons that validate these parameters, or justify these perspectives, are

often contingent upon the truth of the assertion that the agon is not just one feature, but the fundamental feature of ancient Greek society. As the fundamental feature of ancient Greek society, the agon has come to stand, so to speak, for what the road actually is: the agon is the background against which we see the ancient Greeks and the basis for our understanding of what the ancient Greeks do and of who they are. That the ancient Greeks held an “agonistic view of man” and that they developed a “mentalite of agon”^[28] are both ways of saying that the ancient Greeks not only engaged in different types of contests, but that they also thought in terms of contests, they comprehended themselves and their world in terms of the agon. Because the ancient Greeks see themselves agonistically, they represent themselves as agonistic, or they represent the agon as an essential feature of all social relationships. Since the “Greeks looked at their social environment through the prism of the contest,”^[29] their claims about themselves support and sustain our claims about them to the extent that, “so pervasive was the competitiveness of ancient Greek society that it could be illustrated from almost any substantial surviving written source.”^[30] Preserved and substantial documents provide this author evidence of the agon across the entirety of ancient Greek culture. The ancient agon constitutes not just one social field among others, for instance the social field of ancient sport, but is considered to be “fundamental,” that is, constitutive of all social fields.^[31] Or, if the agon is not properly constitutive, it is certainly pervasive, common to practices as apparently diverse as athletics and litigation, and poetry and politics. Hence, the agon is “so fundamental to the Greeks combative approach to social relations.”^[32]

This “combative approach to social relations,” however, is also said to be a “delight”: “the ancient Greeks delight in competition because they so often structure their ‘gatherings’ as ‘contests.’”^[33] For many scholars, ancient literary sources attest to an increasing use of the term agon to refer to public gatherings as contests and conversely. These literary sources correlate to found artifacts, suggesting the significance of

contests in daily, private life. Alongside the highly formalized and ritualized traditions of athletic contests like the Games, there are archaeological remains of various board games and evidence of wrestling and horse-racing matches, cock fights, gymnastic competitions, and beauty contests. These localized or otherwise incidental contests seem to imitate the more formalized poetic, recitative, musical, oratorical and tragic and comedic theatrical contests documented in ancient literature. Moreover, all of these contests can be considered similar or same because they all evince a certain structure or form, bounded by four criteria that can be used to determine or legitimate a genuine agon: there must be 1) a worthy field, 2) a prize, 3) mutually acceptable judges, and 4) an audience.^[34] By these criteria, the Iliad serves as example par excellence of an ancient agon, the worthy field is comprised of Greeks and Trojan warriors, the prize is *arête*, the judges are the gods, and the audience is the archaic world.^[35]

Reading the Iliad as a model of agon, however, can present certain difficulties. As “a poem of war,” the Iliad illustrates what most contemporary authors call an “extreme” form of agon: “war appears to be a specific mode of conflict, of agon—in fact, the most extreme one.”^[36] By this, war is a type of agon, it proceeds as a contest, but it exists at the extreme end of what comprises a spectrum of agon. If we focus on the Iliad as an example of agon par excellence, however, the Iliad occupies a position at the center of that spectrum: it serves as the model or form of contests from speech to battle, and as the model or form, all other contests follow or imitate it. A question arises, then, about which type of contest is the form and which is the instance, war or speech? If war is the model or form of agon, then it is actually war that is the fundamental feature of ancient Greek society and it is war that explains “their combative approach to all social relations.” Hence, war is the original or genuine agon and all other contests are instances and imitations of war. But then how might we understand those contests that are said to be a source of “delight”?

In order to avoid confusing war with “delightful” gatherings,

most literature about the agon claims that while war is a type of contest, it is an extreme type: “the spirit of agon that animated the gene of the nobility was manifest in every sphere. Above all it was manifest in war.”^[37] While war manifests all of the criteria of the agon, not all contests are instances of war. Rather, the occasions for war might differ from the occasions of contest, and it is this difference that is expressed in Graham Shipley’s statement that “war in classical Greece is the continuation of the symposion by other means.”^[38] The inclusion “by other means” can distinguish between, if not the way contests are conducted, then the reasons why contests are waged. While all contests proceed in terms of an oppositional structure, marking off “worthy” opponents who contend for a “prize,” different types of competitions distinguish between different types of prizes to be won, and these can include anything from wreaths for athletic excellence to a political and economic “right” to rule.^[39]

On the other hand, in order to answer both how and why the agon is “manifest in every sphere,” some of the literature about the agon extends its parameters far beyond social relations and the phenomena of war: “the spirit of strife that set city-states against each other was simply one aspect of a much vaster power at work in all human relationships and even in nature itself.”^[40] Accordingly, the agon is “manifest in every sphere” because nature itself is agonistic. Physis displays that same “power of confrontation” responsible for the origin of the kosmos and indicative of all social relations. Hence, the source or origin of agone is located in something other than human society, perhaps something that transcends human society or by which human society is determined—nature.

“War is to humankind what motion and change are to physis. War appears to be a kind of imitation, by humans, of nature in its agitation and, more precisely, blind destructiveness.”^[41] By this, war is the natural and expected counterpart of dynamism in nature, that is, war is an image or a copy of “nature in its agitation.” Any event of extreme natural dynamism, such as a volcanic eruption, earthquake, tsunami,

hurricane, drought, flood, or tornado, serves as a model for us to imitate. In this way natural dynamism prescribes for human dynamism—in its most extreme form, war. Yet since war is an instance or type of agon, it would actually be the agon that is “to humankind what motion and change are to physis.” That is, the cause of our imitations of “nature in its agitation” is the agon, and its inextricable connection to the natural world reveals a basic belief about the kosmos and ourselves: competition and conflict are natural.

This basic belief—that competition is natural—is often attributed to the early Greeks, yet it is difficult to offer a consistent explanation of this belief in either early Greek or modern terms. Specifically for us, since we apparently do not attribute human characteristics to the natural world, the idea that nature acts the way humans act seems to strike at contemporary understandings of both:

Unlike modern philosophers, for whom the problem is one of determining how language and ideas—and the mind in which they reside—are connected with the external world, composed of matter that is brute and dumb, but which—somehow—includes human bodies, the ancient Greeks could believe that nature is material and also alive and intelligent, perhaps even deathless and divine.^[42]

Unlike the early Greeks, we consider nature brute and unintelligent matter. As brute and unintelligent matter, nature cannot be said to act in ways that are purposeful or intentional. Rather, if nature can be said to “do” anything, it does so as an effect or instrument of a force or being to which or to whom we ascribe some type of intelligence or intention for the purpose of explanation, that is, a hurricane is “an act of God,” the extinction of a species denotes “survival of the fittest” and/or human interference in a nonhuman ecosystem. The belief that competition is natural, however, considers and communicates a human activity in apparently nonhuman terms, and in this way the belief not only contradicts our own modern understanding of

nature, it might also affect our own modern myth of the agon: “conflict is so fundamental to human society that it operates both at the level of individual dispute and in a higher order meta-contest among competing modes of conflict. The onset or emergence of harmony cannot be imagined.”^[43]

Since the onset of harmony cannot be imagined, we battle not just one another but even nature itself, and we justify these battles in terms of our own “mentality of agon.” After all, conflict and competition are natural to the human condition. To consider otherwise is to deny who and what we are, and to deny, perhaps hide from, what nature is in fact, “red in tooth and claw.” Yet this inextricable connection between nature and the agon also creates a paradox: we compete with nature for the preservation and survival of the human condition, although the human condition owes itself to nature. That is, we battle nature and one another because it is in our nature to do so.

This is such a confusing condition of belief there must be more to it than its simple articulation here. When we say that competition is natural to the world and to ourselves, do we mean the “spirit of strife” that “manifests itself in every sphere” is natural in the same way oceans, skies, and forests are natural? This also sounds odd, for “competition” and “conflict” are used as descriptive terms for events or occurrences. That is, they have metaphorical rather than analytical value for how we might understand the “what” of what happens. Oceans, forests and skies, also “happen,” but they come to be and act as the result of natural events and processes. When we try to ascertain how and why oceans happen and act the ways they do we might ascribe “conflict” to those natural events and processes as a predicate or adjective. Yet the force of the claim that competition is natural seems to state an essential characteristic of both oceans and contests to the extent we might conflate what something is with how we attempt to understand it. Doing so can encourage the idea that “conflict” is more than a predicate, it is a noun, and it denotes rather than connotes either the thing-itself or a property or attribute of a nonhuman event and a nonhuman entity. That is, what we say about nature

metaphorically is often taken as fact about the natural world. Assuming that “conflict” belongs to oceans or forests this way, however, begs the initial question about the relationship between nature and the agon, and often yields explanations about rather than arguments for the connections between what we call “competition” and the workings of “nature.”

Perhaps what we mean by “competition is natural” is that competition and conflict seem to be natural parts of natural processes. That is, while skies, oceans, and forests come to be as the result of natural processes, a constituent part of these processes resembles or reflects conflict and competition in the human world. Even if we admit that the best we can do is describe nonhuman processes in human terms, something like a “conflict of opposites” does and will continue to occur in the natural world whether we are around to name it as such. Hence, conflict is a fact of nature to the extent it is a constituent part of—at least some—natural processes. And so the claim “the oceans are natural” is not significantly different from the claim “competition is natural.” When we say the “oceans are natural” we generally mean oceans are not made, caused, or brought about by humans and so oceans have no need of humans to exist and persist as oceans. The claim that “competition is natural” similarly states that there is a type of competition that is also not made, caused or brought about by humans and has no need of humans to exist and persist as competition. How natural conflict might differ from human conflict is another matter, but this does not mean that it does not exist in nature. To the contrary, the burden of proof shifts to those who would deny the accuracy of the claim to show how a “conflict of opposites” in the natural world is signally different from a “conflict of opposites” in human terms. If this is the general sense of the claim “competition is natural” it explains both how and why we might believe “the spirit of strife that set city-states against each other was simply one aspect of a much vaster power at work in all human relationships and even in nature itself.” If this is our belief, however, we must also admit that it brings us back, full circle, to the most popular creation story of

ancient Greek myth: is it not, after all, Gaia, “Mother Earth,” who suggests and urges the *agone* necessary to originate the world? As “born of the earth” we are born of this *agon*. Human nature is agonistic because nature is agonistic. And so the *agon* is not just a manifestation of *physis*: the *agon* is not something nature does, the *agon* is something nature “is.”

Yet even for the ancients, who do not conceive of nature as brute, unintelligent matter, this one myth cannot explain or support the multiple perspectives and understandings of nature in early Greek thought and experience. Etymological and contextual analysis of the ancient Greek term *physis*, as it is preserved in Homer, Hesiod, and the “pre-Socratics,” reveals its basic meaning as “growth”: “as an action noun ending in—sis, *physis* means the whole process of growth of a thing from birth to maturity.”^[44] While the processes of growth from birth to maturity are not incompatible with a certain amount of conflict or Strife, there is nothing about an early Greek understanding of nature as growth that suggests conflict is essential to it, that Strife is “manifest in every sphere.”

We might also consider that in Aristotle’s terms the maturity of an organism denotes the complete actualization of its potential—its “perfection.” In a similar way, ancient writers often use the term “*floruit*” to indicate what we might call the prime of a person’s life, a natural process of reaching or attaining one’s fullest potential, one’s maturity. Both senses of growth and completion suggest a coming to fullness, an abundance of nature, or in Heideggerian terms a shining forth. While nature as growth and fulfillment might not be completely devoid of Strife it is certainly not characteristic of blind destructiveness. How we move, then, from an ancient Greek understanding of nature as growth to a modern understanding of nature as “red in tooth and claw” might explain how we have come to believe that “conflict is so fundamental to human society . . . the onset or emergence of harmony cannot be imagined.”

THE POLITICS OF AGON

We might still say that the ancient Greeks did develop the most robust and enduring practices of *agone*, not because they necessarily believed “competition is natural,” but because they brought the techniques of contest into the heart of political decision making, and instituted the debates we recognize as nascent to democracy and the rights of citizenry to participate in and determine political action per their judgment of debate. The four criteria of the *agon* are flexible enough to include a variety of social practices. Significantly for democracy, criteria 3) and 4) are combined to the extent the judges are the audience and conversely, and criteria 1) can be expanded so that a worthy field is comprised by speakers in the assembly, each of whom is granted the political right to speak given his status as citizen. So the phrase “kings of contest” is, in a way, misleading: due to the ancient Greeks it is only by contest, through *agon*, that one rightly becomes king, or due to the ancient Greeks the *agon*, by its very structure, disallows “kings.” Following Geoffrey Lloyd, Elton Barker writes that “authority was something that was won or lost, upheld or extended, in a continual struggle” (10). In this way, political victory, similar to any victory, is relatively short-lived, but the *agon* itself is constant. In Lloyd’s view, the *agon* is ongoing.

Much contemporary political theory proves Lloyd’s point, for the vocabulary of the *agon* continues to dominate modern democratic idiom.^[45] Phrases like the “contestability of reasons” and the “imperative to debate” sustain the expectation that for us, as for fourth-century Athenians, democracy, justice, and competition complement one another. Moreover, today the citizenship body of any *politeia* who consider themselves democratic, or aspire to be so, must enter the *agon*: “Politics in a democratic setting, too, is intensely competitive and engages essentially the same factors as when two boys wrestle in a gymnasium, when armed cocks fight to death in the ring, when a dozen four-horse chariots round a tight turning post at Olympia, or when Euripides takes on his older hallowed rival, Sophocles.”^[46]

While political democracy might not engage the exact same

factors as armed cocks fighting to the death, it is true that as long as we conceive of political dissent and debate as competitive, analogies between contests and politics will continue to ring true to our experience. And so many contemporary authors write as if the agon is a necessary or sufficient condition for any genuine politeia. What differentiates an oligarchy from a democracy, for instance, are the means and measures of the contest—power is accorded by wealth in the first and majority opinion in the second—but the structure or model of the agon is central to the determination of “who will” or “who should” rule: one might defeat all comers in the utilization of wealth and/or one might reign victorious by a greater number of votes. The key element in any genuine political practice is that authority must be won or wrested from others who also contend for authority. To the extent we believe that a body politic without any form of agon is not a political body at all but a tyrant’s hydra, the agon has come to represent not only the right to dissent or the freedom to engage in debate, but also the means by which these rights and freedoms are collectively resolved when and where they come into conflict.^[47] That is, if we believe that politics demands difference and that difference entails conflict, the continuing virtue or value of the agon is that it enacts “fair” and “reasonable” methods of resolving conflict. We owe this “mentality” and its continuing practices to the ancient Greeks, the “kings of contest,” who brought winning and losing to the pulse of political life.

I question, however, whether the agon genuinely guarantees the rights and freedoms we have come to ascribe to it. The resolution of conflict by means of a contest, by means of a competition that determines who wins from who loses, also works to discourage the continuation of disagreement that initially gave rise to conflict or dissent. That is, resolution by contest can only occur in the absence of dissent because resolution enacts the end of dispute, the rendering of a decision or the reaching of a consensus. Regardless of our means of determining political contests, from the numerical counting of hands to the more complicated statistical probabilities of Bohr’s

model, judgments about “who wins” and “who loses” mandate some agreement for the purposes of drawing a conclusion or making a decision in a timely manner. From this perspective, there is actually nothing about the agon, in concept or practice, which necessitates or even supports the development of debate. Rather the agon is often used to stifle debate in order to expedite decision-making practices. In this way, the continuing virtue or value of the agon is shown in terms of its efficiency.

“Efficiency,” however, is a specifically procedural value, and its particular significance for politics arises in terms of how—or how quickly—decisions are made. Hence, it is not by practicing dissent, engaging in debates, or theorizing and deliberating that political decisions are actually made. Decisions are made through the practices and processes of a specific type of judgment, one reduced to articulating a choice that has already been determined by the oppositional structure of the agon, that is, we judge between this or that one. In this way, political decisions have become procedural while dissent and debate have remained substantive. This distinction marks the difference between what causes debate and the result of debate, between the content of dissenting opinions and the way opinions are resolved: “Any political activity . . . refers to two types of matter: the substance of the issue and the procedure by which the issue will be resolved.”^[48] It is only by determining between right and wrong action, or just and unjust policy, that any democratically decided action becomes actionable, becomes law, and this includes, of course, laws mandating who should rule, and who should not. “The issue of government is largely a means of solving . . . the problem of the procedure for conflict resolution.”^[49] In the ancient assembly as now, the agon serves as the model of procedural resolution. Even when the “agon itself is questioned” as a viable means of resolution^[50] criticism is levied from the perspective that contests should resolve conflicts and will provide for agreement. And so there is nothing wrong with the agon, rather its failure in a specific instance is the exception that proves the rule.

In lieu of the more complicated task of judgment about

substantive issues, issues like immigration, market regulation, campaign reform, and same-sex marriage, our debates about such issues are often institutionalized in an oppositional structure in order that they may be contested. As archaic as it might sound, we continue to decide substantive issues in terms of “yay” or “nay,” not because we expect to reach total agreement, quite the contrary we expect that “while some will win, some will lose.” But this means that in place of “an institution that accommodates dissent”^[51] we have institutionalized a practice that, in some sense, ignores or avoids real dissent. If “our political coexistence, as subjects or citizens, depends upon being able to agree about practices while disagreeing about their justification,”^[52] then the practice that determines the existence of all other practices is the agon: this we can agree upon, the contest is king.

Yet it is here, at the level of practice, that the real failure of the agon is revealed. If the agon is—as Lloyd says—ongoing, then any resolution enacted by contest is temporary. A decision to tighten immigration policies and practices today may be appealed or overturned tomorrow. In this way, the resolution of conflict through the oppositional structure of the contest is a short-term way of seeming to gain control of what has then become “dissenting” opinion. Those who disagree with a resolution and/or its enactment are those who are now in a position of dissent, they are those who “lost.” Although those who lose might attempt to reverse a decision and eventually win, the symbolic and material costs of losing are in direct proportion to the symbolic and material gains of winning. From a practical and historical perspective, “winning” often creates a certain amount of cultural capital that makes it more difficult for those who lost to sustain their original momentum in relation to the costs of dissent. That is, once judgment is rendered and a choice is made, those who disagree with the choice find themselves in a dissenting position. From this position, however, dissenters contend with the apparent voice of the Many—or the voice of the Most—that voice that, historically and ideologically, contests are put into place in political practice to guarantee is

heard. But because contests are always oppositional, they do not allow for multiple perspectives and multiple voices. That is, because the agon is binary, the parameters of what constitutes dissent are always in relation to what constitutes agreement, that is, the “winning” choice. Alternatively, in a genuine dialogue about substantive issues, no one is in a position of dissent or agreement since the issue is open and undecided. Since the agon is also ongoing, however, no issues are ever genuinely open or undecided. The choice to dissent, including the content of dissent, is predetermined and constrained by the position and content of the non-dissenting choice. And so even from a position of dissent, contests continue to enact the domination of One perspective, One view, and One judgment over the Many regardless of the perspectives, views, and substantive judgments of the actual Many.

On the other hand, if the agon does allow for a long-term resolution, such resolution marks the end of the agon. To draw from an obvious example, the Declaration of Independence can be considered a long-term resolution, a document effecting a new political organization founded upon the “victory” of Northern European colonists to live free of England’s sovereign lands and rule. But the devastating paradox of both short-and long-term resolutions is that, as praxis, the agon can be and often is manipulated by those whose authority on substantive issues is simply asserted or purchased rather than won, that is, who counts as an “immigrant” and a “colonist” in both instances depends upon who has gained the authority to count. While Lloyd is correct that contests enact a struggle for authority, those who do not enter the agon as well as those who cannot enter the agon simply do not count: it is still the case that the criteria that determine “a worthy field” are the same that determine the worth of citizenry and—due to its binary structure—no contest can determine the worth of an individual without simultaneously deeming another unworthy.

From this perspective, the competitive ethos attributed to the warrior-aristocrats of archaic Greece has remained essentially aristocratic. Regardless of how many people enter

the field, the purpose of the contest is to invariably reduce the field until one group, one position, one voice, or one person “carries the day.” To the extent contests continue to divide and subdivide citizenry from one another, the robust sense of equality sufficient to the expectations and practices of a genuine democracy will remain for us, as for them, unimaginable. The difference, perhaps, between then and now consists of the ways a sense of equality is constructed or derived from the development of longstanding social and political practices. That is, whether the “invention of democracy” is rightly attributed to the governing structures of classical Athenian life, we continue to associate classical Athens with democratic practices and conversely. The idea of “one citizen, one vote,” and each vote counting, is central to the organization of Athenian *ekklesia*. How equality and the *agon* figure—or do not—in a *politeia* named for the “calling out” of its citizens is a story that continues to be told and retold by historians, classicists, and cultural studies scholars today. The purpose of retelling a contemporary version of the story here is to trouble the role the *agon* is often assumed to play, particularly with regard to the “egalitarian spirit” supported, sustained, and apparently created by the ancients’ “agonistic conception of social life.”^[53]

THE HISTORY OF AGON

When Aristotle writes that all “forms of association seem to be parts of political association,” (NE 8.1160a9) he is saying that, at least by the classical era, the *polis*—in terms of who comprises it, and who does not—has come to be a determining factor in all social relationships. Even though the function of *agon* as a determining factor in political relationships is not explicit in Aristotle’s evaluation, our statements to the effect that “For the Greeks, a human being was not just a ‘political’ animal . . . but a competitive one as well”^[54] strengthen the impression that the ancient Greeks’ “combative approach to social relations” is inextricably tied to the historical

development of classical democracy. The question is whether and what role the agon actually does play in the emergence of *demokratia* from the social relationships of archaic and Hellenic Greece. According to Oswyn Murray, the classical forms of sociality that would concern Aristotle are “developments and adaptations of earlier forms,” that is archaic forms. Aristotle’s “politicization of social forms,” then, is “not entirely new.”^[55] Rather, what changes in social relationships between archaic and classical Greece “lies more in the complexity of inter-relationships between different types of association than in the subordination of one type to any other” (234). So the task becomes one of piecing together how and why complicated social relationships develop as political relationships rather than assuming that the establishment of the polis dominates, or obliterates, pre-existing forms of sociality. Murray, for one, suggests that there are forms of “political sociality” that predate the classical era and these forms evolve rather than disappear. If the agon is, indeed, a pre-existing form of political sociality we can expect that it, too, will evolve.

According to many scholars, the earliest evidence of “political sociality” can be found within Mycenaean palace-culture, a culture that 1) represents the initial development of delegation in terms of administrative power and function, but does so 2) within a monarch-centered or imperial model of royal rule that resembles ancient Near Eastern cultures.^[56] While the Mycenaean model exemplifies absolute power embodied in the figure of the monarch, it also illustrates a system of “palace dignitaries” or palace administrators whose bonds of allegiance were personally to the king rather than politically to service of the state. Hence, power is delegated to and through some, although absolute power is embodied by the king who figures “at the apex of the social structure” (29).

Based upon decipherment of Linear B tablets, this monarch is called a *wanax*. As the pivotal figure of Mycenaean palace-culture, the position and function of a *wanax* is “quasi-divine,” he is literally “lord over all” and his power in image and deed is manifested through all social levels and functions. Vernant

explains how “many Indo-European myths of sovereignty” present the king or lord as a person who represents “the various functional classes that made up society” (42). Since the sovereign embodies all social classes and functions, he does not appropriately belong to any of them, rather “all equally found in him the source of the virtues by which they defined themselves” (42). Conflicts between various functions, say a clash between seasonal religious rites and seasonal agricultural demands, are reconciled and resolved, that is, “integrated,” in the singular figure and power of the wanax. Within such a system, the only need for an agon would seem to arise at the end or collapse of a ruling genos (lineage) because in a sovereign system a “crisis of succession” implies a crisis of cultural survival. Although the wanax is surrounded and supported by various dignitaries to whom he delegates authority, their areas of specialization often overlap: “we see in the palace-centered economy a lack of precision in administrative assignments” (27). In Mycenaean palace-culture, there are no clearly defined divisions between administrative tasks that characterize the models of “bureaucratic royalty” or “feudal monarchy” more familiar to pre-modern and modern governments. And so the Mycenaean system appears to be unusual, blending the absolute power of the monarch with a group of dignitaries given authority to do his bidding, although their bonds of personal allegiance translate haphazardly to their political or administrative functions.

As history attests, the concepts and practices that support the Mycenaean wanax did not survive the Dorian invasions: “Neither in mainland Greece nor in Ionia, where a new wave of colonists in flight from the Dorian invasion had begun to settle, is any trace of a royal power of the Mycenaean type to be found” (40–41). Instead of a “crisis of succession” at what we might call a “political” level—who will rule—survivors of Dorian invasion seem to experience something like a crisis of specialization at what we might call a practical level—who will do what, who will officiate between ourselves and the gods, who will fight in order to defend, protect, or acquire territory, and who will provide and manage our food supply? Since conflicts and clashes between

various specializations and social functions can no longer be integrated in the figure of the king, early Athenians were concerned with a different set of social problems that are echoed in their earliest legends: “The Athenian legends . . . were concerned with an inverse process: a crisis of succession which, instead of being settled by the victory of one claimant over the others and the concentration of all *arche* in his hands, led to a division of sovereignty, each claimant appropriating to himself one aspect of power and leaving the rest to his brothers” (43).

Enter the warrior-aristocrats, the *gene* or groups characterized by chiefs such as Agammenon and lords like Achilles. These aristocratic “chiefs” represent a “division of sovereignty” similar to the division of administrative functions among Mycenaean palace dignitaries. But lacking a central figure of authority and power, chiefs must resolve functions that overlap as well as tasks that oppose one another. The competing claims of “priest, soldier, and farmer” demand the development of practices that distribute and apportion social functions that are often simultaneously at odds. Vernant observes, “The emphasis was no longer on a single person who dominated social life, but on a multiplicity of functions that opposed each other and thus called for a reciprocal apportionment and delimitation” (43). Enter the *agon*, perhaps, as a practice to delimit and apportion the “exclusive functions” of “heterogeneous elements” that “were nevertheless expected to blend and coalesce” (45). Looking forward to more formalized decision making practices, Vernant writes that: “The election system . . . implied a new conception of power: *arche* was delegated every year by a human decision, through a choice that presupposed confrontation and discussion” (42).

So, the picture we have of developing *politeia* is thus: In the absence of a singular quasi-divine figure, a “master of truth” who proclaims to the Many the just and the good, the Many can now choose for themselves through practices of “confrontation and discussion.” In this way, the competitive ethos of aristocratic *gene* lives on in the practical demands of developing

politeia: “This egalitarian spirit at the very heart of an agonistic conception of social life is a distinguishing feature of the Greek warrior-aristocrats, and it played a part in casting the idea of power in new terms” (47). These new terms and conceptions of power are supported by the creation of new forms of public spaces: the agora becomes “the communal space and seat of the hestia koine (the central or public hearth),” in the place of the royal citadel are temples inviting and “open to public worship,” and “on the ruins of the palace” comes the acropolis, “consecrated to its gods, the community itself was now projected on the sacred plane” (48). These new open spaces encourage “full exposure given to the most important aspects of social life” (51), including the developing practices of “confrontation and discussion” that we recognize as prerequisite to rituals of political debate and election. In sum, what was once the exclusive domain of a wanax, or the prerogative of aristocratic gene, expands outward, literally “opening to an ever widening circle” the foundational and criterial element of democratic decision making, choice, apparently made possible by the agon:

Indeed, politics too had the form of agon: an oratorical contest, a battle of arguments whose theatre was the agora, the public square, which had been a meeting place before it was a marketplace. Those who contended with words, who opposed speech with speech, became in this hierarchical society a class of equals. As Hesiod would later observe, all rivalry, all eris, presupposes a relationship of equality: competition can take place only among peers. (46–47)

My question concerns that “relationship of equality” presupposed by eris, that is, how is it possible that “competition can take place only among peers”? If contests only occur between persons who are equal, then the results of contests—who wins, who loses—are less significant than the contest itself. In fact, the contest itself seems superfluous since neither contestant can be rightly said to be inferior or superior—they

are “peers.” Although someone wins, this would not change their standing in relation to the one who loses because in order to compete in the first place competitors must be equal. But then what is the mark and measure of this equality? How, given their “combative approach to social relations,” do the ancient Greeks conceive of themselves as a “class of equals”? If it is due to the contest, then does this mean the field of contest is open to all? Or, rather, in the vocabulary of the contest, what are the criteria that determine the worthiness of “a worthy field”?

In proto-political practices the material “field” seems to be constituted in two ways, 1) by what is shared in common, that is a common object or “good,” and 2) by those persons who share this “object” and encircle it rather than take individual possession of it. Hence, the double meaning of “field”: it comprises the space defined or marked off by the location of a common good and the persons who shape or form the perimeter around this space. Since a field is characterized by what it contains as well as the persons who share a claim to its content, a truly open field or open space is clearly a misnomer: a field constitutes a boundary or border between who and what is inside and who and what is outside. Moreover, while persons who embody the field might be said to have equal claim to its object, the common good, contests between these persons invariably divide the field and its object.

Perhaps a more genuine sense of equality—the type of equality presupposed in all eris—can be found in the practices that determine an object or good as common. Marcel Detienne has also expanded upon these new representations of “open” spaces, highlighting the significance of the center, *en meson*, to the development of political practices. In the epics and the Histories, the practice of placing property in the center signifies “both in the allocation of prizes and in the distribution of booty” the persistence of the idea that goods placed at the center are goods that are “held in common” and are “public”: “At every level, in the athletic games, in the booty distribution, and in the assembly, what was central was always both submitted to the public gaze and shared in common. The complementary

characteristics of centrality were publicity and common sharing.”^[57] Publicity and common sharing are also elements of a new type of speech evolved from the “warrior dialogue speech” of the epics. As we have seen, the variety of agon in the Iliad includes passages of persuasive speech such as the opening exchange between Achilles and Agammenon. The possibility of such an exchange suggests an underlying value of *homoioi*, a pre-political understanding of warrior groups as “a group of equals.” Detienne explains:

In warrior assemblies, speech was a common right, a *koinon* set down “in the middle.” Each individual could exercise this right when his turn came, with the agreement of his peers. Standing at the center of an assembly, an orator found himself equally distant from all his listeners, and each listener found himself, ideally at least, in a position of equality and reciprocity vis-a-vis the speaker. (99)

In this way, the “egalitarian spirit at the very heart of an agonistic conception of social life” lives on in the practices of debate and decision making characteristic of the classical Athenian *ekklesia*: citizens standing or sitting upon the original hill focus their attention to the middle, that space for speech about what is “held in common,” that is, the common good. Although one person speaks, he speaks about what is shared by all, and—importantly—“with the agreement of his peers,” another person might contest his speech. Contesting speech for speech might amount to contention about what comprises the common good, in general or particular. The particular topics of speech, the subjects to be debated and voted upon, are brought to the middle as proposals by the Council of Five Hundred. The persons who embody this Council are drawn by annual lottery from the thirty-nine demes that comprise greater Athens. The “radically democratic” character of the Council would seem to ensure the radically democratic character of topics brought to the middle, and so, in this sense, the field is open to whatever is proposed for confrontation and discussion. Hence, the

significance of the middle to this model of political speech reinforces the idea of a group of citizens as a “group of equals.” The measure and mark of ancient Greek political equality, publicity and common sharing is evident in patterns that evolve from pre-political “warrior-speech” to properly political speech, that is, speech that is a common right for every citizen of the emerging polis as it was a common right for every warrior in warrior assemblies.^[58]

Still, there is nothing about this evolving model of warrior-speech with its object in the middle that suggests or sustains a genuine plurality of choice. Although political pluralism would seem to be the necessary result of configuring citizens as potential orators in positions of equality and reciprocity to one another, public spaces constructed around or about a center where problems and interests are brought to the middle are spaces that demand a singular focus or perspective. This demand for a singular focus or perspective actually defeats the apparent purpose of openness by locating and defining what is shared. That is, if the initial configurations of classical democracy had been authentically open, then there would have been no middle or center because possible foci within genuinely open spaces are multiple and de-centered, allowing the eye to wander and rest where it may. But congregation around or about the middle actually commands our view to a common point and in so doing commands our attention away from positions of equality and reciprocity in relation to one another. Since “we never look at just one thing; we are always looking at the relation between things and ourselves,”^[59] the demand of the middle is a thinly veiled demand to turn away from one another and toward the center, to look away from the actual relations between ourselves and to substitute for those relations a common object.

Then, by virtue of the agon, our relations to that object will be determined by that proposal receiving the greatest number of votes. That winning proposal becomes a bill, and that bill becomes a proclamation chiseled upon stele in the agora. Hence, what is determined as common and good is that object

that rises victorious from the middle. Those who voted against, or abstained from voting, will bear no discernible relation to that object, and are no longer in a position of equality and reciprocity to it or to one another. To the contrary, again by virtue of the agon, each proclamation divides the social body into winners and losers, into those who properly share, and those who do not, in the common good.

To further complicate matters, these practices of “confrontation and discussion” said to be sufficient to *demokratia* no more provide the conditions for democracy than for other “alternating forms of government,” including aristocracy, tyranny, and the fluctuating “interregnum” governments between: “Despite their different names, often due to the viewpoint of the person describing them, these forms were actually very difficult to distinguish from one another.”^[60] Throughout the archaic era, a *tyrannos*—like an *archon*—is a chosen leader of the people who contends for power and authority on their behalf, that is, on behalf of the common good.^[61] But not every citizen can be chosen *tyrannos* because not every citizen is free to speak on behalf of the common good. Although every citizen possesses a “right” to speak, every citizen must wait upon “the agreement of his peers” to exercise this “right.” Hence, then as now, the “freedom” to speak is always already delimited by the judgments of those to whom we speak. In this way, what seems egalitarian in the model of warrior-speech translates to what is non-egalitarian in the practice of Athenian *ekklesia*: “Precisely because of the ideal of openness, places of debate become highly charged and important to control. Setting up an assembly or an agon, then, is an act that is not simply descriptive, but prescriptive: it makes a difference what kind of debate is established, when, where, it takes place, and who does it.”^[62]

Perhaps, then as now, it is the purpose of the agon to distinguish between those who only appear equal. Celebrated as an egalitarian practice, contests actually have no share in any type of genuine equality because contests differentiate between those who contend in terms of victory and loss. Moreover, like

the imposition of the middle upon an otherwise open space, the agon increasingly narrows a possible plurality of voices and choices, first to an oppositional structure, an either/or, and then finally to a “One,” that one choice carried by that one voice. In this way, the figure of the One still commands the eyes and ears of the Many, dominating if not from on high then from the middle. Far from encouraging or maintaining social unity, the agon demonstrates a shallow appeal in practice to a principle that contradicts it—*homoioi*—or political decision making demonstrates the superficial hold of this principle in light of its opposing and pervasive practice—the agon. Either way, the result is the same: the agon is not conducive to an egalitarian ethos but is actually that which disrupts equality in the social body.

NOTES

1. I follow Jean-Pierre Vernant’s use of the phrase “warrior-aristocrats” in *The Origins of Greek Thought* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982) to refer to the kings or chiefs of legend or myth, that is, Odysseus is lord of Ithaca, Menelaus king of Sparta. Vernant stresses that the initial Greek model does resemble the Hittite model as part of a general “Indo-European pattern.” He explains, “Together with the units under their command, they formed the *pankus*, the assembly that represented the Hittite community—that is, brought together the body of warriors, as distinct from the rest of the population, according to the Indo-European pattern, in which the warrior is set apart from the villager, the herdsman, and the farmer. These warrior-aristocrats constituted a separate class, and at least the chief of its members were supported on their holdings by peasants bound to the land” (26). While the chiefs are “supported” by the peasants, Vernant cautions against modernizing the *pankus*, seeing this pattern as indicative of feudalism, for instance.
2. Cf: Oswyn Murray, *Early Greece* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993): “The period was best described . . . as ‘the age of agonal man’. The agon or contest was rooted in the competitive ethic of Homeric man which sustained his role of military champion; but in the archaic age it was transformed into a cultural activity—the contest for its own sake as a form of conspicuous display. Merit and birth were equated: the word ‘aristocracy’ itself meant ‘the rule of the best men,’ and their *arête* (excellence) was proved by success in contest” (202).
3. Discussed in chapter 2, the “natural” superiority of Zeus is not clear. In *The Gods of the Greeks* (London: Thames & Hudson Ltd., 2000), C. Keryeni suggests that if we follow Homer, Zeus is said to be Kronos’ oldest son, if we follow Hesiod, it is

emphasized that he is the youngest son of Rhea and Kronos, 22ff.

4. Vernant, *Origins*, 24ff.

5. Joseph Roisman, "Rhetoric, Manliness and Contest" in *A Companion to Greek Rhetoric*, ed. Ian Worthington (Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2007), 393.

6. Nicholas F. Jones, *Politics and Society in Ancient Greece* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2008), 56.

7. Roisman, "Rhetoric, Manliness," 402.

8. Elton T. E. Barker, *Entering the Agon: Dissent and Authority in Homer, Historiography, and Tragedy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), v.

9. One cannot help but think of Nietzsche's assessment of Homeric man (cf: "Homer on Competition" in *The Genealogy of Morals*) in relation to what might alternatively be called the virtues" of the agon.

10. Discussed in chapter 3, this refers to the idea that xenoï somehow compete in the value of their gifts to one another.

11. Troubling competitive, that is, "masculinist" or "binary," values is not a new idea, and one of its most significant expressions can be found in Chela Sandoval's writing on "differential consciousness" in "The Differential Form of Consciousness and Social Movement" in *Methodology of the Oppressed* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 58ff.

12. I am drawing a distinction between "radical" or "direct" democracy and contemporary representative democracy, but the distinction is apparently as old as it is often unheeded. In *Democracy Ancient & Modern* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1985) M.I. Finley writes that Aristotle is clear about the difference between selection by "lot" and election by vote: "Elections, said Aristotle (*Pol.*, 1300b4-5), are aristocratic, not democratic: they introduce the element of deliberate choice, of selection of the 'best people,' the *aristoi*, in place of government by all the people" 19-20.

13. See also Walter Burkert's discussions of "the number of things which the Greeks can turn into a contest" in *Greek Religion* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985), 105-107, and specifically 232-35 for contests during civic religious festivals.

14. Hanna M. Roisman, "Right Rhetoric in Homer" in *A Companion to Greek Rhetoric*, 430.

15. See Barker's discussion (Agon) of the early instance of Longinus who sets "up a public contest over his words" (2ff., *italics mine*) because, by the time of his composition it seems "natural" that the public reception of written words would be configured as an agon.

16. Barker, *Agon*, 8ff.

17. See Barker, *Agon*, 10, fnt 37.

18. Jean-Pierre Vernant, *Myth and Society in Ancient Greece* (New York: Zone Books, 1996), 29.

19. Cf: Jean-Pierre Vernant, *Myth and Society in Ancient Greece*, for paraphrase and discussion of the tale of Ares, Cadmos, and Harmonia, with the comment that: "In the

eyes of the Greeks it was not possible to isolate forces of discord from those of union either in the web of human relationships or in the constitution of the world" (31).

20. Keryeni, *Gods of the Greeks*, 16-17.

21. *Theogeny*, 154-84, translated and commentary by Richard S. Caldwell (Newburyport: MA: Focus Classical Library Group), 1987.

22. In *The Nature of Greek Myths* (New York: Penguin Books, 1974) G. S. Kirk concurs that chaos was not originally confusion or strife, 35ff.

23. See *A History of Greek Philosophy, Volume I* (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 1962), 167ff.

24. The following fragments are taken from Heraclitus (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987), translation and commentary by T. M. Robinson.

25. Aside from authors already mentioned, the scholarly record of the agon includes Gouldner (1965), Cartledge (2002), Goldhill (1991), Ehrenberg (1935), Poliakoff (1987), Weiler (1974), G. E. R. Lloyd (1987), and Sandywell (2000).

26. That is, given sayings like "a road up and down is one and the same road," (Fr. 60) and "the way of writing is straight and crooked," (Fr. 59), Heraclitus is credited with a commitment to teaching that any "x" has observable, opposite features or attributes when perceived at different times, in different ways, by different persons, etc.

27. Robinson, *Heraclitus*, 182-83.

28. Vernant, *Myth and Thought*, 29, and Barker, *Agon*, vii.

29. Joseph Roisman, "Rhetoric, Manliness," 393, characterizing Gouldner (1965).

30. Jones, *Politics*, 56.

31. Cf: "it is quite probable that athletic competition did indeed set many an Athenian on the path to victory in the agones of the democracy" (Jones, 89), as well as the agones of war. For another explanation of the relationship between war and athletics, cf: Leslie Kurke's "The Economy of Kudos" in *Cultural Poetics in Archaic Greece*, eds. Carol C. Dougherty and Leslie Kurke (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998) for an analysis of the story of Milos of Kroton, who "marched out to battle wearing his six Olympic crowns," 141.

32. Jones, *Politics*, 87.

33. Charles Segal, "Spectator and Listener" in *The Greeks*, ed. Jean-Pierre Vernant (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 190.

34. Joseph Roisman, "Rhetoric, Manliness," 394.

35. Joseph Roisman, "Rhetoric, Manliness," 394.

36. Claudia Barracchi, *Of Myth, Life, and War in Plato's Republic* (Indianapolis, IN: Indiana University Press, 2002), 13.

37. Vernant, *Origins*, p. 46.

38. Graham Shipley, "The Limits of War" in *War and Society in the Greek World*, eds. John Rich and Graham Shipley (New York: Routledge, 1995), 13.

39. Cf: Shipley's discussion for a variety of causes, aims, and outcomes of war.

40. Vernant, *Myth and Thought*, 29.

41. Barracchi, *Of Myth, Life*, writes this with specific reference to Plato's *Timaeus*, 144.
42. Joanne B. Waugh and Lisa Wilkinson, "Fleshing Out the Forms of Beauty: Socrates, Dialogue, and the Forms," in *Plato's Form; Varieties of Interpretation*, ed. William A. Welton, (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2002), 222.
43. Jones, *Politics*, p. 56
44. Gerard Naddaff, *The Greek Concept of Nature* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2005), 3.
45. Cf: Alan D. Schrift quoting Ernesto Laclau ("Nietzschean Agonism and the Subject of Radical Democracy," *Philosophy Today* 45 (2001):153-163, "A democratic society . . . is not one in which the 'best' content dominates unchallenged but rather one in which nothing is definitely acquired and there is always the possibility of challenge" (153).
46. Jones, *Politics*, 55.
47. Cf: Ellen Meiksins Wood, "Democracy: An Idea of Ambiguous Ancestry" in *Athenian Political Thought and the Reconstruction of American Democracy*, eds. J. Peter Euben, John R. Wallach, and Josiah Ober (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1994) 59-80, who compares ancient Athenian democracy to contemporary "liberalism," a dilution of the "democratic idea" described here: "The first premise of Athenian democracy was that the demos, and specifically people who were obliged to labor for their livelihood . . . were competent to make political judgments, not just elect their governors but to decide matters of substance" (78-9).
48. Jean Blondel, *Comparative Government: An Introduction* (Deddington, UK: Philip Alan, 1990), 8ff.
49. Blondel, *Comparative Government*, 8.
50. Barker, *Agon*, 7.
51. Barker, *Agon*, 15ff.
52. K. Anthony Appiah, *Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in a World of Strangers* (London: W.W. Norton & Co., 2007), 70.
53. Vernant, *Myth and Thought*, 29.
54. Jones, *Politics*, 55.
55. Oswyn Murray, "Forms of Sociality" in *The Greeks*, ed. Jean-Pierre Vernant, 234.
56. Vernant, *Origins*, 26ff. Hereafter references to page numbers will be included in parentheses in the text.
57. *Masters of Truth in Archaic Greece* (New York: Zone Books, 1996), 97-8.
58. On issues of "fairness" in determining the norms and results of contests in classical life, see Joseph Roisman, "Rhetoric, Manliness," 400ff.
59. John Berger, *Ways of Seeing* (London: BBC and Penguin Books, 1980), 9.
60. Luciano Canfora, "The Citizen" in *The Greeks*, ed. Jean-Pierre Vernant, 122.
61. *Early Greek Political Thought from Homer to the Sophists*, eds. Michael Gagarin and Paul Woodruff, (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 1997), xii.
62. Barker, *Agon*, 18-19.

Chapter 2

Non-Agonistic Practices

The perspective developed in the preceding chapter suggests that the agon simply cannot do everything it has been said, and asked, to do for our understanding of ancient Greek culture. “Though it has become axiomatic to think of ancient Greek society in terms of competition,”^[1] the agon is not central to—or even evident in—all ancient Greek creation stories, the agon cannot account for a comprehensive early Greek understanding of “nature,” and—significantly—the agon does not account for or provide the robust concept and practice of equality that does differentiate *demokratia* from other forms of ancient *politeia*.^[2] By this perspective, there must be other concepts and practices at work in ancient Greek thought and experience that are not agonistic yet just as significant to the growing demand for “social unity” that emerges from pre-Hellenic forms of political sociality.

In this chapter, I identify Greek “oral poetic performance” as an essentially non-agonistic practice, and I suggest that it is this practice more than any contest that inspires the type of social unity required for genuine *demokratia*. The perspective developed below suggests that oral poetic performance is, in principle and its initial practice, authentically egalitarian. Generation after generation, year after year, oral poets tell and aural audiences hear the “stories of gods and men,” and these stories form the collective memories of all of those who participate. The telling and hearing of the stories is a public event, an occasion, and it shares characteristics with other public events or occasions in the ancient world. Much as warriors participate in the expression of a shared, public victory, the occasion of oral poetic performance is an invitation to participate in the expression of a shared, public memory. And as warriors gather around the collected property of their battle, giving rise to what Detienne and others call “warrior-speech” or

“warrior dialogue,” poets and audiences gather to hear the songs of the Muses, giving rise to the common speech of cultural memory. A difference between the two practices—warrior speech or warrior dialogue on the one hand, and oral poetic performance on the other—is the absence of the idea that the songs of the Muses need to be apportioned, divided, or disputed, in any way even though the stories or the songs of gods and men are considered a “gift,” according to Hesiod, they are the Muses’ “gifts toward humanity.”

Of all the “shared property” and “common objects” the Greeks bring to “the middle”—*en meson*—from the spoils of battle to proposals at the Pnyx, the gifts of the Muses seem to be the most common and genuinely shared of all. And so, oral poetic performance—from the perspective of those who sing as well as those who hear—sustains and preserves what is truly considered “public property” for millennia. Its continuing practice as an oral and aural tradition throughout Magna Graecia, long after the introduction of the Greek alphabet and a developing technology of writing emerge, suggests that there are certain values inherent to such a practice that are not easily, or willingly, dismissed from public life.

I am interested in exploring these values from the vantage of, primarily, the poet and audience, those who receive the songs—the gifts—of the Muses. Unlike the spoils of victory, the songs of the Muses have not been won or claimed through any contest. The Muses are “concordant of heart,” “no care troubles their spirits,” and their “gifts toward humanity” seem to serve as reminders of this sensibility to all who hear. Is it possible that the continuing practice of gathering for the stories inspires a robust sense of “equality and reciprocity” that is echoed, but not sustained, in other ancient practices?

If, as has been inferred from Hesiod, we can believe that “all rivalry, all *eris*, presupposes a relationship of equality,” then we have to wonder where this equality comes from. As I have tried to show, it cannot come from the *agon*, for in a very basic way contests depend upon a prior or previous understanding of equality that, as I have also tried to show, is neither sustained

nor preserved by the practice of contests. The riddle of the agon seems to be this: while the agon might be driven by an implicit sense of equality between contenders, the agon explicitly demands inequality as its outcome, the victory of one in contrast to the defeat of the other. In this way, social unity is fractured by a practice that apparently accounts for social unity.

But rooting “social unity” in oral poetic practices also presents a number of possible objections and initial difficulties: 1) oral poetic performance is a “religious” practice, and so seeing it as a socially and politically affective practice challenges deep convictions against the blending or blurring of anything like “religion” and “politics” in modern minds; 2) it is widely held that archaic poets, like archaic prophets and priests, are accorded social advantages and a certain amount of prestige due to their abilities to access, as it were, the words or the will of the divine.^[3] Hence, poets and audiences are not in a position of “equality and reciprocity,” and the aristocratic sensibility that I suggest drives the adaptation of the agon to public life is also at work in the relationship between poets and public; 3) the stories are full of contests, and wandering bards are known to compete among themselves for glory and honor in the telling of the tales. As mentioned in the first chapter, poetic and recitative contests constitute a significant part of the documented competitive practices across Magna Graecia. If oral poetic practice is as egalitarian as I suggest, how could it become an occasion for contest?

In partial answer to the first objection, the social and political aspects of ancient Greek “religious” practices are well known. Jean-Pierre Vernant refers to ancient Greek religion as a “type of political religion” and others refer to it as a “civic religion,” suggesting the differences between our secular understanding of political life and the ancient Greeks’ less than completely secularized practices:

Religious life was an integral part of social and political life of which it is one aspect. Between the priesthood and the magistracy, there are less difference and opposition than

equivalence and reciprocity. The priesthood is a magistracy, and every magistracy has a religious side to it. There is no break, no discontinuity, between the gods and the city or between religious qualities and civic virtues. Impiety (asebeia), wronging the gods, is equally an affront to the social group, a crime against the city.^[4]

Yet if this is the case, then the practices we identify as “religious” have as much import for the development of civic practices as practices we prefer to identify as irreligious or less religious, practices like the Panathenaia, the Olympiad, the Karneia, and all the varieties and dimensions of “war” which no Greek would participate in or express as devoid of “religious” significance. From this it need not follow, however, that the early Greeks recognize and abide by anything resembling a modern theocracy. In order to have a theocracy one must possess a theology, and this is something the early Greeks do not possess. Theology develops from the interpretation of sacred text, and while “the stories of gods and men” are, in their own way, sacred, they are not text: rather, they are sustained and preserved in a speech practice that is not easily or desirably duplicated in writing. And so part of this chapter attempts to illuminate the particular characteristics of ancient Greek “political religion” as a primarily narrative religion, and the early Greek gods as primarily narrativized deities. Where narratives repeat or overlap we might find something like “consistency” or “coherence” attributed to the actions of individual gods and heroes, but it is a consistency regulated by plot more than concept, and action more than idea.

The actions of the gods, plural, communicate a sense of the presence, or absence, of the divine. On this account, what the early Greeks consider sacred is also plural. While pluralism is necessary to narrative, it is not compatible with theological concepts like “omniscience” or “omnipotence”: “The existence of omnipotence clearly excludes the possibility of narrative, which requires a plurality of agents whose deeds and intentions act upon one another to produce the events of the story.”^[5]

In partial answer to the second objection, and as discussed below, while I do not agree that early Greek gods are “agents,” Mario Vegetti’s insights above into early Greek “religion” are increasingly relevant to understanding its practice. As a narrative practice, the relationships between poets and audiences do not easily map onto models of, say, one speaking the “truth” about the divine for the enlightenment of the many. The poet fulfills a social function with regard to these stories, true, but so too do those who hear the stories. Moreover, according to the stories, the Muses’ “gifts toward humanity” include gifts to the audience that are, in effect, indistinguishable from their gifts to the poet. And so, within the stories that are told as well as the occasion of their telling, poets and audiences are equal in relation to one another: they are not identical or interchangeable, but both are, I suggest, indispensable in terms of the reciprocity that structures the event.

Relying upon a comment in Aristotle’s *Poetics*, Paul Veyne compares the “essence of myth” as it is understood in classical Athenian tragedy and what I will call the “essence of poetry” as it constitutes the content of oral poetic performance, the “what” of what the poet says. Veyne writes:

The essence of myth is not that everyone knows it but that it is supposed to be known and is worthy of being known by all . . . the Athenian public were aware of the existence of the mythical world in which the tragedies took place, but they did not know the details of the stories . . . The tragic poet took care to reveal everything to his audience, just as if he had invented his plot. But the poet did not place himself above his public, since myth was supposed to be known. He did not know anymore about it than they did. He was not writing learned literature.^[6]

In partial answer to the third objection, if the oral poet did not “place himself above his public” it is because the public would not place the poet above themselves. This does not preclude poets from competing among themselves in terms of

the artistry of their performances. As Hesiod says, there is a type of competition that “pushes the shiftless man to work,” (20) to want to attain what his neighbor has, thus,

. . . potter is potter’s enemy, and
Craftman is craftman’s
Rival; tramp is jealous of tramp,
And singer of singer.^[7]

So a potter is not a rival of a singer, nor does a craftsman compete with a potter. Those who are “rivals” in *Works and Days*, are those who engage in the same type of task—potter to potter, singer to singer. But between those who sing and those who hear, it is difficult to ascertain what possible contest could arise. Moreover, from the fact that poets and audiences are not rivals it does not follow that they are not equals. Rather, relying on the story of the advent of oral poetry, I show how the absence or lack of rivalry between poet and audience is configured within the aegis of Zeus and Mnemosyne, the “parents” of the Muses. What the Muses do, their “mode of action,” is understood in terms of their genealogy and vice versa, as is the case for all narrativized gods. What the Muses do, then, cannot be separated from who the Muses are, “singers of harmonies.”

The significance of oral poetic performance, what we can discern of it, must come from the initial social function of the stories rather than from what becomes of the stories, that is, the “learned literature” of classical Athens. My focus in this chapter, then, is less upon the content of the stories—what the stories mean—than upon their occasion and what the occasion means. In order to create a conceptually clear account of the practice, I attempt to answer a variety of questions beginning with “Who and what is Zeus?” His titles and epithets are said to “include almost everything a Greek held sacred,” but since almost everything that can be said is said of Zeus, how are we to understand an ancient sense of sacred? I briefly explicate the four terms used for “sacred” in ancient Greece in order to illustrate how different ancient Greek “religious” practices are from modern practices. Based on these differences, I suggest

we can begin to understand how ancient Greek “religious” practices sustain “equality and reciprocity” among its practitioners without sacrificing or subsuming the worth or dignity of each member of the social body to the One. Oral poetic performance is capable of doing this, I further submit, because its form and content are oral and narrative. While narratives might portray contests, narrative structure is pluralistic rather than binary, and so narrative cannot be reduced to or categorized as an agon. In this way, I suggest early Greek “religious” practices are inclusive rather than exclusive, and offer a model for other non-agonistic practices to come.

WHO AND WHAT IS ZEUS?

Not often acknowledged in lists of his attributes and epithets, Zeus is “Father” of the Muses, that is, like justice, sovereignty, and victory, the Muses are said to be “of Zeus.” Yet, who and what is Zeus? To a certain extent answers to this question depend upon the sources consulted and within these sources which attributes and epithets of Zeus are emphasized. Some tell us that Zeus is essentially a weather-god similar to other ancient Near-Eastern weather-gods, and some tell us that Zeus is primarily a god of order, a divine sovereign overseeing the relationships and customs that comprise archaic and ancient Greek forms of life.^[8] Yet whichever aspect of Zeus is considered to be the most important, and for what reasons, most would agree that the variety and dimension of powers or actions attributed to Zeus are the most comprehensive of all in the Olympic pantheon. Zeus is, in a way, the most general of all the gods, his name is associated, at one time or another, with almost all natural and cultural phenomena.^[9]

According to Burkert, Zeus is “the Sky Father” and “strongest of the gods,” he emerges victorious and is “king,” anax or basileus. Yet, according to Keryeni, as Basileus, Zeus “had more to do with the depths than with the sky.”^[10] Hence, Zeus is “above and below,” or, perhaps “below and above,” that

is, he is “everywhere.” Zeus is also attributed “inexhaustible sexual potency” and is called “Father” by men and gods alike. He is “Gamelios, ‘God of Marriage,’ Teleios, ‘Giver of Completeness,’ and Heraios, ‘the Zeus of Hera’.” Zeus is said to have a “planning mind, noos,” an “impartiality” of judgment and apportionment: as “Boulaios he was the metietes, the god of good counsel who helps those who consult him.” Similar to “good counsel,” justice is also attributed to Zeus: “Justice is of Zeus, Dios dika.” Because “he is worshipped everywhere,” individual cities do not claim Zeus as their “god” yet still he is called Polieus, god of the city, and “Ktesios, ‘Protector of Property.’” Beyond the city proper, Zeus “has a special concern for the relations which bind strangers to one another: guests, suppliants, and those bound by oaths—Zeus Xenios, Hikesios, and Horkios.” Zeus is also Soter, “the Saviour,” and as “Meilichios, the god who could be appeased with honey, the kindly god of the depths, he appeared in the form of a serpent.” Finally, “Chthonios, or Katachthonios, [refer] to Zeus’s second, dark sphere, which was contrasted with his upper, bright realm of the sky and Olympus” (117). Hence, who and what Zeus is not only depends upon what is said of Zeus, but what is said of him in which aspect and in which story. He is god of the sky, god of the depths, god of light and dark; he is god of victory, god of judgment, god of kings, god of gods and god of mortals; he is god of property, god of good counsel, god of forethought, god of limits, god of justice, god of cities, and god of all “human communities, races and fellowships, even including those . . . seeking protection” (117), that is, Zeus is god of those outside the community, strangers, beggars, or anyone “in need.”

If there is a connecting thread through all of these attributes and epithets, it might be that Zeus is somehow above all factions and divisions: “only someone who respects his ordinances in a dispute with an equal can be called just; Zeus stands above all disputes.”^[11] This is to say justice is of Zeus, but Zeus himself is neither just nor unjust, Dios dika. Rather he seems to be designated as a principle—or a “power”—that makes justice possible. And this means that whatever is said of

Zeus is not necessarily personified in him. As Jean-Pierre Vernant writes, “The Greek gods are powers, not persons”^[12] and these powers do not exist as singular, irreducible entities the way “persons” and “personhood” exist for us. Unlike a power attributed to a human being, divine power intersects or overlaps depending upon the story, or its versions, in relation to all of the stories taken together. In this way, divine power “exists only by virtue of the network of relationships that makes it a part of the divine system as a whole. And within this network, it is not necessarily a single entity but can equally well be plural, either an indefinite plurality or a fixed number of figures” (360) that configure a divine power or action.

For the early Greeks, there is no contradiction between the attributes and epithets of “many Zeuses” and the “unity” of Zeus, for Zeus is conceived not as a person but as a power, and power is expressed in actions. That is, power is an “action,” it does something, and gods understood as powers are gods who necessarily act. Zeus, then, might be the sum of all actions attributed to him in the stories, and an early Greek, “would have no difficulty in conceiving unity of action divorced from any unity of person”^[13] when it comes to “supernatural beings.”

Still, a key to understanding the significance of Zeus and his place in the Olympian pantheon concerns not just how early Greeks conceive of supernatural beings, but invariably why the divine system is conceived the way it is: what purpose do these, perhaps, “indefinitely plural” powers serve for millennia? Some suggest that a plurality of gods or powers provides the flexibility required to unite heterogeneous local traditions into something like a pan-Hellenic tradition:

What we call Ancient Greece was in fact a loose network of several hundred city-states of varying size . . . One of the principal things that held this network together, however, was a loose pan-Hellenic *koinē* of mythological and genealogical traditions . . . Within these traditions, a balance was maintained between on the one hand a shared identity, epistomised in the canonical pan-Hellenic myths . . . and on

the other hand local traditions which needed to be explained by aetiologies within the context of the “big traditions.” Thus, one of the main functions of the shared cultural tradition was to provide an ideological fabric connecting the different Greek cities.^[14]

From the perspective of poets and audiences, we might add that it is the practice of *koinē* that connects different people prior to their sharing a cultural tradition. By this perspective, however, it seems more difficult to ascertain what is specifically Hellenic about these pan-Hellenic stories. Until such time as multiple and diverse stories are homogenized in “learned literature,” *koinē* constitutes a practice between persons, specifically between poets and audiences. Between persons, Zeus is articulated as a “who” who acts, not a “what” that expresses a power. According to Vernant, however, early Greeks make a seamless interchange between the “who” and the “what,” between a more concrete reference to a god and an abstract understanding of divinity. He explains this interchange in terms of Aphrodite: “Aphrodite is a beauty, a particular goddess, but at the same time she is beauty—what we would call the essence of beauty—that is, the power that is present in all beautiful things and through which they are made beautiful.”^[15] Perhaps not coincidentally, Plato’s forms are often explained in a similar way: a beautiful “x” is beautiful because it “participates” in the form of Beauty, or a just action is not Justice per se, but is just, or is made so, through the form or power of Justice, which is its “essence” or idea.

Early Greeks might make the seamless interchange Vernant suggests, but when it comes to some of the powers attributed to Zeus a concrete reference is difficult to supply. Although justice is attributed to Zeus, Zeus is not just. As “storm-gatherer,” Zeus might be the power that forces the storm, but he is not the storm; as god of victory the most significant agon are celebrated in his honor,^[16] yet he himself is free from contest, or at least free from most contests. Unlike other gods to whom certain attributes more positively or directly pertain, Ares

is warlike and Aphrodite is beautiful, Zeus is not directly identified by any one aspect or action other than the superlative most or best—Zeus is “the supreme god of all,”^[17] the “god of the Greeks par excellence,”^[18] “an all-embracing god of the universe,” “far above all other gods,” and “of the perfected (sic) the most perfect power.”^[19] And so Zeus is seemingly characteristic of all the gods, that is, he manifests a comprehensive sense of what the early Greeks consider divine. W. K. C. Guthrie writes that, “There is scarcely a department either of nature or of human life with which [Zeus] was not connected by his worshippers. This is reflected by the titles and epithets which they heaped upon him, and which include almost everything that a Greek held sacred.”^[20]

Although Guthrie does not expound upon the significance of the “sacred” to early Greek thought and experience, his phrasing yields insight into a difference between modern and ancient conceptions of the sacred. Zeus himself is not sacred in the modern sense of the term, but what is of Zeus, or attributed to him, can be considered sacred in a variety of ways. Of the four ancient Greek terms for “sacred”—hieros, hosios, and hagios/hagnos—the terms hagios/hagnos seem to have some association with the “Indo-European root for religious veneration, hag-. Increasingly, however, hag- terms are pushed into the background in Greek.”^[21] Since hag- terms generally refer to the actions and attitudes of religious veneration rather than the objects to be venerated, the infrequent use of hag-terms suggests that, for the early Greeks, subjective attitudes about veneration, that is, what constitutes appropriate feelings toward the gods, are less significant than figuring out “what” constitutes an appropriate object of veneration. While hagian, for instance, seems to highlight certain temples, festivals, and rites “by extolling them,” hagian also “means gradation, so it can be used in the superlative hagiotion,” signifying whatever rather than whoever is most deserving of veneration, most awe-inspiring and fascinating. In this way, hagios terms seem to allow for varying degrees of awe or fascination, or for a spectrum of attitudes and feelings concerning religious

veneration. While hagios terms do not convey the “juridical factor” of other terms for sacred, hagios terms do evoke the subjective response of a person in relation to a sacred presence. This means that unlike the Judeo-Christian hagios, ancient Greek hagios cannot be said of any god: it signifies the presence of the sacred in terms of one’s relation to it.

Only in early times and then only occasionally is hagiōtaton applied to persons, but confusing and yet significant difficulties arise through the “overlapping” or intersection of hag- terms with ag- terms, such as agos. Agos denotes the most foreboding affliction “which a man draws upon himself by breaking a taboo, especially through perjury, murder, or violation of asylum” (270). A person afflicted with agos as well as anyone else in contact with that person, are called enages.^[22] The only remedy for enages is purification which may, or may not, accomplish its task. Comparatively, a person who is euages is someone who “stands in good relation to the agos, and has nothing to fear.” Euages is similar in this way to hosios which can refer to someone who comes through initiation, someone who has accomplished certain rites and thereby “has nothing to fear.” Still, whether by phonetic accident or coincidence, similarities between hag- and ag- terms carry “semisiological consequences.” Burkert suggests that in early Greek understanding “sacred and dangerous are close together” (271), and this close association is nowhere more apparent than in terms derived from the ancient Greek hagnos.

Hagnos terms denote something or someone more appropriately “sacred” or “pure,” but sacred or pure in the sense of not being able to violate a taboo, for what or who is hagnos cannot succumb to or suffer agos. Things and persons, gods and men, rites and festivals, and even fire or light, can be called hagnos: it represents a family of terms that articulate a quality or characteristic of something or someone incapable of becoming miaros, “defiled, abominable, that which is repudiated with distaste and hate” (271). The subtlety of the term, however, can seem confusing when used in reference to a god or goddess. The “hagna theia, as such, are Demeter and

Persephone.” However much Demeter might appear chaste and aloof in her fasting and mourning, these “two goddesses, in myth and ritual, are brought into contact with sexuality and death more than other deity” (271). Yet, as Burkert explains, it is actually their close association with what is impure that qualify Demeter and Persephone as hagnotes, “it constitutes as it were a protective cloak which no indignity can penetrate.”^[23]

Here it is important to note that scholars sometimes comment upon the “ambiguous” and “capricious” character attributed to early Greek deities and their world: “The divine world is fundamentally ambiguous, and even the most positive gods are tinged with ambiguity.”^[24] Apollo, most often called Phoibos—the Shining One—is at times also called Skotios—the Dark One: “While for some [Apollo] is flanked by the Muses and memory, for others oblivion (Lethe) and silence (Siope) stand at his side” (84). As we have seen, Zeus Basileus “had more to do with the depths than with the sky,” and Zeus Chthonios, or Katachthonios, characterize his “second, dark sphere,” the underbelly as it were of his “upper, bright realm of the sky and Olympus.” Perhaps most ambiguous of all is Artemis, as a virginal goddess with deep affinities to uncultivated earth and animals, she is also not without her darker side: “The inviolable goddess is terrible and even cruel—her arrow threatens every girl who fulfills her womanly destiny.”^[25] Still, a benevolent Artemis presides over and sanctifies the rites of marriage and childbirth. These contrary narrative associations might seem odd to us, but I suggest that taking them too literally can mar their significance.

For instance, along with Demeter and Persephone, Apollo, Zeus, and most notably Artemis are referred to as Hagnos, yet the term seems to attach less to who or what a god is than to what cannot be experienced by any god, such as agos. As Burkert suggests, hagnos might articulate who or what “was, is, and will always be” “sacred” or “pure” regardless of their actions and associations. That is, hagnos could refer to who or what is, as is said of Artemis, “inviolable.” Far from indicating the ambiguous or capricious character of divinity, hagnos might

indicate an early Greek understanding of the unshakeable, impenetrable character of divinity, that is, their “inviolability.” This non-coercible, “inviolable” characteristic of the sacred is made more explicit in hieros.

Hieros is a more frequently used term for what the Greeks held sacred. Something is hieros if it “belongs to a god or a sanctuary in an irrevocable way.” That is, an object or a place is “consecrated” by surrendering it to a god. Surrendering an object or a place to a god disclaims it from human uses and purposes: it is hieros, literally the property of the gods. Yet what is “of the gods” is not limited to consecrated objects or places. Throughout the epic tradition, cities like Troy, natural phenomena like the day, the mountains or the rivers, and even a prince within a god’s domain, are called hieros. The term, then, seems to delimit something like a palpable presence of the divine from what is—at least not “irrevocably”—of the gods. As a predicate exclusive to a divine presence, hieros “can be understood as deriving from a basic meaning such as superior, distinguished, not coercible; the etymological meaning of the word is probably strong.”^[26]

While the linguistic opposite of hieros is bebelos—profane—hieros is most often used in relation to hosios. What is hosios, however, is not necessarily something “weak,” “inferior,” or “undistinguished.” “[S]ome relation to the gods is an irreducible factor” in what is hieros, yet everything else is hosios: hieros, hosios “can stand in opposition, as if hosios meant sacred and not sacred at the same time”: “If the money which belongs to the gods is hieros, then all the rest is hosion—one may dispose of it. If festival days bring duties and prohibitions, the normal days are hosiai” (269-70).

Whatever is hieros takes the shape of a boundary drawn and recognized by “principally negative characteristics”: the holy place—hieron—is not to be entered, the sacred speech—hieros logos—is not to be spoken. But before we think these “negative characteristics” are only prohibitive, Jean-Pierre Vernant reminds us of the particular character of what the early Greeks consider “authentic contact” or “true communication”

with the divine. Taken together, hieros, hosios fulfill the two aspects of true communication: it aims “to construct a bridge, as it were, that will reach toward the divine” while at the same time emphasizing “what is inaccessible and mysterious in divinity, its alien quality, its otherness.”^[27] The apparent absence of the gods from what is hosios as well as the apparent presence of the gods in what is hieros both configure a type of contact or communication with gods. If hieros is, as Burkert writes, “a shadow cast by divinity,” then hosios is the light that distinguishes the shadow by its borders. If hieros delimits the rites of an initiate, the portion of the meal reserved for sacrifice, or proscriptions against childbirth within a sanctuary, hosios characterizes the initiate who comes through the mysteries, the meal following the sacrifice, and the place for childbirth outside the sanctuary. Hosios represents “desacralization after sacralization,” yet as Burkert explains, the initiate comes through feeling “pious and free at the same time,” the meal is a feast, and the birth of the child is a celebration. Whatever is hosios seems to evoke a sense of joy, sanctified abandon or even abundance, for the solemn limits of hieros have been “left behind.”

It seems characteristic, then, of what the Greeks “held sacred” that whatever is unavailable to their direct experience—hieros—is not, as it were, entirely concealed from them. Hieros pulses with the boundary of the gods, but hosios pulses with their possibility. Although “the sacred does not constitute the entire world and does not lay infinite claims upon men,” the sacred manifests a constant presence in varying degrees because the gods are constantly present in varying degrees, or so it is said of Zeus: “For he has hidden all things within himself, and brought them forth again, into the joyful light, from his sacred heart, working marvels.”^[28]

Unlike religious systems in which sacred and profane define and regulate one another, the elements of hieros, hosios constitute degrees of what the Greeks “held sacred.” That is, like the graduated meanings of hagios, hieros, hosios, invoke an understanding of sacred along a continuum. For whatever is

hosios, that is, outside the hieros, is not by virtue of being “outside” “profane.” Hosios celebrates the first gulp of air after surfacing from the deep, it creates an awareness that what is regular and what is ordinary lingers at the lip of the divine. Depending upon one’s attitude, then, whatever is hosios can remake the moments, the chatter, and the routines that are not signally of the gods into an aspect of the sacred.^[29] Far from diminishing the reverence early Greeks feel and practice for what is hieros, hosios “assumes the general moral meaning of what is permitted” and what is expected in terms of one’s “duties towards the gods and men.” (270). The variety and flexibility of what is hosios can explain how and why veneration for the sacred does not degenerate into the “blind, dumb terror” characteristic of some other cultures. To the contrary, for the early Greeks, the sacred is much less an object or an entity to be feared than it is characteristic of a certain ethos, a way of life:

“the sacred” had a widespread and extended significance for the Greeks, describing everything that emanated from the supernatural powers and, more specifically, from the divine will. The natural order, the passing of the seasons, the harvest, day and night, were all seen as sacred, as were the immutable order of social custom, the following on of generation after generation ensured by marriage, birth, burial rites and veneration of the dead, the permanence of political communities and systems of power.^[30]

We might understand the sacred as that which divides divinity from humanity. For the early Greeks, however, while the sacred might distinguish mortals from immortals it does not simultaneously separate mortal and immortal worlds. That is, the sacred celebrates or positively affirms the co-existence and interpenetration of divinity, humanity, and nature, as constituent elements of early Greek life.^[31] Recognition of what is “irrevocably” of the gods and what is not follows from their understanding of the differences between divine and other

types of beings, even though scholars do not agree about what the early Greeks might have conceived these differences to be. Along with Vernant, Vegetti and others suggest that the early Greeks distinguish divinity from humanity in terms of power, and so the sacred “was experienced essentially as power, or as a group of powers, intervening in the processes of nature and of life.”^[32] Alternatively, for W. K. C. Guthrie and others, the primary difference between divinity and humanity is immortality, the gods are deathless and so their presence or absence constitutes the reality of another world humans do not—indeed cannot—inhabit, a world of everlasting life. For many scholars, then, early Greek divinity manifests a power of life,^[33] or perhaps more appropriately, a power over death, that is similar to other conceptions of the divine in the ancient and modern worlds.

Specific to the early Greeks, however, is a longstanding practice by which they revere these “powers of life.” In the absence of a term like our term “religion,” the phrase *theon timai*—“honours to the gods”—comes closest to characterizing what the early Greeks conceive as religion. Yet *theon timai* cannot be considered apart from its practices, that is, apart from how early Greeks honor the gods. According to Burkert, *theon timai* “designates at the same time the cult of those beings about whom, ever since Homer and Hesiod, the poets have had so much to tell” (271). Oral poetry, then, is *theon timai*—“honours to the gods.” Still, although Greek oral poetry shares its ancestry with other Indo-European “poetry dealing with the gods,” ancient Greek oral poetry differs in terms of how it deals “with the gods.” The ancient Greek term for god—*theos*—does not derive from the Indo-European *deivos*, that term which we inherit as the Latin *deus*. Rather, *deivos* “has been abandoned in Greek.”^[34] The “new” term *theos* announces the presence of a god as a “third, objective power,” but it does not refer to or identify a specific god.^[35] “Speaking of *theos* or *theoi*, one posits an absolute and insurmountable point of reference for everything that has impact, validity, and permanence” (272), but speaking of *theos* one does not

identify, designate, refer to, or communicate with any god. A phrase like en-theos, “in him is a god,” indicates a general reference to a presence that “has impact, validity, and permanence,” and so can only be a god, that is, cannot be a lesser divinity like a daimon, and certainly cannot be human.^[36] Theos, like hieros, refers to a real yet otherwise mysterious and inarticulable presence, or so Telemachus exclaims to his father Odysseus:

Father, this is a miracle I'm seeing.
The walls of the house, the lovely panels,
The beams of fir, and the high columns
Are glowing like fire. Some god is inside,
One of the gods from the open sky (Od, 19:37-42).^[37]

“Some god is inside”? Homer tells his audience it is Pallas Athena, but for Odysseus, the nurse, and Telemachus, which god is inside, for how long, or even why, is not a matter for speculation or conversation, as Odysseus reminds Telemachus, “Hush. Don't be too curious about this. This is the way of the gods who hold high heaven” (19:44-45).

Reference to a specific god or direct address to a god requires “the genealogy, personal name, and mode of action of the one who was announced as theos” (271). That is, the names of the gods are reserved for the stories about them. Athenians might refer to Athena, guardian of their polis, as he theos, but they “reserve the name of the god for direct dealings with him” or with her (272). Direct dealings with her, however, carry all the weight of the stories in which she appears, that is, the tales of how it came to be that Athena rather than Poseidon is the principal guardian of Athens. And so while theos and theoi are, in some sense, de-narrativized designations for the gods, the names of the gods provide “an insurmountable reference” to their stories. As Vegetti reminds us, the “plurality of functions” attributed to Zeus “does not derive from his place in a theological system but from a narrative that identifies him as a character” (264). While Zeus is, in some sense, the sum of everything that is said about him, everything that is said of Zeus evokes that entire “collection of tales” Aristotle calls

muthos: this is the “network of relationships” that Vernant writes of, and it is this network of relationships that distinguishes early Greek “poetry dealing with the gods.”

Given the importance of the sacred to all aspects of early Greek experience, from “the natural order” of the seasons to “the permanence of political communities,” it might be misleading to refer to Greek theoi as “characters.”^[38] In the modern sense of the term, “character” implies agency and agency implies personhood. As we have seen, Greek theoi are not persons. Nevertheless, Vegetti’s observation highlights the significance of narrative to early Greek practices of theon timai. The task, then, is to try to understand the significance of narrative as a type of religious practice without reducing the gods to fixed and immutable “characters.” The key to doing this, I suggest, is to consistently remind ourselves of the original oral and aural character of theon timai.

While written literature provides the foundation for many modern religions, that is, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam are all religions of “the book,” the concepts that center each of these religions on particular books or their versions have been extracted from their written narratives. For instance, there is nothing about co- or consubstantiation in the literature of the New Testament, yet the concept of the Trinity is inseparable from many people’s understandings of Christianity. This “abstracted” or “extracted” Christian concept provides ideas for the meaning of Christian literature, and these ideas, in turn, often drive both the understanding and practice of Christianity as a religion. Early Greek religion, on the other hand, is not only not written, it cannot be understood by a set of concepts that structure or determine the meaning of its narratives. Early Greek gods are active gods, they are gods that do something. Whether the sum or modes of their actions express a “power” or an “essence,” from the perspective of those who hear and those who tell the tales, the gods are who and what they are by virtue of what they do. While theos remarks the presence of a god, “Zeus,” “Hera,” “Apollo,” “Athena,” all designate presences in actions. Hence, it is action that identifies, or rather narrativizes,

the Greek gods to poets and audiences. In this way, it is the narration of their actions rather than any theology about them that resonates in the articulation of their names, in “direct dealings” with them.

Yet as Vegetti points out, there are exceptions even to the rule of the narrative identification of certain gods: Olympian names might “be superimposed on a pre-existing deity that resists identification” (264). One might say, then, that the only constant in early Greek narratives are the names of certain gods, specifically Olympian gods. Thereby these names constitute a rudimentary theology that is eventually carried over into written accounts of the gods. But one might also say that the names of the gods are not more significant than the narratives in which the names occur. That is, there are multiple versions of creation, and these multiple versions include a variety of powers considered to be the *arche*, the source or origin of all things. In the story of Okeanos and Tethys, the *arche* is or is of “moving water,” in the story of Night and Eros, the *arche* is or is of an egg, and in the story of Chaos and Gaia, the *arche* is or is of the earth. The only constant to all the stories is an *arche* but not who or what constitutes the *arche*. So inconstant are the accounts of what the *arche* is that in the *Theogeny* an otherwise benevolent “Night” who creates all things through love has been replaced by a thoroughly “destructive” Night. According to Hesiod, Night, who “had not been loved by any god,” is the matriarch of all things cruel, dark and full of affliction: the End, the Fates, mocking Momos, Nemesis, Old Age, Hateful Discord, painful Hardship, Forgetfulness and Starvation, the Battles, the Quarrels, the Murders, the Manslaughters, the Grievances, the Lying Stories, the Disputations, Lawlessness and Ruin, and Oath, “who does more damage than any other to earthly men, when anyone, of his knowledge, swears to a false oath” (*Theo.*, 210–32). Hesiod’s Night is said to be created from Chaos, and she emanates divisiveness. Yet in another story of Creation, Night is said to be the source—the *arche*—and she emanates harmony, attraction, “co-mingling,” that is, Love. Somehow between the two stories,

the “genealogy” and “mode of action” of the power or essence of Night has been completely reversed. Whichever Night is the true Night, however, cannot be determined by appeal to one of the stories in lieu of the other. It is the oral poetic performance and aural reception of the stories rather than any exegesis about them that conveys the meaning and message of Night. From the perspective of poet and audience, then, there is simply no way to hear the names of divinities apart from the stories in which the names appear. Any consistency we or the early Greeks attribute to a god’s actions or ascribe to her name is predicated less on preconceived ideas about who a god is or should be than upon how this god acts—in the stories.

The “plurality of functions” attributed to Zeus, then, might have more to do with the variety of his narrativized actions than with his essentially “sovereign” character. Moreover, the “unity of action” attributed to Zeus could reference his particular actions with regard to the story of the source and origin of the tales. According to this story it is Zeus, not Poseidon, not Hades, not Apollo, Hephaetus, or Ares, who is “Father” of the Muses. Vernant writes that the Theogeny reads like “a hymn to Zeus.” Indeed, the Theogeny reads like a catalogue of “honours to the gods” with explicit and repeated reference to Zeus: “holder of the aegis, Zeus” “great Zeus,” “the great mind of Zeus,” “King in the heaven.” Yet the Theogeny also offers the most sustained account of the source or origin of muthos by detailing the birth of the Muses. In this way, the practice of muthos might abound with elements of what the Greeks “held sacred” because it is said to be—literally and figuratively—“of Zeus.”

MUSES

The followers of Orpheus say this of Zeus:

Zeus is the first, Zeus is the last, the god with the dazzling lightning. Zeus is the head, Zeus is the middle, of Zeus all things have their end. Zeus is the foundation of the earth and of the starry sky. Zeus is male, Zeus is an immortal

woman. Zeus is the breath of all things, Zeus is the sweep of unwearying flame. Zeus is the roots of the sea, Zeus is the sun and moon. Zeus is the King, Zeus is the beginner of all things, the god with the dazzling lightning. For he has hidden all things within himself, and brought them forth again, into the joyful light, from his sacred heart, working marvels.^[39]

Orphic sensibility about the gods or a specific god is generally not indicative of a widespread understanding of divinity, but it is interesting that in this Orphic hymn to Zeus “he has hidden all things within himself, and brought them forth again, into the joyful light.” That is, what Zeus does, his “mode of action,” sounds similar to what Hesiod says about him in the opening of the *Theogony*. Here, Hesiod sings of Zeus and the Muses, “the children of Zeus,” in more than half of the lines that begin the sounding out of “the holy stock of everlasting immortals.” Of the birth of the Muses we are told that Zeus lay with Mnemosyne “far way from the other immortals,” and that after the turning of the seasons she bears her nine daughters “a little way off from Olympus”:

. . . there are their shining
Dancing places, their handsome
Houses, and the Graces and Desire live there
Beside them
In festivity; lovely is the voice
That issues from their lips
As they sing of all the laws and all
The gracious customs
Of the immortals, and glorify them
With their sweet voices.^[40]

The rhythm of the Muses’ songs echo back to them from the “black earth,” the “lovely beat of their footsteps” resonate beneath their feet as they hasten back, always back to their father Zeus “who is King in heaven.” The Muses, then, are “of Zeus”: himself not a Muse, he and Memory are their co-creators, and so Zeus and Memory are—at least—associated with the “mode of action” of the Muses, *muthos*.

Theos, similar to hieros, evokes a “mysterious” and “alien” quality of divinity, an inviolable strangeness and otherness in the midst of daily human experience. But muthos seems “to construct a bridge . . . that reaches toward divinity,” or more appropriately muthos constructs a bridge that extends from divinity. Woven through the fabric of the stories is the narrative fact that the stories do not originate with human agency. According to the Theogeny, Hesiod is no more “author” of what he sings than an audience member is “author” of what she hears. The stories are of the Muses: “And it was they who once taught Hesiod his splendid singing as he was shepherding his lambs on holy Helikon” (22–23). Thus, the poet’s singing is from the Muses, and it is said to be a gift, the “holy gift” of the Muses. Yet the poet is not the only recipient of a gift. In the Theogeny, the Muses’ “gifts to humanity” are said to be threefold: to the “kingly nobles,” to the poet, and to those who hear the poet, the audience.

The “kingly nobles” upon whom “the daughters of great Zeus cast their eyes and bestow their favors” (81–2), are granted not only a sweetness of speech but the ability to judge “with straight decisions” and to declare such judgment “unflinching.” Due to the Muses’ favor, the nobles “can put a quick and expert end to even a great quarrel” and can lightly turn the people’s actions “back to the right direction, talking them over with gentle arguments” (83–91). These mortals are later referred to as “the lords,” they are said to be “from Zeus” and the people love them: “with gentle respect: [they stand] out among all assembled” (93). The favored “lords” of the Theogeny, then, are not those who quarrel the best or the most convincingly: in fact, they do not quarrel at all. Like the Muses, they are “concordant of heart,” and like Zeus they manifest an “impartiality” of judgment that seems to be “above all dispute.”

One who is loved by the Muses is a “poet” and he is said to be “blessed.” As a “servant of the Muses singing the glories of ancient men, and the blessed gods” (100–1), the poet sings what the Muses bid him to sing, and he places them always at the beginning and end of the song: “they breathed a voice into

me, and power to sing the story of things of the future, and things past. They told me to sing the race of the blessed gods everlasting, but always to put themselves at the beginning and end of my singing" (32–34).^[41] The poet's song, then, begins and ends with the Muses who "glorify" "all the laws and all the gracious customs of the immortals." The Muses, then, sing the "honours of the gods." In singing what they bid him to sing, the poet's song, too, sounds out the "honours of the gods"—theon timai.

Marcel Detienne has shown that there is an intimate relationship between glory, praise, and speech in early Greek thought: "Speech, praise, glory: these are a shoot, a jet rising up to the light: 'Like a tree fed by fresh dew, virtue soars into the air, raised among the good and just toward the shimmering ether.'"^[42] If the Muses' songs praise the laws and customs of the gods, then the songs of the poet communicate this praise to human eyes and ears, returning its lovely beat to the open air. In this way, the poet's song brings the Muses' song to sound, to a rhythm and language old as the gods, old as the world, yet full of promise. For praise is not just ordinary speech and songs of praise do not recount ordinary tales. The archaic Greek oral tradition preserves and sustains what Detienne calls magicoreligious speech, speech that makes things happen, or speech that makes real what it says. That is, for the early Greeks, "speech is truly conceived as a natural reality, a part of physis" (72).

The idea that "speech is a part of physis" troubles our contemporary understanding of not just speech—what constitutes it and how it operates—but language in general. The implication is that in early Greek culture there exists at least one speech practice in which what is said does not refer, reflect, signify, or represent anything other than itself. Magicoreligious speech is not speech about an object, it is speech that realizes (kranei) what it says. This speech is a part of nature, and so it acts the way other natural entities act, that is, magicoreligious speech realizes what it says the way oceans realize crests and flowers realize blooms. Such speech is, in Detienne's terms,

“efficacious,” and “indistinguishable from action”: “Speech endowed with efficacy is indissociable from its realization. Such speech immediately takes effect, is realized, becomes action” (74).

From the perspective of poets and audiences, what distinguishes magicoreligious speech from ordinary speech might concern the occasion and purpose for its practice—theon timai. One way we can understand this practice is to recall the story of its origin, and to consider that, from a narrative point of view, this type of speech is indistinguishable from that story. That is, the actions attributed to the Muses are the narration of the stories, that is, the Muses are born to sing the stories of gods and men. However, their stories and the narrative practices of these stories differ from stories of human invention. Stories that originate from human authors are stories that occur in real time and narrativize actions in real time. Muthos, however, does not occur in real time nor does it narrativize actions that occur in real time. Rather, muthos acts the way memory acts: it is “pronounced in the absolute present, with no before and after, a present that, like memory, incorporates ‘that which has been, that which is, and that which will be’” (74). While modern thinkers are accustomed to authoring their own memories, there is still a sense in which even personal memory eludes the parameters and perspectives of real time. One’s focus in the present, or at present, on what was or what did happen is inextricable from one’s ever-changing awareness of what has not yet occurred—what could or might or will or will not be. Inasmuch as personal memory is not “fixed” or “objective” because it is not something that we have or possess as much as it is something that we do, cultural memory is also not something we have or possess but it is something that we do, collectively.

We might understand that it is the collective experience of muthos that generates its efficacy and accounts for the “naturalness” of muthos in early Greek practice. It is clear that in the province of efficacious speech the invariable “distance” between word and object, and the “triangulation” between sign,

signified, and signifier, do not apply.^[43] But this in itself does not mean that efficacious speech is “false” or beyond our abilities to comprehend. There is a “transparency” to language in early Greek culture that can be reconciled to our recognition of the differences between spoken and written language, and how meaning is generated in light of these differences.

Theorists sensitive to the differences between how communication operates in a fully developed literate society and how language functions in a pre-or non-literate society take the implications of Eric Havelock’s “literate revolution” quite seriously when interpreting written texts that emerge from an otherwise oral and aural culture. In ancient Greece, sometime during the eighth century “writing is an inscription on a ceremonial cup” or alphabetic symbols chiseled into a victory monument. During the seventh century, writing appears as a signature at the base of some statuary, and sometime between the ninth and fifth centuries literate techniques are used to preserve the poetry we attribute to Homer and Hesiod.^[44] The material fact of this first writing marks the beginning of a “literate revolution,” and this revolution “forever changes not only how we communicate but why we do so as there are material and conceptual practices and consequences mutually exclusive to speaking and writing.”^[45] Most classicists and philosophers would agree that while speech is specifically suited to concrete, direct, and immediate communication, writing lends itself to abstract, indirect, reflexive and self-reflexive communication: While “the spoken word is invisible and disappears with the breath that carries it,” writing not only makes the invisible visible, it fixes or freezes the “breath that carries it” into words and phrases that remain immutable and changeless, as it were, “objectified.”^[46]

The “objective” character of the written word, however, strikes at the root of what makes speech effective. Written words initially sacrifice the relationship between speaker and listener because in place of a meaning conveyed through performative and embodied elements, writing substitutes a type of meaning that, from the perspective of speakers and listeners,

is actually divorced from the very purpose of speech, the creation of meaning:

In a speech act, meaning is conveyed by the tone, cadence, and phrasing in and with which words are uttered. One does not consider first the meaning of the words and then look at the expression on the speaker's face, the stance of her body, her gestures and movements, or lack thereof. Meaning is transacted, as it were, in the embodied actions of speaker and hearer, who are present to each other, and can repeat and rephrase and question until they reach an understanding.^[47]

While speech relies upon a relationship between speakers and hearers to create meaning, writing is "a single communicative act."^[48] Yet meaning, from the purview of oral and aural communicators, is never a singular, communicative act. Meaning is not generated just by "what" a speaker says or "what" a listener hears, but by the relationship occasioned by speech.^[49]

Seen from this perspective, magicoreligious speech is not completely incompatible with our predispositions toward, and preconceptions about, speech. According to Hesiod, he has been taught to sing the glory "of all the laws and gracious customs of the Immortals": he has been instructed to sing "honours to the gods"—theon timai. But theon timai is an entirely oral and aural practice, it is a speech practice. What distinguishes theon timai from other speech practices is the particular relationship between speakers and hearers—poets and audiences—and the meaning that is generated by virtue of this relationship. Inasmuch as oral poetic performance requires a poet, it also requires an audience; it demands "the actions of speaker and hearer, who are present to each other . . ."

I suggest that this relationship cannot be duplicated in writing. Even if a poet were to recite and perform from a written version of an oral song, it is difficult to see how the meaning generated from the relationship between poets and audiences

would not suffer. Because early Greek poetry is not written poetry, it is not composed, performed, sung, heard, or remembered with reference to the written word.^[50] Without writing, however, there seems to be no possible way to extract—or abstract—the meaning of what is said from the occasion of its utterance: in oral poetry, media and message are inextricably entwined. This lack of differentiation between how something sounds and what something means explains the “transparency” of language in early Greek culture: “the movement from thought to talk to thing is an easy one; in early Greece language is so transparent a medium that, as Thomas Cole says, it ‘neither impedes nor facilitates the transmission of information, emotions, and ideas.’”^[51] That language “neither impedes nor facilitates” is another way of saying “speech is a natural reality, a part of physis.” In early Greece, speech is not just theoretically embodied, it is literally embodied, it acts the way a body acts. And so, in early Greece it is easier to conceive how spoken words are real and “natural.” But written words are necessarily one remove—at least—from their spoken occasion. If meaning is generated by the occasion, then a de-occasioned and disembodied meaning will appear “meaningless.”

The “transparency” of language in early Greece helps explain for us in hindsight of writing how speech works without reference to writing. But it might also alert us to the material fact that it is actually “the audible character and quality of speech that makes the developing technology of writing and reading possible and intelligible.”^[52] That is, a written Theogeny does not emerge fully formed from its audible origins. The sounds of the poet must be transliterated into written symbols that somehow stand in for or hold the place of audible characteristics. These written symbols remain silent until they are given or “lent” a voice by a “reader.” But first readers possess no means for making the symbols intelligible without continual reference to acoustic memory, to how the transliterated symbols sound. In this way, what writing makes visible or initially “objectifies” is a system of sound.”^[53]

As with the Iliad and the Odyssey, we now read the

Theogeny because at some time parts of it were preserved in writing. But it is very easy to forget that what we now read was initially transcribed in visual symbols for an acoustic memory. This acoustic memory persists long after the introduction of the Greek alphabet, and bards continue to communicate “culturally significant information” through oral poetic performance long after the times scholars indicate written versions of the stories are available. The persistence of the oral and aural aspects of the ancient Greek poetic tradition suggests that oral poetic performance not only sustains and preserves the transmission of culturally significant information, that is, an “ideological fabric,” its practice also sustains and preserves a certain value for early Greek thought and experience. It is to the possible value of the experience of oral poetic performance for poets and audiences that I now turn.

NON-AGONISTIC SPEECH

I submit that oral poetic performance maintains a genuinely egalitarian relationship between poets and audiences. That is, we cannot think of oral poetic performance as one enlightened person revealing the “truth” or the “will” of the gods to the unenlightened many without sacrificing the dynamics of a relationship generated in and as a speech practice, including its efficacy as *theon timai*. The meaning generated by this relationship yields a certain value to poets and audiences alike, a value that I identify as thoroughly social yet not conducive to any agon. Seeing oral poetic performance as a principally non-agonistic practice requires—at least—two considerations: 1) a clearer understanding of the effects of oral poetic performance upon its audience, those who receive the third, or the last, of the Muses’ “gifts toward humanity,” and, 2) how the authority of the gift affects a relationship between poets and audiences that preserves and sustains an abiding sense of social unity.

As we have seen, the Muses bestow, or grant, the ability to sing “of all the laws and gracious customs of the Immortals” upon, or to, the poet: oral poetic performance is a “gift” from

the Muses. Yet while the Muses are “fathered” by Zeus, their mother is Mnemosyne—divine Memory. The genealogy of the Muses, then, includes he who is “above all dispute” and she who is the power or the act of memory. Direct address to the Muses, such as Hesiod’s invocation at the beginning of the *Theogony*, includes “the genealogy, the personal name, and the mode of action of the one who was announced as *theos*.” That is, direct address to divinity occurs as part of a story about divinity. “Direct dealings” with early Greek gods are occasioned as stories of the gods, and I suggest that they are often—if not always—narrativized dealings.

The attitudes and expectations of the poets and audiences of oral Greek poetry, then, cannot be separated from the story of the Muses and how this story stands in relation to all of the other stories of the early Greek pantheon. The Muses are the children of Zeus and Mnemosyne, and so what the Muses do, or how they act, are entwined with stories of what Zeus and Mnemosyne do, or the stories of how they act. Recall that “divine power exists only by virtue of the network of relationships that makes it a part of the divine system as a whole.”

As children of he who is “above all dispute” and she who is the power or act of Memory, the Muses communicate the entire “collection of tales” that comprise the “divine system,” including the stories of their own origin and creation.^[54] The Muses, then, are *muthos*. Much as Memory is inseparable from Mnemosyne, *muthos* is inseparable from the Muses. Hence, if *muthos* can be said to “belong” to anyone or anything, it “belongs,” as it were to the Muses: “Far from taking its authority from the poet’s genius, poetry, despite the poet’s existence, is a sort of authorless speech. It has no locutor; it is what ‘is said.’ Thus it cannot lie, since only a locutor would be able to do that. Prose has a speaker, who tells the truth, lies, or is mistaken. But poetry has no more of an author than vocabulary does.”^[55]

Regardless of our predilection against “Muses,” archaic oral poets and audiences consistently appeal to a longstanding tradition that occasions a certain type of speech as not

originating from any locutor, oral poetic speech is “authorless speech.” From the perspective of poets and audiences, as Veyne reminds us, this speech constitutes what “is said,” and what “is said” no more belongs to any person or group than a vocabulary “belongs” to the person who uses it. While we are eager to attach or attribute what “is said” to individual speakers and from this determine whether what “he said” or “she said” is true or false, muthos does not attach to individual speakers or listeners.

I suggest that the “authorless speech” of muthos is compatible with various aspects of the sacred. As we have seen, the sacred constitutes a continuum of indirect and direct experience of the divine, that is, from the solemn limits of hieros to the permissibility of hosios. Authorless speech seems to simultaneously communicate 1) a plurality of direct dealings with the gods by virtue of their actions with one another and with mortals in the stories, while also maintaining 2) the otherwise inarticulable silence of the gods permeating all that is said about them. As authorless, muthos is constrained or limited to the extent that it is not comported as a singular voice belonging to this or that poet, yet as speech muthos also intends and creates indirect relationships between mortals and immortals and direct relationships between poets and audiences. In this way, poets and audiences gather to receive the “gifts” of the Muses, that is, the gifts of muthos, that can be conceived as sacred in a variety of ways.

In the Theogeny, these gifts are said to bear the blessings of Zeus to the “lords,” and the blessings of Memory to poets and audiences alike. Yet Detienne suggests that Mnemosyne gives birth to the Muses “in order that they should be the λησμοσύνη (forgetfulness) of mortals.”^[56] From a certain perspective, this is true. Hesiod says that for the audience who experience the poet’s song, the “holy gift” of the Muses is manifested as a type of forgetting: “when a man has sorrow fresh in the troublement of his spirit . . . the singer . . . makes him presently forget his cares, he no longer remembers sorrow, for the gifts of the goddesses soon turn his thoughts elsewhere” (Theo., 93–104).

While it is common to consider that the effects of oral poetic performance are like a “spell cast” upon audiences, we might also consider what the gifts of the goddesses cause listeners to forget as well as to who or to what their thoughts soon turn. Hesiod tells us that it is the particular gift of the Muse to turn the thoughts of those who hear their songs “elsewhere” than upon their own cares and sorrows—an audience member forgets “his cares, he no longer remembers sorrow.” An audience member, then, is not benumbed and bedazzled to the extent he or she cannot remember anything. Turning one’s thoughts elsewhere than upon oneself can also be characterized as an action that embodies the relations of equality and reciprocity required for social unity. That is, turning outward rather than inward demands one’s focus shift, as we have seen elsewhere, toward the middle. In this way, poets and audiences are connected by what “is said.”

Suspicion about the effects of the songs upon poets and audiences can also arise from the character of what is said. The Muses famously say “we know how to say many false things that seem like true sayings, but we know also how to speak the truth when we wish to” (Theo. 27–28). That is, the Muses sing what is true—*aletheia*—or the Muses sing what seems to be true—*pseudea*. And so poets and audiences are connected by what “is said,” yet what “is said” could be “true sayings,” *aletheia*, or “false things that seem like true sayings,” *pseudea*.

Our attempts to understand what the early Greeks could mean by *aletheia*, in this or that text or in general, have an illustrious scholarly and philosophical history.^[57] Suffice to say here that Pindar refers to *Aletheia* as “Zeus’ daughter” and he invokes her when he is “remembering.” Bacchylides calls *Aletheia* “the fellow citizen of the gods, the only one allowed to share the life of the Immortals.” And in *Works and Days*, Hesiod identifies *aletheia* as the “nonforgetfulness” of poet and audience alike. Detienne explains:

First there is *Aletheia* pronounced by the poet in the name of the Muses. . . . Second we find the *Aletheia* possessed by

the farmer of Ascra himself. In the latter case, “truth” is explicitly defined as “nonforgetfulness.” . . . But no fundamental difference exists between these two cases of Aletheia. They are simply Aletheia considered from two different perspectives—in one case in its relation to the poet, in another in relation to the farmer who listens. (50)

On this account, what the poet sings and audience members hear is, in principle, indistinguishable: both gifts are configured by what cannot be forgotten. Since it is by virtue of memory that the Muses sing and poets and audiences hear, aletheia is inextricable from, some say identical to, memory. A shared memory, then, constitutes the “holy gift” of the Muses to those who hear, be it poet or audience member. Yet how does *pseudea*, those “false things that seem like true sayings,” stand in relation to what cannot be forgotten?

By the perspective developed thus far, the poet hears the Muses, the audience hears the poet. If the Muses sing “false things that seem like true sayings,” *pseudea* . . . *etumoisin homoia*, and the poet sings what the Muses bid him sing, then the poet opens himself, as it were, to what seems to us to be different types of speech: the poet sings Aletheia, or the poet sings of what resembles aletheia but is somehow lacking, *pseudea* . . . *etumoisin homoia*. Detienne suggests that the “wording of the Muses’ declaration is remarkable” (85) here. It conveys an early Greek awareness of a double sense of ambiguity, an “ambiguity of deception and the deception of ambiguity” that will later attach to a type of speech called *apate*—deceitful words. But in the context of the *Theogeny* the wording also conveys “an intermediate stage” between this double sense of ambiguity and what we might call a more rational—or “clear”—distinction between what is *alethes*—true—and what is *pseudes*—false. In this way, the Muses attribute to their songs a deep and abiding sense of ambiguity that will later become the opposite of aletheia in terms of our sense of *pseudea*.

Yet it cannot be forgotten that the Muses are catalogued as

nine in number. Muthos is not only authorless it is also plural, hence the voice of the Muse is not a singular voice. It is more difficult, then, to assign or ascribe ambiguity to it in our sense of deceitful, manipulative, or even false because what the Muses say does not attach, as it were, to any person or group of persons. Unlike the theatrical choruses to come, what the Muses say is both quantitatively and qualitatively multiple due to the content—"the network of relationships"—that comprise the songs. And so rather than reading back from our understanding of what is true and what is false, perhaps early Greek *aletheia* and *pseudea* can be understood in the way the "sacred" can be understood, along a continuum. As we have seen, while the opposite of *hieros* is *bebelos*, *hieros* is most often associated with *hosios*. *Hosios*, far from annunciating what is not sacred, designates "desacralization after sacralization," which I suggest following Burkert, is still an aspect of the sacred. Similarly, in archaic and early Hellenic oral poetry, the opposite of *aletheia*, not-forgotten, is *lethe*, oblivion or forgetfulness. Detienne shows how *aletheia* and *lethe* configure a family of terms that, from the perspective of poets and audiences, distinguish not different types of speech but different effects of poetic speech. There is, on the one hand, praise (*epainos*) which is associated with speech, light, memory, and *aletheia*. On the other hand there is blame (*momos*) which is associated with silence, darkness, oblivion, and *lethe*.^[58] Poetry that praises and poetry that blames are not, however, different types of poetry or different types of speech. Praise and blame are both magicoreligious, but while words of praise act "Like a tree fed by fresh dew, virtue soars into the air, raised among the good and just . . ." words of blame fall "into a particular class . . . that of everything 'vain' or 'useless'" (74). As Pindar says, "Praise touches on Blame," and blame consists of "words without realization": "The Erinyes boast that they, like Momos, have the power to diminish the fame of human beings: 'Men's illusions in their pride, under the sky, melt down and are diminished into the ground, gone before the onset of our black robes, the pulsing of our vindictive feet against them.'"^[59]

In comparison to words of praise which are meant to be spoken and remembered, words of blame lead to silence and forgetfulness, and the early Greeks are clear to distinguish between them much as in later times they distinguish the “one who speaks the truth” from the one who “chatter[s] in vain.” But in the context of *muthos*, *pseudea* is not a part of blame: it is not “vain” or “useless,” nor is the one who speaks it, and significantly *pseudea* is not, like blame, meant to be forgotten. Like *hieros*, *hosios*, which do not reduce to a distinction between what is sacred and what is profane, *aletheia* and *pseudea* do not reduce to a distinction between what is true and what is false. Although we are accustomed to drawing such distinctions, some scholars continue to show how some early Greek thinking is not dominated by the binary logic that so often drives modern thought.

Regardless, then, of whom or what poets become in our reception of the development of early Greek culture, *muthos* is initially what “is said.” Much as a vocabulary cannot be forgotten unless it is not used, *muthos* cannot be forgotten unless it is not practiced. The coming criticism of a philosopher like Xenophanes, that “Homer and Hesiod have attributed to the gods everything that is a shame and reproach among men . . .”^[60] can be understood as an indictment against the tales that blame the gods, which is to say tales that do not praise the gods, and so, in the poet-philosopher’s mind, deserve to be forgotten.^[61]

In archaic expression *pseudea* is like (*homoia*) *aletheia*, so much so there is no mention in the *Theogeny* of how poet and audience should distinguish between them, or even whether it is significant to do so. Immediately following the formula “*pseudea . . . etumoisin homoia*,” Hesiod says: “So they spoke, these mistresses of words, daughters of great Zeus, and they broke off and handed me a staff . . .” (*Theo.*, 29). The Muses attribute both *pseudea* and *aletheia* to their songs prior to instructing Hesiod in oral poetic singing, almost as if the content of their songs, the what of what “is said,” is less significant than the occasion of their speech—theon *timai*. By this, however, no poet

could proclaim himself, and certainly no audience would proclaim a poet, as a “master of truth.” Detienne suggests “the ambiguity of fallacious things is clearly conveyed”^[62] by the formula *pseudea . . . etumoisin homoia*, yet this formula does not differentiate *pseudea* from *aletheia* as in any way a different type of speech, having different import, affecting different purposes,^[63] or—significantly—sounding differently. To the contrary, much as *hosios* is an aspect of *hieros*, *pseudea* is an aspect of *aletheia*: “the *etuma* are of the same reality as the *alethea* and, by the same token, the *pseudea*, through resemblance, are founded in the *alethea*” (86). That is, *pseudea* and *aletheia* are alongside one another: they evoke, in the words of Eric Havelock, an “appositional equivalence”^[64] and so their meaning is generated by association and comparison rather than contrast and negation.

As we have seen, the meanings of the sacred for the early Greeks are also generated along a continuum. *Hieros* designates the presence of *theoi* and delimits their boundary. Whatever is *hieros* sustains and preserves a mysterious and inalienable quality because the *theoi*, as such, are unnamed: divinity is perhaps felt, but unidentified, palpable yet non-narrativized. The songs of the Muses, however, narrativize the gods, designate them as presences in action. The stories themselves are not *hieros* because whatever is *hieros* has no story, it is “a shadow cast by divinity.” Alternatively I suggest the stories are *hosios*: they celebrate the possibilities of gods and men after the solemn limits of *hieros* are left behind. The occasion of the stories, then, is not to reveal the “truth” about the divine, but to unite poets and audiences to what is possible, or what is permitted, through a celebration of speech that honors what “was, is, and will be always.”

Even today we can admit that there are some occasions for speech in which the attitudes and expectations of speakers and hearers coalesce to the extent that the content of what is said is less significant than the fact that someone speaks. That is, there are occasions in which it is expected that someone says something, and these occasions are recognized by all who

participate as exceeding in value and significance the individual interests of those gathered for the occasion. A toast to bride and groom, a eulogy, a prayer, these are all occasions in which the “what” of what is said is secondary to the act of speaking.

Regardless of the best man who agonizes over his speech, or the friend who upbraids herself because she supposes she said “the wrong thing” at a funeral, both occasions require speech and even an unfunny toast or an awkward expression of sympathy satisfies this requirement. A speaker’s anxiety over the “what” of what “is said” actually evokes the primary social function of this type of speech. Persons who “rise to the occasion” speak because it is what the occasion requires. If, as a speaker, I put myself before the occasion, as if the occasion has risen for me, the collective attitudes and expectations of others will put me in my place: when I speak on such an occasion, I am a representative of the occasion, a “mouthpiece” for a situation that is more significant than the sum of its individual parts.

Since early Greek “religion” is primarily a narrative religion and its practice consists in the telling and retelling of the collection of tales known as muthos, early Greek religious practice—theon timai—is an occasion that demands speech. This occasion, moreover, is considered a gift—a gift from the Muses to the poet who sings, and a gift from the Muses to the audience who hears. These gifts are configured within the aegis of Zeus and Mnemosyne, he who is “above all dispute” and she who is or makes memory possible. The genealogy of the Muses in the stories as well as their mode of action in telling the stories can encourage the attitudes and expectations of poets and audiences to accept that as a “gift” this is a speech which need not be disputed and cannot, or should not, be forgotten. The attitudes and expectations that mark the occasion of muthos could explain why, or how, the poet’s speech is undisputed for millennia, for it is not his speech:

The poet’s speech never solicits agreement from its listeners or assent from a social group . . . It does not attempt to establish a chain of words in real time that would

gather force from human approval or disagreement. It is not the manifestation of an individual's will or thought, nor does it constitute the expression of a particular agent or individual. It is the attribute and privilege of a social function.^[65]

Similar to those modern occasions when and where someone is required to speak, the poet qua poet is the one who speaks. But until such time as the poet, or the tragedian, invokes the Muses as a matter of form rather than a manner of speech, oral poetic performance bestows to all those who hear the collective gifts of the Muses. These "mistresses of words" are, as Hesiod says, "concordant of heart" and "full of harmonies." To my knowledge, nowhere else in ancient Greek culture does a practice such as this exist: it comprises a plurality of voices, a multiplicity of stories, a complicated network of actions, and a pantheon of gods. Muthos, then, is a practice that is deeply plural and yet it is celebrated with unity rather than contest, and with joyful singing and listening rather than dispute.

We certainly can—and have—read the stories of gods and men as thinly disguised justifications for aristocratic rule, and we might read the position of poets vis-à-vis audiences as unequal and non-reciprocal. After all, the Theogeny sounds "like a hymn to the glory of Zeus," and poets are the only ones taught to sing this hymn. By this, audiences only listen, or more appropriately, audiences are encouraged to forget themselves while listening. This way of understanding early Greek muthos might be consistent with what political praxis and public poetry becomes, but I question whether it is compatible with the experiences of poets and audiences, particularly in light of the longevity of this experience. It is more likely that since muthos is a speech practice, it is oral and aural, and since muthos is "authorless," "it" does not belong to anyone—these two elements preclude the possibility of the practice of muthos as non-egalitarian. At its most basic level, poets do not invent formulaic diction: they inherit formula from preceding

generations of poets, and so on. A poet's "artistry," that which makes each oral poetic performance unlike every other, has to do with the inclusion or exclusion of formula in performance. Yet a performance is, of course, always in relation to an audience. And, as I have suggested, aural audiences do not just listen: meaning is generated in the relationship between speakers and listeners and in their collective relationship as recipients of the gifts of the Muses. The multiple relationships generated via the practice of muthos suggest that, "Participation in religious rituals guaranteed a mutual recognition of statuses and set the seal upon membership of the society, thereby defining an early form of citizenship."^[66]

"Membership of the society" is manifested between all participants in oral poetic performance because muthos is worthy of being known by all but simultaneously "belongs" to no one. An implication of its authorless status is that muthos happens as it is sung and heard. Since muthos does not belong to any one person or group more than any other it is a thoroughly public and collective activity. That is, muthos is not somehow "stored away" and then brought to the middle, a public space, just when the occasion requires. Rather as a speech practice muthos does not precede its occasion, it is an occasion and this means that muthos is an activity, that is, it is something poets and audiences do, together. Specifically, muthos is an activity of remembering, or muthos is an act of memory with the signal difference that muthos is a collective act of memory. To the objection that no one, regardless of the occasion, has the same experience or takes from it an identical memory, I would add that the personal experiences of participants —poets and audiences—need not be identical or even similar to be felt as equal. Oral poetic performance promotes equality in a qualitative and relational sense, a type of equality manifested in a speech practice rather than in judgment or reflection upon that practice.

The value of muthos, then, could be a value that precedes the agon. Muthos exemplifies a practice of "equality and reciprocity" generated by an occasion in which the one who

speaks and the ones who hear are all recipients of the gifts of the Muses. Admittedly, there are alternative ways of conceiving of the value of muthos. It could be the value of a practice that sustains some type of address from the divine for the Muses teach “the stories of gods and men” and at least some of these stories persist through Hellenism. By this perspective, however, muthos is a specifically “religious” practice and the Muses are specifically “religious” deities in our sense of the term “religious.” Hence, its value to ancient “political religion” can be of little or no value to our secular politics. Alternatively, the practice of oral poetic performance, as has been said, could generate for poets and audiences alike an ideological fabric that assimilates local traditions to the “big traditions” preserved at some time in written form, that is, the epics, the hymns, etc. In this way, the role of muthos in the development of a “political” Greece can alert us to how our current ideologies might assimilate rather than celebrate differences among citizenry. That is, even though the structure of muthos is narrative and thereby plural and heterogeneous, this does not prevent it from developing into a homogenizing and unifying force in the service of, say, political interests.

Nevertheless, even if there is nothing in narrative to preclude its eventual monopolization and/or privatization, the manipulation of narrative does not arise from its practice as narrative. Hence, I still maintain that the practice of muthos can teach us something about the values of speech and equality in ancient Greece. For instance, since oral poetic performance is a type of speech practice that preserves and sustains what “is said,” its value consists in its occasion and the relationships fostered by this occasion: the joyful and equalizing act of the collective reception of Memory. In this way, muthos does not depend upon opposition between its participants so it does not divide the social body by means of any contest. Further, poets do not sing stories about themselves, nor would audiences expect to hear stories about their own experiences: both poets and audiences practice self-forgetting in receipt of the gifts of the Muses. But these gifts do not belong more to one person or

group than another, much as Zeus does not belong more to one city than another. Moreover, *muthos* is not just given and shared at one time, it continues indefinitely; it “was, is, and will be” collective as long as poets and audiences gather to hear the “stories of gods and men.” Significantly, *muthos* happens in this gathering, or *muthos* exists, as it were, “in the middle”—*en meson*. Unlike other objects brought to the middle and then apportioned or disputed, *muthos* remains in the middle: its pulse is in its practice, and its practice is, in comparison to other ancient practices, non-agonistic.

NOTES

1. Barker, *Agon*, p. v.
2. Again, I am concerned less with a criterion of equality than with a genuinely egalitarian practice, that is, a practice that sustains “equality and reciprocity” from beginning to end. While I am aware that, in classical Athenian *ekklesia*, the “ideology of equality was accompanied by the recognition that . . . in hard political praxis the operative criterion governing equality’s implementation is not sameness or identity but similitude or likeness,” (quoted in J. Roisman, 409, fnt 37) “likeness” is still a potentially exclusive judgment, similar to the judgments determined by the *agon*. My point is that political contests as contests do not sustain the type of equality sufficient to *demokratia* in theory or practice, and so there must be a more abiding sense of unity to inspire and institute a *politeia* that boasts, rightly or wrongly, its *isonomia*.
3. Cf: Marcel Detienne, *The Masters of Truth in Archaic Greece* (New York: Zone Books, 1996), 135.
4. Vernant, *Myth and Thought Among the Greeks*, trans. Janet Lloyd with Jeff Fort, (New York: Zone Books, 2006), 353–54.
5. Mario Vegetti, “The Greeks and Their Gods,” in *The Greeks*, ed. Jean-Pierre Vernant (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1995), 264.
6. Paul Veyne, *Did the Greeks Believe Their Myths: An Essay on the Constitutive Imagination*, trans. Paula Wissing (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1988), 45.
7. These citations follow Richard Lattimore’s translation of “The Works and Days” in Hesiod (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1959).
8. In *The Origins of Greek Thought* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982), Jean-Pierre Vernant suggests that Zeus represents “sovereignty” specifically in terms of order: ‘In every domain, whether natural, social, or ritual, order was that product of the victory of the sovereign divinity’ (109ff). W. K. C. Guthrie, in *The Greeks and Their Gods* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1972), maintains that, along with “being the sky itself or, more usually, the being who lives in the sky” (39) it is natural to think of him

as “the ruler and the father,” the “supreme deity” (39ff).

9. Cf: Walter Burkert, *Greek Religion* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985): “Only for the Greeks and Romans is the Sky father the highest god, and he is so primarily as a rain and storm god: Zeus is much more a weather god than the etymology would suggest, and this connects him with the weather gods of Asia Minor with whom he was indeed later equated” (126). Also, W. K. C. Guthrie, in *The Greeks and Their Gods*, writes that: “First and foremost [Zeus] is the god of the sky and weather whom all Indo-European peoples acknowledged under various names” (35ff). C. Kerényi, in *The Gods of the Greeks* (London: Thames & Hudson, Ltd., 2000), disagrees, and clarifies the plethora of Zeus’ surnames as follows: “all of which names preserve Zeus’s quality of ‘god of the weather’; a quality that was less emphasized in our mythology” (116). Jean Pierre-Vernant, in *Myth and Society in Ancient Greece* (New York: Zone Books, 1990), concurs: “However, the power of Zeus is not restricted to these natural forms. It is also at work in human activities and social relations” (106).

10. The following “list” is taken from Burkert’s *Greek Religion* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985) and Kerényi’s *The Gods of the Greeks* (London: Thames & Hudson, Ltd., 2000), roughly 125–31 and 113ff. respectively.

11. Burkert, *Religion*, 130.

12. Vernant, *Myth and Thought*, 359. Hereafter page numbers are referenced in parentheses in the text.

13. Vernant quoting Leopold Schmidt, *Myth and Thought*, 361.

14. Richard Hunter and Ian Rutherford, “Introduction” in *Wandering Poets in Ancient Greek Culture: Travel, Locality, and Pan-Hellenism*, eds. Richard Hunter and Ian Rutherford (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 19–20.

15. Vernant, *Myth and Thought*, 360–61.

16. Burkert, *Religion*, refers to the sacrifice and agon at Olympia, that festival “which shone above all other festivals as gold shines above all other treasures” (130).

17. Guthrie, *The Greeks and Their Gods*, 65.

18. Guthrie, *The Greeks and Their Gods*, 65.

19. Burkert, *Religion*, 131.

20. Guthrie, *The Greeks and Their Gods*, 65.

21. Burkert, *Religion*, earlier alludes to the significant differences between *hieros* and the more familiar term in modern usage, *hagios*: It is “totally impossible to call a god himself *hieros*—for this the Jews and Christians had to have recourse to the word *hagios*” (269). Thus, much of what we might expect in discussions of the ancient Greek concept of “sacred,” such as its immediate associations with the “profane” or its separation of what is supernatural or supra-human from what is natural or cultural needs to be suspended in relation to the early Greeks.

22. See also Vernant, *Myth and Society* (New York: Zone Books, 1990), who writes of terms semantically related to *hagios*: “They express a relation to the awesome domain of the divine. This is evident in the case of *euages*, which clearly has nothing

to do with defilement and means that one is in a good state as regards the agos. The same goes for enages which has the opposite meaning. The term does not refer to the state of those who are defiled, but to those who are caught up in the agos, who are in the power of the agos. The construction of enages plus the genitive of deity does not mean defilement of the deity, but rather in the power of the deity" (135).

23. Cf: Burkert's discussion of Demeter and Persephone in *Religion*, 271ff.

24. Detienne, *Masters*, 84.

25. Burkert, *Religion*, 151.

26. Cf: Burkert, *Religion*, 269, and also Vegetti, "The Greeks and Their Gods," who mentions "the Indo-European root meaning strong" in relation to hieros.

27. Jean-Pierre Vernant, *Mortals and Immortals: Collected Essays*, ed. Froma Zeitlin (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991), 153.

28. Quoted in Kerenyi, *The Gods of the Greeks*, 116.

29. Burkert, *Religion*, comments upon how hosios can seem confusing, "even to the Greeks themselves." It appears to designate duties towards gods and men along with dikaios (just) but it also designates those same duties in terms of "their divine and their civil aspect." That is, its proper application seems open to interpretation, that is, the difference between murder which will "draw the wrath of the gods" and just killing (hosios) with respect to reason, circumstance, context, etc. Hence, suggests Burkert, "not without reason does Plato take hosion as the starting point for a particularly ironic, Socratic dialogue" (270), see *Euthyphro*.

30. Vegetti, "The Greeks and Their Gods," 258-59.

31. Cf: Lisa Wilkinson, *Parmenides and To Eon: Reconsidering Muthos and Logos* (London: Continuum, 2009), for a discussion of this idea in relation to the fragments of Xenophanes, 50ff.

32. Vegetti, "The Greeks and Their Gods," 259.

33. On the inextricable association between "sung speech" (mousa) and its "efficacious" power in relation to physis, see Detienne (*Masters*) 39ff. On the relation of mortals and immortals, see Joanne Waugh and Lisa Wilkinson, "Fleshing Out the Form of Beauty: Socrates, Dialogue, and the Forms" (*Plato's Forms: Varieties of Interpretation*, ed. William A. Welton (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2002)): "But mortals are bound to immortals not because gods have the bodies of men; rather, mortals conceive of themselves in contrast to the corporeal plenitude," the "superbody of the gods" and their "radiant, constant existence" (31). Divine life is enduring; the gods do not die because they are not subject to those forces that render the life of mortals fragile, ephemeral, precarious, and derivative. Thus mortals are called "the ephemeral ones," for they find the meaning of their fleeting existence in relation to what is divine and natural" (*italics mine*, 223).

34. Burkert, *Religion*, 271. Hereafter references to page number are included in parentheses in the text.

35. It is not, in the words of Burkert, a "grammatical quirk" that the singular of theos "does not have a normal vocative" and that like hieros "theos is used predominantly

as a predicate" (272). It is important for us to begin to understand how the ways the early Greeks use the term *theos* implies, as Vernant and others have said, the plural character of the gods, that is, "the Greek gods are not individuals each with a particular single characteristic form and spiritual life" (*Myth and Society*, 108). Hence, *theos* cannot be equivalent to the names of the gods. Rather it is a constant semantic reminder of how the divine is relationally understood and revered.

36. Burkert, *Religion*, writes: "The word *theos* does not lead into an I-Thou relation; it is declaratory of a third, objective power, even if it often arises from a state of confusion and overwhelming impressions" (272).

37. This passage is from Stanley Lombardo's *The Essential Homer* (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 2011).

38. Guthrie, *The Greeks and Their Gods*, 35.

39. Qtd. in Kerenyi, *The Gods of the Greeks*, 116.

40. All citations are taken from Lattimore's *Hesiod* (Ann Arbor, MI: The University of Michigan Press, 1959).

41. There is, perhaps, a significant analogy between the Muses at the beginning and end of the poet's song and Zeus at the beginning and "end of all things." The Muses glorify "all the laws and gracious customs of the Immortals," which have been elsewhere attributed to Zeus: he is god "of all human communities, races, and fellowships . . . including even those seeking protection." As the poet places the Muses at the beginning and end of his singing, the Muses place Zeus in the beginning, middle, and end of their songs. This analogy reinforces the connections between Zeus and the Muses, as well as the idea that the *Theogeny* is, indeed, "a hymn to Zeus," but I suggest for different reasons than Vernant offers.

42. Detienne, *Masters*, 72. Hereafter page numbers will be referenced in parentheses in the text.

43. Cf. Wilkinson, *Parmenides*, 59–63.

44. Exactly when the epics were composed and transcribed is a matter of debate. The earliest and latest dates offered for composition are between the twelfth and the seventh century, and for transcription between the ninth or eighth and as late as the fifth century for complete transcribed text. Cf. G. S. Kirk's section on "Homer" in *The Cambridge History of Classical Literature*, Vol. I (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), Hermann Frankel's *Early Greek Poetry and Philosophy* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, Janovich, 1974), and Eric Havelock's "The Alphabetization of Homer" in *Communication Arts in the Ancient World*, eds. Jackson P. Hershbell and Eric A. Havelock (New York: Hastings House, 1978).

45. Wilkinson, *Parmenides*, 12.

46. Wilkinson, *Parmenides*, 12, with a quote from Charles Segal, "Spectator and Listener," *The Greeks*, ed. Jean-Pierre Vernant (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1995), 194.

47. Waugh and Wilkinson, "Communicating Philosophy: Platonic Dialogue and Socratic Method," in *Philosophy and Communication*, eds. Konstantine Boudouris and Takis

Poulakos (Athens, Greece: International Center for Greek Philosophy and Culture, 2001), 216–17.

48. Waugh and Wilkinson, “Communicating Philosophy,” 217.

49. Cf: Joanne B. Waugh, “Socrates and the Character of Platonic Dialogue” in *Who Speaks for Plato: Studies in Platonic Anonymity*, ed. Gerald A. Press (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers Inc., 2000): “Language and meaning thus exist in the embodied actions of speaker and hearer; they are written on the body, as Foucault reminds us. But this metaphor in which the body is metaphorically a text needs to be turned around, for it is the text that stands in for an embodied speaker” (42).

50. Not everyone agrees that early preserved oral poetry was indeed composed orally (i.e., the catalogue of ships in the *Iliad* as example). Here, however, I follow the insights and implications of Milman and Adam Parry in terms of the practices of oral versemaking. Cf: *The Making of Homeric Verse: The Collected Papers of Milman Parry*, ed. Adam Parry (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987).

51. Waugh and Wilkinson, “Communicating Philosophy,” 215.

52. Wilkinson, *Parmenides*, 14. See also Kevin Robb, “The Poetic Sources of the Greek Alphabet: Rhythm and Abecedarium from Phoenician to Greek,” in *Communication Arts in the Ancient World*, eds. Jackson P. Hershbell and Eric A. Havelock (New York: Hastings House, 1978).

53. See Kevin Robb, *Literacy and Paideia in Ancient Greece* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994).

54. Citing from Philo (*De Plantatione* 30.126), Detienne (*Masters*) retells the tale inspired from the *Theogeny*: “An old story is sometimes sung that was imagined by sages and, like so many others, committed to memory from one generation to the next. It runs as follows: ‘When the creator had completed creation, he asked one of the prophets if there was anything he wished did not exist among all of the things born on earth. The prophet replied that all things were absolutely perfect and complete, but there was just one thing lacking, laudatory speech (*ton epaineten . . . logon*). . . . The Father of All listened to what he had to say and, approving his words, forthwith produced the lineage of singers full of harmonies, all born from one of the powers by whom he was surrounded . . . *Mnemosyne*.’” (40)

55. Veyne, *Did the Greeks Believe*, 64.

56. Detienne, *Masters*, 183.

57. Here I use the straightforward a-not lethe-forgotten, although admittedly others prefer “truth” or “unconcealment” or combinations and derivations, linguistic and philosophic, of one, or two, or all of these.

58. Cf: Detienne, *Masters*, 49ff.

59. Qtd. in Detienne, *Masters*, 72.

60. Frag. 166 in *The Presocratic Philosophers*, Second Edition, G. S. Kirk, J. E. Raven, and M. Schofield (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

61. Cf: Wilkinson, *Parmenides*, “Reconsidering Xenophanes,” 40–55.

62. Detienne, *Masters*, 86.

63. That distinction is left “unanalyzed” until classical theories about the relationship between speech and reality (philosophia) or speech and social relations (rhetorike) begin to consider the ontological relevance of mimesis (Plato) or the poetic skill of *apate* (Simonides).

64. Eric Havelock, *The Greek Concept of Justice: From Its Shadow in Homer to Its Substance in Plato* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1978), 243ff.

65. Detienne, *Masters*, 75. See also Eric A. Havelock, *A Preface to Plato* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1963): “His power derives from his function, and his function does not carry him vertically upward above the spirits of men but extends him horizontally outward to the confines of the society for which he sings” (89, *italics mine*).

66. Francois de Polignac, *Cults, Territory, and the Origin of the Greek City-State*, trans. Janet Lloyd (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1995), 153.

Chapter 3

Xenia: An Economy of Charis

The preceding chapter suggests it is possible—if not probable—that the collective experience of receiving the gifts of the Muses, ritualized and repeated as it is over generations, affects the attitudes and expectations of early Greeks in their relationships to one another at least as much as the evolving “mentality of agon” serves to classify or categorize these very same relationships in opposition to one another. Alongside the agon, then, there is *muthos*, or alongside a practice that distinguishes between its participants in terms of conflict and challenge, there is a practice that unites its participants in terms of equality and harmony.

By this perspective *muthos* offers us a glimpse of a genuinely non-agonistic practice founded in a type of non-agonistic speech. Are the values of this practice, indeed this type of speech, robust enough to persist, as the agon is said to persist, through the evolution of *poleis*? The answer to this question generally depends upon how one understands the advent of *politeia* in ancient Greece, including how one conceptualizes differences between “good” or “bad” political forms. For instance, the type of equality that I suggest is manifested in the practice of *muthos* might reflect something like a “democratic requirement” characteristic of other practices. This democratic requirement is perhaps analogous to the freedom lauded by Pericles in the “Funeral Oration.” He describes the Athenian system in general “as a democracy because many people were involved in the *politeia*,”^[1] but his claim suggests that the involvement of many is not equivalent to the freedom of all to be involved. As long as *demokratia* is practiced as “the prevailing of the *demos*,” citizens who are not recognized, or would not want to be recognized, as members of the prevailing *demos* are not as “free” as others. My focus on *muthos* has been to raise the question of whether all persons, those recognized as citizens as well as those regarded as non-

citizens, would willingly and knowingly regard themselves as involved in some practice of theon timai. Perhaps with a similar question in mind, Francois de Polignac writes,

the “blossoming of religious life” we have noted toward the end of the Geometric period shows that religion was the only agent to affect the entire social body. It signaled the emergence of a society that seemed to acquire self awareness as it retook possession of the past by endowing it with a sacred character, organizing in an increasingly overt fashion collective practices and sanctuaries in which rituals transformed a disparate collection of individuals or groups into a community.^[2]

Polignac further suggests that the creation of community involves a “shared conception of reality” inclusive of patterns of behavior that are “formulated in terms that were identical to all members of the society” (152). In other words, recognized patterns of behavior as well as a shared conception of the appropriateness of these behaviors blend into more general patterns of social organization, the forms of association by which members daily interact and, in Polignac’s terms, “the forms of action that the society adopt[s]” (152). Some of these “forms of action” include the adaptation and adoption of a variety of politeia that are at some point contested, that is, simultaneously considered “good” by some and “bad” by others. But what is actually and willingly practiced in common would seem to have more long-range impact on the forms of actions that are adapted and adopted to emerging political forms, that is, a practice like muthos that is considered “good” by the general population.

Still, there might be a significant difficulty with this line of reasoning. If Polignac is correct that “religion was the only agent to affect the entire social body,” then we would expect, given the principles of social unity manifest in their religious practices, that confrontation and contests would not need to arise in such practices, nor would they be likely to do so. With this in mind,

how might we account for the fluctuation and variety of politeia without separating it from religious behaviors and practices in ancient Greek experience? That is, perhaps the ancient Greeks are able to simultaneously practice social unity in the forms of action described for muthos and social divisiveness in the forms of action that comprise the agon. In this way, as Vernant maintains, Eris and Philia are “opposed but complementary forces” in the development of ancient Greek culture, that is, wherever there is philia (family feeling) there is also eris (strife) and vice versa.^[3]

With regard to other ancient cultures, inasmuch as we have to admit that there is no “innate thrust” to theon timai in the Greek world, there is also “no innate thrust toward politics in the Greek character,”^[4] even if sometimes ancient Greek authors write as if this were their own invention. For instance, Herodotus describes the practices of “putting politics in common” in non-Greek territories and is promptly “not believed”^[5] by his Greek audience. Still, as a variety of poleis emerge on the Greek landscape there seems to be a prevailing concern and effort—at least in Athens—to live free of a tyranny imposed from outside the city proper, that is, to live free from foreign rule or rule by another Greek territory. This concern and effort is expressed in ancient Athens by what Luciano Canfora calls a “compromise,” specifically “the compromise between the aristocracy and the people governed by the rationale, political culture, and language of the gentlemen who ruled the democratic city. For them, democracy was attractive insofar as it represented ‘freedom’ . . . It was a regime, in other words, without a trace of tyranny” (139).

A pluralistic religion, or as I understand it a “narrative” religion characterized by a “network of relationships” or a “plurality of agents,” is a religion indicative of the rationale, culture, and language of its practitioners. A narrative religion becomes a religion through the actual behaviors and practices of persons rather than being conceived as a religion that prescribes for how its practitioners should behave. A narrative religion, then, is a religion without a trace of tyranny, yet it is

not characterized as a “compromise” between competing sensibilities. To be clear: the gods are considered superior, inviolable, and mysterious, but the practices by which these gods are honored does not affect a compromise between its practitioners, nor does it seem to affect a negotiation between gods and men as if mortals and immortals are somehow at odds. Since muthos is occasioned for poets and audiences as receiving the Muses’ “gifts toward humanity,” there is a celebratory and festive aspect to early Greek theon timai that distinguishes it from the “practices of confrontation and discussion” that characterize alternating types of politeia. That is, muthos generates a “shared conception of a reality” embodied in certain recurring patterns of behavior “formulated in terms that were identical for all members of society” (152). I submit that the early Greeks would not consider these behaviors distinct from general patterns of behavior. In their religious thought and behaviors, the ancient Greeks do make distinctions, but as Vernant reminds us, they do not make the same distinctions we make:

their religion and their pantheon can be seen as a system of classification, a particular way of ordering and conceptualizing the universe, distinguishing between multiple types of force and power operating within it . . . I would suggest that a pantheon, as an organized system implying definite relations between the various gods, is a kind of language, a particular way of apprehending reality and expressing it in symbolic terms.^[6]

Following Polignac and Vernant, the issue is not so much a matter of whether religion affects the entire social body but how it might do so, how its practices might result in “new social forms and attitudes” that characterize some of the lived experiences of early Greek life. These experiences, I suggest, yield a certain “economy” of behavior in the development of social and political relationships. To borrow a phrase from the literature of gift-exchange, these experiences yield a “moral

economy.” Since *muthos* is a gift, specifically the Muses’ “gift toward humanity,” it is perhaps not inappropriate to briefly consider the realm of the gift and the dynamics of gift practices in relation to the scholarly record of the advent of *demokratia*.

GIFT PRACTICES^[7]

There are a variety of ways to explain the inception and evolution of ancient Greek democratic practices, most of which tend toward the development of the Athenian *ekklesia*. Some of the examples cited below are parts of a much larger explanation as addressed in chapter 1, and some of the examples have been written about as if they cause democracy rather than correlate with other events and practices in its “invention.” Nevertheless, a general and non-exhaustive list of the reasons for the development of Athenian democracy can include: the collapse of “royal rule” alongside the collapse of Mycenaean civilization, the *koinē* of warrior-dialogue, the increasing influx of rural populations to emerging urban environments, the centralization of a public “Hearth” in these quickly crowding areas, hoplite reforms, Solon’s reforms, Cleisthenes’ reforms, the rise of an Athenian navy, the invention and use of a “chorus” in early ancient theater, an emerging practice of reclaiming Theseus as “the father of democracy,” the architectural development of “median points” such as temples and marketplaces that delimit and “territorialize” the city-proper, and early instances of the term for “citizen” as a means of distinguishing between one who bore arms and one who did not. I add to this list the practice of oral poetic performance with the caveat that unlike some of the events and practices alongside it, oral poetic performance does not seem to conceal an aristocratic sensibility beneath an egalitarian looking practice.

For instance, the existence of a “common” or “public hearth” is a widespread phenomenon in emerging poleis of ancient Greece.^[8] The hearth is associated with the Olympian goddess Hestia and “Hestia is synonymous with eating communally.”^[9] So the existence of a common, public hearth

implies a developing consciousness of the “political community as a family group.”^[10] Louis Gernet explains, “The idea attached to the public hearth remains communal: what is expressed directly from the fact there is a city Hearth as well as an individual family one, is a form of concrete solidarity that makes the well-being of all the well-being of each: it is the very constitutive nature of the city” (333). Individual household hearths are located in the center of a common living area, they are “in the middle” as it were of the private activities of a family, a *gene*. The institution of a single, public hearth links all families and all households and “represented them all without being identified with any one in particular.”^[11] Hence, the public hearth can be seen as a concrete expression of a spirit of *philia*, connecting the well-being of each to the well-being of all. In classical Athens, however, the public hearth was preserved in the Prytaneion, that dining hall Plato’s Socrates refers to at Apology 36d when he suggests the appropriate means of punishment for his crimes: “What is suitable for a poor benefactor who needs leisure to exhort you? Nothing is more suitable, gentlemen, than for such a man to be fed in the Prytaneum . . . ” As Oswyn Murray explains, the irony and insult of Socrates’ proposal strikes at the aristocratic character and tradition of the Athenian public hearth. Contrary to the idea of the prytaneion as genuinely “public” and “held in common,” the Athenian prytaneion is a space reserved for “the honorific dining of an elite” (235), meaning that not just any Athenian may dine communally with any other Athenian in the prytaneion. A mid-fifth-century law lists the “honorific elite” as priests of the Eleusinian mysteries, two descendants of former tyrants, those “chosen by Apollo,” athletes victorious in at least one of four major international contests, and the “elected” archons of the moment. This “public hearth” is not only not open, there are laws that keep it closed to the majority of Athenians. To dine at the Prytaneion is an honor that few Athenians could experience or aspire to in their lifetimes. Thus, its value as “an early institution of the aristocratic state [is] retained and developed in the classical period” (235).

While the existence of a public hearth appears democratic, the practices that preserve it—like the practices that preserve the agon—turn out to be aristocratic in their purposes and effects. In a similar way, the success of the Athenian navy and the rise of Athens as a “maritime empire” are often attributed to reforms that allowed non-propertied thetes to serve as rowers. The majority of thetes, however, serve as rowers in the third or lowest tier of triremes built specifically for offensive maneuvers against invading Persians. Recompense for rowing included the title of “citizen” and pay for service from the treasury, yet one’s class dictated one’s position as a rower just as one’s class dictated one’s position as a trierarch, or ultimately one of the strategoi:

Abroad, the Athenian commoner ruled the seas. At home, he was still a second-class citizen. The law allowed him to vote in the Assembly, but he was barred from holding public office. The pressures of his daily work often kept him away from Assembly meetings. Athens was in fact less a democracy than a commonwealth governed by the richest citizens. All archons and generals came from the ranks of the wealthy, and the bar of property qualification was set so high that even the ten thousand hoplites were excluded. The common citizen could do no more than choose his leaders: leadership itself was denied to him.^[12]

The leadership this author refers to was invariably and repeatedly divided between an elite “political class” willing to accept rule of non-propertied citizens, and those “other” elite desiring a return to a system that restricts citizenship to “those capable of arming themselves at their own expense,”^[13] that is, a system excluding thetes. Although “opening up citizenship” can be historically linked to the advent of Athens as a “maritime empire,”^[14] it is also politically linked to highly contested debates in the Assembly concerning who is and who is not a “citizen” while the subjects of the debate are not present at the Assembly because they are, literally, “out to sea.”

Many, also, have written about the democratizing effects of war upon a social body. It stands to reason that a spirit of unity fostered in opposition to a common enemy is still a spirit of unity. But the practices and effects of war are often not sufficient to change the motivations and expectations of an entire social body. Polignac observes, "Warfare was a crystallizing agent, a factor of mutual reinforcement in the societies that it set in opposition, and it did introduce a collection of changes. But it could not itself make them produce new social forms and attitudes" (151-52). As the rise and demise of the Athenian navy makes clear, strategies that justify and command acts of war come from a fraction or faction of the social body. In the ancient world—at the least—war is a political business transacted by the few and carried out by the many. The many may or may not agree with the reasons and causes of war, but their agreement or dissent has no real effect upon the structure of war or its day to day operations.^[15] Social changes do arise before, during, and as a consequence of war, but they are not democratically enacted changes. They are often changes "at the cost of creating new cleavages that undermined the unification . . . imposed 'from above'" (152). So, while war can create temporary forms of social unity, it also stands to reason that genuine and long lasting forms of social unity cannot be imposed from above. They emerge over time from practices that not only effect but require the voluntary participation of the entire social body.

Seen from this perspective, the inception if not the evolution of *demokratia* was more likely an overtly anti-aristocratic and organic process, growing from practices of "belonging together" and resulting in the eventual verbalization of a doctrine that "held that polis was an organic whole, the different members of which were strictly interdependent."^[16] In this way, democracy can be seen as one type of emergent pattern in human relationships. The value of these relationships can also be seen in practices few would describe as religious or political but many recognize as significant to ancient Greek sociality. The acts of giving and receiving a favor or benefit, a gift, for instance,

establish bonds that are meant to persist through time. The economy of giving and receiving, often referred to as “gift-exchange,” alerts us to a whole set of practices and relationships that exist alongside, or in spite of, other types of exchanges and economies that comprise the range of human interaction, or transaction, in the development of a specifically political culture.

Some gift theorists, moreover, see gift-exchange as constitutive of culture. Marcel Mauss and others suggest that “the practices surrounding the gift can constitute the very foundation of social relations.”^[17] My suggestion that the practice of *muthos* constitutes a joyful and equalizing act because it is occasioned for both poets and audiences as receiving the gifts of the Muses implies that *muthos*, too, is a type of gift practice, it constitutes the value of social unity as a model for human relationships. But can and does this value constitute the foundation of social relations entirely?

If gift practices provide the conditions for social practices, then the three interrelated obligations of gift exchange—giving, receiving, and reciprocating^[18]—would model patterns of exchange for all social practices, including the variety of economies that result from these practices. In other words, a “gift economy” subtends all economies, including mercantile and market economies. What differentiates types of economies from one another are the particular terms and values of exchange, but all economies—even if they only mimic these terms—operate in accordance with the three interrelated obligations that characterize gift exchange, that is, the structure of gift exchange is the structure of all exchange. For instance, in a market economy such as ours, emphasis is placed upon the “objects of exchange” to the extent that the subjects who enact the exchange are often incidental to the transaction. In a gift economy, conversely, emphasis is placed upon the subjects who exchange, the objects of exchange are either not more significant than the value of the relationship between subjects, or the objects of exchange are actually incidental to the value of the relationship between subjects: “Where commodity exchange

is focused on a transfer in which objects of equivalent exchange value are reciprocally transacted, gift exchange seeks to establish a relationship between subjects in which the actual objects transferred are incidental to the value of the relationship itself.”^[19] The differences between commodity and gift exchanges suggest that commodity exchanges can only occur once a community is established. That is, for exchanges to be deemed equivalent, there must be an independent yet “agreed” upon system of valuation like a market. Gifts, on the other hand, aim to secure the relationships that establish systems like markets, and so gift practices can be seen as integral, if not essential, to the development of community.

Still, for most gift theorists, it is “the value of the relationship itself” in terms of the development of community that remains in question. Until recently, gifts were seen either as objects of “disguised self-interest” or as bygone tokens of “pure generosity.”^[20] That is, theorists seemed ultimately split between gifts as a means or a tool for obligating and dominating others, or gifts as once “spontaneous” and “free,” and offered without expectations. Yet how we might explain the development and maintenance of communities on either account—disguised self-interest or pure generosity—begs increasingly complicated questions about human interaction in general.

For some theorists, the differences between ancient and modern gift practices speak to the differences between ancient and modern worldviews, including stark contrasts between the values of ancient and modern social relationships. For others, when it comes to human relationships, there is no appreciable difference between ancient and modern practices. For these theorists, gifts have always been objects of disguised self-interest, they characterize a basic competitiveness in human relationships, and provide evidence of any societies’ emergence from a perennial state of nature. The theorists who reject this Hobbesian or Social Darwinian account of gift practices, however, seem to shoulder the burden of proof: for them, even if contemporary gift practices have become tainted by the

instrumental reasoning that drives post-industrial capitalist culture, prior to the dominating effects of a global economy, the exchange of gifts maintained a different type of economy, a primarily moral economy, generating the type of warmth and intimacy between gift partners that is characteristic of not just human, but humane relationships. For both types of theories, the issue seems to be less about what gifts do and more about what humans can or should do by means of the gift.

Still, polarizing accounts of gift practices serve to remind us that the theories we generate about the gift follow from certain assumptions about the arena or theatre of human interactions. Although many contemporary theorists try to resist “trivializing polarities” that imply universal claims about “the human condition,” theories of gifts do seem to lean to one side or another of these two general statements: that humans are and can only be self-serving and competitive, or that humans are and should be collaborative and cooperative. In light of these differing sensibilities, we might do well to recall the words of Parmenides’ “goddess”: “it makes no difference to me where I begin for I shall return there again.”^[21] In other words, the theories we generate about gift practices begin with questions about the gift, true, but “the questions of the gift are also narrative matters: that is, they interpret the stories we tell about social interaction.”^[22] For instance, Marcel Mauss wrote *Essai sur Le Don* in post-World War I France: he was responding “both to the recent violence of the First World War and the continuing unequal distribution of wealth.”^[23] Apparently, Mauss’ intent was to restore and rejuvenate modern interest in the complexities of human relationships in order to encourage future generations to avoid the hierarchies created by social and economic inequities. For Mauss, these hierarchies yield social disparity and create an instability that proves regressive rather than progressive over time. Yet despite Mauss’ intent and claim that education can provide us with the tools for stabilizing our relationships and ultimately “sharing the wealth,” his analysis and assessment of “potlatch cultures”—cultures that use gifts as a means of coercion^[24]—launched a tradition of suspicion,

one might say cynicism, about the gift. On my view, this tradition culminates in Jacques Derrida's famous claim that the gift is not just impossible, "it is the impossible."^[25] On Derrida's view, because one cannot even conceive of giving without simultaneously expecting something in return,^[26] the "free" and "generous" character of the gift is an aporia, a contradiction at the heart of a semantic and symbolic system that is accountable for the conditions of social praxis. In other words, as soon as a gift is recognized as such, it ceases to exist: "If the gift is annulled in the economic odyssey of the circle as soon as it appears as gift or as soon as it signifies itself as gift, there is no longer any 'logic of the gift,' and one may safely say that a consistent discourse on the gift becomes impossible." Simply put, the polite expression "you shouldn't have" masks the more accurate expression "you couldn't have": there is no such thing as "the gift," yet gift practices constitute the foundation of social practices.

Derrida, unlike Mauss, was not explicitly concerned with the actual practices of gift exchange. He was concerned with the metalogical possibility of the "gift" as it is constructed in texts—like Mauss'—about the gift. From the point of view of those who practice gift exchange, as best as this can be assessed, others observe that neither "disguised self-interest," "pure generosity," or conceptual impossibility, can account for the variety of situations in which gifts are exchanged and the diversity of meanings attributable to gifts, that is, "the same form of behavior may have many different meanings according to local context, and may therefore appear in a wide range of interaction episodes with different social effects."^[27] David Cheal suggests that while gifts continue to establish and sustain trust between partners, the context in which gift practices are relevant and significant is much more narrow and local than traditional theories would allow. So while gift practices do establish trust between gift partners, the social effects of this trust do not extend to the entire community. Hence, a gift economy, for Cheal, is an economy of small groups. Cheal's assessment implies, however, that not only do gifts not provide

“the foundation for social relations,” gift practices might actually yield to the larger influences of sociopolitical practices. In other words, if gift practices are constitutive of wide ranging sociopolitical practices, then we would not expect gift customs to vary or to yield different social effects. Yet gift customs do change and the variety of some of their effects are determined in relation to changing sociopolitical conditions and contexts, those conditions and contexts that are often said to be influenced by gift practices rather than conversely. Even if gift practices continue in spite of a dominant market ideology, they do so in opposition to more general patterns of exchange. Gift practices, then, actually do not affect these more general patterns of exchange and might be affected by them. Because of this, Cheal has been criticized for endorsing the importance of a gift economy that—on his own assessment—has no real effect on the market economy. But Cheal’s sociological analysis shares characteristics with many contemporary gift theories in terms of the value of the relationship gift partners enact, and this is a value that cannot be explained by appeals to absolute “disinterestedness” or self-interest.

Older accounts of gift practices—in general—do not allow for the possibility that gift relationships, like most relationships, are motivated and practiced in a combination of self-interest and interest for the other.^[28] For some recent theorists, a combination of interests between gift partners yields the distinctive value of gift practices. Unlike the finite and limited equivalence exchanges of market practices in which one commodity is exchanged for another and the fairness of the exchange is determined by an independent market value, gifts, regardless of their market value, manifest and retain a primary subjective value, or more appropriately, an inter-subjective value. Gifts are a token of “something that was not there before,”^[29] namely, a different type of relationship.

But when we consider how relationships are designated as “gift relationships,” it is very possible that Derrida is correct: there is no isolated gift because all gifts presuppose a counter-gift. But this is as much as to say there can be no act of giving a

gift without the act of receiving a gift. Theories that posit gifts as objects of “disguised self-interest” or “pure generosity” purport to read the motivations and desires of givers as if the act of giving is independent of the act of receiving. But from another perspective, it is the act of receiving a gift that defines the gift as such. If I do not accept something offered, obviously there is no gift. Likewise, if I do accept something offered but do not acknowledge the person who offers it, there is also no gift. I have simply taken something from another person; I have used the act of receiving to disguise my own self-interest. But gift exchange occasions a combination of interests between selves and others. When I acknowledge and accept something as a gift, I acknowledge another as a person who has an interest in being a giver and, like me, has an interest in receiving. In other words, gifts are a concrete expression of something added to the relationship, something akin to a mutual interest in reciprocation. Inasmuch as there can be no giving without receiving, there can also be no receiving without reciprocating. So, of the three interrelated obligations of gift exchange, reciprocation seems to provide the conditions for giving and receiving in the province of the gift.

On the other hand, and according to some, reciprocity is not distinctive to gift exchange. Per Lévi-Strauss, reciprocity is a universal structure that forms the foundations of all social life and thereby all forms of interaction. Whether it concerns the act or the obligation to act, reciprocity characterizes all types of exchanges, be they verbal, mercantile, market, or gift. Still, I suggest that what distinguishes gift exchange is the mutual acknowledgment of both partners to give and receive not just once or twice, but indefinitely. Verbal exchanges may or may not proceed indefinitely. Most often verbal exchanges are instrumental and informational, and they can become agonistic and/or acrimonious to the extent they cease. Similarly, in market systems, the obligation to reciprocate can be seen as an imperative to settle one’s debt, to return or repay in order to be free of the exchange, that is, it is a system of tit for tat. In a gift system, however, whether it concerns the act or the obligation

to act, reciprocity characterizes the mutual acknowledgment of partners to both give and receive, to perpetuate the exchange, and to “permanently (re)fuel” the debt.^[30]

By this perspective, gift-exchange can be seen as a practice of mutual indebtedness that holds for both partners, and I suggest that it holds for both partners regardless of who initiates the exchange. That is, since there can be no giving without receiving, it is the recipient who acknowledges the other as a giver. Claims that “it is the sheer satisfaction of giving” that yields my reward, or “I gave myself the gift of . . .” mimic the practices surrounding the gift but are not actual instances of gift exchange because the element of reciprocity does not extend beyond one’s own self-interest. Alternatively, a genuine act of reciprocity not only acknowledges the other as a giver, it acknowledges the other’s interest to give and to receive. In other words, genuine reciprocity recognizes the interest of the other in the interest of the self: it generates a combination of interests that do not reduce to the additive models that usually account for an individual’s interest in exchange. In market exchanges, for instance, subjects are considered to be individuals who enact the exchange as individuals. Although the subjects who exchange can be considered incidental to the objects that are exchanged, and thereby subjects may be interchangeable, the prevailing model of market exchange requires two or more independent entities who come to the table as individuals and, significantly, leave the table as individuals. Their combined interests during the exchange might be called the “sum” of their individual interests, but the value of the exchange is measured independently for each. Although market exchanges might enact partnerships, each partner is still an individual at the level of interest. Hence, the popular semantics of “exchange” are derived from the act of one person literally “outbartering” another.

Genuine reciprocity in terms of mutual indebtedness, however, troubles traditional and familiar ideas about exchange. In a genuine reciprocal relationship, subjects are not in a position to outdo one another because subjects identify their

interests in the interests of the other, and conversely. This non-additive combination of interests yields “the value of the relationship itself”: it is a value generated or created from the mutual and simultaneous acknowledgment of both subjects to give and receive indefinitely. In a market system, subjects may be affected or changed by the exchange of objects, and subjects may or may not pursue a relationship based upon the experience of exchange, but we would not identify these changes or pursuant relationships as integral to the exchange. From the perspective of the partners, gain and loss, and friendship or enmity, might be a result of the exchange, but it is not rooted in the process of exchange. To the contrary, market exchange is structured so as to avoid creating social bonds between “partners” because the process of exchange is always conditioned by the “possibility of exiting.” Mutual indebtedness, however, is rooted in the practice of an exchange predicated upon the interdependence of subjects in terms of the relationship. Again, a subject is acknowledged as a giver by another subject who accepts the offered gift. Accepting something offered as a gift communicates a promise to give something back, true, but acceptance also communicates a relational equality between partners: it designates the other as a giver while simultaneously designating the self as a giver. In this way, gift exchange elucidates an economy that is not predicated upon exiting but upon entering. Moreover, subjects neither come to the table nor leave the table as individuals because the three interrelated obligations of giving, receiving, and reciprocating that are often assessed in terms of cycles or sequences are actually expressed simultaneously.^[31] Since I cannot accept a gift without acknowledging the giver as a person who has an interest in my acceptance of the gift, I cannot fool myself into believing that I will somehow decide later whether to reciprocate: I can only decide later how to reciprocate.

In this way, I suggest that simultaneity of obligation precludes the possibility of antagonism between gift partners. Gift partners create alliances for the benefit and pleasure of one

another, yet this combination of interests cannot be secured through opposition or competition. Rather than thinking of mutual indebtedness as a type of economic shortfall that must be made “good,” mutual indebtedness can refer to the character of acknowledgment that conditions a relationship predicated upon a combination of interests, mine and the other person’s as well as the other person’s and my own. Our mutually acknowledged “debt,” then, is to or toward the relationship for its value exceeds what either one of us might give or receive. This combination of interests means, however, that gift relationships cannot be explained by classical models of human relationships in which the partners are always somewhat at odds. For instance, some theorists have used the “law of alternation” to explain gift practices in terms of games.^[32] The idea behind alternation is that gifts cannot be exchanged at the same time, they must be exchanged in sequence. Just as chess partners cannot move at the same time, and combatants do not strike simultaneously, gift partners take turns in the exchange, that is, they alternate between the roles of donor and donee. Since the game of gift exchange depends upon both partners taking turns, gift partners are allies in perpetuating the game. But since gift partners must take turns, the law of alternation also places them in opposition to one another. Gift partners are thereby allies and antagonists at the same time, and gift exchange proceeds like games and contests proceed, move then counter-move, gift then counter-gift.

The law of alternation is derived from the elapse of real time between the exchanges of gifts,^[33] but according to some other theorists, what is most significant about gift exchange is the “collapse” or “deferral” of real time between exchange.^[34] In other words, I do not accept a gift if and only if I have a counter-gift ready to hand. If this were the case, then gift exchanges would look and operate like other social “debts,” that is, I bring a bottle of wine for the hostess, or shovel snow from a neighbor’s sidewalk because she shoveled snow from mine. Rather, it is the act of mutually obligating ourselves to reciprocate that establishes trust between me and my partner in

the province of the gift. The longevity of “trust” is not without an element of “indeterminacy,” but, pace alternation theory, indeterminacy is not the result of the sequence of exchange. Mutual indebtedness characterizes the promise of the relationship: gift partners acknowledge one another as equally accountable to the relationship knowing full well that neither partner completely controls her own nor the other’s interest because, again, it is the combination of interests that grounds the relationship. Moreover, any instrumental value credited to their combined interests would have to come from observers of the relationship. That is, gift partners themselves cannot say we have used this relationship to gain or achieve x, y, and z, without abstracting themselves from the relationship and looking at “it” as if the relationship were a quantifiable object rather than a qualitative process. In the absence of an instrumental value by which to measure or regulate exchange, there is an element of indeterminacy, but it is an element that is incidental to the process, much as the elapse of real time between the acts of giving and receiving and the objects given are incidental. From the point of view of partners, the gifts, like the time between their exchange, are effects of an already established relationship.

On this account, a gift relationship begins to look like a very specific type of relationship. Yet how long it lasts, what is exchanged, who initiates the exchange, and its social effects, seem less significant than the combination of interests that manifest the relationship. I suggest this combination of interests yields “the value of the relationship itself,” and offers the possibility of reconsidering what is meant by a “gift economy” as a non-agonistic economy.

XENIA

Early Greeks and twenty-first-century members of a global economy engage in a variety of exchange practices, some of which may reflect the analytic of what I call “genuine reciprocity” and some of which may not. My purpose has been

to narrow the focus of the “gift” to a definitive type of relationship in order to explore whether this relationship is familiar to the Greek character. The archaic and ancient Greek gift relationship that yields the most scholarly attention is ξενία. Anglicized as *xenia*, translated as “guest friendship,” “ritualized friendship,” “hospitality” or “loyalty,” and sometimes referred to as gift friendship, *xenia* is also a specific type of relationship due, primarily, to the persons who comprise it.

The earliest recorded instance of *xenia* comes from Book 6 of the *Iliad*. While I am most interested in how the “gift” and the practice of *xenia* are dramatized in some of Plato’s dialogues, I think there are alternative ways of understanding ancient Greek *xenia* in light of the differences between agonistic and non-agonistic practices previously developed. These alternative ways certainly bear on my re-reading of Plato and ideas about the character of Socrates. The relevance of the gift to Plato, however, is best assessed in terms appropriate to the tradition of the gift he inherits. So the remainder of this chapter focuses on whether the pronouncement of *xenia* outside the walls of Troy is compatible with recent assessments of *xenia* as well as the more general assessments of the economy of the gift.

I suggest that *xenia* does not constitute a type of agon—it is not an agonistic practice. Yet many theorists would maintain that *xenia* is at least partially agonistic, meaning that ancient Greek gift partners, intentionally or otherwise, compete with one another in the bestowal of gifts. This view of *xenia* seems to be consistent with the episode between Diomedes and Glaucus in the *Iliad*, Book 6. Also, given the argumentative character of philosophy in general, an agonistic *xenia* would seem compatible with Plato’s use of *xenia* as a dramatic frame in, specifically, the *Republic*.^[35] If this is an appropriate way of reading *xenia* in some ancient texts, however, then *xenia* cannot also be considered a social practice in which the value of the objects exchanged is incidental to the “value of the relationship itself.” That is, if *xenia* is partially agonistic because *xenoi* compete in the exchange of gifts, then it is the value of the gifts that drive and determine the value of the relationship.

Hence *xenia* is not a “gift” practice in the sense that gift exchange can be distinguished from other types of exchanges, principally material or mercantile exchanges. While we might want to see *xenia* as characteristic of some type of “moral economy” embedded in early Greek sociality, it is difficult to ascertain what makes *xenia* “moral” rather than just “material” if *xenia* is also, in some sense, agonal. Alternatively, then, I suggest it is possible to consider *xenia* in light of the relations of equality and reciprocity that characterize the practice of *muthos*.

Laurence Godelier suggests that the authority of the gift in ancient cultures—at the least—derives from its location in myth. According to Godelier, gifts are “religious before they are legalistic and linguistic.”^[36] Further, the “religious” character of the gift conceals its origin in stories of human invention while disclosing the “divine sanctions” that proscribe and codify human interactions. In other words, the religious character of the gift is intrinsically double: it conveys the conditions for culture by disguising the authority for those conditions. The practice of *muthos*, occasioned as receiving the Muses’ “gifts toward humanity,” seems to exemplify this type of “doubleness”: the Muses are not human, nor are they strictly Olympian, yet their stories, including the story of their own genealogy and mode of action, narrativize “the suprahuman origins of culture.”^[37] That the stories are multiple, diverse, and in some respects “changeable” does not alter their function as “an insurmountable and impenetrable point of reference for everything that has validity and permanence . . .” Hence, at the heart of the mythical gift there is a fourth obligation recognized but not developed by Mauss^[38]: it is “the obligation to make gifts to the gods.”^[39] This obligation, however, lacks the reciprocal fulfillment of all other gift practices that imitate or mimic it because a divine gift is a gift that cannot be appropriately returned, that is, it is the “first” gift. The genuine reciprocity and mutual indebtedness that holds between mortal gift partners does not hold between mortals and immortals: at the origin of the gift abides a gift that cannot be reciprocated.

Yet the significance of a gift that cannot be returned—an original gift that “introduces something that was not there before”—also suggests that the character of the gift is not “merely reciprocal,” or at least the character of the gift is not only reciprocal in terms of the economic rationalism that often characterizes theories of gift-exchange.^[40] The first gift yields neither a cycle nor a sequence of exchange, but functions at the beginning of a “spiral.” If the gift from which all other gifts come is conceived as suprahuman, then this gift is also “inalienable” or “sacred” because it does not admit, cannot admit, its human origin: “Inalienable objects are sacred because they are said to be given to humans by the gods or ancestors; and yet they require a certain opacity as to their origin in order for society to preserve itself and the myths that engender its identity.”^[41]

Still, not all “inalienable” objects need to derive from a divine source. Some objects are also considered “inalienable” if they cannot be returned in equal proportion because they are never fully relinquished by their owners. These objects carry or bear the mark or the “spirit” of the original donor to the extent that they are never fully given to or possessed by another. In other words, there is ownership on behalf of the original donor, and possession without ownership on behalf of the recipient. The more the original gift circulates, that is, the more it is “possessed” and passed on, the greater its value for that first owner. Similarly, we might say that the more *muthos* is heard and remembered, the greater is its value as mortals attempt to duplicate what can never be duplicated, the “first” gift.

In this way, the pattern of exchange implied by “inalienable” gifts looks like the pattern of exchange that supports *muthos* for millennia. Poets and audiences temporarily “possess” the gifts of the Muses and pass them on, generation after generation. This means that *theon timai* enacts the return of something that can never quite be returned—the original gift of the Muses. As Detienne reminds us, *kudos*, praise, comes from the divine, and *kleos*, glory, rises up to the divine.^[42] The songs of the poet sustain and preserve the character of this remembrance, yet since the songs of the poet are “authorless” they attest to a

“certain opacity” in terms of the origin of the stories and, significantly, the need to preserve them.

The intrinsic doubleness that Godelier attributes to mythical gifts might explain the function of muthos as a specifically religious practice, but I suggest it does not sufficiently explain the function of muthos as a narrative practice between persons. Since the meaning of muthos is generated in terms of its practice, that is, it is a speech practice, it is doubtful that poets and audiences experience the gift of muthos the way we might experience the gift of salvation, or the gift of “Being,” that is, as an inalienable gift that cannot be duplicated. We might attempt to explain the significance of muthos to the early Greeks as their “first” gift because, for us, muthos has come to represent the “suprahuman” origins of their culture, that “ideological fabric” that identifies all Greeks as Greek. Yet I suggest that the practice of xenia troubles the seamlessness of this fabric, as well as our appeals to it for the value of certain relationships.

While xenia is prefigured in muthos and explicitly involves gifts, it is neither uniquely Greek nor conducive to creating alliances that preserve or sustain anything like a group identity. Xenia is a gift practice recognized throughout the archaic and classical worlds as a practice exclusive to “strangers.” If there is something specifically Greek about xenia it might be that, like muthos, xenia is configured within the aegis of Zeus:

Every god protects his domain; he intervenes if, and only if, this domain is specifically violated. This is true at first even of Zeus. He guards the laws of hospitality in the domain of the house and court, and over strangers, and suppliants who have arrived in the protecting domain: Zeus herkeios, hikesios, xenios. What happens on the other side of the boundary does not effect him.^[43]

As often as the gods appear as “strangers” to mortals in the epic tradition, it is not surprising that muthos contains certain guidelines about appropriate behavior to strangers. After all, the gods seem to be the ultimate strangers and customs concerning

how to behave toward strangers are scripted in the province of the ultimate god, Zeus. What is surprising is the apparent flexibility afforded these relationships “on the other side of the boundary” of the god’s domain because, from the perspective of *xenoi*, what discernible or appreciable boundary can be sustained between them? That is, what distinguishes strangers as strangers would seem be an ultimate lack of boundaries because strangers are unlike one another in every appreciable social category: strangers are not family, they are not technically friends, and strangers do not live within the same territory or polis. Hence, what distinguishes persons in the ancient world as like one another in some aspect, as sharing something in common, does not apply to strangers. Rather, it is a lack of similarity and a lack of bonds formed by virtue of similarity that designates strangers as strangers. It is difficult to ascertain, then, how what is not there, that is, what strangers do not share in common, could constitute a viable “boundary” between them.

For instance, when a stranger enters the “domain” of house and court, it is customary to welcome the stranger as a “guest-friend.” Where and when the term *xenos* is used to refer to interpersonal relationships, the ancients did not distinguish between *xenos* as a stranger and *xenos* as a guest. But there is also a sense in which a *xenos* is a person who is—and must remain—genuinely “Other.”^[44] By definition, whoever is a stranger to me is someone who is not a *philos*: a stranger is a person who is not related to me by blood or marriage, not a member of my tribe or *ethne*, and not a fellow citizen.

Historically, the conceptual boundary that demarcates a *xenos* from a *philos* expands with the emergence of cities. That is, the bonds of *philia* once reserved for family groups extend outward to include “locality,” persons and groups comprising a village or tribe, and eventually persons comprising the city proper. Yet, “Within Athenian territory, friends who came from different *demes*, *trittyes*, or tribes, would call each other *philo*i, *hetairo*i, or *epitedoi*, never *xenoi*.”^[45] Although we might want to see *xenia* as a type of *philia*, it seems more likely that the only

condition for *xenia*, from the point of view of any Greek, is that a *xenos* is a person outside my community, and this can include members of different cities (Spartans, Thebans), members of a different *ethne* (Macedonian), and someone who is non-Greek (Persian, Egyptian).^[46] Significantly, a relationship of *xenia* between two non-Greeks follows the same patterns as a relationship of *xenia* between two Greeks. From the point of view of the partners, then, *xenia* is not a subset or species of *philia*.^[47] To the contrary, *xenia* exemplifies a unique type of relationship regularly practiced throughout the ancient world.

Since a *xenos* is a person who exists, literally and figuratively, “outside” the bonds of my community, gifts exchanged between *xenoi* might be unlike gifts exchanged between *philo*i. While gifts between *philo*i strengthen, sustain, or—in the case of marriage—create social bonds, gifts between *xenoi* seem to answer to or affect different expectations and purposes. Their instrumental character—if it can even be considered as such—is to perpetuate relationships between strangers. Yet why would a relationship to a stranger be desirable?

Simply put, no one is more different from me than my *xenos*: he is not kin, he is not a member of my *deme* or tribe, my *ethne* or *polis*, and he is not a “friend” in Aristotle’s sense of useful, pleasant, or “good.” In sum, my *xenos* is a person with whom I share nothing. Since he is outside my community, between us there exists no “common object” to place “in the middle.” Yet this lack of something shared between *xenoi*, something both partners could be said to have an interest or stake in, prompts an interesting comment in the *Magna Moralia*. Because *xenoi* do not share a common object or “common aim” there is no cause for dispute between them. Hence the author of the *Magna Moralia* suggests that *xenoi* constitute the “firmest of relationships” possible between human beings:

Further it may perhaps be thought that wherever justice is possible, there friendship may exist too. Wherefore there are many species of friendship as there are just dealings.

Now there can be justice between a foreigner and a citizen, between a slave and his master, between one citizen and another, between son and father, between wife and husband, and generally every form of association has its separate form of friendship. But the firmest of friendships would seem to be that with a foreigner, for they have no common aim about which to dispute, as is the case with fellow citizens; for when these dispute with one another for the priority, they do not remain friends (2.1211a6–13).^[48]

The interpersonal ties that constitute *philia*, the “forms of association” between kin and fellow citizens mentioned above, effect a sense of social unity, but these ties do not negate the possibility of, or protect these relationships from, *eris*, conflict or strife. To the contrary, evident from the earliest forms of Greek sociality through—at least—the classical era, a spirit or sense of unity is always accompanied by a spirit or sense of conflict. As mentioned, Vernant calls *philia* and *eris* “opposed but complementary” forces that inevitably comprise the “two poles of society”:

The spirit of conflict and the spirit of union—*Eris-Philia*: these two divine entities, opposed and complementary, marked the two poles of society in the aristocratic world that followed the ancient kingships. An exaltation of the values of struggle, competition, and rivalry was associated with a sense of belonging to a single community, with its demands for social unity and cohesion.^[49]

Many scholars associate the convergence of *eris-philia* with the *agon*. To the extent that the equality generated by the spirit of *philia* is never without its complement *eris*, the *agon* allows for expression of this conflict through contest without sacrificing the sense of *philia* requisite to the development and establishment of community, particularly a democratic community. But also on this account, one cannot have *philia* without *eris* and conversely, except it would seem in the

practice of *xenia*.

The author of the passage in the *Magna Moralia* identifies the cause for dispute among civic friends as integral to the basis of their friendship: friends share a “common aim” or purpose, this is what designates them as “insiders” to one another. “Just dealings” among friends vary in accordance to their common aim, that is, at a practical level the common aim between “son and father” might differ from the common aim between “one citizen and another.” Yet where there is no common aim, there is no cause for dispute, and where there is no cause for dispute, there is the greatest possibility for justice, that is, in relationships of *xenia*. The passage from the *Magna Moralia* also implies that “just dealings” can be measured in terms of longevity, in terms of remaining friends. By this, we can infer that injustice is associated with behaviors arising from dispute and/or the result of dispute, that is, persons in dispute “do not remain friends.” Yet if there is no cause for dispute in the first place, there is the greatest possibility for justice, or at least the greatest possibility for avoiding injustice and remaining friends.

In conjunction with Vernant’s quote, if *eris* can be seen as that which disrupts *philia*, then *eris* is that which threatens, or at least ruptures, the longevity of *philia*. On this account, only a relationship devoid of *eris* can be reasonably predicted to remain stable, perhaps even to last. But also on Vernant’s view, *eris* and *philia* are opposed but complementary, implying that there is no completely *eris*-free friendship at the level of social relationships. Vernant’s insight is affirmed when we consider all the variable and complex ways *philo*i are bound to one another in the ancient—and modern—worlds. These relationships create a pantheon of personal and social roles, our own intricate “network of relationships,” that are further complicated and enriched when they are experienced within a political order, that is, when some of our *philo*i are civic friends: “Civic friends were related to one another not merely through friendship but through a whole array of other roles . . . they had rights and obligations towards each other by virtue of their common participation in formal institutions and in numerous informal

groups and ties, which together made up the city's social texture."^[50] Regardless of "personal ties of attachment" civic friends cannot be friends to everyone and cannot even be friends consistently because the numerous formal and informal groups and ties will invariably yield some type of conflict. Yet beyond the city, tribe, or family proper, relationships between strangers are free to develop or not without the "external authority" of the group, and this means they are free to develop in terms other than eris-*philia*.

Hence, *xenoi* do refer to one another as "friend." "You are my *xenos philos*," says Diomedes to Glaucus in the *Iliad*, but the qualifying *xenos* alerts us that this is a type of friendship beyond the boundaries of social orders. Interestingly, the ancients seem to have less difficulty practicing these relationships than we experience classifying them. Strictly speaking, *xenoi* are not "friends" if by "friendship" we mean one of the bonds of *philia*. Without *philia*, however, there is at least the possibility of avoiding *eris*. As a relationship between strangers, *xenia* does not have to be considered in light of the mutual antagonisms many scholars see as integral to the development of social unity, for the practice of *xenia* does not intend to establish or perpetuate social unity. Rather, the value of *xenia* as a relationship is not circumscribed by any social order. Yet the material fact that *xenoi* exchange gifts troubles what is considered to be the most significant aspect of gift practices: their central if not essential role in the establishment of abiding social relationships.

Xenia, then, does not fit neatly into contemporary accounts of gift practices. One theorist even suggests that in archaic societies the only persons who cannot engage in gift practices are strangers: "The price paid for maintaining [a society's] equilibrium is that it may have no permanent and structured relationship with a stranger, for if it cannot turn him into an ally, no concrete and personal gift relationship is possible."^[51] The claim is that gift practices create allies, and unless a stranger "can be transformed into an ally"^[52] there can be no gifts for or from him.

Yet too much scholarly attention to the gift—what constitutes it, who has it, what occasions it, and what are its consequences—can support a reading of xenia that begins to sound more mercantile than moral. Reading xenia as mercantile, however, cannot account for the longevity of the practice. Moreover, in many instances in ancient literature where and when xenia is pronounced, the exchange of gifts follows a declaration of xenia, a statement to the effect that “you are my xenos, and I am your xenos.” The gifts that are presented, exchanged, or countered gain their significance in terms of the relationship rather than the other way around, that is, xenia is declared and then gifts are exchanged, gifts are not exchanged and then xenia is declared.

Gifts between xenoï, then, might be seen as a symbol or token of an already established relationship. In this way, the objects exchanged are incidental to the value of the relationship itself. Alternatively, gifts between xenoï might also be seen as necessary to the establishment of relationships because this is a meeting between strangers. That is, since my xenos is a stranger to me and I to him, conventional appeal to the external authority of a group does not suffice for the establishment of trust between us. The designation “host” refers to one partner’s perspective from one partner’s domain, yet from the perspective of the other partner, the “guest,” a “host” is still a stranger and the host’s “domain” is not within the “guest’s” social order. From the perspective of both partners, then, the aim of the gift cannot be to bring one another “inside” the bonds of their respective communities, to transform a xenos into a philos as it were. This would amount to the assimilation or appropriation of one partner’s group identity to the exclusion of the other. And so gifts between xenoï do not attempt to establish the rudimentary obligations and dependencies integral to the establishment of a community. Gifts between xenoï do establish personal alliances, and gifts between xenoï do seem to be obligatory, but it cannot be forgotten that xenia establishes personal alliances that actually undermine the expectations for violence and conflict that arise when strangers meet. The

longevity of *xenia* sustains this non-aggressive attitude and its reciprocal gestures in perpetuity: like the *agon*, *xenia* is ongoing. Yet while the *agon* is a practice that resolves conflict among “friends” through contest, *xenia* is a practice that dissolves conflict among strangers, through gifts.

For the early Greeks, it is clear that some expectations about appropriate behavior to strangers, including expected norms of conduct, govern these “firmest of relationships.” It is also clear from Gabriel Herman’s exhaustive analysis of occasions for “ritualized friendship” that these relationships are not unique to Greek experience. This means that—concerning *xenia*—the customs surrounding the gift and its effects do not vary across the ancient world. If there is an economy specific to *xenia*, it is not confined to small groups. Yet what is not clear, to me at least, is why and how personal alliances between strangers foster relationships that “from the point of view of the partners, appeared not as an end in itself but as a means for creating a moral obligation.”^[53] In other words, how is it possible that *xenia* not only could but should arise? Often *xenoi* live at great distances from one another and their relationship persists even when their respective communities are at war. Moreover, as we can infer from the story of Diomedes and Glaucus, the practice of *xenia* can take priority over the practice of war.

GOLD FOR BRONZE

The earliest instance of *xenia* in ancient Greek literature comes to us in Book 6 of the *Iliad*. The *xenoi* are the Achaean Diomedes and the Lycian prince Glaucus who is fighting for Troy. Their recognition and declaration of “old ties of hospitality” is worth considering in some detail because it completely subverts narrative expectations of how humans behave on a field of battle.

By the opening of Book 6, audiences—both aural and literate—are familiar with the god fighting Diomedes. In Book 5, Pallas Athena instructs Diomedes “not to fight with any of the

gods except Aphrodite.” Given his chance, Diomedes strikes at the goddess of love: “he leaped high after her and with his point wounded her trailing hand.” Soon afterward, Ares takes the field and Diomedes departs, obeying the instructions of Athena. Yet she returns to him saying:

Diomedes, son of Tydeus, I do love you.
You don't have to fear Ares or any other
Of the immortals. Look who is here beside you.
Drive your horses directly at Ares
And when you're in range, strike (5:879-883).^[54]

So, Diomedes returns to battle and also strikes at the god of war: Athena drives his spear to the pit of Ares belly, slicing through armor and “right through to the flesh.” When Diomedes withdraws his spear, “Ares yelled so loud, you would have thought ten thousand warriors had shouted at once” (5:915-16). The sound reverberates “in the guts of the Greeks and Trojans” and Ares departs the field, “like a darker clot of air winding off, on its way to becoming a tornado” (5:922-23).

By the end of Book 5, then, Diomedes has attacked and wounded two gods, Aphrodite and Ares. Though encouraged and protected in doing so by Athena, in the beginning of Book 6 Diomedes and his men are on their own in “no man's land.” This is the moment when Diomedes sees Glaucus charging ahead of everyone else to battle. Shining in gold armor, Glaucus is initially a stranger to Diomedes, he has never seen him before “on the fields of glory.” Although both “are eager to fight,” Diomedes pauses to inquire who or what Glaucus is: mortal or immortal? If Glaucus is a god, then Diomedes “would not want to fight” him: without the urging on and protection of a god, mortals who fight with gods, like Lycurgus, do not fare well. But if Glaucus is human, then “step right up for a quick end to your life” (6:146). Thus begins a lengthy passage in which Glaucus and Diomedes recall their genealogy to one another. Glaucus admits his lineage from Bellerophon, and Diomedes remembers that his grandfather, Oeneus, was xenos to Bellerophon. As we hear, Oeneus entertained Bellerophon “in his halls for twenty days, and they gave each other gifts of friendship” (6:224-25).

The revealed relationship between their grandfathers can mean that Diomedes and Glaucus are *xenoi*, but they are not necessarily obligated to renew the “old ties of hospitality.” Herman explains: “In practice, the obligations of ritualized friendship could certainly be ignored. One could leave the bond unactivated until it fell into abeyance; one could fail to provide much-needed assistance; and one could even inflict injury on a partner. In all these cases interaction would in practice stop” (71). Between Diomedes and Glaucus, the situation is ambiguous because there do not seem to be any formal ways of disestablishing a bond of *xenia* other than behaving as if the bond does not exist. Since neither Diomedes nor Glaucus are aware of the bond between them until they recall their genealogies, this becomes the moment when they must choose whether to ignore or renew the bond. Records of *xenia* suggest that honoring rather than ignoring ties of hospitality is preferable, that is, in “most cases the disruption of the sacred bond entails disgrace” (70). But because these ties exist beyond the respective social orders of the partners, there are certainly no laws, written or otherwise, to effect retribution for a violation of *xenia*. Yet contrary to the scene in Book 6, the possibility that one could be ignorant of the ties, that one or both partners are not aware of the *xenoi* of their “fathers,” does not seem to be an issue. *Xenia*, or rather its possibility, persists “independently of individual actions or wishes” (70). In Book 6, however, the renewal of *xenia* does depend upon the mutual recognition and willingness of both parties given the opportunity, or the occasion, to re-establish the old ties. Moreover, mutual recognition and willingness to honor the ties are contingent upon at least one partner’s knowledge that the ties do exist. Specifically for Diomedes and Glaucus, the renewal of *xenia* is predicated upon each partner’s knowledge of his own genealogy, which is to say each partner’s knowledge of his own narrative and its content of inheritance, *xenia*.

This aspect of the scene in Book 6 raises a significant issue with regard to the longevity of *xenia* and its resemblance to relationships sustained by *charis*, grace. In a *charis* relationship

“it is the memory of the event that is crucial.” In Book 6, it is the memory of the tie that prompts its renewal. Likewise for *charis* “remembering the favor implies acknowledging and reciprocating it.”^[55] In the ancient world, as Anne Carson tells us, “[g]ratitute and memory go together” (41).

Famously, then, Diomedes tells Glaucus that they “can’t cross spears with one another, even in the thick of battle” (6:234–35): there are plenty of Trojans and their allies for Diomedes to kill, and enough Greeks for Glaucus, but Diomedes and Glaucus will not harm one another. Rather, “let’s exchange armor, so everyone will know that we are friends from our father’s days” (6:239–40). The exchange of armor, their gifts to one another, act as a sign to all of those on the field that these two warriors share a bond that supersedes the exigencies of battle. The episode between them then draws to a close as Diomedes and Glaucus leap from their chariots, clasp hands, pledge their bond, and exchange armor, Diomedes’ bronze for Glaucus’ gold. The scene actually ends on the comment that Zeus took away Glaucus’ “good sense,” for he exchanged “the worth of one hundred oxen for nine.” Bellerophon gave to Oeneus a “gold cup,” Oeneus gave to Bellerophon “a belt bright with scarlet.” Their grandsons exchange gold for bronze, or bronze for gold, respectively. As a Homeric poet turns to another scene, is the lingering moral of this exchange “beware Greeks bearing gifts”?

Between Diomedes and Glaucus, the exchange of armor is a concrete expression of the renewal of *xenia*, it echoes or imitates the original exchange of gifts between their grandfathers and demonstrates in a public space their mutual commitment to re-enact the bond. The exchange of armor also portrays their vulnerability toward one another and, pace the “law of alternation,” the narrative exchange occurs simultaneously. Alternatively, many read “Homer’s” comment about the exchange as an indication that there is something untoward about this transaction. Diomedes takes advantage of Glaucus, manipulating the renewal of “the old ties of hospitality” for material gain.^[56] Or, Glaucus takes advantage of

Diomedes: he uses the renewal of the “old ties of hospitality” to bestow a gift of greater value, thereby perpetuating a debt that further obligates Diomedes. From another perspective, the inclusion of the episode is meant to elicit discussion among aural audiences. Or, in lieu of discussion, “Homer’s” comment is didactic, reinforcing what is implicitly understood about *xenia* in more explicit terms: that gifts between *xenoi* should be equal in value in order to underscore the “equality and reciprocity” that characterize the relationship.

All of these claims about the meaning of the exchange presuppose certain routes of inquiry into the values of *xenia* and/or its narrative expression. The possibility that one gift partner could intentionally out-or under-give another, for whatever reason, focuses attention on the material aspects of the practice and applies an economic measure or standard to that practice. Alternatively, the idea that the episode is meant to elicit questions about the practice of *xenia* or educate audiences as to its value focuses attention to the possible intentions of verbal exchange, that is, to the reasons for the stories. Yet all these routes lead from an implicit understanding of economy on the part of the inquirer, be it an economy of words or objects. While we might readily admit that the economic terms of post-industrialist capitalism do not apply to a “mythical” account of gift-exchange on an archaic Greek battlefield, it seems harder to admit that the expectations we have for verbal exchange often follow models of our expectations for market exchanges, that is, for us meaning is a “transaction,” or communication is a “negotiation.” If there is an economy at work in the *Iliad*, however, it would have to be a narrative economy, implying that the episode between Diomedes and Glaucus cannot be understood apart from how it illustrates that “network of relationships” characteristic of all the tales as well as what is preserved as the tales evolve over time.

For instance, the historical record of *xenia* suggests a shift in public attitudes toward the gifts *xenoi* exchange. Gabrielle Herman observes that gifts between *xenoi* in the Homeric world manifest a type of material trade between the otherwise closed

economies of isolated and disparate households. Willingness on the part of the head of a household to hold himself and his heirs to “the obligations imposed by the gift was a measure of his moral quality”^[57] and exchanges between heads of households create a standard for developing personal alliances in a non-aggressive and non-threatening manner. In this way, gift exchanges between xenoī not only introduced “indispensable extraneous commodities” across households, they enact the “peaceful manifestations” we refer to now as “foreign relations and diplomacy.”^[58] Archaic or pre-Hellenic xenoī, then, constitute a relationship that founds a moral and material economy. Hence, Herman’s definition of xenia is: “a bond of solidarity manifesting itself in an exchange of goods and services between individuals originating from separate social units.”^[59]

In a post-Homeric world, however, gift economies between strangers threaten the “organic whole” of emerging poleis. Xenoī are “outsiders” to one another, they share only the “ties of hospitality,” but these ties “quickly came to be viewed as a mark of misguided solidarity” (79). In the world of the polis, a *doron* (gift) might be seen as a bribe. In fact, in post-Homeric Greece, the line between a gift and a bribe is blurred to the extent that “there was in the Greek language no vocabulary for bribery distinct from that of gift-exchange” (75). Hence, gifts between xenoī came to be seen as “good” or “bad” depending upon how a private gift affects the city’s welfare: “Thus, while lavish gift givings had been the mark of heroes and kings, abstinence from gift-exchange became the mark of a good citizen” (78).

From the perspective of poets and audiences, one would expect a corresponding shift in how the story of Diomedes and Glaucus is told and heard. In other words, the transcribed and “learned literature” of classical Athens is certainly not identical to the completely oral narratives celebrated in the eighth century. Yet the story of Diomedes and Glaucus remains, and is preserved in an episode that contrasts Diomedes wounding two gods in Book 5 to planting his spear “in the bounteous earth”

and refusing to strike the mortal Glaucus in Book 6. The verbal exchange and exchange of armor between Diomedes and Glaucus also bridges the departure of Hector from the battlefield at the beginning of Book 6 to his return with Paris at the beginning of Book 7. The progression of the narrative, then, moves from a mortal fighting with gods at the instigation of Athena, to a prophet counseling Hector to leave the battle in order to beseech the women of Troy to pray to Athena, to the renewal of *xenia* between Diomedes and Glaucus, and finally to our most intimate portrait of Hector in conversation with his family, all of whom are apparently implicated in the violation of *xenia* that justifies, if not causes, the war, or so Menelaus makes clear:

You haughty Trojans, never to be glutted with the grim war noises,
Wherewith you defiled me, wretched dogs, and your hearts knew no fear
At all of the hard anger of Zeus loud-thundering,
The guest's god, who someday will utterly sack your steep city.
You who in vanity went away taking with you my wedded
Wife, and many possessions, when she had received you in kindness (13:621-627).

From the perspective of poets and audiences, narrative apposition between a renewal and a violation of *xenia* would not go unnoticed or unheard. But the narrative apposition on its own begs the question of the character of Paris' violation of *xenia* in comparison to the character of its renewal. Since public attitudes toward *xenia* already imply that a renewal is morally superior to a violation—a renewal avoids disgrace while a violation entails it—the narrative thread that connects both instances of *xenia* might have something to do with grace, *charis*. Hence we might ask how the ancient Greek value of *charis* is pertinent to the ancient Greek practice of *xenia*?

A pattern of behavior common to ancient accounts of *xenia* from “historians as dissimilar in other respects as Herodotus, Thucydides, and Polybius,” illustrates how two strangers encounter one another, yet the aggression and violence expected to ensue on such an occasion is deflected, or “averted,” by “some generous gesture” (43). This gesture can take a variety of forms: it could be “a well timed service,”

perhaps indicative of the hospitality Oeneus offers to Bellerophon, or it could be “the saving of one’s life,” perhaps indicative of Diomedes’ initial question to Glaucus and his response, or a “generous gesture” could be “a most valuable gift,” *euergesia*, a “favor” or a “good deed.” According to Herman, the appropriate response to *euergesia* is *charis*, which he transliterates “a display of gratitude.”

I suggest that the response to *euergesia*—*charis*—is just as essential to the development of “a sacred bond of trust between the partners” as the generous gesture itself. Similar to the effects of reciprocity in gift practices, good deeds and favors must be acknowledged and accepted in order for “a certain short-term sacrifice of self interest on the part of the benefactor” (42) to have an effect. But this also means that a beneficiary is not in “a state of helplessness” (43). Inasmuch as it is the act of receiving a gift that defines the gift, the act of acknowledging and accepting a favor defines the favor. An act that is imposed or a deed on one’s behalf that cannot be refused will constitute an obligation, but it will not serve to generate “a sacred bond of trust.” Recognition and acceptance of a generous gesture does place the recipient, or beneficiary, in “a state of debt,” but it cannot be overlooked that the person who makes the gesture is also in an initial state of debt: if a generous gesture goes unnoticed or is noticed and refused, it is not a generous gesture. What we might consider a momentary lapse of self interest or a calculated attempt to secure a favor in return can also be seen as an initial state of risk. Unless there is *charis* on the part of another, there is, simply put, no good deed.

Euergesia, then, cannot be “an end in itself” (44). Unlike modern acts of altruism that may or may not yield a response, *euergesia* is validated by *charis* on the part of another human being. *Charis*, then, is definitely a means to establishing a relationship, although the type of relationship established through *charis* is not always agreed upon. On Herman’s account *euergesia* is a calculated means of securing a favor in return: “*euergesia* was unabashedly recognized as a secular strategy in the conduct of interpersonal relations. The benefactor put the

beneficiary in a state of indebtedness, from which state the beneficiary could only redeem himself by a display of submission and loyalty—and that was all there was to it” (48–49).

A “display of submission and loyalty,” like a “display of gratitude,” however, does not account for the active component of charis. According to Bonnie MacLachlan, charis is an action more than an expression. She explains, charis “was not merely a passive state of mind, a grateful feeling, but a gesture of response and thus essentially social in its setting.”^[60] Dating from the epics, the phrase charin oida, “I know the favor,” expresses a disposition on the part of the speaker to acknowledge and reciprocate. Reciprocation can be understood as a return of pleasure, yet the term charis denotes pleasure of a distinctive type. Derived from the Indo-European root gher, “pleasure,” charis is “something that brought joy” (4). Moreover, the early Greeks do not distinguish between the feeling of charis and the object, person, or action that encourages this feeling. Subjective feelings of pleasure are articulated as hedone and chara, but charis denotes an “event” that from the point of view of its participants is also meant to establish a relationship: “A charis event, provoked by moral or aesthetic beauty, was disarming: It broke down barriers that confined the self, and it demanded that the beneficiary reach out to another. If this did not happen, the party who was responsible for conferring the pleasure was left exposed and vulnerable. This was cause for alarm” (11).

On Herman’s account, charis is the appropriate response to a favor, yet on MacLachlan’s account, charis supports both the gesture and the response: charis bestowed yields charis in return. On both accounts, the initial gesture can be disarming, but also on both accounts charis initially disarms one of the partners more than the other. According to Herman, the beneficiary seems to have no choice but to submit to the gesture. By this, once Diomedes recognizes and reminds Glaucus that their grandfathers were xenoi, Glaucus must follow Diomedes’ lead, “the memory of the event is crucial.” Intriguing

in this regard is the narrative fact that once he recalls his genealogy, Glaucus does not speak again. It is Diomedes who claims they cannot cross spears with one another, and it is Diomedes who suggests they exchange armor. On Herman's account, it seems that Glaucus must submit to the gesture. On MacLachlan's account, however, it is Diomedes who is initially "exposed and vulnerable," both in terms of his inquiry, which Glaucus is apparently under no obligation to answer, and in terms of the invitation to exchange armor. In this regard, it is actually the strength of Glaucus' character that completes the renewal of the bonds of *xenia*, honoring the tie and reciprocating "a most valuable gift" in response.

It is also possible that both Diomedes and Glaucus are appropriately and literally disarmed by the event. As MacLachlan observes, "charis was never self-denying but by the same token was never confined to the self" (7). A relationship predicated upon *charis* is a relationship that yields a combination of interests, and—as I have suggested for gift practices—this combination exceeds the individual interests of either partner. While *xenia* can look and feel like *philia* because it shares affinities with ties of kinship and friendship, strictly speaking *xenia* is not an instance of *philia*. The external authority that holds for each *xenos* individually does not apply to their particular relationship, and this includes obligations to feel a certain way toward one another. Their only obligation, it would seem, is to respond in kind with *charis*, to mutually acknowledge and accept equal responsibility and opportunity to give and receive "something that brought joy"—perhaps something like a "gift."

By this perspective, *charis* is a comprehensive principle of certain types of ancient relationships. It can be seen to hold between poets and audiences in their reciprocal relations to the gifts of the Muses, and it can explain the renewal of *xenia* in Book 6 of the *Iliad*, that is, for both Diomedes and Glaucus "it is the memory of the event that is crucial." While it is doubtful early Greeks understood the "barriers" that confined the self in terms that a modern thinker might understand these "barriers,"

the erasure of barriers is similar to a lack of boundaries between strangers. We recognize how opening ourselves to the “other” requires a certain amount of courage. For the early Greeks, our sense of courage might resemble their sense of grace, *charis*. Yet what is remarkable about *charis* in the practice of *xenia* is how it perpetuates relationships with those who are strange and unfamiliar without, from the perspective of the partners, attempting to draw one another into a complicated web of social relations: *xenoi* do not attempt to make one another “like me,” or like “one of us.” In a profound yet very basic way, *xenia* is a practice that respects difference—indeed, celebrates it—throughout the ancient world. With respect to differences between individuals, *xenia* seems to be the antithesis of the *agon*, and this includes not attempting to appropriate what is not one’s own—as Paris did—as well as not attempting to outdo another—as Menelaus vows.

Whether and how the value of this type of relationship, including its moral component of *charis*, can be sustained in classical Athens prefigures, I suggest, the practices of a citizen who declares himself a “gift of the gods to the city”—Plato’s Socrates.

NOTES

1. Luciano Canfora, “The Citizen” in *The Greeks*, ed. Jean-Pierre Vernant (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1995), 138.
2. de Polignac, *Cults, Territory*, trans. Janet Lloyd, 153. Hereafter page numbers are referenced in parentheses in the text.
3. Once again, the *agon* comes to the foreground: “The Athenian democratic community was founded on conflict, and it was because of it—rather than despite it—that Athens achieved a form of order, a new communitarian order of society” (Paul Cartledge, “Introduction: Defining a Kosmos” in *Kosmos: Essays in Order, Conflict, and Community in Classical Athens*, eds. Paul Cartledge, Paul Millett & Sitta von Reden, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 9.
4. Canfora, “The Citizen,” 123.
5. Canfora, “The Citizen,” 123.
6. Vernant, *Myth and Society*, 104.
7. Literature on the gift, and theories about gift practices, constitute an extensive and elaborate field devoted to the conditions, restrictions, regulations, and implications of

human interaction in general. My brief analyses pale in comparison to the complexities of the issue which certainly does warrant, and has warranted, our closer attention.

8. Murray, "Forms of Sociality" in *The Greeks*, ed. Jean-Pierre Vernant, 235.

9. Louis Gernet, *Anthropology*, 331. While Hestia is in part associated with communal dining, a more comprehensive exposition is offered by Vernant in "Hestia-Hermes" from *Myth and Thought Among the Greeks*: "To Hestia belongs the world of the interior, the enclosed, the stable, the retreat of the human group within itself" (161). Some of the aspects of Hestia make her the perfect complement and contrast to the "swift-footed god who rules the realms of the traveler," Hermes. Hence, there is a certain amount of tension associated with the hearth, a contrast between rest and motion, stability and impermanence, that is, and inside and outside.

10. Murray, "Forms of Sociality," 235.

11. Vernant, *Origins*, 126.

12. Jonathan Hale, *Lords of the Sea* (New York: Penguin Group, 2009), 95.

13. Canfora, "The Citizen," 126.

14. Canfora, "The Citizen," 125.

15. Graham Shipley comments: "Yet wars are almost never fought for, or by, whole communities; nor is the decision to go to war ever resolved upon, literally, by a community" (13). Hence the volume of essays Shipley is here introducing distinguishes between the "aims of the leaders" and "those of 'ordinary soldiers.'" ("The Limits of War" in *War and Society in the Greek World*).

16. Gabriel Herman, *Ritualised Friendship and the Greek City* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 79.

17. Gary Scott, *Plato's Socrates as Educator* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2000), 32.

18. Scott, *Plato's Socrates*, 32. See also Marcel Mauss, *The Gift: The Form and Reason for Exchange in Archaic Societies*, trans. W. D. Halls and fwd. Mary Douglas (London: W.W. Norton, 1990) 39ff. in the context of his analysis of potlatch cultures.

19. Alan D. Schrift, "Introduction: Why Gift?" in *The Logic of the Gift: Toward an Ethic of Generosity*, ed. Alan D. Schrift (New York: Routledge, 1997), 2.

20. Mark Osteen, "Introduction: Questions of the Gift" in *The Question of the Gift: Essays Across Disciplines*, ed. Mark Osteen (London: Routledge, 2000) 2.

21. Fragment B2 in *Parmenides of Elea: Fragments*, trans. and commentary David Gallop (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991).

22. Osteen, "Questions of the Gift," 1.

23. Schrift, "Why Gift?" 5.

24. To a certain extent, for Mauss all gifts are coercive as they are never what they might appear, that is, either "free" or "disinterested" but they disclose systems of rules and regulations for exchange that do not resemble—or need not resemble—modern practices of monied exchanges.

25. Jacques Derrida, *Given Time I: Counterfeit Money*, trans. Peggy Kamul (Chicago:

The University of Chicago Press, 1992), 24.

26. Even the idea that I derive satisfaction from the “joy of giving” and do so in secret, that is, I give X and yet no one knows that I have done so, this is still an instance of self-gratification and there is no possibility of, say, donating secretly without expectation of return or even consideration of this expectation. Even if I guard myself against feeling good about myself, the act of giving is always also an act of getting something. Derrida explains, “The simple consciousness of the gift right away sends itself back the gratifying image of goodness or generosity; of the giving-being who, knowing itself to be such, recognizes itself [sic] in a circular, specular fashion, in a sort of auto-recognition, self-approval, and narcissistic gratitude” (Given Time, 23).

27. David Cheal, *The Gift Economy* (London: Routledge, 1988), 3.

28. Cf: Martha Woodruff, “The Ethics of Generosity and Friendship: Aristotle’s Gift to Nietzsche?” in *The Question of the Gift*, for a discussion of Aristotle’s idea of the friend as “another self” to whom, and for whom, one is neither completely disinterested nor self-interested (118–131). In the same collection of essays, the “true gift” is discussed by Lee Anne Fennell, (“Unpacking the Gift: Illiquid Goods and Empathetic Dialogue”) as embodying and perpetuating an empathetic dialogue (93) between gift partners that, regardless of its “mass-produced” character, still creates meaningful human connection (85–102).

29. Osteen, “Questions of the Gift,” 7.

30. Jacques T. Godbout in collaboration with Alain Caillé, *The World of the Gift*, trans. Donald Winkler (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1998), 133ff.

31. The idea that gifts create deferral (Bourdieu) or gifts “give” time (Derrida) either through misrecognition of their material character or because they must be forgotten in order to escape “the economic logic that governs relations of simple exchange”(Schrift, “Why Gift?” 11) are probably more politically effective ways to conceive of gifts in the modern era than the explicitly relational ways I suggest here, although I do think my analysis has more bearing on things ancient and Greek, like Plato’s Socrates.

32. Godbout and Caillé, *The World of the Gift*, 134ff.

33. Godbout and Caillé, *The World of the Gift*, 134ff.

34. Cf: Jacques Derrida’s “The Time of the King” (121–47) and selections from Pierre Bourdieu’s “The Logic of Practice” (190–230) in *The Logic of the Gift*, ed. Alan D. Schrift.

35. Cf: Claudia Barracchi, *Of Myth, Life, and War in Plato’s Republic* (Indianapolis, IN: Indiana University Press, 2002), discussed more fully in coming chapters.

36. Qtd. in Osteen, “Questions of the Gift” 9.

37. Osteen, “Questions of the Gift,” 9.

38. In her “Foreword” to Mauss’ *The Gift*, Mary Douglas suggests that Mauss’ early work on “Sacrifice” is at least implicit in “the idea of a morally sanctioned gift cycle upholding the social cycle” (x) and that he would have gleaned this idea from the

Vedic literature he initially studied.

39. Osteen, "Questions of the Gift," 10, explaining the ideas of Laurence Godelier.

40. Osteen, "Questions of the Gift," 7ff.

41. Osteen, "Questions of the Gift," 9, explaining the ideas of Godelier.

42. Detienne, *Masters*, 46ff.

43. Burkert, *Religion*, 248.

44. Herman, *Ritualised*, 10-11

45. Herman, *Ritualised*, 11-12.

46. Herman, *Ritualised*, 11-12.

47. Alternatively, Lynette Mitchell (*Greeks Bearing Gifts*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997) includes an assessment of *xenia* as a subset or species of *philia*: "*Xenia* ('guest-friendship' or 'ritualized friendship') was a specialized and institutionalized relationship following a pattern of balanced exchanges and was often, although not always, at the utilitarian end of the scale" (12).

48. *The Magna Moralia*, trans. G. Cyril Armstrong (*The Loeb Classical Library*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1935).

49. Vernant, *Origins*, 45-46.

50. Herman, *Ritualised*, 30.

51. Godbout and Caillé, *The World of the Gift*, 143.

52. Godbout and Caillé, *The World of the Gift*, 141.

53. Herman, *Ritualised*, 10.

54. Citations are from Stanley Lombardo's translation in *The Essential Homer*.

55. Bonnie MacLachlan, *The Age of Grace: Charis in Early Greek Poetry* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993), 88 and 77.

56. This is the most "usual" way of reading this passage, yet Godbout and Caillé caution that such a reading of the "gift" in general as well as its alternatives could present problems: "If the gift and the counter-gift are unequal, then there's a winner and a loser, and possibly exploitation and trickery. If, on the other hand, they are the same, then there's apparently no difference between the gift and a rational, self-interested mercantile exchange. In short, either the gift results from uncharitable motives and is illegitimate, or it is non-existent, illusory" (5).

57. Herman, *Ritualised*, 79. Hereafter page numbers are referenced in parentheses in the text.

58. Herman, *Ritualised*, attributes this insight to Moses Finley, 79.

59. Herman, *Ritualised*, 10ff. for expansion on why he terms *xenia* "ritualised friendship."

60. MacLachlan, *Age of Grace*, 5. Hereafter page numbers are referenced in parentheses in the text.

Chapter 4

The “Gift” of Socrates

Interregnum

The general question of the remaining chapters is basically this: Is it possible that Plato’s dialogues, in part or in whole, present a non-agonistic type of speaking and thinking integral to the practice of philosophia? Since so many of our descriptions of Plato’s dialogues include terms like “contest,” “battle,” “challenge, and “debate,” this might seem like a useless line of inquiry. Much as it has become common knowledge that the ancient Greeks “structure all of their social relationships in terms of the agon,” it has also become common practice to read the speech between Plato’s characters as intentionally or inherently agonistic. Even though we understand that Plato’s characters wage contests for truth or knowledge rather than athletic wreaths or military honors, most of us continue to assume that Plato’s characters do compete in some way. Claudia Barracchi bemoans “systematically trivializing appropriations of Platonic dialectic as a matter of argumentative contention conducted for its own sake and involving winners and losers,” yet she also suggests we read Socrates in the Republic as a “philosophical warrior” whose battle is for an end “other than victory, or a wholly other kind of victory . . .”^[1] With a nod to Nietzsche, Ramona Naddaff reads the Republic as Plato’s appropriation of literature for the “philosophical work of censorship.” She writes that “literature becomes the ammunition [Plato’s] Socrates uses to condemn poetry and to stage a contest between poets and philosophers, philosophers and philosophers, and poets and philosophers.”^[2] As Roslyn Weiss analyzes differences between the Socratic elenchus and eristic, she suggests that Plato’s Socrates must win in order to effect the moral improvement of his interlocutors, that is, unlike sophists and orators, Socrates play is serious “because the

victory he seeks is the victory for the view that is true and noble.”^[3] Indicative of a general trend in Plato scholarship, these writings subject Plato’s philosophia to the axiom of the agon, implying that the dialogues should be read in accordance with the mentalite of contest and competition that forms the basis of classical Athenian life.

We must also admit, however, that the intellectual battles waged in Plato’s dialogues are never clearly won by any of the characters who “compete,” including Socrates. While some philosophers claim that by the end of Book I of the Republic Socrates has successfully defeated Thrasymachus, the dialogue certainly does not stop there. The objections of Glaucon and Adeimantus that they are not convinced by Socrates cannot be, then, just “incidental” to the conversation. Rather, as analyzed in the next chapter, these objections significantly change the direction of the dialogue. For that matter, neither does the inquiry that continues through Book II cease at the end of Book X. The various routes this discourse on justice take remain open through the Timaeus and the Critias as all three dialogues most likely occur in the same dramatic setting, and all three conversations can be traced back to the original extension of hospitality to Socrates by the character Cephalus.

The ongoing discussions of the Republic can also alert us to another non-agonistic aspect of—at least some of—the dialogues. Inasmuch as no one ever truly “wins” one of Plato’s dialogues, the conversations in the dialogues do not end. While many dialogues come to a dramatic close, characters and readers alike are not finished with the conversations. In comparison, contests and debates must end: time demands that particular agons are not ongoing. Winners must be declared and decisions must be determined. As discussed in chapter 1, the binary structure of the agon is sufficient to provide an efficient means of resolution. Yet this value of efficiency is not present in Plato’s dialogues. Rather, in comparison to a binary or agonistic structure, Plato’s writings present multiple voices and multiple perspectives, some of which are left unexpressed or unexplored at a dialogue’s “end.” In response to the unresolved character

of Plato's dialogues, some philosophers suggest that the purpose of Plato's writings is to encourage those who read or those who hear to take up the inquiry themselves.^[4] This approach to the dialogues can imply that their purpose is primarily pedagogical and preparatory for the practice of philosophy even if it is not constitutive of philosophy itself. Yet, how inquiry can and should continue, and what would make our inquiry properly philosophic rather than sophistic or eristic, is a very real issue as anyone who has ever taught Plato's dialogues might attest. Is it possible, then, that part of the reason we continue to describe the dialogues as "verbal contests" or "intellectual battles" is that it is somehow easier to do this than to constantly remind ourselves that what is at issue in Plato's dialogues is what constitutes philosophia as well as what passes for a genuine philosophical argument?^[5] To explore this issue, however, requires a certain suspension of disbelief when it comes to assessing what actually happens in the dialogues, and this involves considering: 1) that no one character actually ever wins one of Plato's dialogues, because 2) the arguments and ideas within any dialogue are consistently and continually subject to examination, either within the same dialogue or in another, and 3) the examination of arguments and ideas does not always commence or end with the character Socrates, rather, 4) other characters are often just as significant to the inquiry as Plato's Socrates, so 5) the aporetic character of so many of the dialogues coupled with the plurality of positions expressed and refuted within them speaks against their character as "contests."

The reasoning that leads to this claim presupposes certain beliefs about how to read Plato. These beliefs are briefly sketched here and brought to bear on the interpretations that follow. First, I submit that Plato's dialogues are—at least in part—dramatic presentations of the character Socrates, but they cannot contain "esoteric teachings" available only to the most skilled or adept readers^[6] because dramatic presentations are necessarily narrative presentations, and narrative presentations are pluralistic in terms of their structure and content. As

discussed previously, the agon is essentially binary, it operates in terms of oppositions and requires—temporarily or otherwise—the negation or denial of one voice or one position in favor of another. Alternatively, narrative requires an ongoing interdependence between a number of actions and characters. While certain narratives might portray or represent agons, the pluralistic structure of narrative prevents it from being an agon itself. Plato’s “narrative” of Socrates, so to speak, proceeds as all narrative proceeds, in terms of the mutual dependencies of actions, characters, and thought. While the action specific to Plato’s writings is “dialogue,” there is nothing about what occurs in dialogue that prevents us from asking “who is speaking,” “to whom” and “in what context”? Moreover, some would maintain it is because Plato composes dialogues that these are exactly the types of questions that must be asked.^[7] But this further means that who Socrates speaks with, for what reasons, and of course how characters speak with one another, are just as important as “what Socrates says,” if not—perhaps—more important in terms of what Greg Recco calls “the drama of the argument.”^[8] Furthermore, in hindsight, Plato’s writings comprise an oeuvre, and few would deny that what is at issue in Plato’s oeuvre is what distinguishes philosophia from other intellectual practices. But this issue can beg the question of how Plato establishes his conception of philosophia and—significantly—whether his conception is primarily articulated in terms of what philosophia is not, oratory, poetry, sophistry, etc.^[9] Alternatively and finally, there might be a more positive conception of philosophia established through the drama of the dialogues, one which is not necessarily always in opposition to or in contest with other Athenian intellectual practices, but is developed in the figure of the philosopher who is presented to us in the Apology as a “stranger” and a “gift.”

For readers who have not read the first chapters, a summary of what is meant by “non-agonistic” practices and how I have assessed these is included below under the heading “Who and What Is Socrates?” Following this brief recapitulation, I offer an account of how Plato’s portrayal of Socrates seems

compatible with some of the elements of muthos and gift practices previously explicated. In “Socrates as Gift” I continue to explore the figure of Socrates with particular attention to the Apology and Socrates’ claim that he is both a “stranger” to the manner of speaking in the court and a “gift of the gods” to the city. Plato’s unusual positioning of the character Socrates in the Apology suggests to me that “Socratic speech” and “Socratic inquiry” might have political import for our democratic concerns, and I offer an alternative reading of some of “what Socrates says” to support that possibility. The “Economy of Philosophy” explores the pre-or noncommercial aspect of Socrates’ “occupation” in relation to my account of “Socratic speech” as a form of dialogical justice. Thus, in general, I read the Apology to determine the political value of the gift in the figure of Socrates, both as an aspect of Plato’s philosophia and its possible democratic nuances.

WHO AND WHAT IS SOCRATES?

In chapter 2 I show how answering a question like “Who and what is Zeus?” is an extremely complicated task. But I also show how attempting to answer the question is not without merit because it reveals a person’s predispositions to, and suppositions about, the entire field of ancient Greek muthos. Whether one sees Zeus as a “sovereign,” as a “character,” or even as a “sovereign character,” depends upon how one understands the purposes and practices of ancient Greek mythology. As mentioned, I see ancient Greek muthos as a primarily narrative practice that can only loosely be called a “religion” in the modern sense of the term. Earlier, I suggested that muthos cannot be claimed to have or constitute a theology until it is written down. Here I add that even after the epics are initially transcribed, the “who” and the “what” of what is preserved in first writing does not constitute a “religion” or a “theology” in our modern sense. Our first literature is not like our current literature: it is not composed in the same way with the same techniques and materials. Simply put, first literature is

a different type of craft. As “different,” the material and conceptual practices that constitute a “theology” or a “religion” of “a” or “the book” in the modern sense are not available to early Greek thinkers.

What is available to early Greek thinkers, however, is a different type of economy, one more suited to the preservation of significant communication than to its interpretation and evaluation. First writing is the result of translating acoustic memory into visible symbols, or of transcribing how a song sounds to how a song looks in terms of linguistic and alphabetic marks.^[10] By this process, a written Homer and a written Hesiod have already been subjected to a type of economy, but it is an economy of saving or capturing the sound of something into a form only loosely resembling our written language. Moreover, the sounds of Homer and the sounds of Hesiod that are preserved are also the result of an “artistic economy” as explained by Milman Parry and others.^[11] The artistry of the oral Homer and Hesiod depends upon formula that each bard include in his singing, yet these formula stand in relation to formula that could have been included but are excluded from a particular poetic performance. The choice of which formula to include is, thereby, an artistic choice,^[12] and although we can only speculate that formula preserved in writing were initially orally chosen for their meter and rhythm, every identifiable formula in literate versions of the Iliad and Theogony echo perhaps dozens of formula excluded from the oral poetic performances that serve as the basis for acoustic memory. Within the economy of preliterate muthos, then, no formula stand in isolation from all others; that is, there is no definitive epithet for Zeus, Athena, Hera, et al., nor is there any one “right” way to express dawn’s rosy fingers.^[13]

The exigencies of oral poetic performance prompt the articulation of one formula in lieu of another, but overall it would seem that all formula qua formula are equally available and possible, or in other words, all formula are contenders. The dynamics and mechanics of ancient Greek muthos, then, alert us to a conceivably lost art: one in which media and message

are inextricably entwined in a genuine plurality of voice, that is, one in which there are many ways to say who and what is Zeus.

But this otherwise pluralistic art of speaking and listening seems to have vanished from the ways we explain social relationships in ancient Greece. As discussed in chapter 3, its possible values have certainly vanished from the ways we explain early Greek social practices like *xenia*. For us at least, an abiding relationship between strangers can only be understood in terms of its advantages to one or the other partner, or to both partners mutually. Thereby the value of the relationship is often read back from the partners' exchange of gifts and the practice is conceived as instrumental and in some sense agonistic. The instrumental function of *xenia* is measured in terms of the inter-subjective and fluctuating moments of inferiority and superiority between *xenoi* based upon their perpetual exchange of gifts in lesser or greater values. *Xenoi*, then, are in a situation of making or meeting a challenge provoked by the economic value of their gifts. The relationship will endure as long as some sort of balance is maintained over time, but the particular moments of *xenia* can be seen as agonistic because one partner attempts to "outdo" the other. Hence, *xenoi* engage in a perpetual contest of "goodwill," an ongoing agon that here, as elsewhere, cannot entirely rid itself of the "power" or "force" of *eris* in all social relationships, even relationships between strangers.

I mention again the pervasiveness of the agon in our understanding of all things ancient and Greek because when it comes to answering the question "Who and what is Socrates?" a wealth of knowledge about the practice and purpose of ancient Greek *philosophia* will emerge, and this knowledge often includes the assumption that, like all other ancient Greek social relationships, the practice of *philosophia* is inherently agonistic. Yet Socrates, like Zeus, comes to us as an ancient literary representation, and while some ancient literary representations can be made to yield to our assumptions, it is also possible that some ancient literary representations subvert these assumptions.

To a certain extent, as Zeus stands to *muthos*, Socrates

stands to philosophia, and one would be hard pressed to deny the literary richness of both figures without begging the question of what it is exactly that distinguishes the character of Zeus from the character of Socrates. That one is the “invention” of generations of bards and the other is a historical Athenian citizen written about by other historical Athenian citizens sidesteps the issues of representation as a collectively creative and responsive act.^[14] That is, to represent some “x” in word and deed requires some type of community of beliefs about “x,” perhaps even an entire system of beliefs for which the representation of “x” plays an integral part. More significantly, a representation of “x” that is preserved and endures is necessarily a collective act of representation, or a collective act that memorializes “x.”

Representations of “Socrates” that come to us from an ancient world surely “stand in” or “stand for” some community of beliefs about “Socrates” but we cannot assume beforehand that our beliefs about “Socrates” map directly onto that ancient world. This is particularly true in relation to Socrates because he is so widely written about in so many ways in the ancient and modern worlds. For our contemporary assessments of Socrates, I suggest we consider how what the early Greeks consider impious, for instance, affects the entire social body, that is, “Religious life was an integral part of social and political life. . . . Between the priesthood and the magistracy, there are less difference and opposition than equivalence and reciprocity. . . . Impiety (asebeia), wronging the gods, is equally an affront to the social group, a crime against the city.”^[15] By this, Plato’s Socrates’ concern with piety is not a disinterested search for a definition or a purely personal concern for his own well-being. Rather, piety and impiety are explicitly social concerns, and as they are social they are collectively experienced and collectively understood. The structure of collective understanding, however, is narrative and pluralistic rather than binary and competitive. As we have seen, the “network of relationships” that comprises the tales of gods and men is analogous to the “multiplicity of functions” that constitutes the social order. Since pre-Hellenic

and most of Hellenic Greece is non-literate, this social order is predicated upon the persistence of speech practices and the appropriateness of speech to generating meaning. Hence, it must be some type of speech that clarifies, say, the impious from the pious, and this type of speech must occur in a variety of contexts with a variety of speakers to be compatible with the “network of relationships” and “multiplicity of functions” that comprise social life.

I suggest that “Socratic speech” exemplifies the process of bringing multiple perspectives and positions “to the middle” as an object or “good” that garners our shared concerns. As Plato portrays him, speaking with Socrates compels recognition of the differences between claims that are unwarranted and actions that are undesirable, and claims that are both warranted and desirable for the “forms of action” that comprise human life. When we add to this that Plato presents “Socratic speech” and “Socratic inquiry” as if it were “authorless,” it becomes increasingly relevant to remind ourselves that the tradition of speech which foregrounds Plato’s dialogues would not recognize the practice of One speaking to and enlightening the Many. To the contrary, in a primarily oral and aural culture, all communication occurs as speech and this implies that meaning, also, is generated in thoroughly embodied and contextualized practices that accrue a “general sense” or “form” as repeatedly discussed, examined, and assessed over time.

From the ancient world, the variety of writings that represent an Athenian “Socrates” as well as the writings about Socrates that were not preserved but are referred to in writings that were, all communicate something to us about the figure of “Socrates.” As is well known, Plato is not the only or first Athenian composer to write about Socrates or to write about Socrates in the form of dialogues. A longstanding belief in some of Plato Studies is adequately summarized by John Cooper as he introduces a standard edition of Plato’s Complete Works:

It is clear that the dialogue form for philosophical writing began within the circle of those for whom philosophy meant

in the first instance the sort of inquiry Socrates was engaged in . . . Plato was not the first or only Socratic to write philosophical dialogues, but he certainly elaborated and expanded the genre far beyond what anyone else ever attempted. (xvii)

Cooper goes on to explain Plato's elaboration and expansion of the genre of dialogue in terms of what I take to be a "developmental" understanding of Plato's oeuvre.^[16] The basic idea of developmentalism is that Plato's first composed and often shortest dialogues—Euthyphro, Crito, Lysis, Charmides, etc.—center on the character of Socrates and attest to the earliest and most explicitly Socratic period in Plato's philosophic writings.^[17] As Plato matures, his dependence upon or attachment to the historical Socrates becomes less apparent and Plato begins to develop his own philosophical ideas in "middle" writings like Republic and Symposium. As Plato ages, criticisms of his own ideas begin to appear in longer, more sophisticated dialogues not necessarily starring "Socrates," that is "late" dialogues like Parmenides. The developmental approach allows us to read and study Plato's dialogues as written evidence of the longevity of a philosophic career: his writings evince the stages of his own philosophical progression and his eventual analytic reflection upon that progression. In conjunction with analyses that date the dialogues in terms of emerging or disappearing linguistic markers such as syntax and vocabulary,^[18] those who read and study Plato's dialogues developmentally can point to the early, middle, and late writings, and orient their interpretative parameters in terms of these different periods in Plato's thought. In this way, Cooper can explain how Socrates "dropped out of the cast of characters . . . in the magnum opus of [Plato's] old age, the Laws" (xviii), and why and how someone like Aristotle, born fifteen years after the death of the historical Socrates, could initially compose philosophically in the form of dialogues but without mention of "Socrates." Although both Plato and Aristotle wrote dialogues and were thereby in some way influenced by the "Socratic"

practice of philosophy, they are also distinguished by the presence or absence of a “personal attachment” to the historical Socrates.

Yet Plato’s apparent “personal attachment” to Socrates is at least as significant as Aristotle’s lack of political attachment to Athens, for Aristotle was never considered “Athenian.” If we are to rely upon historical attachments to infer why-who-wrote-what in the way they did, we could just as easily say that Aristotle abandoned the dialogue form when his “personal attachment” to the historical Plato was subverted by “law.”^[19] A problem with both of these suggestions is that they assume that biographical “facts” in some sense predetermine philosophical method to the extent that attention focuses not on what happens in the dialogues but upon reasons as to why Plato wrote dialogues, that is, he was initially imitating Socrates. But this approach sidesteps the issue of how Plato writes about Socrates and offers very little explanation for all of the other characters in Plato’s dialogues unless they, too, are simple imitations of historical characters.^[20] Thereby, the artistic economy of Plato’s dialogues, including the relationship between what is included and what is excluded from Plato’s accounts of fifth-century characters and events can easily be overlooked. Alternatively, it is also possible that part of the continuing appeal of Plato’s dialogues concerns the many different ways Socrates is presented, and thereby the many different ways Plato writes of what was considered “common knowledge” about Socrates for fourth-century audiences.

Still, one of the virtues of the developmental approach is how it can adequately answer to the flaws of the more conventional “doctrinal” readings and interpretations of Plato’s dialogues. A “doctrinalist” is less concerned with the progression and analysis of Plato’s ideas and more concerned to locate these ideas and their implied theories within the verbal exchanges of the dialogues. For a doctrinalist, “what Socrates says” and—significantly—the logical justifications and consequences of “what Socrates says” constitute the arguments of Plato’s philosophia. The conclusions of these arguments yield

a set of propositions that articulate Plato's theories on a variety of philosophical topics, that is, Plato's epistemology, Plato's ethics, Plato's metaphysics, etc. Hence, a "doctrinal" reader concerns herself with ideas, the particular ideas that constitute Plato's philosophy as demonstrated by analysis and assessment of "what Socrates says." A difficulty for the doctrinalist, as developmentalists know,^[21] is that what Socrates says in one dialogue is not necessarily, or even often, consistent with what Socrates says in another dialogue. Socrates' claim in the *Apology* that he will not cease to practice *philosophia* is apparently inconsistent with his argument in the *Crito* that it would be unlawful to escape his penalty.^[22] Moreover, is it not in the *Phaedo* that Socrates, who banished poetry from the *kallipolis* in the *Republic*, says he is composing poetry in preparation for death?

Alternatively, when the dialogues are read with an eye and ear for the narrative details of setting, character, and—indeed—plot, we can begin to understand how the literary elements of Plato's dialogues are not merely incidental to their philosophy. Moreover, "what Socrates says" in Plato's dialogues is always said to someone, or in other words, "what Socrates says" is never in isolation from who he says it to. A "dramatic" reading of Plato's dialogues attempts to balance the logical rigor of "what Socrates says" with the dramatic context of each dialogue. Since dramatic contexts fluctuate throughout Plato's oeuvre, dramatic readers and interpreters try to become sensitive to all the ways "what Socrates says" are presented as "what Socrates asks" in relation to specific "interlocutors" in a variety of dramatic instances. Thus, for a dramatic reader, the significance of "what Socrates says" cannot be determined apart from Plato's dramatic presentation of the dialogue and its thematic parallels to, and divergences from, other dialogues. Nor would locating the particular period in which the dialogue was composed offset the innumerable analytic and dramatic inconsistencies yielded by a strict developmentalist approach. When we consider that the character Socrates is presented at the tender age of twenty-five in what is considered one of

Plato's latest dialogues, the *Parmenides*, and at the age of seventy in what is considered one of Plato's earliest dialogues, the *Euthyphro*, the developmental theory falters on its basic supposition: that there is a systematic and linear method available for philosophical analysis of Plato's oeuvre. Even the assumption that the dialogues narrate something like the adult life of Socrates fails to account for the intervening forty-five years of the dramatic and/or historical Socrates, that Socrates who apparently engages in philosophical inquiry and speculation from the time he meets the "venerable and terrible" *Parmenides* until the time he drinks hemlock at the end of the *Phaedo*. Suffice to say, the dialogues do not support what begins to sound like our own *muthos* of Socrates, but the dialogues do yield the "sort of inquiry" Plato deemed valuable enough to compose and others believed important enough to preserve.

This "sort of inquiry" dramatically presents a character called Socrates as well as a character called "the Stranger," and a whole host of other characters named *Euthyphro*, *Lysis*, *Crito*, *Phaedrus*, *Glaucon*, *Adeimantus*, et al. Much as we would call *Achilles* or *Odysseus* a character or a figure, it is not completely untoward to refer to Plato's *Euthyphro* or Plato's *Lysis* as characters. Then, given what these characters do in the dialogues, we further refer to them as "interlocutors" because they speak with Socrates. But it would seem odd to refer to Socrates as a character like all the others, that is, as an interlocutor himself. Socrates is "the paradigmatic practitioner of the fledgling vocation called philosophy,"^[23] hence he is not exactly like other characters. On the other hand, given the content and structure of the dialogues, he is not exactly unlike them either. Only if we assume that Socrates is somehow in charge of the dialogue—and it is easy to assume he is—can we distinguish Socrates from all of Plato's other characters. When it comes to the *Republic*, however, other characters are also presented as taking charge of the dialogue, and at times it is they, rather than Socrates, who urge the conversation forward. Offered hospitality by *Polemarchus* "to stay" in the *Piraeus* and enjoy the rest of the festival, it is *Glaucon* rather than Socrates

who initially accepts the invitation. At the beginning of Book II, when Socrates suggests that Thrasymachus' challenge has been met, it is Glaucon and Adeimantus who will not let the elenchus go. Moreover, in dialogues that some suggest precede or preface the Republic, Socrates must be invited or persuaded to stay and to talk. In the Charmides, Socrates is welcomed by Chaerephon and asked to recount the battle of Potidaea; in the Laches, Lysimachus must be cajoled into including Socrates in the conversation; in the Lysis, Hippothales entreats Socrates to "tell me what a man should do or say to endear himself to the boy he fancies," (206c); and even Meno, the "guest-friend" from Thessaly, is the first to ask whether virtue is teachable. Plato's Socrates, then, is a character who at times steers and at other times allows himself to be steered in dialogue. And this suggests that it is not just what Socrates says or what he does but who he speaks with and what they do that is significant to the "drama of the argument."

There could, however, be other issues at work in the identification of Socrates as "the" or "the only" significant speaker in the dialogues. In order to focus exclusively on Socrates, we must already assume that we clearly understand the purpose of the dialogue: we know Socrates is speaking philosophically to others who are not speaking philosophically, yet by speaking with Socrates they are encouraged, influenced, or prompted to see the differences between more conventional or usual types of inquiry and the type engaged in by Socrates. Yet if this is the case, what constitutes philosophical inquiry does not actually happen in the dialogues. The character Socrates is never completely free to practice *philosophia* because he is always in conversation with other characters who do not necessarily understand, agree, or appreciate what Socrates says and what he is trying to do. This means that the sort of inquiry portrayed in Plato's dialogues yields an image of the practice of *philosophia* that is always, in some sense, pre-philosophical. The character Socrates, as the philosopher, speaks to other characters who are not philosophers, and this further means that Socrates speaks from and for a position that

is always somehow at odds to the types of speaking and thinking engaged in by other characters. Yet Socrates' particular position, the paradigmatic philosophical one, can only be expressed or experienced in relation to what it is not, which in turn suggests that Socrates the philosopher can only be understood in relation to who he is not, a sophist, an orator, a poet, et al.

Since an issue in Plato's writings is—in part—"what is philosophy," we cannot assume that we know the answer beforehand and, moreover, that we also know how Socrates is its "fledgling practitioner." Our common knowledge about Socrates has been created over time by communities who consider Plato's dialogues significant enough to preserve and disseminate as particular types of writings or particular types of texts. This process is not unusual or untoward, but it does create a very odd economy at the origin of Western philosophical inquiry: the philosophical figure all other ancient Greek thinkers are contrasted to, that is, the pre- or the post-Socratics, never actually practices philosophy. Rather, Plato coins the term *philosophia* with reference to Socrates, and so for Plato, at least, philosophy is a matter and manner of speaking and acting like Socrates. Yet what Plato's Socrates says and what Plato's Socrates does in the dialogues cannot be appropriately understood apart from what other characters say and what other characters do in the dialogues. This suggests to me that the practice of *philosophia*—at least for Plato's Socrates—involves engaging in dialogues with multiple persons who articulate multiple perspectives.

That Plato does give pride of place to what Socrates says and what Socrates does, and goes to some length to distinguish what Socrates says and what Socrates does from what other characters say and do in the dialogues, can be inferred from the magnitude of Socrates' appearances and the sheer quantity of "what Socrates says." Yet the specific quality and value of what Socrates says and what Socrates does is not so easily inferred. I have sketched how who and what Socrates is seems to be compatible with the "bigger picture" of speech and community

in ancient Greece. I turn now to the dialogue that is perhaps the least conversational yet the most dialogical in terms of the scope of Socrates' audience,^[24] the Apology. Generally considered to be the most historically accurate of Plato's portrayals, the Apology dramatizes Socrates speaking simultaneously to a great number of Athenian citizens. While the sheer size of his audience is not conducive to Socrates' usual manner of speaking with his fellow citizens, aside from his account of himself as a midwife in the Theaetetus, the Apology offers a sustained account of who and what Socrates is, that is of what "the paradigmatic practitioner of the fledgling vocation called philosophy" says of himself.^[25]

SOCRATES AS GIFT

In Plato's Apology, the character Socrates repeatedly mentions his attachment to the city "by the god." What is more, and quite startling to our eyes and ears at least, is Socrates' claim that he is a gift to the city from the gods, and this gift will not easily or soon be replaced:

Indeed, gentlemen of the jury, I am far from making a defense now on my own behalf, as might be thought, but on yours, to prevent you from wrongdoing by mistreating the god's gift to you by condemning me; for if you kill me you will not easily find another like me. I was attached to this city by the god—although it seems a ridiculous thing to say—as upon a great and noble horse which was somewhat sluggish because of its size and needed to be stirred up by a kind of gadfly. (30d-e5)^[26]

The trope of "gadfly" suggests the irritating and annoying effect of Socrates' practices upon many persons in the city, which he readily admits.^[27] But the practice is also said to constitute a "gift," a *doron*, bequeathed to the city "by the god." Yet, this is no ordinary gift primarily because—for many Athenian citizens—it does not yield *charis*. As discussed in

chapter 3, the attitudes and behaviors surrounding “the charis-convention amounted to a *lex talionis*, but of a positive sort” (7). Bonnie MacLachlan explains that charis “bound people together” and exemplifies “the distribution of favors and good behavior” (7) between persons who mutually acknowledge and reciprocate it. Hence, I have suggested that it is charis rather than gifts that bind strangers as *xenoi*. In other words, it is charis that answers to the value of relationships between strangers, and so the gifts exchanged are incidental to that value rather than, as is generally believed, indicative of that value. With this in mind, when Socrates declares himself a gift to the city, is he invoking a spirit or mentalite of charis? What could it mean to do this, and further why would he do this in the middle of a litigatory practice, a practice that is explicitly agonistic, an *agon timon*? For if there is one place charis does not seem to belong, it is in a court of law. On the other hand, since this is a democratic court of law, how could charis not belong? A “distribution of favors and good behaviors” toward one another is another way of characterizing those “just dealings” the author of the *Magna Moralia* alludes to when he distinguishes a variety of human relationships. As we have seen, the “firmest of relationships” are practiced by *xenoi*: because *xenoi* do not initially share “a common good” there is no reason for dispute between them, and in the absence of dispute there is the greatest possibility for “just dealings.” I have suggested that *xenoi* do share something in common, namely their relationship, but this is a “common good” that they create together over time and in the absence of the external authority of their respective social orders. If a court of law is instituted to uphold a common good, a “law” that, likewise, was freely created by citizens with respect to their shared obligations and responsibilities for one another, then the court’s structure and practices will exemplify “just dealings.” But if a court of law is instituted to judge between disputants in terms of a “law” that was not freely created by citizens with respect to their shared obligations and responsibilities for one another, then the court’s structure and practice will resemble an *agon* because the “law”

it upholds is, or will become, a de-personified, disembodied, and de-contextualized version of a “good.” Into the space between a “law” that is collectively created and collectively experienced and a law that exists at least one remove from the actual wills and actions of citizens, Plato might allude to those “firmest of relationships” in order to foreground the significance of Socrates as a type of “stranger.”

Prior to his claim of himself as a gift, Socrates has distinguished his manner of speaking from the speech of those who speak before him, his prosecutors, as well as in general from the type of speaking usual to the courts:^[28]

The position is this: this is my first appearance in a lawcourt at the age of seventy; I am, therefore, a stranger to the manner of speaking here. Just as if I were really a stranger, you would excuse me if I spoke in that dialect and manner in which I had been brought up, so too my present request seems a just one, for you to pay no attention to my manner of speech—be it better or worse—but to concentrate your attention on whether what I say is just or not, for the excellence of a judge lies in this, as that of a speaker lies in telling the truth. (17d15–18a4)

In terms of his manner of speaking, Socrates claims he is a stranger to the court, and asks his audience to listen to him as if he really were a stranger, to accord to him the same type of hospitality they would grant anyone unfamiliar with the customs of the city. Oddly, and immediately thereafter, Socrates also asks his audience to pay no attention to how he speaks, but to focus instead upon whether what he says is just or not. His reasoning is that virtue in judgment entails consideration of the content of what is said in lieu of its effect or context. Yet it is precisely the effect of Socrates’ uncusomary talk that provokes the disclaimer in the first place: “this is my first appearance in a lawcourt at the age of seventy; I am, therefore, a stranger to the manner of speaking here.” This suggests that on the one hand Socrates positions himself as a stranger to the conventions of

the court while on the other he remarks that regardless of whether one is really a stranger, the significance of what is said—and how we recognize this—has little or nothing to do with who is speaking and how they speak: “my present request seems a just one, for you to pay no attention to my manner of speech—be it better or worse—but to concentrate your attention on whether what I say is just or not, for the excellence of a judge lies in this, as that of a speaker lies in telling the truth.”

This distinction is important because the portrait of the philosopher Plato is creating is often said to reflect the character of the historical Socrates. Hence, who is speaking and how he speaks before the court would seem to make all the difference to what is said before the court. But Plato’s Socrates initially asks to be considered a “stranger” and then surprisingly asks to not be considered at all. Framed in this way, Socrates’ request and claim indeed sound “strange.” His request to the jury to pay no attention to how he speaks might strike us as antithetical to the requirements and judgments of what we call “identity politics,” wherein the significance of what is said is determined by the embodied identity of the speaker. Comparatively, in the *Apology*, not only is it not important to consider how someone says something when we judge as to the justice of what is said, in order to do this we must also somehow depersonalize ourselves in relation to the speaker: Socrates asks his audience to consider what he says apart from how he says it, yet how he speaks is characteristic of who he is. The very idea that there is a way of considering what is said without regard for the identities and contexts of speakers has been significantly criticized by feminist, post-structural, and post-colonial theorists alike, and for excellent reasons: it is impossible to determine the significance of what is said apart from how it is said and the person who says it in terms of their “situatedness.”^[29]

Alternatively, ancient Greeks have been accustomed to doing just this when they gather to receive the gifts of the Muses. Poets and audiences alike practice a type of self-forgetting in an act of collective remembrance. Part of this

practice includes distinguishing between aletheia and pseudea along a continuum of what cannot or should not be forgotten. When we add to this that Plato's representation of Socrates' trial is written as if from memory, be it Plato's personal memory of attending the trial, the collective memory of "what is said" about the trial, or in combination, the significance of memory to Plato's Apology becomes more apparent and relevant as this is the only one of Plato's accounts of "Socratic speech" attested to by the historical record. Reading the Apology in relation to an ancient Greek tradition of memory allows us to consider its relationship to practices that anchor the socio-cultural circumstances of citizenship in a type of speaking that is brought "to the middle" and so is not the personal concern of one, but the collective concern of the many. In the Apology, that what Plato's Socrates says is meant to evoke the memories of his audience is evident in Plato's repeated use of phrasing for "do not create a disturbance."

The term *θορυβέω*, generally transliterated as "uproar" or "disturbance," occurs several times early in the Apology when "what Socrates says" apparently causes a stir.^[30] The first instance of *θορυβέω* prefaces Socrates disclaimer about his manner of speech: "One thing I do ask and beg of you, gentlemen: if you hear me making my defense in the same kind of language as I am accustomed to use in the marketplace by the banker's tables, where many of you have heard me and elsewhere, do not be surprised or create a disturbance on that account" (17c5-d2). To this, Socrates' audience makes no outcry. The second instance of *θορυβέω*, however, occurs when Socrates explains that what "has caused this reputation and slander" is a certain kind of wisdom: "Human wisdom, perhaps" (20d5), but this is not equivalent to the type of wisdom others may possess. They may be "wise with a wisdom more than human," but Socrates says that he is unequivocally not wise in this way, and anyone who says so "is lying and speaks slander to me" (20e2). To this the audience does cry out, so Socrates says again, "Do not create a disturbance." The audience, however, will not honor his request a second time. Socrates

calls upon “the god at Delphi as my witness” and the brother of Chaerephon to attest that when Chaerephon asked the oracle —“do not create a disturbance”—whether any man is wiser than Socrates, the Oracle replied “no one is wiser” (21a5). What the Pythian could possibly mean by this claim is taken up by Socrates as his “occupation”^[31] and his “service to the god.” Yet it is only after Socrates describes his occupation and acquits himself of Meletus’ charges, that Socrates makes another apparently “disturbing” claim: “whether you acquit me or not, do so on the understanding that this is my course of action, even if I am to face death many times” (30c2).

Socrates asks the jurors again to listen to what he will say for it will be to their advantage to do so. Although they will soon “hear other things at which [they] will perhaps cry out,” they should listen. Why? Because if “you kill the sort of man I say I am, you will not harm me more than yourselves” (30c5). In response to this claim, the audience remains silent, and it seems reasonable for us to ask “why?” After all of the other outbursts Plato portrays, Socrates’ claim that “you will not harm me more than yourselves” does not cause uproar. Socrates is not threatening retribution if the Athenians harm him, nor, I suggest, is he adopting a position of self-sacrifice or moral superiority.^[32] The claim “you will not harm me more than yourselves” neither excuses Socrates from harm nor condemns the Athenians to committing harm. Rather, the claim is articulated as an “if, then” statement, that is, “if you kill the sort of man I say I am, [then] you will not harm me more than yourselves.” As a conditional claim, Socrates articulates the particular relationship that could hold between democratic citizens. To the extent that an act which harms Socrates will also harm his fellow citizens, Socrates conceives of his penalty or his acquittal as a collective action, the consequences of which are collectively experienced, that is, whatever they do to him they also do to themselves because justice, like piety, is collectively experienced.

That citizens are invariably connected to one another within the parameters of the “law” is implied by the dramatic setting,

but Socrates' claim is not a usual or conventional way of conceiving of the relationships that hold between persons in a court of law: jurors are in place to judge between sides in an agon timon, hence the expected manner of speaking in such a situation would include a variety of technai proven effective in swaying the jurors.^[33] I suggest, however, that Socrates has already shown the futile character of this contest in his examination of Meletus' reasons for bringing charges to a public court. This representative of the poets does contradict himself when questioned by Socrates, but the source of Meletus' contradiction is revealed in his attempt to depersonalize Socrates as a citizen by refusing to address him privately on the issue of "corrupting the youth." In other words, Meletus does not treat Socrates as an equal but appeals to a law that is apparently in place to assure equality to all who have access to it, that is, citizens. In comparison, Socrates' assertion of the conditional relationship that could hold between citizens resonates with a much more social account of justice than is often credited to the Apology since Socrates claims that any collectively derived decision will affect the entire social body. The issue, then, cannot be to simply apply justice but to determine together what is just.

To a certain extent, whether Socrates is sentenced to death, whether Meletus does heed Socrates' charge of social irresponsibility, indeed whether the jurors do recognize the significance of what is said, are all secondary concerns to the fundamental relationship that binds citizens as citizens. That these are "equal" relationships in terms of shared protection and access to the law (isonomia) derives from a deeper sense of the "social" evolved from centuries-old practices of "sharing in common." Again, what makes "insiders" inside to one another is what they "share in common," what exists "in the middle" and "in between" them. If justice is something that citizens share in common, then justice cannot be appropriately understood as something one side has more than the other, because justice is what happens between citizens, that is, it is not as if Socrates is saying "Meletus is not acting justly, but I am," or "you do not

understand what justice is, but I do, hence you cannot harm me.” Rather the relationship Socrates maintains in this “his defense” is neither defensive nor offensive. If it were, then he would speak from a position that communicates he is aware that his accusers have delivered a first strike and initiated a contest, specifically a contest of justice. While some of us might delight in the way Socrates destroys Meletus in cross-examination, I suggest that Plato’s portrayal cannot be a matter of finding fault on one side or any other, that is, in Socrates, the accusers, or the majority of voters on the jury, because Plato’s Socrates is clear that the actions of accuser and accused are inextricably connected in ways that dispel any such binary accounts or judgments of justice.

Thus revealed Socrates is a “gift” who belongs to the city, that is, he is “the kind of person to be a gift of the god to the city” (31b). As a “gift” Socrates embodies the space between citizens that indicates the value of their relationships. Citizens will surely disagree with one another, but in a genuine democracy citizens do not try to “outdo” one another, they do not seek victory at the expense of another citizen. As Greg Recco has shown, the very idea that justice is and can be contested is an oligarchic idea. While democratic practice entails that each citizen embody and act upon a collectively determined good, oligarchic practice positions the good as something to be won. Hence disagreement and dissent within an oligarchy are necessarily partisan, evoking claims made “on behalf of a group that wishes for selfish reasons to harm the ruling party, rather than as claims rightly made on behalf of the whole” (9). Claims made on behalf of the whole are not claims every citizen will agree with or even accept, but they are “just” insofar as they are responsibly made on behalf of the collective, that is, for the supposed good of the social body. Of course, in order for citizens to make and consider such claims, it is imperative that the equality mandated by law is embodied in practices, practices like Socratic inquiry.

In this way, and in relation to the oral and aural tradition that Plato inherits, I suggest that “Socratic speech” exemplifies

the values of dialogical justice. Plato's Socrates is concerned to elicit multiple perspectives and multiple positions from multiple persons, and the dialogues exhibit the intersections and overlapping of these positions on a variety of invariably intersecting and overlapping topics. "Socratic inquiry" is concerned to foreground these positions, including reasons for maintaining and abandoning them. Reasons for and against particular positions might generate the meaning of a particular dialogue, but these reasons do not precede that dialogue nor carry over into another dialogue as anything other than a position or perspective subject to examination by other characters in other contexts. While Plato's Socrates does not completely agree with what other characters say in the dialogues, nor—it is significant to note—do other characters always ultimately agree with him, dialogical justice might also be what happens between characters who disagree. Learning the patterns of thought and points of contention evoked by disagreement can educate us to democratic competence, to the ability to abide the multiple perspectives and positions that have always comprised our collective experience. In this way, Plato's dialogues remind us of the intersections and overlapping of civic experience and the relevance of philosophical inquiry to the improvement of that experience. The point of "Socratic inquiry," then, cannot be to compel all to agree to a singular proposition, a "One," but to impel all to participate in what is brought "to the middle," that is, the particular topic of inquiry.

To the objection that Plato's Socrates, as the philosopher, has a unique obligation to teach or to educate those with whom he speaks, it is also possible to consider that Plato's Socrates models our shared obligation to keep the parameters of the dialogue open and the discussion ongoing when it comes to issues like justice, virtue, and education, issues that concern us all. A shared obligation implies a shared responsibility not only for what is brought "to the middle," but also for its results, which is another way of saying that what we decide together we must be willing to experience together in a genuine democracy.

From another perspective, it might seem that in the Apology

Plato positions Socrates in the middle of ideologies that we would expect to compete for political primacy given the recent “democratic revolutions” of 404/403 BCE. By invoking Chaerephon who accompanied the tyrants in exile and upbraiding Meletus for not speaking with him personally, Socrates would seem to be playing to both sides at once: he appeals on the one hand to oligarchs returned from exile in attendance,^[34] and on the other to newly empowered democrats present who would affirm Meletus’ avowal of the worth of most citizens to “improve the youth.”^[35] Yet if Socrates is appealing to both sides at once in an attempt to unify or berate all factions equally, then he must not consider himself positioned on any side. Thus some philosophers read Socrates’ declamation of himself as a “gift from the gods” in terms of an appeal to a third and higher authority, a divine authority, in order to dispel the political conflict that divides the jury. In this way, Socrates is not actually “in the middle” at all, but is positioned by Plato as “other than” and somehow above the social and political order, or at least in his understanding of justice he is independent of the fits and starts of political debates about justice.

Plato’s Socrates, however, seems to be the current object of just such a debate. Moreover, it is difficult to maintain something like Plato’s asocial or apolitical intent in light of the vocabulary of the gift. In the ancient world, as now, gifts are not just symbols of relationships, they are concrete manifestations of relationships. In other words, the world of the gift is not an abstract and disembodied world, for even divine gifts have palpable expressions and consequences. Hence, any ambiguity about gifts stems not from their otherworldly and impersonal character, but from their deeply personal and material nature, that is, gifts denote a presence that demands a response. Per chapter 2, when the poet sings “the gifts of the Muses to humanity,” his audience is as much connected by the audible rhythm of the song as by the collective memory of its content. As poets and audiences are “called out” in their collective receipt of the gifts of the Muses, citizens too are “called out” in

their collective judgment of proposals brought “to the middle.” A significant difference between the practice of *muthos* and democratic decision making, of course, is the requirement of a vote as a procedural resolution for democratic disagreements. Without a vote it seems that nothing would ever be accomplished, however with a vote there is the possibility that many or the most votes will be cast unwisely, resulting in a “tyranny of the majority,” a popular but potentially harmful resolution. The virtue of “Socratic speech,” as it is described here, is that it does not prefigure the terms of the debate prior to dialogue about those terms. In other words, citizens like Meletus who do not engage in dialogue about the issues that genuinely concern us all are not aware of the intersections and overlapping of the multiple perspectives and positions that comprise a social body. Such citizens might think there are no means available to them by which they can consider and reflect on substantive issues before these issues are institutionalized in terms of a binary “vote,” that is, an *agon*. Prior to the *agon*, awareness of a plurality of meanings can support cohesiveness and coherence as much as it currently seems to strengthen divisiveness and dissent. “Socratic speech,” however, cannot abide a “tyranny of the majority” because 1) “Socratic inquiry” requires multiple perspectives, all of which 2) are tirelessly yet equally subject to examination. In this way, Plato’s Socrates models “just dealings” with all claims, even those we might suppose are the most absurd, like Euthyphro’s characterizations of “piety.” Nevertheless, what Socrates says and what Socrates does consistently seems to promote the type of conditional relationship he claims in the *Apology*, not just once, but twice.

At 30d and 31a, Plato’s Socrates refers to himself as a “gift” and provides evidence for such a claim by pointing to the existential fact of his poverty: it “does not seem like human nature for me to have neglected all my own affairs and to have tolerated this neglect now for so many years, while I was always concerned with you, approaching each one of you like a father or an elder brother to persuade you to care for virtue” (31b1–4). In response to Socrates’ claim of poverty on their behalf, the

jurors do not cry out. Nor does the jury create a disturbance in response to Socrates' claim of himself as "gift." Actually, once Socrates declares himself a "gift," the audience does not create another disturbance throughout the remainder of Plato's *Apology*. Can we assume there is something about the vocabulary of the gift that finally hushes the audience? Since Plato has gone to some lengths to narrate how what Socrates says causes an uproar, the dramatic silence of the audience following the iteration of the gift might give us pause as well.

Certainly it is not usual Athenian practice to declare oneself a gift. Moreover, it cannot be typical to claim oneself a gift "from the god" to the entire city. Between the image of a "gadfly" and the assertion of himself as a "gift," Socrates remarks "although it seems a ridiculous thing to say," but which is the ridiculous thing to say: that he is a gift from the gods, or that this "gift" is like a "gadfly"?

In the ancient world, persons who are not considered citizens can be given by citizens as "gifts" to others citizens: the "exchange" of women in marriage as well as the lending or borrowing of slaves attest to the use of persons as "property." Yet Socrates is not a woman or a slave. Rather, as a citizen, Plato's Socrates is necessarily *philos* ("friend") to those he addresses. As we have seen, "Athenian" demarcates all Athenians as "friends" in contrast to those whose citizenships exists "outside" the city proper, that is, Spartans, Thebans, Egyptians, etc. While classicists have recently shown how a term like "Athenian" need not stipulate a coherent sense of cultural identity among all Athenians,^[36] gifts between citizens do serve different purposes than gifts between non-citizens. As early as the *Iliad*, a distinction between those "inside" one's community and those "outside" one's community makes all the difference in terms of appropriate behavior surrounding the "gift." For instance, if Helen were not considered the "property" of Menelaus, Helen could not be considered a "gift" that Paris "takes" without promise or obligation of "return." But, of course, Paris is non-Greek, and so his violation does not strike at the root of kinship practices; it does, however, blatantly ignore the

charis that binds the hospitality practices known as xenia. While violations of xenia may incur shame or disgrace, there is no written law against violating one's xenos. There is, perhaps, a moral code that in the pan-Hellenic world is attributed to the god of hosts, Zeus. Yet, as protector of guests, suppliants, and strangers, Zeus himself is not a "host," or in any way rightly said to be a "host." Just as Zeus Dikeos signifies that Zeus is of justice but is not himself just, Zeus Xenios is god of strangers but he is not himself a stranger.

Hence what Plato's Socrates, an adult Athenian male, might mean by declaring himself a "stranger" and a "gift" can seem ambiguous to us. As Kevin Robb reminds us, "As in the cases of xenia . . . when the advance of literacy has altered an institution of oral life, it can become unrecognizable for what it once was" (83). Written records of xenia and our accompanying assessments of these records—including mine—are necessarily "pale reflections of Greek oral originals." Still the written records can serve to remind us how often practices attributed to Zeus in the Greek world are also recognizably and easily practiced by non-Greeks. In this way, relationships of xenia are "lawless" to the extent they exist between persons who do not share a particular social or political order. Rather, as I suggest, they create their own "common good" by virtue of their relationship. In classical Athens, however, the extent to which persons do not "share things in common" seems to be contingent upon an increasingly narrow concept of "friends" in relation to expanding accounts of citizenship. That is, Thessalians and Athenians are both Greeks, yet Plato's Meno is identified as a xenos of Plato's Anytus in the Meno. Persons, therefore, who are non-friends in the political sense of not-sharing citizenship do not share a polis, and so gifts between them are not regulated by the norms associated with expected Athenian practice. In this way, Socrates' disclaimer that he is a stranger to the customary manner of speaking in court actually reveals that he is not in any way a stranger for if he were really a stranger he would not be familiar with the customs of the Athenian court.

By calling attention to his manner of his speech as if he

were a stranger, Plato's Socrates invariably calls attention to what is said. While in some sense calling attention to how one speaks adds a dimension of pressure for a speaker, it can also free both speaker and audience to hear something unexpected, to encounter in a familiar form an unfamiliar perspective, or, as is often the case with Plato's Socrates, an unfamiliar question. In this way, perhaps, Socrates' expression of himself as a "gift," which to my knowledge does not occur in any other of Plato's writings nor is echoed in any other accounts of Socrates' trial, [37] is articulated in the middle of a setting that explicitly evokes a shared social and political order, an Athenian lawcourt. Socrates' claim that he is a "stranger" to the custom of speaking in this overtly public space might allude to appropriate behavior to strangers. In conjunction with Socrates' expression of himself as a "gift," the allusion to *xenia* becomes more relevant as *xenia* is a fairly common fifth-century practice certainly known to Plato's fourth-century audiences. Might Plato's Socrates, then, invoke the practice of these relationships in order to call attention to their "just dealings"? If this comparison is appropriate, it invariably raises the question, 'How is it possible that one can treat a stranger more honorably and virtuously than one treats a friend?' Relationships of *xenia* need not serve the social and political order but they are lauded less than a century later in the *Magna Moralia* as the most enduring of all human relationships because relationships between *xenoi* are *eris*-free or non-agonistic relationships. I would add that relationships of *xenia* are also conditional relationships to the extent that what is shared in common is created in common by virtue of their relationship. Hence, Plato's Socrates' assertion of the conditional relationship that holds between citizens, as it is substantiated by Plato's dramatic allusion to *xenia*, might be a significantly philosophical comment on the appropriate character of "citizenship."

There are perhaps other non-agonistic practices that comprise archaic and classical Greek daily life. *Xenia* and oral poetic performance, as they have been recorded, include a vocabulary of the gift and so these are the practices I suggest

bear some relation to Plato's positioning of Socrates in the Apology. What remains to be seen is how what Plato's Socrates says and what Plato's Socrates does can be plausibly conceived of as a "gift" without reducing it to an aspect of Socrates "divine mission" on the one hand or Platonic irony on the other. That is, some interpreters of the Apology read the vocabulary of the gift in tandem with Socrates' "divine mission," that is, literally his "service to the god." If we import what Plato's Socrates says in other dialogues about the intrinsic goodness of the gods we can reason thus: Since the god is good, and philosophy is a "gift" from the god, then philosophy is good, or philosophy is a "good" bestowed to us in the figure of Socrates much as muthos is bestowed as "the gift of the Muses to humanity." This interpretation can explain the silence that follows the iteration of Socrates as a gift: in the presence of a gift of the gods bestowed and received as speech, one must initially listen. I choose, however, not to pursue this interpretation because of the multiple aspects and actions of the ancient Greek "divine." Try as we might, because ancient Greek religion is a narrative religion, and thereby essentially pluralistic, we cannot weave a coherent theology from their accounts. Simply put, the Greeks say everything about their gods and goddesses, and it is not clear to me what of all of "what is said" of the gods may or may not refer to Socrates' "service to the god." Even if we assume that Plato, the philosopher, develops a theology in other writings, what Plato's Socrates says in other writings is said in different dramatic contexts and to different characters. In the Apology, Plato's Socrates explains his "occupation" as his "service to the god," but the god in question is whichever god speaks through the Oracle at Delphi, supposedly "Apollo." Plato's Socrates, however, says he does not understand what the god could possibly mean, so he sets out to speak with whoever might be willing to converse in order to assess the meaning of the Oracle's pronouncement. Hence, by his own account, Socrates' "service" is dialogical. Moreover, the result of Socrates' "service" yields difference by comparison rather than certainty or "truth" by contest, for Plato's Socrates says that in

comparison with those he speaks he is “wise” to the extent that he does not claim to know what he does not know. This is, apparently, Socrates’ assessment of the “gift,” and it must be remembered that in classical Athens, the value of a gift is determined in relation to its public effects, that is, gifts are not, to fourth-century audiences, always “good.”

I suggest we consider instead how the narrative tradition of *muthos* foregrounds the story of the Oracle, and how the audience reacts to that story: they create a disturbance. Plato’s dramatic use of *θορυβέω* suggests a variety of possibilities about how listeners who do not otherwise speak nevertheless affect the “drama of the argument.” Suffice to say here, that if the narrative tradition of *muthos* is a source of a pluralism deeply rooted in democratic ideas and their corresponding institutions, then it is possible that by positioning Socrates as a “gift” who belongs to the entire city, that is a citizen who occupies not one side or another but that space “in the middle,” Plato preserves that rudimentary yet profoundly contextual and visceral disposition to equality in the figure of Socrates: in the *Apology*, “Socrates” is circumstantial evidence of an *isonomia* that could have been.

This type of reading is perhaps all the more appropriate for twenty-first-century citizens who cannot help but compare the democratic possibilities embodied in Plato’s Socrates to the devastating inequities of present day. But, of course, as positioned “in the middle,” what I might like to hear Socrates say is not necessarily what Plato’s audiences heard. Recco observes that while Plato does not put forward arguments that favor the type of uncertainty that must be embraced if one is to genuinely come to know and understand something like “courage,” “justice,” or “knowledge,” he does advance the “kind of readiness to abide uncertainty” (11) in the figure of Socrates. If Recco is correct, then it is also difficult to maintain that in general Plato’s writings are purposively ironic or composed as pastiche, for example, Socrates is a “gift” that most Athenians give back. Assuming that Plato uses irony to criticize his contemporaries’ assessments and treatment of the

historical Socrates, we might say that in declaiming Socrates as “stranger” and “gift,” Plato invokes the value of robust and multicultural social relationships at the heart of one of the prides of his native city, the lawcourt. This is an institution founded upon an isonomia repeatedly lauded by Athenians to Athenians for the collective glory of Athens.^[38] That isonomia has very little to do with the demagogic practices of 399 BCE and even less to do with the “trumped up” charges against Socrates is obvious to any reader of the Apology. So, by positioning Socrates as “stranger” and “gift,” might Plato also call attention to the frayed and fraying ties of “just dealings” among Athenians? Is it actually Athens “who” is on trial here?^[39]

Perhaps. Yet Socrates declamation of himself as a “gift” also calls into question the value of his occupation. How are we to understand the value of this “occupation,” and thereby the apparent value of philosophy, and might this explain the stunning silence of the audience once Plato’s Socrates introduces the vocabulary of the gift?

THE ECONOMY OF PHILOSOPHY

A thoughtful and sustained account of Plato’s portrayal of Socrates in relation to the economy of the gift is offered by Gary Scott in Plato’s Socrates as Educator. Scott explains how the claim in the Apology and elsewhere that Socrates does not accept fees for what others call his teaching distinguishes Socratic education from learning that has an established market value, that is, sophists like Evenus in the Apology can expect to be paid for pedagogical services (20b–c). I would add that in classical Athens poets as well are materially compensated for their compositions and performances. Hence, we find Simonides mourning the loss of *charis* between patron and poet in a “new economy” of cash exchange.^[40] In comparison to what Evenus receives and what Simonides has lost, Socrates promises to explain his particular occupation to the jury. But it should be noted that he does so in order to answer to the source of the slanders against him. Hence, Socrates’ initial description of

what he does is in response to what he is perceived as doing. From this position of response, Socrates accounts for his “reputation for wisdom” which, we have seen, causes something of a “disturbance.”

At this point in the Apology, Socrates’ occupation has no recognizable value apart from how it differs from what others do. Thus we might understand that Socrates’ account of himself as a “gift” is directed against what others do and is distinguished by virtue of the fact that Socrates, unlike a sophist or a poet, does not receive anything in return for what he says. But this is a difficult position to maintain in light of the purposes of his conversations and Socrates’ own admission that their substance consists of “my own concerns” (33a6) as well as his admission that “I was always concerned with you” (31b). Socrates might not be motivated by money, but he is motivated by something even if this something appears to have no redeemable market value. Gifts, as many theorists will tell us, do carry certain obligations. Among these reciprocity demands that recipients of a gift offer some form of return. Positioning himself as a gift, then, Socrates cannot be claiming that he desires or receives nothing in return, but only that what he receives is not a “fee.” Since the narrative fact of Socrates’ fee-less “occupation” is consistent throughout Plato’s oeuvre, Scott suggests that “it has not been sufficiently emphasized how crucial it seems to be to [Plato’s] conception of [philosophy] that its practice be carried out at a pre-commercial level of human relations” (31).^[41] In this way, it is not so much that Socrates is not paid for what he says but that what he says and what he does, philosophēin (e.g., “to do philosophy”) occurs at a social level that is un-regarded, or perhaps disregarded, “in the marketplace and at the banker’s tables.”

Aside from “education by Homer” which has, in part, become professionalized in Plato’s world, the only other type of paideia that can claim some pre-commercial authority for citizenry is sunousia. Kevin Robb suggests that the lure of Plato’s Socrates for young male Athenians is conceived as a threat to the tradition of sunousia and specifically to one of its

most successful exemplars,^[42] Anytus. Born into a non-privileged social and political position, Anytus is one of the most powerful democratic reformers in 399 BCE, elected as strategos due to his agency in the revolutions of 404/403.^[43] According to Robb, the real threat to Anytus is not Socrates' "impiety": the *graphe asebeia* Socrates is accused of violating had only recently been written into law.^[44] While the record of the law was not preserved, given the ancient practice of civic religion we can infer that it was broad enough to include the possible effects of *asebeia* upon the polis. In the case made against Socrates, the effects of *asebeia* refer to his effects upon the youth of Athens. Hence, Socrates is brought to trial because of the perceived harmful effects of what he says or does not say in terms of whom he speaks with, the youth. By this, the charge of *asebeia* has little or nothing to do with the narrative fact that Socrates does not receive a fee,^[45] but it would seem to have everything to do with the perceptions of a "kind of man" like Anytus: Socrates' interpersonal conversations with youth who have leisure to listen seem to mimic, if not betray, the traditional and vital "associations" established between an older and younger generation through *sunousia*:

Viewed anthropologically, *sunousia* was, in the preliterate ages of our species, a fundamental and daily exercise, necessary to survival. Before the important knowledge that a group must conserve has been adequately textualized, and so made "public" and available to anyone who can read, this procedure, and the male bonding and relationships it fosters—so strong, so often compared to that of father and son—are indispensable. It is a feature of all oral societies, rendering them inherently conservative and normally male-dominated. (82–83)

Well documented and articulated by Robb and others, classical Athenian society is not a functionally literate society. The rudimentary technologies of reading and writing referred to in some of Plato's dialogues are certainly not available to the

majority of Athenians, nor, as we might infer from Plato, are these technologies desirable for a variety of reasons. As notorious as Socrates has become for not taking fees he is equally noted for his lack of written words. Rather, Socrates prefers speech as, conceivably, a “daily exercise” that supports and preserves connections between citizens. While it is true that in some dialogues the character Socrates does converse with young males, he is often invited to do so, or cajoled into doing so, by an older male citizen in attendance. Yet in some other dialogues Socrates does not converse with any youth, or—at times—conversations that begin with a young man become conversations with an adult or the adults present. Moreover, the conversations that Socrates says he has “in the marketplace and by the banker’s table” are not overtly dramatized by Plato. Rather, the settings of Plato’s dialogues range from private homes, to gymnasia, and once outside the city proper in the *Phaedrus*. Further, while some of the dialogues occur in public spaces—and some do not—the only genuinely public speech Socrates makes in Plato’s dialogues is this one in the *Apology*. So it would seem that far from modeling an alternative to *sunousia*, Socrates practices *sunousia* in some dialogues, yet in others he does not restrict his conversations to the youth of Athens. As specifically mentioned in the *Apology*, Socrates seeks out citizens known as “wise” while in other dialogues Socrates himself is “sought out,” reaffirming the idea that it is dialogue that constitutes Socrates’ “occupation.”

This in no way implies that the historical assessment of the significance of *sunousia* to Socrates’ trial is incorrect. It is rather meant to suggest that *sunousia*, like *sophistry* and *poieises*, are not strictly opposed to Socrates’ “occupation” in the *Apology* as he does not even indirectly refute such practices here. Rather, Socrates characterizes what he does as a “gift.” Yet so unusual and unfamiliar is Socrates’ “gift” that issues of whether and how one can pay, or pay back, a philosopher is discussed by Aristotle in several passages of the *Nicomachean Ethics* and the *Politics* in terms of “incommensurable gifts.” Following Scott, I cite a lengthy passage from the *Ethics*, Book IX: Ch. 1, 1164a29–b7:

But those who take the money first, and then do nothing that they said they would do, because their promises were excessive, are reasonably accused since they do not carry out what they agree to. And presumably the sophists are compelled to make excessive promises for no one would pay them money for the knowledge they really have; hence they take the payment and then do not do what they were paid to do, and reasonably are accused. But where no agreement about services is made, friends who give services because of the friend himself are not open to accusation, as we have said, since this is the character of the friendship that accords with virtue. And the return should accord with the decision [of the original giver], since decision is proper to a friend and to virtue. And it would seem the same sort of return should be made to those who have shared philosophy in common with us. For its worth is not measured by money, and no equivalent honor can be paid; but it is enough, presumably, to do what we can, as we do towards gods and parents. (Irwin trans., italics mine)

Familiar to readers of Plato's *Protagoras*, *Gorgias*, *Laches* and *Charmides*, the promise to teach virtue to others without "possessing" requisite knowledge of virtue is a continuing source of inquiry for the character of Socrates when he is conversing with someone who explicitly claims to teach virtue, when he is conversing with someone who expresses knowledge of a particular virtue, or when he speaks with someone who desires education for himself or another. Familiar also to readers of Plato's *Meno*, the abrupt question, "Can virtue be taught?" begins the dialogue even though it is asked by Anytus' guest-friend, Meno. Ancillary claims about teaching and about what is taught also sustain the *Theaetetus*: here Socrates converses with a highly promising youth who, although said to physically resemble Socrates, is in the middle of his formal "education" and so quite young, that is, not yet of age to participate in *sunousia*. In all of these dialogues, Socrates does not purport to know what knowledge or virtue, or knowledge of virtue is. It is

actually Plato's Critias in the Charmides who coins the hypothesis that sophrosune is "knowledge of knowledge" (166c), and it is the young Theaetetus who infamously offers that knowledge is "true judgment with an account" (201d). The value of what Socrates says in these, as in many, dialogues would seem to hinge on his ability to not only keep the conversation going but to do so in a way that remains vital to the conversants, that is, what type of knowledge would "knowledge of knowledge" be, what kind of account distinguishes judgment as true, etc. In other words, while almost anyone can ask questions to keep a conversation going, Plato's Socrates asks the types of questions significant to the apparent interests of the interlocutor, and as a conversant's interests change, so do Socrates' questions.

For instance, specifically in the Gorgias and Theaetetus the issues concern whether one can expect to be taught virtue and more generally what it means to be taught, that is, what one receives from an education. Plato's Gorgias claims that his craft, "oratory," is capable of exercising its influence "on the greatest [and best] of human concerns" (451d5) while Plato's Theaetetus admits he is not able to "answer [Socrates] questions about knowledge" in the same way he has aptly answered questions about the "lengths and powers" of geometric figures (1148b). Whether discussion focuses upon the craft of Plato's character Gorgias or the mathematical ability Theaetetus has learned from Theodorus, Plato's Socrates is concerned to ask and re-ask the types of questions that most immediately pertain to the person with whom he converses. In this way, issues concerning knowledge, education and virtue, are examined in accordance with the perspectives of those with whom Socrates speaks in the dialogues, and the variety of these perspectives is significant. The Gorgias yields one of the few passages in Plato's dialogues in which "what Socrates says" is both suspended at length in the speech of Callicles (462c-487d) and expanded at length during the exchange with Polus (468a-481b), while the Theaetetus contains the fullest portrait of Socrates' admission of himself as a midwife (148e-151d). In the Gorgias, Socrates

submits himself to listening to Callicles, yet he is much more “forthcoming” with Polus, both of whom are dramatized as students of Gorgias. In the *Theaetetus*, however, Socrates does not position himself as a teacher in relation to a self-proclaimed “student.” It is as if Socrates agrees to meet these interlocutors “in the middle” of the inquiry, keeping a balance in “the value of the relationship” at hand. That is, Plato’s Socrates submits himself to examination by the student of a proclaimed teacher and he engages in propaedeutic in relation to a young student, [46] but Socrates is neither teacher nor student in either context: he meets both characters, as it were, “in between,” and the lessons derived from their interactions are just as—if not more—significant than what the characters say. [47]

This dramatic positioning of Socrates stands in stark relief to Aristotle’s explicit claim about the “excessive promises” sophists are “compelled to make” but never make good upon. Alternatively, if Socrates’ type of questioning, his “occupation,” can be considered philosophy and it is a “shared philosophy in common with us,” it can only be valued and measured within “the character of friendship that accords with virtue.” By this, philosophy is an inherently social practice and the value of what Socrates says and what he does is provided in the social possibilities of “friends” (*philoí*) speaking with one another, or the possibilities of those speaking with one another becoming friends.

On its surface there would seem to be nothing troubling about Aristotle’s assessment: friends do not pay one another for services provided to one another in friendship, or, if among friends some appropriate return seems warranted, since there is no explicit agreement made between them beforehand, the decision about appropriate return should be made by the original giver, that is, the friend who provided a service. Moreover, the return “should accord” with this decision, meaning it need not be exactly what is requested but in some way appropriate, for among friends a favor or its return is given “because of the friend himself.” We can suppose, then, that among friends the favor or return is given for the good of the

friend, and it is this interest in the “good” of the other that distinguishes “good friends” from other types of friendships for Aristotle.^[48] How one pays or makes a return to a philosopher follows a similar pattern because the relationship abides by a similar economy. The value of a “shared philosophy in common with us . . . is not measured by money.”

By Aristotle’s account, 1) a philosophical conversation has the “character of friendship that accords with virtue,” and 2) any service that a philosopher offers or renders should be returned in accordance with the philosopher’s decision about what constitutes an appropriate exchange since the philosopher is “the original giver.” These characteristics resemble certain aspects of *xenia* to the extent that the gifts exchanged are determined by the partners of the relationship and need not accord with any predetermined or prevailing economic standard. On the other hand, Plato’s Socrates is not always the “original giver” in the dialogues. One who converses with Socrates might understand that he or she will benefit from the conversation, but the value of the benefit is not determined prior to the conversation. Indeed, whatever value such a conversation might have would seem to await determination by the one who initiates the conversation, but is this Socrates or an interlocutor? Aside from instances already mentioned, in the *Minos*, *Critias*, *Ion*, *Greater Hippias*, *Rival Lovers*, *Hipparchus*, *Alcibiades*, *Phaedrus*, *Symposium*, *Menexenus*, and *Clitophon*, Plato’s Socrates does not initiate the conversation. Hence, who benefits whom?

In the context of certain dialogues, this might be an inappropriate question to ask. As we have seen, the combination of interests that result from gift practices exceeds the individual interests of gift partners. Rather “the value of the relationship itself” is created in this combination, and since the value of the relationship is created between them, neither partner can completely control its significance. Similarly, “Socratic inquiry” seems to effect a combination of interests between interlocutors. By virtue of their conversation, its meaning comes to exceed the explicit propositional content of

their particular claims. That is, the combination of interests between Socratic partners might yield something like a “form” or model something like “just dealings.” Either way, as Plato’s Socrates tells young Theaetetus, “if ever in the future you should attempt to conceive or should succeed in conceiving other theories, they will be better ones as the result of this inquiry” (210c).

On this account, Socrates’ “gift” is indeed pre-commercial, and there exists for it no recognizable economy beyond, perhaps, the charis of such conversations, which we have seen not all Athenians experience. Thus, in the Apology, those who speak with Plato’s Socrates, or listen to him speak with others, are not said to be “taught” anything:

I have never been anyone’s teacher. If anyone, young or old, desires to listen to me when I am talking and dealing with my own concerns, I have never begrudged this to anyone, but I do not converse when I receive a fee and not when I do not. I am equally ready to question the rich and the poor if anyone is willing to answer my questions and listen to what I say. And I cannot justly be held responsible for the good or bad conduct of these people, as I never promised to teach them anything and have not done so. (33a5-b5)

In lieu of characterizing what he does as teaching and what he says as worthy of being taught, Plato’s Socrates characterizes his occupation, that is, who and what he is, as a “gift of the gods to the city.” The difference in vocabulary denotes a difference in the purpose of the practice. Sophistry and poesis are learned and practiced by citizens, that is, they are intellectual activities that Athenian citizens engage in, but the fact that citizens engage in such activities is not sufficient for being a citizen, or being Athenian. That non-citizens might teach citizens the art of oratory, for example, is less significant than that some citizens think they are well educated in citizenship by such an art. Alongside the various arts that citizens learn, and citizens and non-citizens teach, philosophia,

as practiced by Socrates, is concerned with questioning and formulating what it means to be a citizen, certainly in the hopes of becoming a “good” one, but more immediately in being the type of “citizen” who takes such inquiry seriously. In this way, Socrates’ occupation provides the value of the question for not only what is taught, but how so and for what purposes. Hence, Plato’s Socrates does not teach.^[49] Rather, Plato—at least in part—characterizes the value of the question as the “gift” of Socrates. Since gifts among friends are meant to strengthen what one hopes are pre-existing bonds, there can be no identifiable economy of such a gift beyond the value of the relationship sustained, or not. Like the combination of interests that I suggest obtain for *xenia*, Socrates’ “gift” presents the possibility of such combinations, for the value of the question might exceed and illuminate the value of the relationship.

Most questions, by their character, are not agonistic: they can be used to initiate a contest, but they can also be used to assess the appropriateness of contests in contexts like a democratic court of law. I have suggested that in a genuine democracy, there are many ways to say what justice is. I also suggest that democracy is distinguished from other political forms by its “narrative” structure of community. Our analytical predilection against anything that resembles a “story” might block us from seeing the stories that support our facts, but what are these facts about justice, equality, fairness, and retribution, other than the result of our practices of speaking with one another? A unity of voice does not consist in everyone saying the same thing, but it would seem to demand focus on the same topic, all eyes and ears “to the middle.” Only those courageous enough to genuinely desire knowledge of what occurs “in the middle,” what happens between us and is thereby genuinely for us, will be able to abide the uncertainty of this position. In the *Apology*, I suggest that Plato dramatizes Socrates in such a position. He is simultaneously “stranger” and “gift,” he is like and unlike those to whom he speaks, he does and does not belong. His *charis* is reciprocated by those who vote to acquit, encouraging the conversations to continue. His *charis* is not

reciprocated by those who operate on a different account of the value of citizenship. That theirs is not a genuinely democratic account is a trivial truth. But that the source of anti-democratic Athenian practices might arise from the idea that competition between “truths” is required for democracy is not a trivial matter. In the *Apology* as elsewhere Plato’s Socrates does not “play to win” for such childishness does not befit anyone who genuinely desires philosophēin. For us, the significance of Socrates’ anti-competitive character rests in our response to the “gift”: it remains ours to accept and reciprocate or reject and forget as we see fit.

NOTES

1. Barracchi, *Of Myth, Life, and War in Plato’s Republic* (Indianapolis, IN: Indiana University Press, 2002), 152, is primarily offering a reading of the *Republic* and secondarily a reading of *Timaeus* and *Critias*, and she does not seem to suggest that Socrates as a philosophical warrior pertains to or is relevant to other or all of Plato’s dialogues. My concern is with the persistence of this image of Socrates in general.
2. Ramona Naddaff, *Exiling the Poets: The Production of Censorship in Plato’s Republic* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2002), 10ff.
3. Roslyn Weiss, “When Winning is Everything: Socratic Elenchus and Euthydemian Eristic” in *Proceedings of the V Symposium Platonicum: Selected Papers* (Sankt Augustin: Academia, 2000) 72–73.
4. Alan C. Bowen, “On Interpreting Plato” in *Platonic Writings/Platonic Readings*, ed. Charles L. Griswold, Jr. (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2002), cf: 61–63 in terms of how “readers are directed in several ways” in the reading of a Platonic text.
5. Gerald A. Press, “Introduction” in *Plato’s Dialogues: New Studies and New Interpretations*, ed. Gerald A. Press (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 1993), cf: 2–3.
6. Cf: Greg Recco, *Athens Victorious: Democracy in Plato’s Republic* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2008), 2–4.
7. Cf: Joanne Waugh, “Socrates and the Character of Platonic Dialogue” in *Who Speaks for Plato: Studies in Platonic Anonymity*, ed. Gerald A. Press (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishing, Inc., 2000).
8. Recco, *Athens*, 4.
9. Cf: Andrea Nightingale’s discussion of how Plato marks the boundaries of “philosophy” by opposing it to other fourth-century intellectual practices in *Genres of Dialogue: Plato and the Construct of Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

10. Cf: Kevin Robb, *Literacy and Paideia in Ancient Greece* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994); see also Jesper Svenbro, *Phrasikleia: An Anthropology of Reading in Ancient Greece*, trans. Janet Lloyd (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993).
11. Cf: *The Making of Homeric Verse: The Collected Papers of Milman Parry*, ed. Adam Parry (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987).
12. As Parry suggests, "The repeated use of a phrase means not only that the poet is following a fixed pattern of words, it means equally that he is denying himself all other ways of expressing the idea" (*Collected Papers*, 279).
13. George B. Walsh understands the Homeric tradition in terms that "the linguistic kosmos of the poem" is believed to "match the kosmos of things" (19), and so the artistry of the Homeric poet is more constrained than I here suggest. Cf: *The Varieties of Enchantment: Early Greek Views of the Nature and Function of Poetry* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 1984).
14. I am using the term "representational" as it is supported by a basic understanding of, and disposition to, language as a system of signs. While differences obtain between subjects, and subjects and signs, in order for communication to occur there must "intelligibility," and intelligibility is neither purely linguistic nor subjective; it requires some type of community, and so, in this sense, representation, that is, a collection of intelligible signs, is never a private but always a public act.
15. Vernant, *Myth and Thought*, 353–54, also referenced in chapter 2.
16. It should be noted that in his "Introduction" to *Plato: Complete Works*, ed. John Cooper (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 1997), John Cooper cautions against "developmental" readings, and he is often understood as a non-developmental. I read his historical references as implying developmentalism, and so the issue is more about this particular approach to reading Plato than it is about identifying certain philosophers as certain type of readers.
17. Some philosophers write about four rather than three periods in Plato's texts, cf: Jean-Francois Pradeau, *Plato and the City: A New Introduction to Plato's Political Thought*, trans. Janet Lloyd (University of Exeter Press, 2002).
18. Commonly referred to as "stylometry" and used for a variety of different literatures, criticism of stylometry and chronological readings of Plato's dialogues can be found in Holger Thesleff's *Studies in Platonic Chronology* (Helsinki: Societas Scientiarum Fennica, 1982) .
19. The story goes that although apparently Plato's favored and most talented student at the Academy, Aristotle could not inherit the school upon Plato's death. Since Aristotle was not Athenian, he could not "own" Athenian property, and thus the Academy passed to Plato's nephew. Cf: W. K. C. Guthrie, *A History of Greek Philosophy*, Vol. II (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965).
20. Cf: Luc Brisson, *Plato the Myth Maker*, translated, edited, and introduced by Gerard Naddaff (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1998), for a summary of continuing debate about which Critias is the Critias of Plato's Critias, 27–30.
21. Cf: Press, "Introduction," *Plato's Dialogues: New Studies and Interpretations*.

22. Cf: Recco, Athens, for an alternative explanation of this discrepancy, specifically in “Citizen Socrates.”

23. Gary Alan Scott, *Plato’s Socrates as Educator* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2000), 8.

24. I am using “dialogical” in the sense of P. Christopher Smith’s analysis of Plato’s *dialogesthai* as a means of opening up questions in “talking” things “through” (“Not Doctrine But ‘Placing in Question’: The “*Thrasymachus*” (Rep. I) as an *Erôtêsis* of Commercialization” in *Who Speaks for Plato?*, ed. Gerald A. Press). While the *Apology* is more monological than dialogical overall, as discussed below I read some of Socrates’ claims as eliciting questions about this apparently “democratic” setting and the lack of *dialogesthai* practiced between citizens, specifically between himself and Meletus.

25. Admittedly we might also look to the *Gorgias*: during an exchange with the character Polus Plato’s Socrates “is uncharacteristically forthcoming with his own views . . . [and] introduces them with an earnestness that grows in intensity as the dialogue progresses” (Donald J. Zeyl, “Introduction” to his translation of *Gorgias* (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 1987), xiiff).

26. Citations from the *Apology* follow G. M. A. Grube’s translation (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 2000).

27. As an aside, given the significance of the navy to the majority of Athenians in 399, we might ask why Plato uses “gadfly” rather than a type of maritime pest, if—as many maintain—Plato’s invectives are anti-democratic, that is, anti *demos*.

28. For a discussion of what is not so “simple and plain” about Socrates’ speech, see E. E. Pender, “Plain Speaking? Socrates *Polutrops*,” in *Skepsis*, Vol. 16, 2005, 246–261.

29. Many philosophers and classists have criticized Plato for creating a metaphysic of pre-or post-subjective truth, a “truth” that somehow exists independently of speakers and their circumstances. Cf: Kate Gilhuly’s reading of Plato’s *Symposium* (*The Feminine Matrix of Sex and Gender in Classical Athens*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), which suggests Plato’s “metaphysic of disembodiment” as an appropriation and disassembly of female embodiment in Plato’s character of “Diotima.” A fuller exposition of this metaphysic and its origins in early Greek philosophy can be found in Andrea Cavarero’s *In Spite of Plato: A Feminist Rewriting of Ancient Philosophy*, trans. Serene Anderlini-D’Onoforio and Áine O’Healy, with foreword by Rosi Braidotti (New York: Routledge, 1995). While I agree with Cavarero that Plato can be read this way, I have also noticed a certain feminization of the character Socrates in Plato’s writings that suggests, à la Gilhuly, not so much a neutrality of gender (which presents itself as “male”) but a blurring of gender that troubles the binary system we often infer from ancient writings. This by no means implies that Plato is “feminist” in our sense of the term, but it does suggest to me that the issue of gender in Plato’s dialogues needs further exploration and consideration.

30. See Craig Cooper’s “Forensic Oratory” (*A Companion to Greek Rhetoric*) for the

expectation that jurists will become vocal, at the least: “The reason so much energy went into arousing and calming the passions of the dicasts is explained by the format of a trial itself” (209). Consisting of a “single set of speeches,” jurors are granted one opportunity to hear the litigants, and no opportunity to ask questions, etc., as voting proceeds immediately following the conclusion of these timed speeches.

31. See Recco, Athens, for association of one’s “occupation” (work) with one’s designation as “citizen” and how and whether Socrates’ occupation as “service to the god” is appropriately understood as an appeal to “divine authority.”

32. Socrates does mention that neither Meletus nor Anytus can harm him, as in “he” (which seems to refer to either Meletus or Anytus) “could not harm me, for I do not think it is permitted that a better man be harmed by a worse” (30c–d), but Socrates’ implicitly conditional claim is addressed to the jury, not his accusers.

33. Cooper, “Forensic Oratory,” 204ff.

34. See Recco, Athens, for the amnesty granted to returning exiles in “Citizen Socrates.”

35. See Kevin Robb’s “Asebeia and Sunousia. The Issues Behind the Indictment of Socrates,” in *Plato’s Dialogues: New Studies & Interpretations*, for a discussion of some of the issues of the political situation of Athens in 399.

36. Cf: Josiah Ober, “Postscript: Culture, Thin Coherence, and the Persistence of Politics” in *The Cultures Within Ancient Greek Culture: Contact, Conflict, and Collaboration*, eds. Carol Dougherty and Leslie Kurke (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

37. “At the end of the *Meno*, Socrates and Meno concur that if virtue is “present” in anyone it is present as a “gift of the gods,” but neither Socrates nor Meno suggest this is true for Socrates. Also, in *Socrates Defense*, Xenophon seems more concerned to explain Socrates perceived “arrogance” during the trial as a misinterpretation of his insistence that he would neither speak about the trial before it occurred nor prepare for it in any way (*Conversations of Socrates*, trans. Hugh Tredennick and Robin Waterfield, London: Penguin Books, 1990).

38. Cf: Pradeau’s analysis (*Plato and the City*) of the political purpose of funeral orations with reference to Nicole Loraux, *The Invention of Athens*, trans. A. Sheridan (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986).

39. Cf: James A. Colaiaco, *Socrates Against Athens: Philosophy on Trial* (London: Routledge, 2001), who writes: “This book also interprets the *Apology* and the *Crito* according to the unifying theme of a tragic conflict between philosophy and politics: philosophy, not in the academic sense, but as a way of life” (9) which includes critical thinking and deep engagement “with issues vital to the state” (9). See also Jacob Howland, “Plato’s *Apology* as Tragedy” in *The Review of Politics*, 70 (2008): “Socrates defeats the city in two ways. The first consists in his exposure of the ugly or ignoble use of shame and intimidation to secure civic unanimity. . . . The second consists in his demonstration of the impotence of intimidation and violence in the face of a philosophically courageous individual” (535).

40. Cf: Carson's assessment in *Economy*: "I like to think Simonides represents an early, severe form of economic alienation and the "doubleness" that attends it. Finding himself born into a society where traditions of gift exchange coexisted with commodity trade and a flourishing money economy . . . he took a naked view. He uncovered his eyes in both directions" (19).
41. See also P. Christopher Smith's analysis of *Rep. I* for distinctions between a noncommercial and thoroughly commercial understanding of justice (Not Doctrine but 'Placing in Question': The "Thrasymachus" (*Rep. I*) as an *Erôtêsis* of Commercialization" in *Who Speaks for Plato?*
42. Robb, "Asebeia and Sunousia," 83.ff.
43. Anytus' historical apposition to Plato's Socrates, who claims he would have "died long ago" (31d) had he participated in the city's affairs is a striking comparison given Robb's suggestion ("Asebeia and Sunousia") that it is Anytus who is Socrates' primary accuser.
44. See Recco, Athens, and Robb, "Asebeia and Sunousia," on the newness of the *graphe asebia* and how without a written law his accusers could not have brought Socrates to court.
45. See Robb, "Asebeia and Sunousia," also for a discussion of Plato's Anytus in the *Meno* and this character's tirade against the sophists to Plato's Socrates.
46. As we hear at the end of the *Theaetetus*, Socrates' midwifery and *Theaetetus*' willingness to engage in its practice have revealed that all these theories about knowledge are mere "wind-eggs," yet *Theaetetus* will conceive better theories in the future, should he choose to do so, as the result of this conversation.
47. In an analysis of "spokesperson theory" in ancient authors' understandings of Plato's dialogues, Harold Tarrant comments on the character *Theaetetus* offering mathematical lessons to readers: "This hardly makes *Theaetetus* into a spokesperson himself, but it does highlight the extent to which lessons can emerge in a dialogue through interaction between questioner and interlocutor" (77, *his italics*). ("Where Plato Speaks: Reflections on an Ancient Debate" in *Who Speaks for Plato?*) I suggest Tarrant's insight about lessons through "interaction" can be extended to narrative interaction as well.
48. Cf: *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book VIII, 1156a-1160a31.
49. This claim seems quite contrary to much received scholarship on Plato, specifically Werner Jaeger's *Paideia* (Volume II, trans. Gilbert Highet, New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), wherein he states that Plato and Xenophon use the term *paideia* "incessantly to describe Socrates activities and his philosophy" (59) even though Plato's Socrates "avoided calling his own work *paideia*." My point is that I read Plato's Socrates as Socrates, and conversely, I am not particularly sensitive to the distinction Jaeger makes. A compelling account of "what precisely Socrates is denying" when he denies being a *didaskalos* in the passage I cited is offered by Scott, *Plato's Socrates as Educator*, 16-27.

Chapter 5

Socratic Charis

Per chapter 1, the term *agon* can signify an event of competition or the place where a contest occurs. By classical times, a seamless interchange between something that happens and the location or place where it happens suggests the hold and the force of the *ethos* of *agon* upon the social body. Again, wherever and for whatever reasons two or more are gathered in the ancient world, there is an *agon*. Yet it might also be the case that synonymy between event and place signifies new limits to, or restrictions upon, the *agon*. While the archaic meaning of *agon* as “gathering” is preserved, homonymy between place and event can also imply a reduction of the *agon* to—at least—particular types or kinds of gatherings. So, there might also be a corresponding shift in attitude that designates more personal and social relationships as nonagonistic in contradistinction to the public and political events that are recorded as agonistic. I suggest that such a shift is possible in relation to the continuing theme of this work, namely that there are many ways two or more may gather together in the ancient world, and not all of these ways are appropriately or apparently agonistic.

In the previous chapter I suggest how Plato’s Socrates’ nonagonism in the *Apology* is indicated in the most agonistic of its episodes, his “cross-examination” of Meletus. Summarized in the claim that “you will not harm me more than yourselves,” Plato’s Socrates exemplifies in word and deed a desire for social unity. Driven by the democratic requirement that whatever is decided together is experienced together, Socrates dissolves the *agon* by speaking from and for a position “in the middle” of the social body. I also suggest that when the dialogues are read with an eye and ear for what Plato’s other characters say and do, Socrates’ nonagonistic character is exhibited in his narrative abilities to personalize the possible interests, concerns, positions, and experiences of his “interlocutors” without psychologizing over them. In this way, far from sacrificing the

logical rigor of “what Socrates says,” consideration of how he speaks, to whom, and in what contexts, reveals the complexities of the variety of perspectives in the dialogues as a constitutive element of Plato’s philosophia. Moreover, this suggestion is not so startling when we consider how philosophers actually practice philosophy. Like Socrates, when the issue is beauty, or justice, or knowledge, we do not speak to just one person about this one topic, nor do we generally settle for just one person’s perspective or proposition. Rather, if we are willing to “abide the uncertainties” of genuine conversation, meaning is generated in the very act of speaking and listening, that is, it happens and is remembered long after its point or its propositions are forgotten.

[1]

When it comes to the figure of Socrates in Plato’s Republic, however, readers who might be willing to consider the non-competitive aspects of Socrates as a “stranger” and a “gift” in the Apology, might not be willing to consider a consistency of character here. As the Iliad is often read as an example of the agon par excellence, the Republic can also be read as a model of Plato’s agon in logos in a variety of ways:[2] Socrates spars with the infamous sophist Thrasymachus in Book I. Having defeated Thrasymachus, Socrates is nevertheless challenged in Book II to convince those who are “on his side” anyway that it is better to be just than unjust without appeal to the consequences of being just. “Lacking keen eyesight” for such a task Socrates steers the conversation to the hypothetical building of a just city. This city is fashioned according to a “division of labor” refined by natural divisions between citizens, that is, while citizens are equal as parts of a whole they are nonetheless not equally equipped to rule. Natural inequality between persons necessitates a new program of paideia that is established in Books III–VII. This new program institutes further divisions that are philosophically justified in opposition to current practices. As the de-evolution of constitutions and their corresponding character types in Books VIII and IX purport to show, poetry, uncensored and unrefined by philosophical paideia, is a destructive element in any poleis. Per Book X,

unless poets can make a suitable “defense” against Socrates’ attack, poetry can have no place in a “beautiful city,” or by analogy, in a beautiful soul.

When the plot of the Republic is understood this way it is no wonder that many read the assessment of poetic-mimetic art as a type of victory for philosophy and, thereby, a stunning defeat for poetry. Yet Socrates “retelling” the Myth of Er at the end of Book X can prove troubling for those who read the Republic as the definitive schism and separation of *muthos* from *logos*.^[3] For such readers, it must be a certain type, or genre, of poetry that Plato denounces. But then the question arises, which type of *poeisis*—per Plato—is unsuitable: dramatic, lyric, mythic? David Farrell Krell suggests that Plato “was concerned to construct his entire polity . . . from top to bottom—in opposition to tragedy.”^[4] Still others remark the destruction of *muthos* in the rise of Socratism: from Benjamin we hear “Socrates: that is the figure through which the old myths are annihilated and received. . . . In the midst of the terrible struggle the young philosophy seeks to assert itself in Plato.”^[5]

And so perhaps it is Homer, perhaps it is Euripides, or perhaps it is even Simonides with his new art of memory and delight in *apate* who inspires Plato’s reference to “the ancient quarrel between poetry and philosophy” at 607b.^[6] Still, regardless of who or what the reference indicates, its placement toward the end of the Republic alerts us to the possibility that Plato—at least—thinks *philosophia* is “other than” *poeisis*. How much “other” is a continuing matter of inquiry among contemporary philosophers. But since the sides of the quarrel are, in some sense, drawn by Plato, it is reasonable to infer that not only is this Plato’s quarrel, as the preceding content of Books II and III make clear, he has chosen sides and wherever there are sides there is ultimately a contest. With a nod to Nietzsche we might say that Plato ostracizes the poets figuratively in order to rival them literally. In this way, it is not surprising that throughout the Republic the character Socrates does not speak with any poets. Unlike conversations dramatized with the orator Gorgias, the sophist Protagoras, the rhapsode

Ion, and even the “tyrant” Critias in dialogues so named, not only are there no poets present in the Republic, there are no poets who speak in the Timaeus or the Critias. Ramona Naddaff suggests that Plato’s Socrates sets himself up as “the sole contestant” in this agon between poetry and philosophy, philosophy and philosophy, and poetry and poetry (10). In this way, Plato’s Socrates rivals himself, yet the yield of Socrates’ contest, according to Naddaff, is ultimately productive: “Plato redraws the boundaries between the two discourses in such a way that the boundaries, and the identities of each in relation to one another, become more fluid, more permeable” (8).

By “censoring” poetry Plato opens the boundaries between philosophy and poetry, yet it is still worth asking whether one must come through the agon to create such new discursive possibilities. In Hegel’s and Nietzsche’s worlds, yes; in Plato’s world, many would say “absolutely,” yet in our world is the trope of the agon still relevant and obligatory? Per chapter 1, the equality presupposed in all rivalry conceals a profoundly aristocratic sensibility that shows itself on a personal and political level. To the extent that I might even consider trying to become a contender, I have to set myself in opposition to someone else. Then, to the extent I do contend, I am obligated to demonstrate the virtue of my difference over the virtue of the other. In this way, the agon perpetuates judgment between differences. While the criteria we use to compete and judge who “wins” seem to “exist independently of the wills and actions of the individuals” engaged in contest, ultimately these criteria belong to us. Since the criteria we use to judge between winners and losers belong to us, we can and could change not only the means by which we judge but the parameters of judgment as well. Yet we continue to obey the structure of the agon and the rules that support this structure even when doing so means that in order for me to win another must lose. In the end, whether judgment is for or against me might matter only to me and those “like” me, but the moment I consider entering the agon genuine equality cannot be sustained. Whether I win or whether I lose, I must think, I have to think I am “better than” someone

else. Although we might dismiss this as nothing more or less than the subjective, or inter-subjective, phenomenology or psychology of the agon, the setting up of the “self” in opposition to another, when it comes to the social and political order the structure of the agon remains the same. Also per chapter 1, the very idea that the poor must contest those who cause their poverty, and the harmed and abused must fight for their “right” to not be harmed and abused, is a deeply disturbing idea. As long as it remains a philosophically justifiable idea, there would seem be to no way out of the agon.

In this chapter, then, I try to read—at least—parts of the Republic without the agon. I offer this reading as an option rather than an argument, as a possibility in lieu of a contest for the “truth” about the real meaning of the dialogue. Initially I explicate the poetic tradition of *charis* in order to highlight a general sense of its significance in ancient Greek culture. Plato, of course, might have understood *charis* differently, and certainly in more depth than my brief exposition here allows. Still, to my knowledge, we do not often consider the figure of Socrates in terms of *charis*, perhaps because *charis* has been reserved for analyses of the ancient Greek poetic tradition. Since, as above, the ancient Greek poetic tradition would seem to have nothing to do with Plato’s *philosophia*, Plato’s Socrates would seem to have nothing to do with *charis*. Alternatively, my interpretation of Books I and II of the Republic considers the narrative and philosophical potentials of *charis* in an elaboration of a discursive permeability and fluidity between poetry and philosophy that, while an issue for us, might not have been such an issue for Plato’s Socrates.

POETIC CHARIS

As mentioned in chapter 3, the term *charis* is often transliterated as “pleasure” or “grace,”^[7] and while discussions about *charis* are usually reserved for analyses and assessments of ancient Greek poetry, Aristotle makes mention of the significance of grace in the Nicomachean Ethics, Book 5, section

5, entitled “Justice in Exchange”:

In communities for exchange, however, this way of being just, reciprocity that is proportionate rather than equal, holds people together. For a city is maintained by proportionate reciprocity. . . . Indeed, that is why they make a temple of the Graces prominent, so that there will be a return of benefits received. For this is what is special to grace; when someone has been gracious to us, we must do a service for him in return, and also ourselves take the lead in being gracious again (1132b32–1133a6).^[8]

At least for Aristotle, *charis* has something to do with “proportionate reciprocity” in exchange and “proportionate reciprocity” in exchange has something to do with holding a city together. As Carson suggests, like *xenia* and *xenos*, the term *charis* is “semantically reversible” (22), meaning that it does not matter who initially bestows *charis*, its significance is relational and proportional—this is “what is special to grace.” Plato uses the term *χαρις* or *χαριν* over a dozen times in the first seven Books of the Republic, and while admittedly the Republic contains many words, its dramatic setting as an extension of *xenia* or “hospitality” is worth considering in relation to *charis* since “*charis* is the generic equivalent for a whole texture of exchanges that constitutes a gift economy as well as for the piety that guarantees them” (22).

Distinguished from the concrete designations and practices of the *agon*, *charis* remarks a “social feeling,” that is, it is a disposition toward sociality or an attitude about being “social” that cannot easily be inferred from the varieties of archaeological remains that confirm the *agon*. Like the *agon*, *charis* also happens or occurs between persons, but since no one wins or loses at *charis*, its presence or absence is less easily detected. While the marks or signs of *charis* might not be shown, they are deeply felt, that is, *charis* is a relational or inter-subjective value that occurs—or not—and while it is as public as a smile its source is perhaps just as enigmatic.

One thing charis is not, however, is unremarkable: the varieties of ways early Greek poets speak about charis are striking. Just as we recognize subtle shifts in the occurrences and uses of *agon*, *charis*, too, “evolves.” In the *Iliad*, *charis* or *charin* appears twelve times in contexts of “gratitude,” “thanks,” “favor,” “joy,” “good service,” “grace,” and once the term is used to describe Thetis’ “graceful head-dress.” In the *Odyssey*, *charis* occurs less frequently although it is used more often as a description: *charis* is “handsome,” “(divine) comeliness,” “verbal grace,” or in the adverbial “beautifully.” *Charis* also qualifies how something is done, “they fell before Troy in the cause of *charis*,” or how something is perceived, “his work is full of *charis*.” Shifts in the meaning of *charis* between the two epics could be significant for the “history of *charis*” to come. In the *Iliad*, *charis* remarks a disposition or act of gratitude as well as the favor or “good service” that yields such an act or disposition. The general sense of *charis* as “joy” or “grace,” then, signifies a particular occurrence or relationship as being of a certain kind. In the *Odyssey*, *charis* most often remarks the physical appearance or material character of someone or something, yet it is also used to distinguish between one’s appearance and one’s action. In the instance of Odysseus’ rebuke to Euryalos, *charis* is used to disassociate Euryalos’ physical appearance from the character of his speech: he is “godlike in appearance, [yet] speaks without grace (*kharis*).”^[9]

The possibility that something or someone might only appear beautiful or graceful is usually explained in terms of the “double capacity” of the goddess Aphrodite and her close association with *Χαρις*, the Graces. Pindar, Homer, and Hesiod all remark the connection of Aphrodite with the daughters of Zeus and Eurynome. Like the Muses, these daughters form a “family” designated as the Charites. In the *Theogeny*, Hesiod seems to imply that Mnemosyne can trace her lineage to this other family of daughters, “next to them the Charites and Himeros have homes in joy” (Theo. 64). Later in the poem, the Charites themselves are more fully articulated:

Eurynome, Okeanos' daughter of fairest form,
Bore to him the three fair-cheeked Charites,
Aglaia, Euphrosyne, and lovely Thalia;
Limb-loosening desire poured from their glancing
Eyes; beautifully they glanced under their brows.^[10]

The three daughters represent “splendor,” “gladness,” and “festivity” respectively, and while they are often said to embody “everything that is beautiful and graceful in nature and human life,” by emphasizing their “erotic attractiveness” Hesiod apparently strengthens their association with Aphrodite.^[11] Collectively, the Graces are the “attendants” or “the handmaidens of Aphrodite”: they clothe, prepare and otherwise tend to the goddess, and are credited in some part for her “resplendent presence” and its effects. Elsewhere, Charis is regarded as a singular form of the Graces, much as Moira is regarded as a singular form of the Moirai, the Fates. In the Theogeny, charis is mentioned only in a footnote in our commentaries: she is one of the goddesses promised to Kadmos.^[12] Hence, prevalent yet changeable in Homer, charis singular is absent from Hesiod. We might ask, then, what becomes of charis?

From the earliest times, there is a “connection between charis and gleaming metal.”^[13] The etymological lineage of the term charis can be traced to the names of bronze-smiths inscribed on Mycenaean tablets, explaining the attraction or lure of charis as “splendor” or “radiance.” For instance, as the wife of Hephaestus in the Iliad, Charis is associated with the splendor and the wonder of this god's works: “she is described as ‘she of the glistening head-band’.” In the Theogeny, however, there is no singular charis, no gleaming metal, nor is there anything implicitly or explicitly untoward about the joyful character of the Graces in conjunction with a “limb-loosening desire” that pours from their eyes. Their beautiful glances may be seductive, true, but there is nothing to suggest the harmful or dangerous effect of their gaze. It is only in the story of Pandora in Works and Days that Hephaestus, Aphrodite, Athena, Hermes, the Seasons, and the Charites prove culpable in the creation of “she” who in the

Theogeny is called a “lovely evil,” a “sheer trick, irresistible to men” (Theo. 585, 589). MacLachlan explains, “The dangerous potential of the love-lure added to Pandora by the Charites was assured by the work of Persuasion (Peitho), who directed the natural pleasure in beholding beauty to men’s self-destruction. The power of charis resides in its unerring ability to provoke a response. Reinforced by persuasion, it could be deadly” (37).

Charis, “assured” by Persuasion,^[14] would seem to be capable of provoking harm rather than joy, and pain rather than pleasure, but it is important to note that in the story of Pandora in the Theogeny, neither the Graces, Aphrodite, nor Peitho appear: the “sheer trick” is foisted upon unsuspecting mortals by the Lame One and Pallas Athene at the behest of Zeus. The Hesiod of the Theogeny, it seems, would concur that the Charites are entities or elements of “attraction” but they do not become an “an attractive compelling power” simply by association with Aphrodite. Rather, in Works and Days, they must be “[r]einforced by persuasion.” Yet how does attraction to, or desire for, something or someone radiant and beautiful come to be understood as a type of persuasion that might—or might not—prove harmful?

The differences between the story of Pandora in the Theogeny and Works and Days may or may not be significant: after all it is the story of Pandora and both versions speak to the impossibility of cheating or surpassing “the mind of Zeus” (Theo. 613). Per chapter 2, all the tales manifest a “complicated network of relationships” that allows for the interchange of characters or “agents” in conformity with plot, that “unity of action” Aristotle later reminds us is the most significant element of the story: “The particular actions, the plot, is what the rest of tragedy is there for, and what the rest is there for is the most important” (Poetics, 1450a23).^[15] Although Aristotle remarks this is a “distinctive element” of tragedy, it illuminates the changeability of character and thought in ancient narrative. While Hesiod’s plot of Pandora remains the same, his deities do change, yet this is not an unusual occurrence in the mythic tradition. We have already seen how the positive valuation of

“Night” in an Orphic account of creation becomes a quite lengthy negative valuation of Night in the Theogeny. Still, with regard to the different valuations of grace in Hesiod’s works, I am prompted to ask about the narrative connections between the Graces and their harmful effects because Hesiod does not explicitly make this connection. While instances of *charis* in the Iliad resonate with a singular sense of “joy” and “gratitude,” ambiguity about *charis* begins to emerge in the Odyssey and is well established in Hesiod’s Works and Days. Yet, if it is only by association with *Peitho* that *charis* becomes suspect, then it is actually the potentially harmful effects of Persuasion that might trouble the poets as it seems to trouble Plato in the Republic. In other words, there is nothing about *charis* as “radiance” or “joy” that is necessarily ambiguous, but there is also nothing about *charis* that prevents it, or her, from being narrativized this way.

Soon, then, we find statements to the effect that while strife and grace are “antithetical, they are also interchangeable,”^[16] so much so that by the time Aeschylus composes *Agammenon*, Clytemnestra’s *akharis kharis* (sic. “graceless grace”) signifies a moral antinomy “reflected in the complexity of the language.” George Walsh observes:

When the chorus describes the funeral rite (1545), it denotes Clytemnestra’s role as grieving wife with the term “grace” and her behavior as Agammenon’s killer as “graceless”; “graceless grace” suggests the conflict between the two roles. . . . Thus, there are two definitions (murder and marriage) for both terms of the figure and two ways of simplifying each term, each dictated by the interpreter’s moral perspective. (fnt. 26, p. 150)

Clytemnestra’s positive valuation of her role as “grieving wife” cancels out the chorus’ negative valuation of her role as “killer,” and vice versa. Walsh’s point, I believe, is that there is no way to choose both for the chorus and Clytemnestra without eradicating the value of *charis* and its received implications for appropriate behavior in social roles. Troubling *charis* by

confounding its referent, Aeschylus compels his audience if not to choose then at least to recognize the narrative complexities of this old, old tale. Given the almost equal amount of votes to acquit or convict, ambiguity about charis, or at least its effects, is also evident in what I have called Socratic charis in the *Apology*. The value of charis might “reside in its unerring ability to provoke a response,” but there would seem to be no means available to guarantee response of a certain kind.

With this in mind, it is startling to consider how the poet Pindar simplifies charis in his art. For Pindar, virtuous speech is charis, it “embodies” grace and so it cannot be confused with what it is not, akharis. Pindar stakes this claim for his poems of praise on the strength of kairos, that standard or “rule of suitability” which allows the poet to distinguish the “right amount” of praise.^[17] The right amount of praise, however, is not entirely left to the poet’s judgment: poetic speech is moral speech because it “possesses the moral quality of the things it represents” (130).

Yet also for Pindar, “Praise touches on Blame”^[18] and conversely. As Detienne tells us, confusing the two will make of the poet a “vain chatterer,” a Euryalos or perhaps an Ion. Yet more importantly, too much praise “elevates men ‘out of proportion’ (para kairon O 9.35–39) by abusing the gods themselves” (44). On the one hand we might say that knowing the right proportion, kairos, is clearly more important than knowing the particular details of a praiseworthy action or even—perhaps—knowing how and why something or someone can be distinguished as praiseworthy. On the other hand, Pindar’s insistence on kairos entails a particular ontology: what is lacking in kairos is also “lacking god’s endorsement,” and what is lacking god’s endorsement is also “lacking reality.” Hence, for the poet, kairos is not only the best thing to know, it is the only thing that can be known: “if exceptions to the kairos are equivalent literally to nothing, the kairos is not merely the best but the only thing that can be known, and there is only one kind of knowledge, the knowledge of virtue” (44).

As many classicists and scholars have noted, unlike Homer

and Hesiod, a poet like Pindar does see himself as an “author” of sort. His vocabulary does not come to him fully formed, nor, by virtue of a new economy of compensation, is he restricted to the retelling of the old tales. Pindar, unlike Homer, is a poet for hire, most notably “a hired praiser of aristocratic athletes,”^[19] and so it is quite possible to speculate how the recent commercial integration of poetry might affect a commercialization of praise, or in Leslie Kurke’s terms “an economy of praise.” Pindar’s “moral selections” might be nothing more or less than choices made on behalf of the highest bidder. Seen in this light, the character Socrates’ claim in the *Apology* that it is “excellence” that “brings about wealth and all other public and private blessings for men” (30b) need not contradict Pindar’s claims about “virtuous speech,” but it does question the ground upon which the poet’s claims to *charis* and *kairos* are maintained in perpetuity. Pindar’s knowledge of virtue, *kairos*, does not hinge on the collective and communal memory sustained by oral poetry, but upon a principle of “moral selection” from the subject matters of the tales. As we have seen, however, “[g]ratitute and memory go together.”^[20] Pindar, as it were, chooses between memories, accepting some, rejecting others. If, as William Fitzgerald suggests, communities are not made in advance of poetic speech but “the poem constitutes a community, or its possibility, by a resistance to certain forms of closure and enclosure” (xi), Pindar’s “moral selection,” justified in terms of *kairos*, actually forecloses the genuine possibilities for community created by the pluralism of the old tales. Choosing his subject matter, Pindar “obscures the painful or criminal aspects of human experience, but preserves a special, restricted ‘truth,’ the memory of triumphant virtue” (130). Walsh refers to this as Pindar’s “partial vision,” a vision that the poet nevertheless insists is valid because, “it is validated by the gods” (131). In comparison with the tradition Pindar receives, however, what singular or partial vision could possibly exist for the tales and their gods? “Moral selection” precludes not only the possibility of choice, but perhaps more significantly the possibility for making choices with respect to

the multiple variations and versions that constitute the tales. As we have seen, narratives cannot be, by their very structure, reduced to one or the other “meaning” without eradicating them as narrative. To the extent that Pindar’s virtuous speech embodies grace, it is a grace of imposition rather than expectation, and univocity rather than response: Pindar’s *charis* is literally of “one man, one art.”^[21]

On his own terms, Pindar’s artistry is one of exclusion and selection between *muthoi* worthy of being remembered and deservedly forgotten. This distinction, however, recalls an intimate connection between *aletheia*—what is not-forgotten—and *lethe*—what is forgotten.^[22] For Pindar, the significance of what is not-forgotten is that it should not be forgotten and so it is deemed worthy of praise, that is, the subject matter of his poems. The significance of what is forgotten is, of course, that it should be forgotten, it is blameworthy, lacking *kairos*, and so incapable of “turning the fine things outward” or inward to impact a listener’s “self-consciousness” of their own virtue.^[23] Yet since “Praise touches on Blame” and conversely, Pindar also positions himself as a poet of blame: he is a “vain chatterer” of what he will not allow to be remembered, what is explicitly censored from the community that confirms his art *qua* art.^[24]

Perhaps the commercialization of poetry cannot occur without such censorship. The marketability of a poetic object, like an ode or a song, depends upon its desirability. For Pindar the *kairos* of desire also accords with “what god is willing to give.”^[25] A problem for the poet, then, might be how to translate what is unequivocally “good” to him and so requires no persuasion—in Parmenides’ words, it just “is”—to what is marketably “good” to others. In other words, “Selling poems provokes thought about what their value is, and who can measure that?”^[26] If Pindar’s model for community is the *agon*, or we take it as such, then value and victory will become identical.^[27] Not only will the *agon* not be subject to question, as that event which makes victory possible the *agon* will be considered necessary for what is deemed valuable and worthy

of praise, that is, winning. In such a world, an otherwise ambiguous charis can become synonymous with victory, specifically a victory that results from the “favor of the gods.” Hence, for Pindar, virtuous speech is charis and conversely as both are “validated by the gods.” Equivocating charis and virtuous speech secures Pindar’s praise a marketable place as a desirable “good,” as both “beneficent”—“found” or divine—and “useful”—a product of poetic skill and “invention.”

Written records of charis alternate from a “grace” experienced between persons as “joy,” to the potentially harmful properties of the Charites in Works and Days, the ambivalence of Aeschylean charis, and lastly through Pindar’s formulation of charis as virtuous, that is, victorious, speech. In all of these accounts, however, whether it is represented as “the favor of the gods” or a favor between persons, charis evokes a type of relationship. By classical Athens, ambiguity surrounding the “charis convention” might point to questions concerning the type of relationship charis can or should evoke: charis is, after all, “disarming.” Questions, too, can be disarming, and their value can also be said to reside “in their unerring ability to provoke a response.” If, in classical Athens, the type of relationship charis makes possible is open to question, there is a certain logic in conceiving of charis as a question, and thereby Socratic charis as the grace of the question.

CEPHALUS: A GRACEFUL HEAD?

Pindar’s censorship cannot help but remind us of the apparent program of Plato’s Socrates throughout the Republic. Reading backward from mention of the “ancient quarrel between poetry and philosophy” toward the Republic’s end, Socrates’ analyses and assessments of poetic modes, meters, rhythms, diction, and content are generally considered the topics of Books II and III. The return to the subject of poetry in Book X serves as an application of the epistemological theory of Books VI and VII: poetry is determined to be a “third remove from the truth” and thereby destructive to the soul in terms of its effects. The

subject of poetry in Book X also acts as a linchpin for the de-evolution of constitutions and their corresponding character types in Books VIII and IX. Hence, while Pindar censors certain plots, Plato censors the entire art, banishing poetry from the kallipolis forevermore. Ramona Naddaf observes, however, that the subject of poetry, including its implicit relationship to philosophy, forms a significant part of Book I. Before the conversation turns to a philosophical debate about justice, Cephalus recites a “charming” expression of Pindar’s, and it is his son Polemarchus, “heir to the argument,” who enters the wisdom of Simonides into conversation. Thus the coming censorship of poetry is prefaced in the opening book, supporting the idea that the political and metaphysical contests to follow are narratively introduced as a contrast between the philosophic and the poetic.

In the opening of the Republic, Plato’s Socrates does not ask Cephalus or Polemarchus to comment upon what they have learned from poets. That both characters refer to poets, or perhaps depend upon poetry to formulate their ideas, could suggest the specific type of education father and son received. However, Plato’s Socrates is actually the first to quote a poet, specifically Homer, in his conversation with Cephalus, and I suggest that there are significant differences between Socrates’ and Cephalus’ “use” of poetry in conversation. Thus, in this section, I analyze the conversation and character of Cephalus to see how it “sets the stage” for discussions to come. Admittedly, Cephalus is not usually accorded a prominent place in analyses of the Republic or even assessments of Book I. He does recite Pindar “by heart” whereas his son Polemarchus only paraphrases Simonides. But since the real disassembly of poetic wisdom occurs in how Polemarchus understands the saying “to give to each what is owed” and whether such understanding is conducive to at least a partial vision of justice, Cephalus seems to be as easily dismissed from analysis as he so quickly excuses himself from conversation. Still, Cephalus is the first conversant: he is host and his brief dialogue with Plato’s Socrates introduces twin themes of pursuant discussion, notably what is justice in its

specific relation to wealth.

At 328c, Cephalus welcomes Socrates to his home, declaring his growing desire for conversation now that he—advanced in age—is contentedly finished with the more active pleasures of the flesh. Socrates replies that he “enjoys talking with the very old” for they have already traveled a road the rest of us will likely follow, and so we should ask them about the character of this road—is it “rough and difficult or smooth and easy”? Socrates says he will gladly hear Cephalus’ thoughts about this now that Cephalus has, as the poets say, reached “the threshold of old age.”

Cephalus replies that he will tell Socrates “exactly what I think,” for he has learned about what others who are “like” him think as they “often get together in accordance with the old saying” (“God ever draws together like to like”). While the persons Cephalus gathers with are like him in at least one aspect—advancing age—they are unlike him in a significant way: they tend to “complain about lost pleasures,” becoming angry “as if they had been deprived of important things.” Some also “moan about the abuse heaped on old people by their relatives” and because of all of this they “repeat over and over that old age is the cause of many evils” (329b). Yet Cephalus tells Socrates that he once overheard the poet Sophocles praise a freedom from the tyranny of the passions that old age make possible. Then as now, Cephalus admits, he thinks the poet is right: old age is not the cause of evils, rather in terms of slavery to desire or abuse from relatives, “the way people live” determines the pleasures and pain that beset them. For Cephalus, “moderation and contentedness” throughout one’s life make old age easy to bear.

In this passage, Cephalus alludes to a saying of Homer —“God ever draws like to like”—but he does not quote Homer directly as does Plato’s Socrates. Perhaps Cephalus does not know his Homer “by heart” or perhaps Homer’s saying is so well known and in so many versions that allusion is only appropriate. Nevertheless, while Cephalus does not quote Homer, he does gather with those who are “like” him. In so doing, however, he is

quick to distinguish himself from them by reference to another poet, Sophocles, whose opinion about the benefits of old age he says he shares. Sophocles' saying, however, only implies that one need not continue to be a slave to some desires as one ages, but it does not elucidate whether or how one could or should live "free from tyranny" throughout one's lifetime. In other words, "freedom from the tyranny of the passions" due to advancing age is not a sufficient condition for a life of "moderation," yet Cephalus does not explain the connection he has made between Sophocles' statement and his own principle of "moderation." This suggests that Cephalus has, as his son will after him, taken what a poet says far beyond the context of its utterance. Doing so allows him to manipulate "what is said" to his own conception of a "good" life, that is, "moderation and contentedness." Plato's Socrates, however, having committed himself to poverty in order to exhort all citizens equally to virtue, would recognize that there is one area—at least—in which Cephalus does not live moderately, that is, he is very wealthy. Hence Socrates says that while he admired Cephalus for saying what he did about "moderation and contentedness," he also "wanted him to tell me more, so I urged him on . . ." (330d). Socrates asks Cephalus three questions as the conversation continues: Might it be wealth that brings consolation to you in old age? (329e) Did you inherit your wealth? (330a) "What is the greatest good you've received from being very wealthy?" (330d). Cephalus responds to the first question that there is something in what the majority say about the benefits of wealth, "though not as much as they think." He alludes to "the retort" of Themistocles to explain that, unlike what most people think, while a good but poor person "wouldn't easily bear old age," neither would a bad but wealthy person "be at peace with himself" (330a) because the value of wealth is not in its amount but in its proportion to the character of the person who possesses it. Similarly, in the matter of his family's wealth, Cephalus explains that he neither acquired as much as his grandfather nor diminished as much as his father but is "satisfied" to leave his sons a little more than was left to him.

Hence, he is “in the middle,” as it were, of two patrimonial extremes: he is “moderate.” Yet as Cephalus answers Socrates’ question about the greatest good his wealth has afforded him, he explains its value in terms of what he does not have to do because of it. Cephalus tells Socrates that as the end approaches he need not wake at night filled with foreboding that he has not or cannot “pay the penalty.” He can also look back upon his life without finding many injustices, and his reward for this, as Pindar “charmingly” puts it, is “sweet, good hope”:

Sweet hope is in his heart,
Nurse and companion to his age,
Hope, captain of the ever-twisting
Minds of mortal men.

Cephalus’ wealth affords him hope, it is a “nurse” to his old age, and it is in this way that wealth is valuable to a “decent and orderly” person: it “can do a lot to save us” from cheating or deceiving someone unwillingly and for having to “depart for that other place in fear because we owe a sacrifice to a god or money to a person” (331b). Cephalus is, therefore, free to not treat anyone unjustly because he is wealthy. While his account echoes Socrates’ claim in the *Apology* that it is virtue that makes wealth a good for human beings, Cephalus does not seem to understand that virtue precedes wealth. Rather, wealth has proven a blessing to Cephalus because he thinks he uses it virtuously even though the standard of his virtue is what he does not have to do, that is, treat anyone unjustly.^[28]

Cephalus, the “head” of the household in which Socrates remains a guest through the *Timaeus* and the *Critias*,^[29] strikes me as a very enigmatic figure: he is the welcoming host, the “original giver” who opens his home to Socrates and Glaucon, insisting that he desires the “pleasure of conversation” all the more now that he is older. Yet twice in his brief conversation with Plato’s Socrates, Cephalus opposes himself to what others think, to those who are “like” him in advancing age and to the “majority” in terms of their knowledge about wealth. Perhaps Cephalus is a character who understands the “pleasure of

conversation” in terms of a contest? Like other characters in other dialogues, Cephalus spends his aging days in “trivial, indeed juvenile sophisms without any potential for improving one’s life.”^[30] Similar to Plato’s Euthydemus and Dionysodorus, Cephalus confuses *philosophia* with pseudo-intellectual banter, and a genuine means of seeking wisdom with an eristic that results in verbal yet shallow victories? Perhaps, yet unlike some of Plato’s other characters Cephalus promises to tell Socrates “exactly what I think” and what he does think is—in some part—the result of listening to what others say. Moreover, Cephalus admits to possessing “sweet hope” as it is expressed in the words of Pindar. And so Cephalus is committed to improving his life, or at least his preparation for death, through the acquisition of “sweet hope.” The conditions of belief that ground Cephalus’ hope, however, seem as random as the conditions that ground his principle of “moderation.” The only explanation Cephalus offers to support his beliefs derive from his own particular interpretation of what a poet says. Yet, as we have seen, what a poet says is never subject to just one particular interpretation. Traditionally, what a poet says is collectively remembered and preserved in order to initiate discussions about meaning, not in order to impose meaning. Hence, what a poet says is, by convention, said “in the middle” and thereby belongs to all.

Socrates’ quote from Homer is used to describe, add to, or illustrate the topic of conversation, and Cephalus initially follows Socrates with his own allusion to a Homeric saying. The content of what the poets say, in this instance, does not seem as significant as the act of referring to what “the poets say” to establish mutuality and common ground between host and guest. But Cephalus’ quote from Pindar is used as justification for living a certain type of life, namely his own. Into this situation, Plato’s Socrates offers the grace of the question, encouraging Cephalus to consider what follows from his “hope.” Cephalus concurs with Socrates that it would not be just to speak the truth to one who is “out of his mind” or to pay back a debt if so doing might injure the one to whom the debt is owed (331c), yet having agreed with Socrates—“That’s true”—he

immediately exits the conversation, intending to “look after the sacrifice.” Comparatively, then, while Socrates quotes Homer to begin the conversation, Cephalus quotes Pindar as if to end the conversation, and I suggest it would not be lost on Plato’s audience that this aging, wealthy man has abruptly left the dialogue, as if departing to that “other place” never to be heard from again. Between Socrates and Cephalus the issue might not be that what the poets say can be interpreted in many ways, but that what the poets say is preparatory for discussion between them: a la the charis convention, it provides common ground between host and guest. Yet when one is extended charis in the form of the “pleasures of conversation” from a host, like Cephalus, who has no apparent need or desire for conversation, the charis convention is called into question, and might cause us to inquire “Who and what is Cephalus?”

In relation to justice in the *Apology*, I have suggested that Socrates is positioned “in the middle” of the social body in order to provoke genuine inquiry into “Who is just.” In relation to injustice in the *Republic*, I suggest that Cephalus is similarly positioned “in the middle” of other characters’ perspectives about “who is unjust.” For instance, Cephalus’ justice does not easily align with a desire to “outdo others” in the pursuit of self-interest because Cephalus is content with not having to cheat or deceive anyone unwillingly. Yet Cephalus’ understanding of justice implies that others figure for him only to the extent that, far from being used, they are not to be abused. While Cephalus does see justice as a type of “good” relationship with others, he does not see justice as the cause of good relationships, or as what happens between persons to qualify their relationship as “good.”

It is also difficult to see Cephalus in the “any man” who takes advantage of the ring of Gyges, celebrating the power to be unjust without suffering its consequences. Rather, Cephalus cannot be the type of person “who only appears just” yet secretly or perhaps unknowingly harbors injustice in word and deed because Cephalus thinks he is just for the reason that he has not been compelled to treat anyone unjustly. Still, Cephalus

seems to think that justice prescribes only for what should not be done. Similar to the content of Socratic wisdom which consists of “knowing that I do not know,” Cephalus’ justice would seem to demand a more positive account of what should be done just as Socratic wisdom would seem to demand a more positive account of what should be known. Yet, while Cephalus’ son Polemarchus attempts to affirm a more positive account, that is, justice is harming one’s enemies and benefitting one’s friends, Plato’s Socrates reveals that, between father and son, Cephalus’ principle of non-harm comes closer to what should be known: “If anyone tells us, then, that it is just to give to each what he’s owed and understands by this that a just man should harm his enemies and benefit his friends, he isn’t wise to say it, since what he says isn’t true, for it has become clear to us that it is never just to harm anyone” (335e, italics mine).

Not having “to cheat or deceive anyone unwillingly” might be restated that willful or intentional cheating or deceit is unjust, that is, harmful. While Cephalus does not articulate why “it is never just to harm anyone,” his belief that he is just because he has not harmed anyone also distances him from the type of tyrant Thrasymachus and Glaucon portray. At 362b–c in Book II, Glaucon characterizes the “wealthy man who believes himself to have great power” (336a) that Thrasymachus describes in Book I.^[31] This “wealthy man” is interested in being unjust rather than being believed to be so, he profits in everything he does “because he has no scruples about doing injustice. In any contest, public or private, he’s the winner and outdoes his enemies.” The result is that he becomes wealthy, “benefitting his friends and harming his enemies,” and setting up “magnificent offerings” to the gods. This unjust man takes better care of the gods and those he is fond of than any just person might do. And so, “it’s likely that the gods, in turn, will take better care of him. . . . That’s what they say, Socrates, that gods and humans provide a better life for unjust people than for just ones.” If Glaucon is alluding to his host, Cephalus, then he demonstrates that he did not actually listen to what his host had to say, for Cephalus does have scruples. The problem for

Cephalus is locating the proper source or origin of these scruples in order to justify his “sweet hope.” In the end, perhaps it is for Cephalus that the “Myth of Er” is eventually retold.

Although it is apparent to most readers that Cephalus’ account of justice is superficial—it is “a fine sentiment”—I suggest it is this account that is the most difficult to dispel because Cephalus, contrary to what he initially tells Socrates, seems to have no real desire for conversation. In a primarily oral and aural culture this can mean that he has no real desire for, or need of, others. As Cephalus’ commercial understanding of justice is brought to the foreground, it becomes easier to see how Cephalus has privatized the benefits of his wealth in relation to the state of his soul. Like the *hagna theia* of old, Cephalus’ wealth has made him “inviolable,” it has become a “protective cloak that no indignity can penetrate.” And so for Cephalus it is actually wealth that makes virtue a blessing and thus provides him “hope.”

Like so much of what illuminates and sustains social bonds, wealth is both visible and invisible. As Anne Carson says, “You can hold a coin in your hand and yet not touch its value” (45). Marx teaches that a difference between wealth and money is the freedom to frame the terms of exchange, to determine whether what I offer is “good” or “good enough.” That is, the value of the coins in my hand is determined in relation to the value of something else. If this something else is of equal or lesser value, then what I hold in my hands is “good enough.” But when the value of the coins in my hand is not “good enough,” then I am “at a loss” even though I still hold the coins. The value of what Socrates offers as a “guest” is apparently not “good enough” for Cephalus; it is certainly not “good enough” to convince Cephalus to stay and engage in the “pleasure of conversation.” This suggests that the source or origin of Cephalus’ value resides in some extra-personal rather than interpersonal realm, a realm, perhaps, to which he must “sacrifice.” The logic of Cephalus’ valuation is similar to the logic that locates the value of money in some extra-material realm, a realm that determines the terms of material exchange,

the terms of “property.” And Cephalus is, of course, a “man of property,” his home is the setting of the Republic.

The ancients speak about property in two different ways, as two different types, although “the two types often correspond to different degrees of value.” Relying upon records of ancient property, Louis Gernet characterizes the two different types as visible and not visible. Ownership of land, for instance, is visible and “remains privileged because it pertains to the family.”^[32] More individualized types of property are less visible or “secret in nature,” like gifts.^[33] By the era of classical Athens, however, strict demarcation between these two types and their values has broken down. Gernet observes, “we find significant patrimonies that have almost nothing to do with landed property: we even find some where the largest part consists of credit” (347). In Plato’s time, then, ownership is no longer restricted to land, and so “property” takes on a variety of meanings that might blur the distinctions between the visible and the invisible, and between money and wealth. This new “wealth,” to paraphrase Marx, is “a real abstraction.”^[34] Imprecise in its valuation it is nevertheless made real by a system in which “everything is evaluated in terms of money” (347). Even Aristotle, despite theoretical pretensions against doing so, must define “wealth as something neutral and homogenous” (347). Both visible in its monied form and invisible in terms of its origin, a claim to wealth made on credit is recorded as *metereon*, “something in mid-air” (348). As such, monied wealth can exchange anything for anything, creating in David McClellan’s words, a “fraternization of incompatibles”: “money is the enemy of man and social bonds. It changes fidelity into infidelity, love into hate, hate into love, virtue into vice, vice into virtue, slave into master, master into slave, stupidity into wisdom, wisdom into stupidity. It is the universal confusion and exchange of all things, an inverted world.”^[35]

In classical Athens, the “being” of wealth is that it can make anything equivalent to anything, that is, it can make anything be. In the Republic, I suggest that Cephalus is the voice of this “being.” He converts pleasure into “sacrifice,” he changes

entering into a relationship into exiting from a relationship, and he transforms “hope” into commerce. Like Pindar, Cephalus’ is a “partial vision” of his own selection, yet it is a vision cobbled out of a “credit” that is not grounded anywhere. Positioned thus, what is a fee-less philosopher to do? One cannot contest a view of the world contrived, as it were, “in mid-air.” While we might say that Cephalus has confused a virtue—justice—with a vice—wealth—in the new economy of classical Athens this would seem to be as insubstantial a vice as it is insubstantial a virtue: “Where love is the structure of hospitality, neither host nor guest withholds what is seemly from the other. But money changes the relations between people, makes a riddle out of human *philia*.”^[36]

Perhaps this is the riddle, the general difficulty (*aporia*) facing Plato’s Socrates. It is a problem of the insubstantiality of the very being of the world he has entered and the *logoi* that emerge from it.

SOCRATIC CHARIS

In the early books of the *Republic*, *pleonexia*—“a grasping temper”^[37]—is often said to be injustice or the cause of injustice,^[38] while “having and doing what is one’s own” is often taken to be justice or the cause of the justice, and Plato’s use of *oikeiou*—“one’s own”—marks this comparison.^[39] There is a certain logic of opposition, however, driving this vision of justice: for many philosophers, Plato develops an account of justice that holds for the person as well as the city by elaborating the differences between the *oikos*—the “home”—and that “grasping temper” so divisive to *politeia*. Plato stages this contrast in the home of a wealthy man as if to appropriate or assimilate the “good” of the home to the greater good of the polis, and he constructs a bridge from house to polis with a “noble lie.”^[40]

Absent from this type of reading, however, are the conditions of *philia*, that “family feeling” that sustains brothers in arms as if they were brothers by blood. As we have seen,

Vernant suggests that *philia* cannot be thought without its opposite *eris*: the “spirit of conflict” (*Eris*) and the “spirit of union” (*Philia*) are “two divine entities, opposed and complementary.”^[41] These social forces or energies configure “demands for social unity” alongside social disparity and account for the practice of debate and argument manifested in the middle (*eos meson*) of the social body: “Those who contended with words, who opposed speech with speech, became in this hierarchical society a class of equals. As Hesiod would later observe, all rivalry, all *eris*, presupposes a relationship of equality: competition can take place only among peers” (47). I have suggested that a potential problem with the pairing *Eris/Philia* is that if one cannot think *Eris* without *Philia*, one also cannot think *Philia* without *Eris*. The lines from Hesiod to which Vernant alludes are from *Works and Days*, 25–26, yet it is worth considering the fuller passage in relation to the idea that justice is, indeed, “having and doing what is one’s own.”

In lines 10–24 Hesiod distinguishes good from bad strife, for “It was never true that there was only one kind of strife” (12).^[42] Bad strife “builds up evil war, and slaughter,” and no one loves her. But good strife “pushes the shiftless man to work,” (20) to want to attain what his neighbor has. Wanting to attain what another has, however, does not necessarily entail having to outdo them. Rather one can satisfy a desire for what a neighbor has by “doing one’s own work” with an eye to securing not exactly what another has but “one’s own.” *Philia*, in Vernant’s sense, plays a role in so far as Hesiod’s “family feeling” has been violated prior to the poem, for Hesiod’s direct addressee is his brother Perses, remembered for cheating Hesiod out of his inheritance. It would seem, then, that the occasion for the passage is at least as significant as its content. In lines 10–26 we are told to distinguish between two types of Strife and to listen to good strife, to want what our neighbor has, and—importantly—to work for it. We are told to “check the impulse” to engage in quarrels in the meeting place and disputes in the courts until a “year’s livelihood” is laid up in store, and if we—or Perses—wonder why we must work, Hesiod

recounts the story of Zeus' "anger" with Prometheus and the devolution of the ages of man in relationship to the gods. The passage, then, remarks the wrongfulness of actions motivated by a desire to take or to claim more than one's own—pleonexia, an aspect of "bad" strife.

In the Republic, is Socrates' character and conversation compatible with a concept of justice articulated as "having and doing what is one's own"? If so, then justice in the Republic is analogous to Hesiod's "good" strife—"doing one's own work"—yet absent Hesiod's "bad" strife, *pleonexia*. The dramatic situation between the characters, however, is more complicated than this account of justice allows. Cephalus recognizes Socrates as—at least—not *philos*: "come regularly to see us, just as you would to friends or relatives" (328d, *italics mine*). While this might not mean that Socrates is, to Cephalus, a "stranger," from the beginning of the dialogue it is clear that Plato's Socrates is not of the *oikos*, or at least not of this *oikos*, a home "in mid-air." Yet if Socrates is not *philos* in the sense of family or friend, might he be *philos* in the sense of a fellow citizen of the polis? Gabrielle Herman observes that, "Xenia and patriotism pulled in two opposing directions, and, in practice, xenia could be preferred to patriotism. But the fact remains that patriotism would not go unrecognized" (159).^[43] Yet even a thin understanding of political *philia* in terms of a generic form of citizenship seems tenuous given the dialogue's dramatic setting. The extent to which political *philia* extends to Socrates as a fellow Athenian depends upon how Athenian this *oikos* in the Port of Piraeus might be. If the character of Cephalus' wealth is indicative of a new type of "property" that transcends its ties to land, then dramatically speaking this *oikos* established on credit could be, might be, anywhere. Thus assumptions about a political *philia* that holds for and between the Republic's characters from the beginning of the dialogue might need to be suspended. The relationships between the Republic's characters can become political to the extent, per the Apology, they create a community together. But the extent to which they already constitute a community begs the question of political *philia* and

hence, also, the question of “justice.” Political *philia*, like all species of *philia*, cannot be thought without its complement *eris*. From Hesiod, one kind of strife yields one sense of justice, the “having and doing what is one’s own” akin to *oikeiou* in the Republic. A problem, however, is how “good strife” is consistent with the idea that “it is never just to harm anyone.” An account of justice that promotes wanting what another has yet forbids outdoing another to get it sounds like a nonagonal account: it precludes taking what another has or could have, that is, a share of the common good, and endorses procuring one’s own share for and on “one’s own.” But this type of justice is predicated on a desire for what others have, and still promotes an initial position of inequality and/or inequity. *Charis*, however, starts from a position of mutual loss, that is, it is “disarming,” and proceeds to a relationship of “equality and reciprocity” by mutual willingness and action. More importantly, *charis* is, by this perspective, completely free of strife as it prefigures the possibility of a relationship. So, if the complement of *philia* is always strife, and in this *oikos* Socrates is not *philos*, then in this *oikos*, for Socrates, there is also no strife, either “good” or “bad.” And as we have seen, in the absence of *philia* and strife (*eris*), there is also no *agon*.

Of all the varieties of relationships possible, in the Republic it would seem that *xenia* is preferred. If the value of *xenia* abides in a combination of interests partners co-create through *charis*, then the dramatic exit of Cephalus prefigures the dramatic *aporia* of Plato’s Socrates. Considering how Socratic *aporia* functions as Socratic *charis* illuminates—at least in part—the nonagonistic value of the character and conversation of Socrates in this specific dramatic situation, a guest in a wealthy man’s home. Per the Apology, Socrates’ occupation is pre-or noncommercial. He cannot, thereby, return the favor of hospitality in any material or monied way, and while his host seems to recognize this by welcoming Socrates in terms of the “pleasures of conversation,” Cephalus is also a “man of money”: a man whose “good” is abstract, impersonal, ahistorical, and homogenous. This “good,” however, is not appropriate to the

dramatic situation. For *charis* provokes “mutual dependence, it is a “willing and precious reciprocal exchange,”^[44] and specifically in a relation of host to guest and guest to host, *charis* requires mutual indebtedness: “The aim of the gift economy is accumulation for de-accumulation; the gift economy is above all a debt economy, where the actors strive to maximize outgoings. The system can be described as one of ‘alternating disequilibrium’ where the aim is never to have debts ‘paid off’ but to preserve a situation of personal indebtedness.”^[45]

If the contrary to having or claiming more than one’s own—*pleonexia*—is giving or ceding more than one’s own, then doing so places one “at a loss.” In the economy of *charis*, however, personal indebtedness insures the cycle of grace will continue, the relationships endure, indeed, the conversation goes on, for personal indebtedness holds between those who give and those who take to the extent that if a gesture is not accepted and acknowledged, both parties are “at a loss.” Far from characterizing Socrates’ initial conversation with Cephalus as prefiguring the more strident contest with the poets to come, it is also possible to read the Republic in terms of *xenia* and its value of *charis* as it is this practice, rather than any *agon*, that frames the dialogue and provides a standard for the true or only apparent bonds between its characters.^[46]

For instance, Eric Sanday suggests the real drama in the beginning of the Republic occurs not in terms of what Socrates says, but specifically in Glaucon’s taking over Thrasymachus’ argument.^[47] Famously, Thrasymachus is the first character to introduce the vocabulary of *pleonexia* into the discussion in Book I—“A person of great power outdoes everyone else” (344a). At 359c we also hear “to outdo others and get more and more . . . this is what anyone’s nature naturally pursues as good” Hence, the desire to take or claim more than one’s own is said to be, as many say the *agon* is, “natural,” and actions motivated by this desire are accepted as “good.” Just as famously, in Book II Glaucon and Adeimantus “renew” Thrasymachus’ arguments, and in so doing, they speak

convincingly on behalf of injustice (367a).^[48] Yet Socrates tells them that he remains unconvinced. While what they say might sound persuasive, it does not echo who they are: “for if I had only your words to go on, I wouldn’t trust you. The more I trust you, however, the more I’m at a loss as what to do. I don’t see how I can be of help. Indeed, I believe I’m incapable of it” (367b).

Socrates’ *aporia* in this instance is intriguing for a number of reasons. First, although Glaucon and Adeimantus speak convincingly on behalf of injustice—one might say they are more convincing with Thrasymachus’ arguments than Thrasymachus—Socrates distinguishes between the content of their speech—the “what” of what they say—and the content of their character: they are “Sons of Ariston.” Similar to a distinction he makes in the *Apology* between what is said and how it is said, Socrates’ distinction here marks one of the aspects of imitation in Book X as well as one’s awareness of this aspect, that is, discernment “of the relationship between the image and the thing of which it is an image.”^[49] At 596d Glaucon asks Socrates how it is possible to create an image, indeed, how is it possible to create any and all of the images of any and all of the things in the world. Socrates answers: “It isn’t hard. You could do it quickly and in lots of places, especially if you were willing to carry a mirror with you. . . . With it you can quickly make the sun, the things in the heavens, the earth, yourself, the other animals, manufactured items, plants, and everything else mentioned just now” (596d-e).

Glaucon responds, “Yes, I could make them appear, but I couldn’t make the things themselves as they truly are” (596e). “Well put,” says Socrates, and we might agree for as we come to hear the problem with images is not so much whether or how to create them, but how to recognize them, how to discern that something is an image of something else, that is, that *x* is not actually *y*, or by analogy, that one’s speech does not create an accurate image of one’s character. The point in Book II, then, is not that Glaucon and Adeimantus are not unjust, but that they do not—perhaps cannot—resemble Thrasymachus, they do not

attempt to become “just like the one” they imitate. In narrative terms, we might call this a difference between exposition and imitation: “Wherever an utterance reveals its author, there is exposition. Where, by contrast, the author gives up his “I” in favor of another utterance, upon which he confers reality and behind which he disappears, there is imitation.”^[50]

While Glaucon and Adeimantus give up the “I” in order to “imitate” Thrasymachus, the entirety of the Republic is Socrates’ exposition of the conversation, and offers one of the few instances in the dialogues—like the Apology—wherein the character Socrates claims the “I”: “I went down to the Piraeus yesterday with Glaucon” (327a). In the Timaeus and the Critias we learn that Socrates’ exposition in the Republic is part of an agreement between the characters of these two dialogues that Socrates recount the conversation of the previous day, that is, the Republic. Moreover, Plato’s Socrates begins the Timaeus by claiming that “you were my guests yesterday, and today I’m to be yours” (17a). Since *charis* begets *charis*, in the Timaeus and Critias the characters’ speeches are meant to return the favor of the Republic to its conversational host. But this would also mean that the “I” of the Republic acts a gift or an offering in this “feast of speeches,” and as such it cannot be an imitation “behind which he disappears.” Socrates’ speech in the Republic, then, is in direct contrast to the renewal of Thrasymachus’ position by Glaucon and Adeimantus. And so, to Socrates’ discerning eye and ear, the “Sons of Ariston” are exposed as “bad”—or ineffective—imitators, which is as much to say that their speeches are insubstantial, their *logoi* are “in mid-air.”

Also intriguing, when Socrates says, “I am at a loss . . . I don’t see how I can be of help” he remarks a position that is dramatically apposite to the image of Thrasymachus in Book I: “he coiled himself up like a wild beast about to spring, and hurled himself at us as if to tear us to pieces” (336b). While *pleonekteo* denotes a quantifiable result or amount, an advantage or a gain, *pleonexia* (or *pleonexian*) consistently denotes a disposition, or an attitude—that is, “a disposition to take more than one’s share.”^[51] Thrasymachus’ remarks about

outdoing others, however, are phrased in terms of actions: “a person of great power outdoes everyone else,” that is, he acts, and “to outdo others,” that is, to act. Dispositions and attitudes, on the other hand, can be unremarkable in terms of their actions and unreadable by their consequences, for wanting more than my share does not entail having more than my share, nor does having more than my share imply I was disposed to do so. Rather, *pleonekteo*, like imitation, characterizes giving oneself over subsequent or consequent to a choice. Because it implies a choice, however, *pleonekteo* cannot be natural: it cannot be “what anyone’s nature naturally pursues.” Moreover, a disposition to take or to claim more than one’s own is not, or need not be, the only opposite of “having and doing what is one’s own” (434a). Like *pleonexia*, *oikeiou*—“to make one’s own”—might signify a disposition or an attitude; that is, I might be disposed to mind my own business, or do my own work. But in the language of the Republic, “one’s own” is an action, or at least qualifies an action: *Twn en autw prattn outos dikaios, oikeiou* (“the having and doing of one’s own would be accepted as justice,” 434a). A characteristic of an action, however, is not necessarily a characteristic of a disposition that may—or may not—lead to the action. It’s at least possible, then, that the opposite of a disposition like *pleonexia* is another disposition, and that the opposite of a disposition to take or claim more than one’s own is a disposition to give or to cede more than one’s own: it is a disposition to place oneself “at a loss.”

To declare oneself at a loss—*aporia*—remarks a variety of difficulty: there is the “difficulty of passing” to or through a place, “difficulty” concerning questions, trying to figure something out, “difficulty” when dealing with persons, trying to find something out, and “difficulty” in relation to resources, indicating a “want of means,” “embarrassment,” “hesitation,” the want of a thing, a “need” or “poverty.”^[52] While some interpret Socratic *aporia*, in this instance and elsewhere, as feigned, for Socrates is truly never “at a loss,” since the narrative mode of the Republic is exposition rather than imitation, and he is speaking with Glaucon and Adeimantus,

whose narrative mode is imitation rather than exposition, it is quite possible that Plato's Socrates is genuinely "lacking keen eyesight": "I thought what I said to Thrasymachus showed that justice is better than injustice, but you won't accept it from me" (368b).

Finally, that Glaucon and Adeimantus won't accept what Socrates has "shown" also renders Socrates "at a loss." Yet the debt is refueled as Glaucon attempts to "do justice" to Thrasymachus by refusing to abandon the argument of Book I. Sanday observes, however, that while "attempting to do justice to Thrasymachus, Glaucon has somehow failed to notice that he is already persuaded by justice" (307). That is, Glaucon is persuaded by the very terms he says he rejects for Thrasymachus, namely the conditions of belief. In Book II Glaucon restates and elaborates the position that justice is indeed the advantage of the stronger and, whether we like it or not, is less beneficial than justice. This is so because there is actually no such thing as "justice itself." There is only acting as if one is just in order to avoid the reprimand, punishment, or dishonor that follows overt attempts to gain personal advantage over others. Yet, according to the argument, people will inevitably seek their own advantage, not just initially, but always. In relation to Book I, even the longstanding belief that justice is harming one's enemies and benefitting one's friends is not sufficient to prevent harm or produce benefit when the real issue is how to secure or acquire what is best for "one's own." Hence, in the beginning of Book II, justice is revealed as the first of the dialogue's "noble lies," and continuing to embrace or embody this lie will lead to personal ruin.^[53] As we know Socrates is asked not only to persuade but to convince those present that this position is more than false: Socrates is asked to praise justice, to restore it to its pride of place among human virtues, and he is initially asked to do this without appeal to its benefits or consequences: at 358d Glaucon tells Socrates, "But I've yet to hear anyone defend justice in the way I want, proving that it is better than injustice. I want to hear it praised by itself, and I think that I'm most likely to hear this from you."

Of course Socrates is asked to do for justice what has not been done for injustice. No one in the dialogue seems to object to the shadow of justice cast by supposing the benefits of injustice. That is, if there truly is no such thing as justice itself, not only would there be no reason for fearing punishment, there would also be no way of knowing that seeking advantage for “one’s own” could be considered unjust. In this light, the one character in the dialogue who appears to truly understand what he says to the extent that his actions accord with his words is Thrasymachus: only in a genuine absence of justice are we free to stipulate what justice is. Sanday comments, “from where Socrates stands, the difficulty is twofold: while Glaucon seems not to understand an argument he believes in deed, Thrasymachus refuses to follow an argument he clearly enough understands” (307).

According to Sanday, Thrasymachus refuses to follow the argument because he is already convinced, and as such he is unpersuadable. On the other hand, this is the same Thrasymachus who “blushes” in Book IV as if to gracefully say without saying that he, too, is only playing at speeches. Thrasymachus’ play is extremely effective, however, since Glaucon and Adeimantus seem to believe that Thrasymachus has significantly challenged Socrates. Moreover, while Glaucon seems to be committed to some form of dialogical justice and to the idea that philosophical inquiry should not be in the service of seeking one’s own advantage, he “crafts” his capitulation to Thrasymachus’ position in order that it may be proved wrong by Socrates. If Socrates can prove the words of Thrasymachus false, he has proven that what Glaucon believed all along is right. Lest we confuse the practice of philosophia with preconceptions about its purpose, Glaucon has placed both philosophy and its fee-less philosopher in the service of his own personal, intellectual victory.

It is also important to remember that it is Glaucon who rejects Socrates’ initial description of a city founded on an equal accommodation of needs, it is a “city of pigs” in Glaucon’s view. Hence, it is actually not Plato’s Socrates who steers the

conversation toward a guardian class. Rather it is Glaucon, the “budding philosopher” whose apparent commitment to dialogical justice is undermined by his stronger belief in a “justice” that he can neither articulate nor “defend” in his own exposition.

Many philosophers read the Republic as that place where we can clearly see Plato begin to abandon the elenchus of the historical Socrates to develop his own more “demonstrative philosophy.” While the Socrates in the Republic is initially interested to draw out the beliefs of the other characters and to subject these beliefs to examination, testing the reliability of these beliefs requires exposing their formation. If beliefs about “justice” have been formed in an unjust society, then the elenchus will not be sufficient to answer the question “What is justice?” Enter, then, the construction of the kallipolis in order to be able to see more clearly the justice of a singular soul, or enter the institution of a more appropriate paideia, one which declares the victory of philosophy in its contest with poiesis, or enter the “blueprint” of a just politeia, founded upon the type of inquiry that yields the type of propositions that compel agreement among all who hear.

But I suggest the difficulty with all of these assessments of the real meaning of the Republic is similar to our expectations for the real meaning of dialogue, specifically philosophical dialogue. Our tendency to focus on the mimesis of singular persons rather than the mimesis of interactions between characters leads to a manipulation of narrative at the expense of its pluralistic structure. When I focus too much on what the character Socrates says I cannot help but pull him out of the dialogue, lifting him, as it were, as one from the many. Yet the relevance of the many actions and the many voices in the Republic is remarked by the request of Glaucon and Adeimantus in Book II, and the narrative fact that Socrates does not honor this request: Socrates does not praise justice itself by itself for such would actually not require dialogue. In order to praise justice one must, a la Pindar, suppose that one knows not only what justice is but why it is worthy of praise. Yet if one truly

knows how and why to praise justice, then dialogue about justice is unnecessary. Rather, knowledge of justice might be clarified through dialogue, or, as I suggest, justice might be what happens between persons in dialogue. Either way, the value of Socratic charis is the value of Socratic dialogue. As a dialogical value, charis might only mimic the bonds certain knowledge could yield, but in the absence of such certainty it is a bond, nonetheless, predicated on the possibility of a genuine combination of interests. While we would like to believe that a proposition that encapsulates “justice” can create genuine bonds between citizens, some of our citizens, like Cephalus, would like to believe that their wealth secures them a certain independence from these bonds. Into the spaces this creates between us comes the “barefoot philosopher,”^[54] giving, taking, and reciprocating, the grace of dialogue. Socrates’ “gift” is not free, but its presence is a reminder of the responsible freedom that tempers genuine social bonds.

In the end, if philosophy is to practice a genuine commitment to dialogical justice it must be founded on a genuine commitment to dialogue. While we might attempt to read Plato’s dialogues as perennial contests between words and deeds, in the dialogues no one ever wins, and no one ever loses. This is perhaps in part what it means to talk with Socrates, that “gift of the gods” rejected by so many members of his own city. And this is perhaps in part the legacy of Plato’s philosophia: for dialogical justice requires a commitment to democratic justice, a commitment to building and maintaining symmetrical “relations of equality of reciprocity” in lieu of the asymmetrical relations created by the agon. Recognizing the difference, for us, might mean the freedom to reinterpret the stories we continue to tell ourselves.

NOTES

1. Christopher Tindale writes: “Truth, if it is found anywhere, is to be found in the dialogue of our lives, and not in the words that at best can only express the periphery of the dialogue.” In “Plato’s Lysis: A Reconsideration,” *Apeiron: A Journal for Ancient Philosophy and Science*, 18, no. 2 (1984): 107.

2. While here I consider the possibility that what is taken to be a contest with the poets can also be read nonagonistically, the extent of the topos of the agon in the Republic encourages some philosophers to read other dialogues in relation to its contests. Cf: John Kress' comparison of the "Olympic contest" of the Philebus to the dramatic action of the Republic concerning the transformation of Glaucon and Adeimantus, in "Pleasure Unlimited: Philebus and the Drama of the Unlimited," *Epoché*, 15, no. 1 (Fall, 2010): 13–34.

3. It should be noted that Ramona Naddaff, alternatively, reads the Republic in terms of "Plato's censorships," plural, and in doing so, that is, distinguishing between the first censorship in Books II and III and the second in Book X, reveals what is most significant about Plato's censorship: while the first censorship might suppose a fixed boundary between the literary and the philosophic, the second censorship discloses this "urge for what it is: a dangerous illusion that promotes a limited, narrow identification of the philosophical with the nonliterary." In the end, "the censorship of literature provokes the loss of the illusion of a fixed, transcendent absolute identity" for literature and philosophy. In *Exiling the Poets: The Production of Censorship in Plato's Republic* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2002), 8ff. Hereafter page numbers are referenced in parentheses in the text.

4. "A small number of houses in a universe of tragedy: notes on Aristotle's *περί ποιητικής* and Holderlin's 'Anmerkungen'" in *Philosophy and Tragedy*, eds. Miguel de Beistegui and Simon Sparks (London: Routledge, 2000), 88.

5. Quoted by Simon Sparks in "Fatalities: Freedom and the Question of Language in Walter Benjamin's Reading of Tragedy," in *Philosophy and Tragedy*, 198, from Benjamin's *Arcadia*, II. 1:130.

6. All references to and citations from Republic are taken from G. M. A. Grube's translation, revised by C. D. C. Reeve (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 1992). Following Grube: "But in case we are charged with a certain harshness and lack of sophistication, let's also tell poetry that there is ancient quarrel between it and philosophy, which is evidenced by such expressions as 'the dog yelping and shrieking at its master,' 'great in the empty eloquence of fools,' 'the mob of wise men that has mastered Zeus,' and the 'subtle thinkers, beggars all'" (607b–c). Although the sources of the quotations in the passage are unknown, they are often taken as allusions to the criticisms of Xenophanes and Heraclitus against Homer and Hesiod. Hence, comments to the effect that "Plato deplored the profession [of sophistry] for the same reason he deplored poetry all the way back to Homer, namely, that it cut words free from any obligation to reality" (Carson, *Economy*, 49), are standard for most assessments of the "quarrel."

7. Carson, *Economy*, lists its "lexical equivalents" as: favor, gift, goodwill given or received, payment, repayment, gratification, pleasure afforded or pleasure received, charity, grace, and Grace, 22. Hereafter page numbers will be referenced in parentheses in the text.

8. This is from Terence Irwin's translation (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing

Company, Inc., 2nd Edition, 1999).

9. George B. Walsh, *The Varieties of Enchantment: Early Greek Views of the Nature and Function of Poetry* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 1984), 7. Cf: *Od*, 8.166-77.

10. Notes to lines 906-911 from *Theogeny*, translation and commentary by Richard S. Caldwell (Newburyport, MA: Focus Classical Library, 1987).

11. Caldwell, *Theo.*, fnt for lines 907-911.

12. Caldwell, *Theo.*, fnt. for lines 836-838.

13. Bonnie MacLachlan, *The Age of Grace: Charis in Early Greek Poetry* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993), cf: 37 and fnt. 33.

14. From Lattimore's translation: The goddess gray-eyed Athene dressed and arrayed her; the Graces, who are goddesses, and hallowed Persuasion put necklaces of gold upon her body, while the Seasons, with glorious tresses, put upon her head a coronal of spring flowers" (72-75). Earlier, Aphrodite "mists" Pandora's head "in golden endearment" and in the "cruelty of desire and longings that wear out the body" (66) while Hermes is mentioned twice as the agent of Pandora's "treacherous nature" (67-68, 76-79). Although the association between Hermes and Persuasion is beyond the scope of this project, it is intriguing to consider that also in Hesiod's terms it is not Aphrodite, the Graces, or Persuasion that prompts "man's" self-destruction but Hermes.

15. This is from *A New Aristotle Reader*, ed. J. L. Ackrill (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1987).

16. Walsh, *Varieties*, 113, refers specifically to "factitious strife and enchantment," in terms of the "double capacity of Aphrodite."

17. Walsh, *Varieties*, 43ff. Hereafter page numbers are referenced in parentheses in the text.

18. Detienne, *Masters*, 47ff.

19. William Fitzgerald, *Agonistic Poetry: The Pindaric Mode in Pindar, Horace, Holderlin, and the English Ode* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), ix.

20. Carson, *Economy*, 41.

21. This is Ramona Naddaff's phrase for the conclusion of a passage of Book IV in the *Republic*, specifically Plato's Socrates' rejoinder that "justice is doing one's own work," provided it is work one is "naturally best suited" for and that one's work "comes to be in a certain way." See Naddaff, *Exiling*, 12, and *Rep. IV*, 433a8-b5.

22. Cf: Detienne, *Masters*, 48ff.

23. See Walsh, *Varieties*, 130ff. for an assessment of what I call the poet's perceived "pedagogical" value in relation to his audience.

24. Cf: Walsh's discussion of the equivocal character of Pindar's poetry in *Varieties*, 58-61.

25. Walsh, *Varieties*, 56.

26. Carson, *Economy*, 26.

27. Cf: Fitzgerald, *Agonistic*, x.

28. It is also interesting to consider how Cephalus' account of justice correlates with "just dealings" in terms of those "firmest of relationships" mentioned in chapter 3. In the absence of cause for dispute, as in *xenia*, there appears to be the greatest possibility for avoiding injustice and remaining friends. From a more charitable perspective than the one offered here, Cephalus might view his wealth as a mechanism or means for avoiding disputes, thereby injustice, and so remaining friends with whomever he encounters.

29. Or at least we might infer all three dialogues occur at Cephalus' *oikos*. As mentioned later, the *Timaeus* is dramatically introduced as an agreed meeting between Socrates, Timaeus, and Critias, in which Socrates says he played "host" to the conversations of yesterday, that is, the *Republic*. Yet since the characters are still "in the midst of celebrating the festival of the goddess" (*Tim.* 26e), they might all still be in the same dramatic setting, even if this setting is, by this reading, dramatized as "in mid-air."

30. Cf. Euthydemus and the speech of Callicles in *Gorgias* (484c–485e) as discussed by Harold Tarrant in "Where Plato Speaks: Reflections on an Ancient Debate" in *Who Speaks for Plato: Studies in Platonic Anonymity*, ed. Gerald A. Press (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2000), 67–82.

31. Thrasymachus enters the conversation in Book I after Socrates explains to Polemarchus that the source or origin of the idea that "justice is harming one's enemies and benefitting one's friends" is most likely not a poet like Simonides but "belongs to Periander, or Perdiccas, or Xerxes, or Ismenias of Corinth, or some other wealthy man who believed himself to have great power" (336a).

32. Gernet, *Anthropology*, 346. Hereafter page numbers are included in parentheses in the text.

33. Gernet, *Anthropology*, writes that these are "marginal" and includes the quote "free gifts," emphasizing, perhaps, their non-mercantile value, 347.

34. Quoted in Carson, *Economy*, 45.

35. Quoted in Carson, *Economy*, 21.

36. Carson, *Economy*, 23.

37. Πλεονξία, following A Lexicon, Abridged from Liddell and Scott's Greek-English Lexicon (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 564.

38. Cf. *Republic*, fnt. 18 at 344a.

39. See *Republic* fnt. 18, and Liddell-Scott, *Lexicon*, οικειόω, "to make one's own," 477, as distinct from translations of "one's own."

40. As if the "lie" was not, cf. David Wolfsdorf ("Φιλία in Plato's *Lysis*," *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology*, vol.1 103 (2007), 235–259. Comparing the *Lysis* to the *Republic*, and commenting upon Socrates' use of the phrase οικεία ἀρετή ("proper excellence") in *Rep.* 353b14–c2, Wolfsdorf suggests that "what belongs to or is οἶκειον to an entity of a certain type is an excellence of a particular kind and that the possession of this excellence enables that entity to operate properly and optimally. In *Republic* I Socrates characterizes such activity or operation as happiness (εὐδαιμον)"

254.

41. Vernant, *Origins*, p. 45. Page numbers from this text are hereafter referenced in parentheses.

42. All citations are again from Lattimore's translation.

43. From *Ritualised*, Herman here is discussing legends of Athenian ambivalence toward the heroic Alcibiades, he who honored his Spartan xenos before his native patris.

44. Quoted in Carson, *Economy*, 20.

45. Quoted in Carson, *Economy*, 13, from I. Morris, "Gift and Commodity in Ancient Greece," *Man*, 21:1-17 (1986), and Herman, *Ritualised*.

46. Some philosophers read the dramatic opening of the *Republic* as agonistic: Socrates is not invited to Cephalus' home, he is commanded to appear, and from this perspective Cephalus' comment to Socrates, "So do as I say: Stay here with these young men" takes on a completely different tone. For instance, while I read Socrates' extended stay at the home of Cephalus during the festival of Bendis as an elaboration of the practice of *xenia*, guest-friendship, Claudia Barracchi (*Of Myth, Life*) reads the hospitality Polemarchus offers to Socrates as a command: Polemarchus "orders" Socrates and Glaucon to wait and further "challenges" Socrates "to either prove stronger than we are" or to stay (328a). In this way, Barracchi suggests the language of imposition that opens the *Republic* is significant: "The unfolding of the dialogue . . . will have been Socrates' way of freeing himself . . . of proving himself stronger, of prevailing over the violence of brute self-assertion. The dialogical involvement will have been Socrates' fight" (149). Barracchi thereby likens Socrates to a "philosophical warrior" throughout the *Republic*, and reads his dialogical involvement as "combat" or "warfare." Unlike "real" combat, Socratic warfare aims not for the annihilation of one's interlocutors, but for "that death which is other than termination," that death which precedes the intellectual-ethical transformation of all parties "in their belonging together." This "agon in logos," she says, has the virtue of mimicking hand-to-hand combat only in so far as it brings war to speech. And "as long as war is in speech . . . war proper is postponed" (156). Or, rather, war is what happens when dialogues cease.

47. "Philosophy as the Practice of Musical Inheritance: Book II of Plato's *Republic*," *Epoché*, 11, no.2 (Spring 2007): 305-317. Hereafter page numbers will be referenced in parentheses in the text.

48. Cf: "for you must indeed be affected by the divine if you're not convinced that injustice is better than justice and yet can speak on its behalf as you have done" (*Rep.*, 367a).

49. Jean-Pierre Vernant, "The Birth of Images," *Mortals and Immortals: Collected Essays*, Trans. Froma Zeitlin (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991), 166ff.

50. Luc Brisson, *Plato the Myth Maker*, translated, edited, and introduced by Gerard Naddaff (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1998) 69.

51. Cf: Liddell-Scott, *Lexicon*, 564.

52. Cf. Liddell-Scott, *Lexicon*, 92.

53. Again, and perhaps similar to Aeschylus' Clytemnestra, this both can and cannot be said of Cephalus: inasmuch as the conditions of his hope are articulated by the poet of "One man. One art," Cephalus' "hope" has no real connection to others. Still he is hardly the image of a person who willingly and knowingly seeks the disadvantage of others.

54. Bonnie MacLachlan, *Age of Grace*, comments upon a poetic personification of the Charites who "return from their quest barefoot and starved and reproach the poet for a fruitless journey" (84). The poet is Theocritus and the work is titled the Sixteenth Idyll, called "Charites" which MacLachlan explains is "an elaborate but transparent appeal to the tyrant Hieron to remunerate Theocritus for his poems." See also Carson, *Economy*, 21ff., for an alternative explanation of the role of *charis* in Simonides.

Epilogue

Listening for the Tyrant

Both the *Timaeus* and *Critias* open with mention of the conversations that dramatically precede them, and how all of these conversations stand in relation to one another based upon the original frame of hospitality in the *Republic*. As noted, Socrates refers to himself as a former “host” in the opening of the *Timaeus*, and the characters *Timaeus*, *Critias*, and *Hermocrates* agree to return his “gift” to them in the form of their own speeches, as Socrates says in the *Timaeus* “the subjects I assigned you to speak on” (17b). The character *Timaeus* admits he does not remember “all of them” and asks —“if it’s not too much trouble”—that Socrates review them “from the beginning” (17b).

Socrates’ review of the *Republic* in the *Timaeus* is contingent on the narrative fact of 1) his own “assigned subject” which is, with a few additions, the content of Book V of the *Republic*, a book full of laughter, that 2) he later refers to as a “made-up story” (26e). Moreover, Socrates admits that he cannot give such a city “fitting praise” (19d), specifically in the way it goes to war. So this is the task set to *Hermocrates* and *Critias*. In relation to Socrates’ “made-up story,” however, *Critias* insists that his account of primeval Athens (the story of Atlantis) will be “strange” but “true” (20d).^[1] I suggest it is here that the differences between the tyrant and the philosopher begin to emerge.

In the context of *xenia*, equal exchange is determined qualitatively rather than quantitatively; the aim is not to outdo one another but to perpetuate the cycle of debt between one another. As we have seen, *xenia* operates on a principle of shared indebtedness, a *charis* that supports a non-agonistic ethos of exchange. If the speeches of *Timaeus*, *Critias*, and *Hermocrates* are to be counter-gifts to Socrates’ speech in the

Republic, they must complete the original gift and bring it to full significance.^[2] That is, their speeches must be appropriate to the original offering, Socrates' attempt "to see" whether the justice of a single man is writ large upon the justice of a "made-up" city. Hans Georg Gadamer reads Socrates' account of justice in the Republic as an attempt to enact justice in word and deed: "What is just and right is not the right that someone has in opposition to another. Rather it is being just. Each is just by himself and all are just together."^[3] Gadamer's reading of Socratic justice is similar, I suggest, to Barracchi's reading of Socratic dialogue as an intellectual-ethical transformation for the purpose of the interlocutors "belonging together." Both of these philosophers read Plato's Socrates commitment to dialogical justice in terms similar to what I suggest is Socrates' commitment to democratic justice in the Apology. Moreover, Gadamer likens justice in the Republic to that which happens or occurs in philosophical discussion because, unlike imitation that aims to produce on its own what the imitator chooses to produce, a philosophical discussion of justice is "an avowal of commitment to a spirit shared by all"(66), that is, a philosophical discussion of justice is not an image of one's own made to seem collective by the absence of the "I" that confers a false reality: a philosophical discussion of justice is not an imitation but an exposition.

Still, the limits of Socratic exposition are elucidated by none other than Socrates. At Timaeus 19c, Socrates says, "I'd love to see our city distinguish itself in how it goes to war and in the way it pursues the war: that it deals with the other cities, one after another, in ways that reflect positively on its own education and training, both in word and deed."^[4] On these matters Socrates says he is unable to "sing fitting praise," and so leaves it to others to "bring this city to life." When it is Critias' turn to offer his "gift of thanks," the principles of hospitality proscribe the conditions of Socrates' request: Critias must continue to speak of justice in a way that brings the speeches of Socrates and Timaeus to their full significance and he must prepare the way for Hermocrates who will speak last in

the order arranged for this “feast of speeches.” Yet Critias signally contrasts his prepared speech with Timaeus’ previous account, saying: “It is inevitable, I suppose, that everything we have all said is a kind of representation and attempted likeness. Let us consider the graphic art of the painter that has as its object the bodies of both gods and men and the relative ease and difficulty involved in the painter’s convincing his viewers that he has adequately represented the objects of his art” (107b).

Simonides is the poet who famously states “The word is a picture of things” and—as we know from Socrates’ conversation with Polemarchus—these words can be interpreted in many ways. But a correct interpretation of words will not always yield a picture. Socrates admits that for his words there is no image, it is a “made-up story.” The story is appealing, perhaps, due to its wealth of images, but I suggest that Socrates is committed, as Anne Carson says Simonides is committed, to leading us to the edge where words stop, that edge where words point “beyond themselves toward something no eye can see and no painter can paint” (51). Following Barracchi and Gadamer, I refer to this as the “belonging-together” of genuine dialogue, it is the “form” Socratic charis makes possible, and in the *Timaeus* and *Critias*, Socratic charis includes the return of a favor, to listen.

Critias, however, does not seem to understand the wisdom of the poet he alludes to or the charis of the philosopher to whom he is “indebted.” Critias is not aware of the edge of his words, or the frame of their image. There are no “shadows cast by divinity” for Critias because in the world of the *agon* there are no shadows. The *agon* allows for light and dark, true and false, and inevitably victory and defeat, but its binary structure cannot afford the subtle nuances of genuine speaking and listening and the “hope” that can emerge from this type of dialogue. Critias, alternatively, must be right or at least seem to be right, so he says that the case with speeches is “precisely the same” (107d) as the case with painting. When it comes to representing gods “to an audience of mortals,” as Timaeus did,

it is easy to give the impression of an adequate or even excellent representation since the audience lacks experience and certain knowledge of the gods. But when it comes to representing human beings “we are quick to spot any defect” because our “life-long” familiarity with the subject proves us harsh critics (107d). Hence, “human life is no easy subject for representation, but is one of great difficulty . . .” (107e–108a).^[5]

Critias, also, is “at a loss,” but rather than use *aporia* to “affirm what is of concern to everyone” (66) he insists upon the greater difficulty of his task as it compares with the others, as if his speech is not one among many, but signally all his own. His repeated requests for sympathy indicate he thinks he will be judged, as if this is a contest, as if the superiority or inferiority of his speech were an issue among friends. But most telling is his assertion that, contrary to Socrates’ “made-up story” and Timaeus’ implausible theology, Critias’ account is “true.” And so not to be outdone, Critias offers a special prayer to Mnemosyne “for the success or failure of just about everything that is most important in our speech lies in the lap of this goddess” (108d). Yet the story Critias is about to tell does not originate with any goddess: it was told to him as a child during a “recitation contest” of “our fathers” (Tim, 21b), a contest occasioned by the *Apaturia*, and absent any Muse.^[6]

In the absence of the Muse, must we enter the agon?

NOTES

1. Baracchi, *Of Myth, Life, and Vidal-Naquet*, The Black Hunter (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986) attribute Socrates’ claim that Critias’ account is “true” to a belief that, in comparison perhaps to what is said in the *Republic*, the character Socrates holds Critias’ coming account as true, yet in the context of the Critias, Socrates is simply reaffirming Critias’ own declaration at 20d: “And of course the fact that it’s no made-up story but a true account is no small matter” (26e).

2. Cf: Carson, *Economy*, 18 who is discussing Pierre Bourdieu, *Perisistiany*, 1966.

3. Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Dialogue and Dialectic: Eight Hermeneutical Studies on Plato*, translated and introduced by P. Christopher Smith (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1980), 67. Hereafter page references are included in the text.

4. From Plato: *Complete Works*, ed. John M. Cooper (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 1997), Timaeus translated Donald J. Zeyl. While I agree

with Baracchi that Socrates' request can be interpreted as a gesture to bring the kallipolis to life through the most extreme dynamism—war—it's also interesting to consider Vernant's suggestion that: "Politics can be defined as the city seen from the inside, the public life that the citizens share within the domain of whatever is common to them . . . War is the same city facing outward, the activity of this same group of citizens now confronting something other than themselves . . ." (Myth and Thought, 36).

5. From Plato: Complete Works, ed. John M. Cooper, Critias trans. Diskin Clay.

6. The significance of the Apaturia to ancient military ethos is discussed by Vidal-Naquet in "The Black Hunter and the Origin of the Athenian Ephebia," in *The Black Hunter*, 106–28. Suffice here to say that this ritual celebrates the offering of young male citizens' newly shorn hair to the goddess for their possible acceptance into full citizenship, that is, their acceptance into the phatry. The character Critias, eight or nine, was allowed to attend the festival where he first heard, from his grandfather or great-grandfather, Critias (presumed to be Critias the Tyrant, although accounts differ; Cf: Brisson, "Means of Transmission," in *Plato the Myth Maker*, 25–39, and Vidal-Naquet, "Athens and Atlantis: Structure and Meaning in a Platonic Myth" in *The Black Hunter*, 263–284) the tale of the Athenians most glorious of all accomplishments—the defeat of Atlantis.

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